

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW ON SDGS IMPLEMENTATION IN BONTHE DISTRICT



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Foreword

Acknowledgment

Advanced Draft

Acronyms

AU	African Union
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDCC	District Development Coordination Committees
DHMT	District Health Management Team
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FQSEP	Government Free Quality School Education Programme
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MCH	Maternal Child Health
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NaMED	National Monitoring and Evaluation Department
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
QAERP	QAERP Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLHIS	Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey SSL
TLM	Teaching and Learning Materials
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VLR	Voluntary Local Reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals
VNR	Voluntary Local Reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals
WASH	Water, Sanitation Hygiene facilities

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Key Highlights of the Report

The Bonthe District Voluntary Local Review was conducted as part of the process of localizing the implementation of the SDGs and for strengthening development cooperation and partnerships in the district development process. The process also covered an assessment of the policy and institutional environment for implementing the SDGs, including the integration of the goals into the district development planning process. The review report sheds light on the district's progress on the 2030 targets and ascertained the impact of policies and strategies on the welfare of the people.

The VLR process was jointly led by the Bonthe District Council and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, with the technical support of Statistics Sierra Leone. The entire review process was based on inclusive stakeholder participation, informed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) prescribed guidelines for undertaking VLRs in Africa. Several technical working sessions and stakeholder consultation workshops were held, including a civil society-led community engagement with local and chiefdom authorities. In addition to the extensive desk reviews, local-level data was collected as part of a rapid impact assessment of the Government Free Quality School Education Program, and for assessing the potential and opportunities for the blue economy in the district.

Policy Architecture and Enabling Environment

As one of the sixteen administrative districts in Sierra Leone, Bonthe District has two local councils—the *Bonthe District Council* and the *Bonthe Municipal Council*—which are the highest political authorities in the district with both legislative and executive powers to promote and coordinate development programmes in the district. The district council formulates and implements the district development plans to facilitate service delivery and sustainable development for its populace. The current Bonthe District Council Development Plan, 2020-2022, is anchored on seven priority sectors: *i) education; ii) health; iii) water and sanitation; iv) agriculture (local economic development); v) social welfare, gender and children's affairs, vi) road and infrastructure, and vii) marine and fisheries resources.* and the SDGs and it is the main instrument for implementing the SDGs on the ground. As the main instrument for implementing the SDGs on the ground, this plan is strongly aligned with the Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan, 2019-2023, and the 2030 agenda.

The Council has a functional Planning and Development Committee that supports the general coordination of the district development planning landscape, including the preparation and implementation of the council development plan. Through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, the District Development Coordination Committee was revitalized in 2020, as a platform for the general coordination of development actors within the district, and for following up on the implementation and reporting on the SDGs.

Through intensive stakeholder and community sensitization, and integration of the goals into the sector and district programmes, the VLR process generally enhanced local ownership of the SDGs. The Bonthe District Parliamentary Caucus actively participated in the review process with a strong commitment to regularly follow up on the implementation of programmes and to ensure that the council's annual budget allocations are aligned with the district SDG targets and development needs. These efforts led to the establishment of a ***local-level Civil Society Integrated SDG Platform*** for regular follow-ups on the implementation of the goals in the district, and for championing advocacy and public awareness on the goals.

Within the context of the district development priorities, three goals were identified as the ***district accelerator SDGs—goal 2, goal 4, and goal 14***—considered to have the largest transformative knock-on effect on the other sectors and SDGs. Goal two was chosen on the premise that agriculture (dominated by food production) is the key economic activity of the

district which employs more than 70 percent of the district population. Guided by the overall national strategic focus on human capital development, goal four was chosen to improve the district's human capital for enhanced productivity and transformational development. With an estimated coastline of 35 km and employing about 30 percent of the district population in either fishing, marine transportation, or other blue economy-related activities, goal fourteen is crucial to the district's drive for sustainable development.

In addition to the district accelerator goals, a total of eight other goals were effectively localized, based on their relevance to the district development context, and informed by data available for assessing the progress on the goals and targets.

The VLR process also developed the *District-Specific SDG Results Framework* and ensured existing local council development plans and sectoral programmes are directly or indirectly linked to the SDGs, by extension, the MTNDP.

Progress on the Goals

The VLR found out that Bonthe district has made key milestones in the SDGs implementation at both the policy front and in results areas, even in the face of several challenges and uncertainties. Given the huge data gaps at the local level, progress was ascertained on a total of twenty-six indicators from eleven goals that were effectively localised. To compensate for the huge data gaps, progress was also assessed on the policy and institutional fronts.

i. Accelerator Goal 4: Quality Education

A rapid impact assessment of the Government's Free Quality School Education Programme was carried out, focused on three programme areas: *a) school feeding support; b) tuition fee grant, and c) the provision of teaching and learning materials*. The result shows that the programme has been doing substantially well with both the parents and school authorities very satisfied with the school feeding programme, reporting an estimated level of satisfaction of 62 and 70 percent respectively. Following the introduction of ***Tuition Fee Grants by the Government***, the greater majority (94 percent) of parents reported not to be paying school fees. The introduction of the Government free quality education programme in 2018 was assessed to have led to an 11 percent increase in ***school enrolment in the district***, with enrolment among girls increasing by 21 percent. ***Welfare Impact analysis:*** the study also estimated the monetary savings parents could make from the average lunch money per child from the school feeding programme, and the study concludes that a total yearly savings of NLe394 per pupil for a parent could be made. The Average government spending on tuition, textbooks, and examinations per child was valued at NLe242 in the 2019 Education Sector Analysis, which could be the average saving per child for a parent. From these estimates, the minimum savings that a parent could make per year per pupil in government or government-assisted primary schools will be NLe 636 [which is NLe394 (from school feeding support) + NLe242 (tuition, textbooks, and examination)], which could make a considerable welfare difference for the rural households with a high level of poverty.

At the indicator level, progress was ascertained on a total of four indicators, each disaggregated by sex. The areas of progress include: i) improved secondary school completion rate for both men and women; ii) improved score in the Primary School Net Attendance Ratio from 56.2 percent in 2013 to almost 86 percent in 2019; iii) Gender parity achieved and exceeded at the primary school level; and iv) adult literacy rate significantly improved from 43.2 percent to 67.6 percent for men and from 19.7 percent to 33.8 percent for women. Areas of poor performance are: i) decreased completion rate for primary school education for both men and women, and ii) gender parity score at the secondary school level deteriorated from 0.9 in 2013 to 0.75 in 2019.

ii. Accelerator Goal 2: Zero hunger

A total of six indicators were assessed, of which the district recorded positive performance on four indicators while the others showed retrogression. The report shows that the ***prevalence of undernourishment*** improved slightly from about 17 percent in 2013 to about 16 percent in 2019, and the ***proportion of underweight women*** reduced drastically from 3.5 percent in 2013 to 0.4 percent in 2019. Also, the ***prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviations from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age*** improved from 36.8 percent in 2013 to 31.9 percent in 2019, which is above the national target for 2020 at 24 percent, while severe stunting among children under-5 decreased by 1 percentage point between 2013 and 2019.

The VLR also sheds light on the level of food insecurity in the district, especially to account for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We conclude that the prevalence of food insecurity in the district deteriorated during the period under review, a similar trend in other parts of the country. Several other studies attributed the worsening food security situation to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallouts, the outdated agricultural methods, and the insufficient and expensive agricultural inputs employed by the farmers.

iii. Accelerator Goal 14: Life below water

A total of six indicators were localized for tracking the district's progress on goal 14 of the SDGs. The lack of existing data could not permit any trend analysis on these indicators but the data developed now form the baseline for assessing the district's progress towards the 2030 targets. Nonetheless, the study further assessed the potential and opportunities for the blue economy in the district and concludes that a large proportion of the district population rely on the blue economy for their livelihoods. While fishing and marine transportation were found to be the major livelihood activities for the coastal communities, the lack of adequate infrastructure and improved equipment are the binding constraints on the welfare of these coastal communities and the general local economy. We assert that livelihood supports for these communities could not only increase their monthly income significantly, but it could also promote sustainable fishing operations and good environmental management.

iv. Accelerator Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions

Three indicators were used to assess performance on ***goal 16***, of which the district recorded positive performance on two indicators: The ***Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority*** improved significantly from 64.2 percent to 91 percent during 2013-2019, and the ***proportion of women experiencing sexual violence in the district*** declined by from 7.9 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2019. However, the district is ranked among the worst-performing regions in the country for the ***proportion of young women who experienced physical violence, which worsened*** during the period under review.

The district has also advanced efforts in setting the required institutions and policy environment to deliver on this goal. Following the assignment of new magistrates to the district, periodic magistrate court sittings have resumed and the district now experiences a speedy trail of court cases. The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board has resident paralegals that are in promoting access to justice for indigents of the district.

v. *Progress on the other Goals*

Goal one: No poverty

Due to data limitations, we could not provide a trend analysis on the district poverty situation. Recent available data shows updates on only two indicators for ending poverty in all its forms: The proportion of the district population living in absolute poverty recorded at 46 percent in 2018, extreme poverty is 3.2 percent, and multidimensional poverty is estimated at 77.3 percent. Relative to other districts in Sierra Leone, Bonthe district is doing great on all poverty-related estimates, ranked as the least poor district outside of the Western Area of the country.

Goal Three: Good health and well-being

The district made progress on some indicators for **goal three**. This includes a jump in the **proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel** from 40.6 percent to 72.5 percent between 2013 and 2019; the proportion of **births delivered in a health facility** increased from 33.9 percent in 2013 to 70.7 percent in 2019; the **proportion of women of childbearing age with access to antenatal care from a skilled health provider improved from 93.1 percent in 2013 to 98.6 percent in 2019**; and the **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for women of childbearing age (15-49 years)** declined from 8.5 percent in 2013 to 8.3 percent in 2019; among others. However, undesired performance was noted on four important indicators (Under-5 mortality per 1,000 live births, Neonatal mortality rate, the proportion of infants ever breastfed, and Adolescent birth rate), all of which require policy attention.

Goal Five: Gender equality

A total of seven indicators are reported on in this assessment, which produced mixed results: while progress was made on three of the four indicators assessed, gains on the other two goals were reversed and the district is among the worst performing districts on this goal. The district made progress on **the proportion of women and girls aged 15-49 years subjected to sexual violence** which dropped slightly from 7.9 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2019; the **proportion of the district ward committee members who are women** increased from 17 percent in 2016 to 33 percent in 2020; the **proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting** decreased from 97.1 percent in 2013 to 94.2 percent in 2019 and remain amongst the highest in the country. Finally, the **proportion of women aged 15-49 years who own a mobile telephone**, increased from 32.1 percent in 2017 to 36.5 percent in 2019.

The district performs poorly on the **proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical violence**, which worsened from 26.8 percent in 2013 to 38.7 percent in 2019, recording the highest incidence of physical violence across the country; and **the proportion of men age 15-49 years who own a mobile telephone** marginally decreased from 69.1 percent in 2017 to 68.8 percent in 2019.

Goal Six: Water and sanitation

Based on the indicators assessed, the district's performance on **goal six** was encouraging, although meeting the 2030 targets would require sustained efforts. Progress was made on all four indicators reported so far: i) **the percentage of household members with an improved drinking water source on-premises, whose source water was tested and free of E. coli and available when needed** improved from 6.8 percent in 2017 to 45.1 percent in 2019; ii) **the proportion of households with improved sanitation facilities** improved from 21.6 percent to 64.9 percent between 2013 and 2019; iii) **the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water** jumped from 12.7 percent in 2013 to 73.3 percent in 2019; and iv) **the proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality Freshwater withdrawal** improved from 42.2 percent to 45 percent during the period 2013-2019.

Goal Seven: Affordable and clean energy

Three indicators were localized for goal seven but progress was ascertained for only one indicator. Access to electricity remains a pronounced challenge with 2.6 percent of the population estimated to have access to electricity, often sourced from private solar companies and generators. The entire district is yet to be connected to the national power grid and the ***proportion of the population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology for cooking, space heating, and lighting is estimated at 0.3 percent in 2017 and 2019***. The major source of energy for cooking is firewood, while solar lamps (chine lights) are primarily used to light up homes.

Goal Eight: Decent work and economic growth

Three indicators were localized for goal eight, with a poor performance recorded for one indicator: the proportion of children (5-17 years) engaged in child labour increased by 10 percentage points during 2013-2017. Access to a bank or financial services remains very low in the district and below the national average.

Goal Seventeen: Partnerships for the goals

A total of four indicators were localized for ***goal 17*** but given the data limitation, performance was assessed on only three indicators. The local revenue stream remains weak, albeit the sharp increase in ***total own source revenue as a share of total annual funds*** from 9 percent in 2018 to 20 percent in 2022. ***Internet usage*** increased sharply for the men while the score amongst women was maintained, and ***mobile phone ownership*** increased for the women. Another strategic area of progress ***in partnership and development coordination*** is the establishment of a functional District Development Coordination Committee as a platform for enhanced local development coordination and strengthened partnership.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and socioeconomic context of the district

The 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by world leaders offered a plan of action for People, the Planet, and Prosperity aimed at changing our planet. Since then, Sierra Leone has quickened the pace of implementation, successfully domesticating the global agenda in 2016 and putting into place significant policy and institutional reconfigurations in the national development process. The Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP), 2019–2023, is the operational framework for implementing the SDGs on the ground. The country has been particularly engaged in the SDG review and follow-up frameworks at the national, regional, and global levels, undertaking three Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) in 2016, 2019, and 2021, and participating in the Annual UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs. Through these reviews, the government has demonstrated the nation's progress toward the SDG targets and assessed the impacts of policies at the national level.

In 2020, the government effectively decentralised the ownership and implementation responsibility of the MTNDP to the 22 local councils across the 16 administrative districts (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2020). At the local level, the strategic plan of the respective district local council is the operational framework for implementing the SDGs, the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, and by extension, the MTNDP.

Bonthe District is one of the 16 administrative districts in Sierra Leone and is located in the southern region, 187 miles southeast of the capital city, Freetown. In addition to the mainland areas, the district is comprised of several islands, with Sherbro Island on the Sherbro River estuary being the largest island. The district borders Pujehun District to the southeast, Moyamba District to the North-West, Bo District to the southwest, and the Atlantic Ocean to the West. Politically, Bonthe district is organised into district and municipal councils.

The 2021 Mid-Term Census puts the district population at 297,561 (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2022)¹ with a sex ratio of 101. Bonthe district is the least populous in Sierra Leone. According to a 2013 World Bank study, about 79 percent of the district population resides in rural areas. The district population structure shows that 50 percent of the population are in the active workforce bracket of 15-64 years; 20 percent are children under the age of 5 years; and 25 percent are in the group of 5-14 years.

Table 1.1: Bonthe District Population by Sex and Chiefdom

No	Chiefdom	Male	Female	Total	Sex ratio
1	Bendu-cha	3,586	3,315	6,901	108.2
2	Bum	17,393	17,400	34,793	100.0
3	Dema	7,359	6,887	14,246	106.9
4	Imperri	28,163	27,265	55,428	103.3
5	Jong	28,907	29,358	58,265	98.5
6	Kpanda Kemo	7,347	7,227	14,574	101.7
7	Kwamebai Krim	7,452	7,296	14,748	102.1
8	Nongoba Bullom	14,744	13,834	28,578	106.6
9	Sittia	15,344	15,573	30,917	98.5
10	Sogbeni	8,313	8,651	16,964	96.1
11	Yawbeko	4,982	4,789	9,771	104.0
12	Bonthe Urban	5,965	6,411	12,376	93.0
Total		149,555	148,006	297,561	101.0

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone

¹ Based on the 2021 Mid-Term *Housing and Population Census*, Statistics Sierra Leone

The district is comprised of twelve chiefdoms, covering an estimated total surface area of 3,468 km², with Mattru Jong as its capital and largest town, located in the Jong chiefdom. Bonthe City on the Sherbro Island is the largest city and it plays host to the Bonthe Municipal Council.

Generally, the topography of Bonthe District is characterised by many natural features, including rivers, mangroves, Inland Valley Swamps (IVS), Bolli-lands, and upland that stretches deep into the mainland. Among the navigable rivers in Bonthe district are the Jong, Wanjei, Sewa, and Sherbro Rivers, which also provide good fishing opportunities. Similar to other coastal regions, the district receives considerable rainfall during the rainy season on an average of 168 days per year.

The mainstay of the local economy of Bonthe district are agriculture and fishing. Agriculture, which is dominated by small-scale farming of cassava, groundnuts, and rice, is the main sources of income for households. The district is estimated to have over 35,000 hectares of arable land, stretching along the sewa, wanjei, and Jong rivers. As the second major economic activity, fishing along the many river estuaries and streams is practiced by a large proportion of the district population, attracting both men and women from far and wide. Oil palm cultivation is also another crucial source of livelihood for residents of the district and it historically attract many traders from across the country.

Like many other regions in the country, Bonthe has huge potential for mining and tourism which could collectively be important source of revenue for the local economy. The district has significant mineral resources including one of the world's largest deposits of titanium ore (rutile), hosting a foreign owned consortium, the Sierra Rutile Limited and VIMETCO company. The district's natural endowment such as white sand beaches and historic sights provide huge touristic potential which is yet to be harnessed.

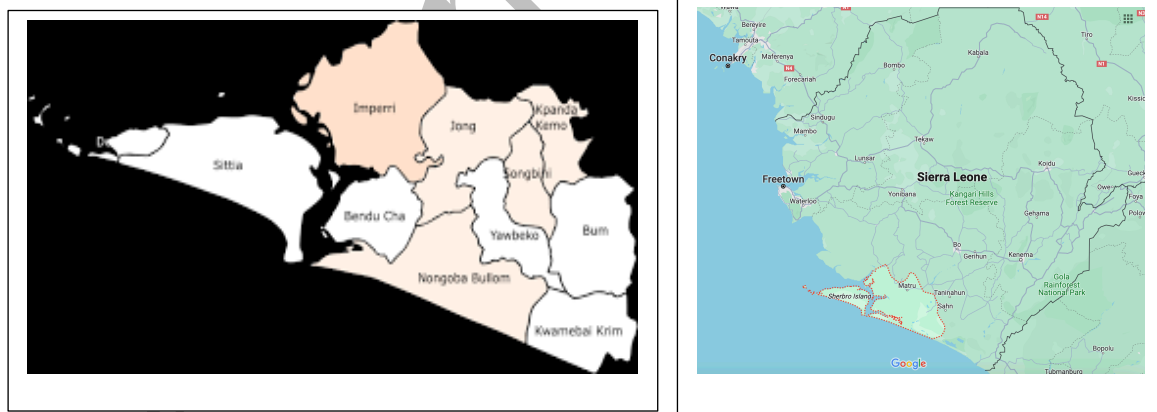


Figure 1.1 Geographical Map of Bonthe district

However, despite its abundant natural resources and huge economic potential, recent estimates and development outcomes have shown that the district is among the most underdeveloped and deprived in Sierra Leone. Estimates based on the 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey data record extreme poverty at 6.6 percent (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2019) while the 2019 Sierra Leone Multidimensional Poverty estimates rank the district as the 5th most deprived district in the country (Statistics Sierra Leone and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2019)². While this estimate puts Bonthe district as the second poorest district outside

² Page 16, Sierra Leone Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019

of the Western Area, many communities in the district lack adequate infrastructure and access to good health facilities, water and sanitation, and social amenities.

The entire district is off the national power grid and households rely on rechargeable/battery run lights and other sources like solar lamps to light up their homes, and charcoal is the main source of energy for cooking. Also, the communities do not have access to good sanitation facilities and most communities use communal bush, river bed, latrines and buckets. The Sherbro Island communities in particular depend on rivers, streams and wells for the supply of clean water for domestic use.

The 2004 Local Government Act mandates local councils to provide enhanced service delivery to their populace to facilitate sustainable development. The district is divided into two contours of political administrations: the mainland is governed by a district council, with its headquarters in Matru Jong Town, and the island is governed by the Bonthe Municipal council. The district council is the highest political authority in the district with both legislative and executive powers to promote and coordinate development programmes in the district (Government of Sierra Leone, 2004). The Council is comprised of eighteen (18) elected councilors, representing the 18 wards from the twelve (12) chiefdoms in the district, with the chairman providing political leadership and strategic policy direction of the council. The Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs (formerly known as the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development) and the Local Government Service Commission provide oversight and supervisory responsibilities. The Chief Administrator is the Head of Administration for the Council, under the direct supervision of the Chairman (illustrated in Figure 1.2 below)

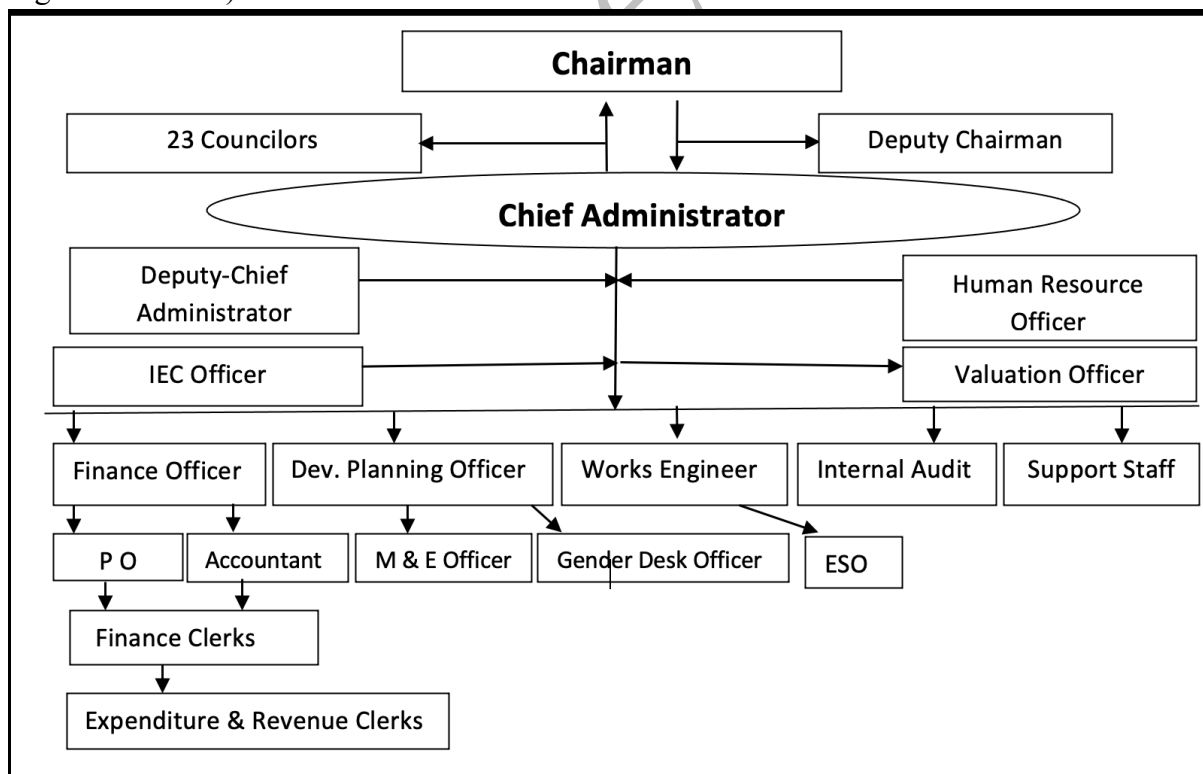


Figure 1.2: Administrative organogram of the Bonthe District Council

To deliver on its mandate, the Bonthe District Council formulates and implements the district strategic development plan, aligned with the MTNDP, the SDGs, and other international and regional frameworks. The existing strategic plan of the District Council, the Bonthe District Council Development Plan, 2020-2022, is anchored on ten priority sectors: *i) education; ii) Roads (Infrastructural Development); iii) agriculture; iv) Energy; v) health; vi) water and sanitation; vii) Fisheries and Marine Resources; viii) Youth and Sports; ix) Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs; and x) Environment*. Similarly, the strategic plan of the Municipal Council, the Bonthe Municipality Development Plan (2019-2021) is anchored on ten priority sectors: *i) education; ii) Health; iii) Agriculture and Food Security; iv) Infrastructural Development; v) Local Economic Development; vi) Water and Sanitation; vii) Youth and Sports; viii) Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs; ix) Energy; and x) Marine Resources* (Bonthe Municipal Council, 2019). The implementation of these priorities is underpinned by strong advocacy for community environmental initiatives and strategies, including a strong monitoring and evaluation plan. The plans, therefore, integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental—, which is the thrust of the 2030 agenda and the SDGs. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the district and the rest of the country embrace the 2030 agenda and its 17 SDGs as they resonate with the development aspirations of the district, and by extension, the people of Sierra Leone.

1.2 National strategic policy context

The 2030 agenda was adopted when Sierra Leone was implementing its third Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP III, 2013-2018) in the face of the 2014-2016 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in the Mano River Union (MRU) basin in West Africa (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2016). The EVD is recorded to have decimated approximately 11,000 lives in the sub-region and reversed most of the country's post-war economic gains. Following its launch in 2015, the Government of Sierra Leone successfully integrated the 17 SDGs into the national development plan and was among the first set of 22 countries to be voluntarily reviewed at the 2016 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs. That year's Sierra Leone Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report articulated progress in domesticating the goals, including their alignment to the national development plan, the implementation arrangement, and the Sierra Leone-specific SDG Results Framework. The country has been generally consistent in upholding the strong principle of alignment between the national development plan and the international and regional development frameworks, ensuring that the results framework of the national development plan integrates the results of the 2030 Agenda for coherence and effectiveness in their implementation and reporting.

In 2019, four years into the SDG era, the successor plan to the PRSP III, the MTNDP was launched, anchored on a strong political will for enhanced public service delivery, with human capital development and strengthened justice and governance systems as the leading state priorities for building resilience and sustainable development, and for achieving prosperity for all (Sierra Leone Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the SDGs 2019, 2019). The strategic priority on human capital development was underpinned by the desire to improve the country's low human capital development index score of 0.36 for 2020 (which is

below the sub-Saharan Africa average of 0.41).³ At the justice and security front, Sierra Leone continues to make significant strides with the introduction of robust mechanisms for the application of the rule of law, inter alia, albeit remained critical challenges. These two priority areas, directly related to SDGs 4 and 16, are crucial to the long-term national socioeconomic transformation with the biggest knock-on effect on the other SDGs. The plan is broadly divided into eight policy cluster areas which are mutually reinforcing: *i) Human Capital Development; ii) Diversifying the Economy; iii) Infrastructure and Economic Competitiveness; iv) Governance and Accountability for Results; v) Empowering Women, Children and Persons with Disability; vi) Youth Employment, Sports and Migration; vii) Addressing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience; and viii) Means of Implementation.* Annex 1.1A illustrates the linkage between the district strategic plan, the MTNDP, and the SDGs.

In the course of implementing the MTNDP and the SDGs, the economy of Sierra Leone has endured several socioeconomic shocks with devastating impacts on the national progress towards the SDG goals and targets. The immediate pre-MTNDP period witnessed the August 2017 landslide and floods in western Sierra Leone, which caused widespread socio-economic damage. In just one day, August 14, 2017, the minimum direct socio-economic loss to the disaster was estimated at US\$ 32 million (World Bank Group, 2017)⁴.

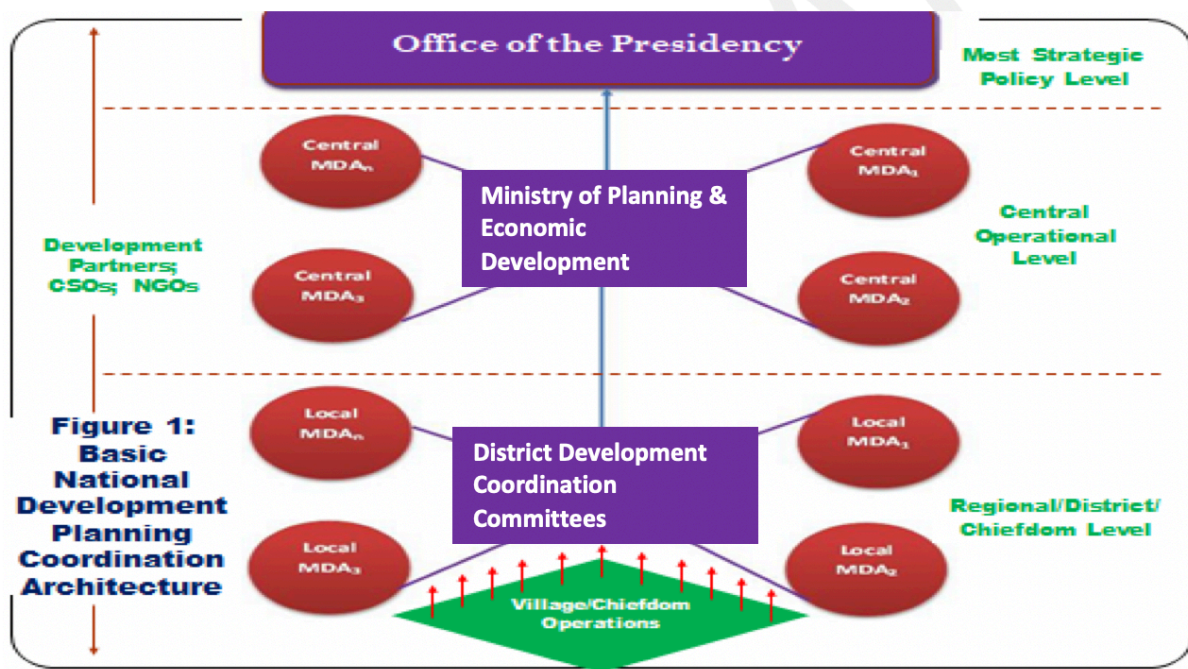
In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck with a widespread effect on the global economy, placing already vulnerable sub-Saharan nations like Sierra Leone at heightened risks of worsening vulnerabilities. Consequently, the Sierra Leone economy, in 2020, recorded a contraction in GDP by 2 percent despite registering low infection cases and deaths.

To mitigate the severe impact of the pandemic on the economy and livelihoods, the Government, in 2020, proactively developed and implemented the Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP), alongside the National Health Preparedness and Response Plan. The economy was thus projected to recover by 2.9 percent in 2021 due the resumption of effective activities in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, services, and other sectors. Inflationary pressures moderated with the year-on-year inflation declining to a single digit of 8.9 percent in March, before edging up to 10.2 percent in June 2021. These interventions contributed to the re-commencement of effective implementation of the national development plan and, by extension, the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063 (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2021).

The country traditionally operates a two-tier planning system to advance the SDGs implementation, where the sectors implement programmes and projects at the center/national level. At the local level, the devolved functions of Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), local councils, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) are at the heart of programme implementations through the district council planning system.

³ World Bank Development Indicators Databank, 2020

⁴ World Bank (2017), Rapid Damage and Loss Assessment of August 14th, 2017 Landslides and Floods in Western Area



Source: Adapted from the Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023)

Notwithstanding the crucial role of the districts and communities as the front-line hosts for the actual SDGs-related policies and interventions, no local reviews and assessments have been done on the SDGs, neither has there been any comprehensive SDG localisation in any of the 16 administrative districts or five regions of the country. This gap, among others, was glaring in the recent 2021 VNR process, especially in the report on the CSOs-led local level data collection and sensitisation on the SDGs. To close this gap, and complement the extensive national-level gains on the integration of the goals and stakeholder mobilisation, there is a compelling need for strengthened community mobilization on the SDGs. This Bonthe District Voluntary Local Review on the SDGs is therefore undertaken for sustained local and community mobilisations for achieving the SDGs. The process also assessed the district's progress on the goals and targets and produced the district-specific SDGs results framework and dashboard.

Guided by the leading strategic policy areas of the state and the socio-economic context of the district, the VLR also covered in-depth analyses of the Sierra Leone Accelerator SDGs (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2021)⁵—in the context of access to free quality education (Goal 4) and the provision of equal access to justice for all (Goal 16)—in the district, and assessed the potential of the Blue Economy in the district.

1.3 The COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, and District VLR

A few months into the implementation of the District Development Plan and the MTNDP, covid-19 struck with widespread macroeconomic uncertainties for delivering on the district plan and the SDGs.

⁵ At the 2021 HLPF, the Sierra Leone presented goals 4 and 16 as its the country's accelerator SDGS. Please see page xx of the Sierra leone 2021 VNR report

Unfortunately, while the district and the rest of the country were recovering from the pandemic and staying the course of implementing its development plan, the global economy was struck with another disruption, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War which has caused the energy and food prices to soar at unprecedented pace. The combined effects of these two crises have badly affected progress toward SDG targets.

1.4 The Focus and Objective of the District VLR

The objective of this VLR is to first assess the district's progress in the implementation of the SDGs. A core part of the review process was dedicated to localising the goals and ensuring their alignment with the local development plan while ensuring that local knowledge of the goals and targets is deepened.

Using available data from various surveys and reports, the process developed an indicator system and dashboard for the effective tracking of progress in the implementation of SDGs at the district level.

The ultimate goal of this review was to strengthen local institutional dialogue and development cooperation for accelerated delivery of the SDGs at the local level and to provide the district council the opportunity to showcase the innovative development initiatives of the district.

1.5 Organization of the Report

The rest of the document is organized as follows: The next session presents the methodology employed in the review process, followed by the policy architecture and enabling environment in session three. Session four contains an analysis of the district's progress on the goals and targets, while session five examines the structures and mechanisms for advancing the implementation of the SDGs. The district's approach to recovery from shocks and innovative development initiatives is presented in session six, and the last session is on the general conclusion and the next steps.

2. Methodology for the Conduct of the VLR

Here we summarise the methodology used to undertake this local-level review of the SDGs implementation process. The approach employed was informed by the UNECA's prescribed guidelines for undertaking VLRs in Africa, and consistent with the Sierra Leone approach of inclusive participation in the national planning process.

2.1 Consultations and data collection

The Bonthe District VLR process was based on broad stakeholder participation, jointly led by the district council and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED), with the technical support of Statistics Sierra Leone. The actual review phase was preceded by an inception meeting between the district council authorities and MoPED which set up a technical committee for the review process, discussed the shape and structure of the VLR Report, and agreed on the roadmap for the review process. The process effectively commenced with a general stakeholder consultation workshop, with stakeholders largely drawn from the existing membership of the District Development Coordination Committee (DDCC), local/chiefdom authorities, the civil society (including women and youth groups and persons with disabilities), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and private sector operatives. The workshop

sensitised stakeholders about the SDGs and their implementation framework in the district, informed them about the VLR process, and sought their input on how Non-State Actors and the Private Sector would invest in the SDGs implementation.

This was followed by separate chiefdom and stakeholder consultations as follows: i) CSOs and Private Sector representatives on their knowledge and investment opportunities in SDGs implementation; ii) three chiefdom-level engagement on the status of the SDGs and development in their chiefdoms and communities. We undertook technical working sessions, media, and community engagement, local-level data collection, and desk reviews to enrich the report and to guide policies going forward. The actual field data collection exercise was preceded by a one-day training for data collectors to administer questionnaires. The draft report and the district-specific SDGs Results Framework were validated through a general stakeholder validation.

Like the various levels of stakeholder engagement, the data collection instrument also gauged the level of awareness and knowledge of the SDGs. Data was collected on the Government's Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSEP) in the district to assess its impacts on educational outcomes as well as the impacts on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries and communities. Another crucial area assessed is the potential and opportunities for the blue economy in the district. This was completed by s

2.2 Coordination of the VLR process

To effectively guide and provide oversight to the VLR process, a Technical Committee, comprising MoPED, Statistics Sierra Leone, and a representative from the DDCC was formed. The committee met regularly to guide the review process, including field data reports, and advised on other technical issues.

2.3 Limitations of the process

This report only provides broad updates on the SDGs implementation process in Bonthe District, showcasing stakeholder and institutional arrangements at the local level.

The review process was largely constrained by the lack of reliable data, especially disaggregated data at the local level. Given the huge data limitation, progress was provided on only a handful of indicators, complemented by highlights of key policy and institutional efforts that have been made so far in integrating the SDGs into local development processes.

3. Policy Architecture and Enabling Environment

This session discusses the policy and enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs in the Bonthe district, including the integration of the goals into the district development planning process. We will also discuss the three dimensions of sustainable development in the context of the district development processes, while articulating the district's perception of the concept of leaving no one behind.

3.1 Creating Ownership and Incorporation of the SDGs

The VLR process ensured intensive stakeholder and community sensitization on the goals and their relevance to the development aspirations of the people. The integration of the goals into the sector, and the overall district development programmes enhanced ownership of the SDGs. The joint engagement between CSOs and local authorities, and sensitization of the private sector on their role in the development process, have all contributed to enhanced partnership on the SDGs.

The Parliament of Sierra Leone, including the chairman of the Bonthe District Parliamentary Caucus, was part of the entire review process and pledged to assiduously follow up on the implementation of programmes and to ensure that the annual budget allocations for the district council are aligned with the district SDG targets and development needs as prescribed in the SDGs results framework.

As a crucial part of the local review process, *a local-level CSO Integrated SDG Platform* has been established for follow-ups on the implementation of the goals in the district, and to champion advocacy and public awareness on the goals. This platform, in collaboration with the *National CSOs Integrated Platform*, led the interactive engagements with chiefdom and local authorities on the need for increased collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders and the district council for sustainable development. The platform has helped to change the development planning landscape of the district, where chiefdom authorities and private sector operatives are no longer development spectators but that they are now active partners of development.

The review process also accentuated the district development priorities in the shape of *district accelerator SDGs as SDG 2, SDG 4, and SDG 14*. These accelerator SDGs are considered to have the largest transformative knock-on effect on the other SDGs and related sector areas based on the ensuing analogy:

- i) The key economic activity of the district is agriculture which employs more than 70 percent of the district population, dominated by food production. Thus, strengthening the capacity of farming communities for sustainable large-scale productivity will improve their livelihood and the agricultural sector;
- ii) Similar to the national context, goal four is chosen to improve the district's human capital development to enhance productivity and transformational sustainable development; and
- iii) The district has a coastline of about 35 km with an estimated coastal population of 101,890 (about 30 percent of the district population), whose predominant economic activities are fishing, marine transportation, and farming, rendering the blue economy a crucial role in the district's drive for sustainable development.

Following the successful decentralization of the MTNDP across the 16 administrative districts during 2019-2020, MoPED in 2020 revitalized the District Development Coordination Committees, DDCCs, through which development actors and local authorities regularly meet

to discuss development programmes in the district. The DDCC platform is used for following up on the implementation of the SDGs, tracking, and reporting on progress. The DDCCs are preceded by standardised development planning guidelines produced by MoPED, which has made it possible for the consolidation of the council's development planning system to the national planning process, aimed at the socio-economic transformation of the district. Also, the current Bonthé District Development Plan 2020-2022, the main instrument for implementing the SDGs on the ground, was developed through broad stakeholder consultations.

With the development of a district-specific SDGs results framework and dashboard, we have ensured that all local council and sectoral programmes and financing are directly or indirectly linked to the SDGs, by extension, the MTNDP.

While implementation of the current district development plan ends this year, this is an awesome opportunity for the successor District Development Plan to be highly SDGs driven and people-centered.

3.2 The district planning and programming framework

As part of the immediate post war institutional building efforts, decentralization was resuscitated and District Development Planning was effectively reactivated through the Local Government Act 2004. As mandated by the Act, the local councils have functional Planning and Development Committees that effectively provide oversight and guidance to the council development planning process. The committee supports the preparation of local council development plans that are consistent with the National Development Plan and also supports the general coordination of the development planning landscape of the councils. The DDCC is also playing center stage in the general coordination of development actors within the district.

The planning and development committee is composed of elected councillors, one chosen by the Chairman of the Council to be the chair of the committee, the Chief Administrator of the council as the deputy chair, the Development and Planning Officer as the Secretary to the committee, the M&E Officer, the heads or representatives of the sectors operating in the district /council (maximum of 6).

Additionally, there is a Local Technical Planning Committee, comprised of technical staff from devolved Government MDAs, the Development and Planning Officer, and the M&E Officer of the council. This technical committee conducts needs assessments on key interventions to inform policy actions and provides technical leadership in the preparation of the District Development Plan.

However, a remaining challenge has been the dearth of requisite capacity and structure within the development planning sphere of the council for the effective operationalisation of the committees. Given the renewed demand for enhanced decentralization, there is a need to restructure and operationalize the planning and development committee of the council. Efforts must be made to strengthen systems at this local level for effective service delivery, which remains critical to sustainable development.

The Government and development partners have thus far continued to provide capacity-building support to the local councils. The EU delegation, for instance, is currently providing such capacity building, reforms, and programme supports to six local councils, including the Bonthé District Council.

3.3 Monitoring and evaluation framework

As already noted in previous sessions, the SDGs have been implemented within the existing framework of implementing and reporting on national and local development plans to ensure coherent, harmonized, and aligned national development efforts. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development coordinates the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level and ensures continued integration of the goals into the plans of Government MDAs and local councils as well as ensuring progress reporting on the indicators and targets from these institutions.

As part of the efforts to strengthen the national M&E system, in 2018, the Government established a specialised outfit for monitoring and evaluation of strategic capital projects of the country—the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department (NaMED)—to enhance value for money with public projects through effective supervision and reporting. Since then, the Department has advanced the establishment of a web-based public project tracking system, and it regularly monitors the government’s flagship programmes, including the Free Healthcare Initiative and the FQSEP. The National M&E Policy and the M&E Manual have been produced with a clear articulation of how local-level M&E systems interface with the national-level M&E operations. With the support of the World Bank, NaMED is reactivating M&E committees in all councils. This local-level M&E committee effectively tracks progress on all development programmes and reports directly to NaMED and MoPED.

Towards advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the district-specific SDGs results framework, which is derived from the national SDGs results framework will be used to track the district’s progress on the goals and targets. The SDGs dashboard will be available and displayed at the district council to showcase the district’s progress on each of the goals and indicators that have been localised.

3.4 Leaving No One Behind

The Sierra Leone SDGs domestication process in 2016 took into consideration the principle of leaving no one behind and identified key areas to be critical in addressing the concept of leaving no one behind⁶. These areas, as identified in the national SDGs consultation process, are summarized as follows: (i) Addressing Socioeconomic Participation and Inclusiveness; (ii) Addressing issues of disability and stigmatization; (iii) strengthening the justice system and tackling the welfare of the incarcerated; (iv) Addressing food insecurity, extreme poverty, and rural development; (v) island, coastal communities and people behind the road; (vi) natural resource management and the survival of those not yet born; and (vii) data disaggregation. This section, therefore, presents the local perception and progress made in pursuing the welfare of especially high-risk groups in society.

- (i) **Addressing Socioeconomic Participation and Inclusiveness:** Inclusive participation in both political and socioeconomic activities is considered critical to the operations of the district council. The newly re-established DDCC platform is being effectively utilised to bring relevant stakeholder communities to the table and to ensure inclusive participation in the local development processes through bi-monthly meetings and follow-ups on key discussion points. The district council also has its monthly *Development Hours Radio Talk Show* through which the general populace is engaged in development programmes in the district.

Furthermore, the sustained operations of the Ministry of Youth Affairs’ devolved office, which is housed at the district council, has been very crucial in advancing

⁶ Pages 14-16 of the 2016 Sierra Voluntary National Review Report

youth empowerment initiatives at chiefdom levels, providing them with support to engage in meaningful socio-economic activities.

The council's inclusive and transparent budget preparations process as part of the national annual budget hearing and discussion has proven laudable in enhancing transparent socioeconomic participation and inclusive governance. This process involves the participation of CSO, District Budget Oversight Committees, devolved Government MDA, and the Local Council, all at the various stages of the budget preparation process.

- (ii) ***Addressing issues of disability and stigmatization-*** The current Revised District Development Plan acknowledges issues of disability and stigmatisation as crucial to addressing the welfare of its people. The plan has therefore adequately articulated strategic actions under its social welfare, gender, and children's affairs pillar, including massive sensitisation of communities on the content of the Disability Act and mobilising support from the central Government and NGOs to ensure adequate provision is made to support disability programmes in the district.
- i) ***Strengthening the justice system and tackling the welfare of the incarcerated-*** Within the framework of goal 16 of the 2030 agenda and the MTNDP, judicial reforms and restructuring are key strategies being pursued in promoting justice, the rule of law and good governance. The district has been one of the beneficiaries of the interventions of the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board in providing free legal representation to the less privileged and vulnerable groups, juveniles in conflict with the law. In the past couple of years, several cases, involving both adults and children have been settled out of the court system through the Board's Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism. The Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone police has been very effective in minor family cases while the District now benefits from quarterly sitting of the high court of Sierra Leone.
- (iii) ***Addressing food insecurity, extreme poverty, and rural development-*** The social safety net programme of the National Commission for Social Action, agro-support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS), and a host of other interventions of government have been contributing to addressing the high incidence of extreme poverty, and improving the welfare of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), the aged and the less privileged in the district. The MAFS is engaging its funding partners to revive large-scale rice cultivation in the district while the Youth Affairs Ministry is supporting the Youth Farm Project across the various chiefdoms in the district. Also, consistent with the initiative for the transformation of agriculture and rural economy, MAFS continues to distribute basic irrigation and soil analysis equipment to the District Agricultural Engineers for effective and efficient fieldwork.
- (iv) ***Island, coastal communities and people behind the road-*** Bonthé district has a long coastline with a number of coastal and riverine communities whose lives and livelihoods are often impacted by the unforgiving impact of climate change and adverse weather conditions. The risk of outbreaks of diseases is also very high in these communities. For Yeliboya and other riverine communities that are at risk of being below sea level, mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that they are immediately captured in district development planning processes and their needs looked into, if we are not to risk leaving behind a whole set of communities.
- (v) ***Natural resource management and the survival of those not yet born-*** The district is endowed with a variety of natural resources, but the sustainable utilisation of these huge resources remains critical for creating economic growth and prosperity of the people. Mindful of this, both the central government and the local council

have made significant efforts to prioritize the sustainable management and optimal use of the district's environmental and natural resources. Like the rest of the country. The Bonthe District Council has domesticated the implementation of the Extractive Industries Initiative (EITI) principles, and all capital projects are given environmental consideration with the mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken.

- (vi) **Data disaggregation-**: Since the launch of the SDGs in 2015, data disaggregation has been strengthened at the national level with various surveys undertaken, albeit remaining significant challenges, especially at the local level.

Although data from the 2021 Mid-Term National Housing and Population Census was not available to enrich this report, it is hoped that once they are published, the challenge of data gaps at the local level will be lessened, thereby increasing the number of indicators to report on in future reviews.

3.5 Structural Issues

Since its re-establishment in 2004, the Bonthe District Council has contended with a number of structural challenges in financing and coordinating development within the district.

Among the many challenges are:

- (i) **Limited funding space**: The limited revenue stream and inadequate budget allocation from the central Government for financing development programmes continues to undermine the council's ability to deliver on its mandates of promoting sustainable development. The weak private sector and the large-scale informality in the district are among the other leading factors contributing to the limited revenue stream.
- (ii) **The dearth of capacity**: The effective implementation of development programmes has been largely constrained by the apparent dearth of requisite capacity and structure within the development planning sphere of the council, including weak M&E capacity to ensure there is value for money in the implementation of programmes. Generally, the local governance system suffers from a large-scale staff attrition rate, which is often attributed to poor conditions of service for officers. Given the renewed demand for enhanced decentralization, for delivering on development outcomes and the SDGs, there is, therefore, the need to review and restructure the financing mechanism for the councils, as well as the general management and administration of the human resource capacity of the council.
- (iii) **CoVID-19 pandemic**: This was a leading barrier to the effective implementation of the SDGs and to achieving planned results in the District's Development plan. Implementation processes, including engaging communities across regions and districts, were disrupted at the peak of the pandemic for a considerable period.
- (iv) **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation**: The coastlines are highly susceptible to coastal erosion and to the potential impacts of climate change such as sea level rise. Studies have shown that a number of coastal communities in Sierra Leone are at risk of being below sea level. These communities would require strategic support in the form of critical infrastructure and decent settlement, livelihood support, and water and sanitation to enable them adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- (v) **The Russia-Ukraine War and macroeconomic shocks**: The current Russia-Ukraine war is an external shock that has badly affected socio-economic activities and constrained resource flows for the implementation of planned projects, in addition to its impact on food and commodity prices.

4. Progress on the Goals & Targets

Bonthe district has made key headways in the SDGs implementation at both the policy front and in results areas, even in the face of several challenges and uncertainties. This section, therefore examines the district's progress on the SDG targets and indicators, focusing on eleven goals (goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 16 & 17) which have been localized at the district level. We will further illustrate progress at the institutional and policy fronts which could be the springboards for delivering on the SDGs target. The achievements articulated in this report are based on the response and inputs of the various stakeholder groups, analysis of field-level data, and the review of existing reports on the national development plan and the SDGs.

4.1 Progress on the Accelerator Goals

The Sierra Leone Accelerator SDGs—SDG4 (*inclusive education*) and SDG16 (*justice, peace, and inclusive society*), alongside the district accelerator goals are strategically pursued at the local level. This session therefore provides a status update on the district's accelerator goals (SDG2, SDG4 & SDG14) in addition to the Sierra Leone accelerator goals.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

As part of the review process, we undertook a rapid impact assessment of the Government Free Quality School Education Programme, FQSEP, at the primary level in the district. The assessment covered a sample of 21 schools in 21 different communities in the district, with 63 pupils, 63 parents, and one school administrator respondent from each of the sampled schools. These categories of respondents are the direct beneficiaries of the Government FQSEP. Programme areas of the FQSEP assessed are a) school feeding support; b) tuition fee grant, and c) the provision of teaching and learning materials. The following is an analysis of the findings of the study.

Background on the school feeding programme

We gauged the impact of the school feeding programme on the educational outcome and general welfare of primary school pupils and parents in the district. **Table 4.1a** presents a summary of the outcome data *on the school feeding programme*. Out of a total of 21 schools assessed, 4 (19 percent) are government schools and 17 (81 percent) are government-assisted schools; of which 12 schools receive their school feeding supply through the Government, while 9 schools receive their feeding supply through NGOs. This is further illustrated in **Figure 4.1a** where about 43 percent of the schools received their school feeding ration through NGOs, and 57 directly from the Government.

Table 4.1a: Background data on the school feeding programme

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
Total number of schools Assessed	21	
Type of School		
Government school	4	19
Government-assisted school	17	81
Institutions providing the school feeding support		
Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education	12	57.1
NGOs	9	42.9
Regular and timely supply of the school feeding support		
Regular and timely supplies	18	85.7
Irregular and supplies	3	14.3
Classes of children being fed	Classes 1-6	100
Number of children beneficiaries since 2018	10,067	
Girls	5,057	
Boys	5,009	

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

Figure 4.1b describes the regularity of the school feeding program, showing that the majority (85.7%) of the primary schools receive school feeding supplies regularly and on time, while 14.3% negate that statement. The data also shows that all classes (from 1 to 6) of pupils benefit from the feeding programme, with a total of 10,067 pupils (5,057 girls and 5,009 boys) beneficiaries since 2018.

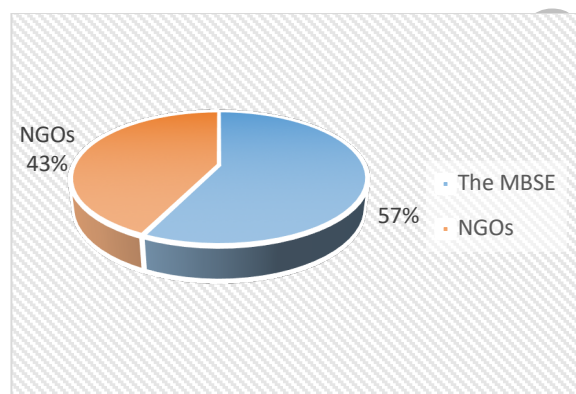


Figure 4.1a Provision of school feeding

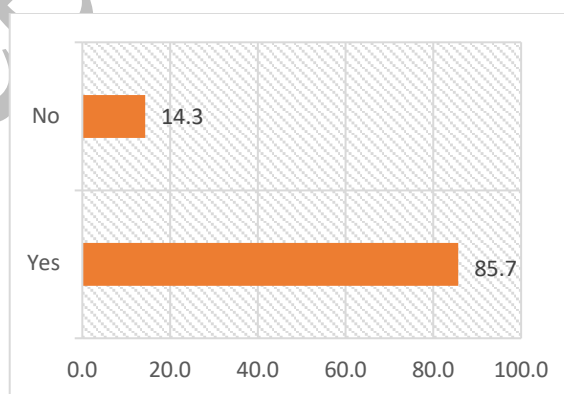


Figure 4.1b Regularity of school feeding

Tuition fee grant & teaching and learning materials

From **Table 4.1b**, 100% of the sample schools benefit from both Government's School Fee Grant and Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM), with a total of 6,191 pupils (3,247 girls and 2,944 boys) from the sampled schools benefiting from the fee payment.

Table 4.1b: Tuition fee grant payment by the Government

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
Total number of schools Assessed	21	
Schools benefitting from both Government school fees and teaching and learning materials	21	100
Pupils benefitting from the school fees payment by the government		6,191
Girls	3,247	52.44
Boys	2,944	47.56
Classes benefitting from the school fees programme		
Classes 5-6	1	4.8
All Classes	20	95.2

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

The assessment identified the core TLMs supplied to all the schools—*core textbooks, notebooks, chalk, pens, pencils, and crayon* (please see **Table 4.1c**) with only 14.3 percent of the schools receiving other TLMs. The assessment also shows that the TLMs are not supplied regularly and on time, with only 28.6 percent of the schools confirming the regular and timely supply of TLMs. We also noted a high level of appreciation for the TLMs support and the schools consider the materials to be very relevant to the schools.

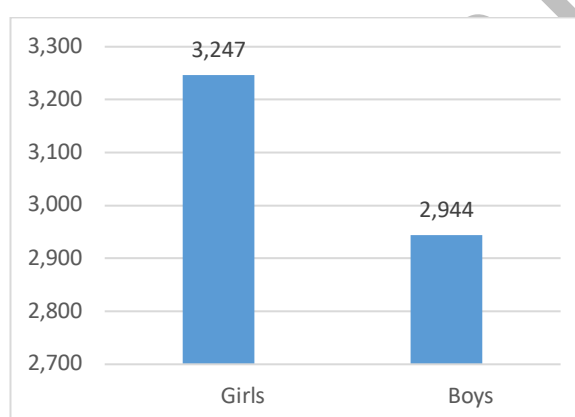


Figure 4.1d: Number of children by gender who benefited from fees

Table 4.1c: Supply of teaching and learning materials

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
The total number of schools assessed	21	
Types of core teaching and learning materials supplied	Core textbooks Notebooks chalk Pens/Pencils/Crayon	100
Other learning materials provided by the Government		
Yes	3	14.3
No	18	85.7
Regular and timely supply of the teaching and learning materials		
Regular and timely supplies	6	28.6
Irregular and supplies	15	71.4
Relevance of the learning materials to the schools	21	100

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

Socio-Economic background of parents and pupil

Table 4.2a presents the socio-economic background of the parents, showing that 65 percent of the parents were males and 35.7 percent were females.

As illustrated in **Figure 4.1d**, the employment status of the parents shows that about 64 percent of the parents were self-employed, 17 percent were employed, and 12 percent were unemployed. About 52 percent of the parents were in monogamous married relationships; 29 percent were in polygamous marriages; and 5 percent were never married.

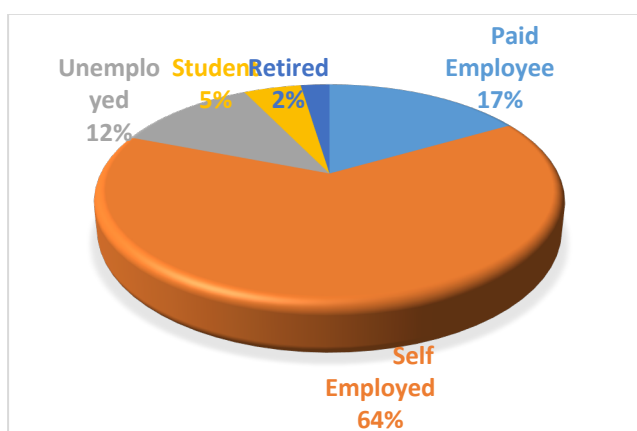


Figure 4.1d: Employment status of the parents

Mindful of the fact that education is a crucial factor in shaping the lifestyle and socioeconomic status of people, we attempted to assess the educational attainment of the parents. The result shows that about 59 percent of the parents attended school, and 41 percent did not attend school. Among those that attended school, about 29 percent completed primary education, 38 percent have junior secondary education, 14.3 percent have senior secondary education, and only 4.8 percent have higher education.

Table 4.2a: Socio-economic background of parents

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
Total number of parents respondents	63	
Sex of the parents		
Female	22	34.9
Male	41	65.1
Employment Status of the parents		
Paid Employee	11	16.7
Self Employed	41	64.3
Unemployed	7	11.9
Student	3	4.8
Retired	2	2.4
Material Status of parents		
Married Monogamous	33	52.4
Married Polygamous	18	28.6
Widowed	9	14.3
Never Married	3	4.8
Ever attended school		
Yes	37	58.7
No	26	41.3
Highest educational attainment of parents		
Primary	18	28.6
Junior Secondary	24	38.1
Senior Secondary	9	14.3
Vocational/Tech/Nursing/Teaching	9	14.3
Higher (First Degree)	3	4.8

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP School feeding and the provision of daily lunch

We further studied the provision of daily lunch to pupils after the introduction of the school feeding programme. From **Table 4.2b** and **Figure 4.2b**, approximately 59 percent of the parents were still providing daily

Table 4.2b: Parents and provision of lunch

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
Provision of lunch since the start of the school feeding		
Yes	37	58.7
No	26	41.3
Average lunch money per child per day		NLe1.97

Source: Authors' construct based on field data

lunch for their school children even after the introduction of the school feeding programme, while 41 percent of the parents no longer provide lunch. For the parents who were providing lunch, the average lunch money provided per child was estimated at **NLe1.97 per day**.

Level of satisfaction with school feeding

As illustrated in **Table 4.2c**, the pupils, parents, and school authorities all generally rated the school feeding support very highly. The level of dissatisfaction among the pupils and parents was estimated at 5 percent each, but this increased to approximately 14 percent for the school authorities. Among the pupils, the general level of satisfaction (very satisfied, just satisfied, and okay) was estimated at 95.2 percent, and the parents recorded the same level of satisfaction.

Table 4.2c: Level of satisfaction with the school feeding support

	Percentage		
	Pupils	Parents	School Authorities
Level of satisfaction with the school feeding support			
Very satisfied	48.6	61.9	71.4
Satisfied	16.6	23.8	8.3
Just okay	30.0	9.5	6.8
Not satisfied	4.8	4.8	13.5

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

Figure 4.2c, therefore, illustrates that both parents and school authorities are very satisfied with the introduction of the school feeding programme, having the highest scores of 62 percent and 71 percent respectively; and 48 percent of pupils were also very satisfied with the school feeding programme.

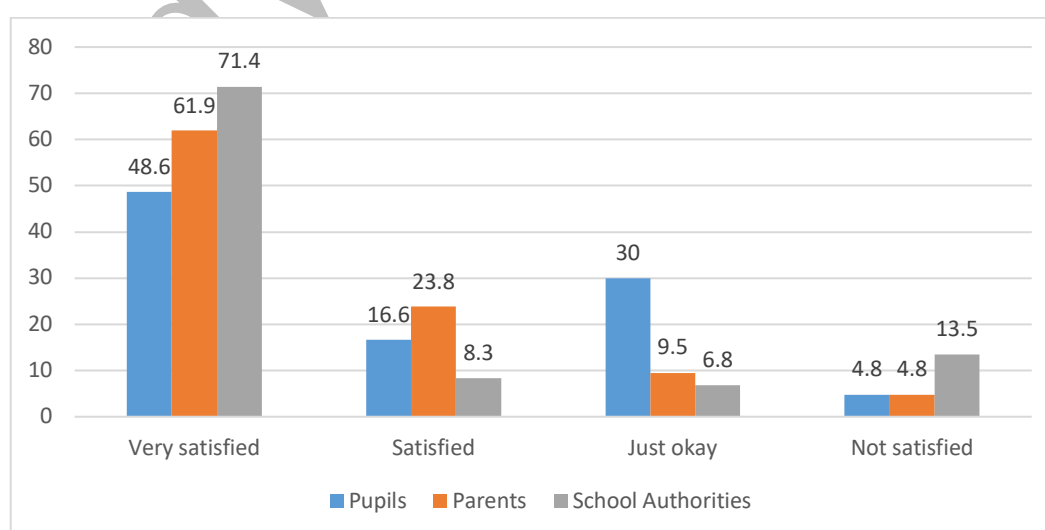


Figure 4.2c: level of satisfaction ratings

Government tuition fees grant against school fee payment parent

From **Table 4.2d**, the assessment found that 63.5 percent of the 63 parents paid school fees before the 2017/18 academic year when the FQSEP was introduced, suggesting that some parents (about 37 percent) did not pay school fees before the inception of the FQSEP. There should be caution in the appreciation of this outcome; in that, public school examination fees that were paid by the Government before FQSEP must not be interpreted as tuition fees that parents had paid. For the parent who paid school fees, the average amount paid was NLe36.8.

Table 4.2d: School fees support by the Government and school fee payment by parents

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
School fees payment by parents before 2017/2018		
Yes	40	63.5
No	23	36.5
School fees paid by parents in 2020/2021		
Yes	4	6.3
No	59	93.7
The average amount paid by parents		
Before 2017/2018	NLe36.8	
In 2020/2021	NLe38.8	

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

In comparison to the 2020/2021 school year after the introduction of the FQSEP, the greater majority (93.7 percent) of parents were not paying school fees. The extreme minority (6.3 percent) who reported to be still paying fees had quoted the amount of NLe38.8 as fees paid.

Provision of teaching and learning materials against the purchase of teaching and learning materials by parent response

Table 4.2e: Provision of teaching and learning materials by parents

Policy Variable	Number	Percentage
Teaching and learning materials provided by parents before 2017/2018		
Yes	42	66.7
No	21	33.3
Teaching and learning materials provided by parents in 2020/2021		
Yes	28	44.4
No	35	55.6
The average amount spent on school materials by parents		
Before 2017/2018	NLe300	
In 2020/2021	NLe382	

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

From **Table 4.2e**, 66.7 percent of the parents were providing TLMs for their children before the 2017/2018 school year, quoting NLe300 as the average amount spent per year per child. Following the introduction of the FQSEP in 2018, the percentage of parents who still buy TLMs for their children in 2020/2021 decreased to

44.4 percent, with an average annual expenditure of NLe382 per child.

Assessing trends in school enrolment

Table 4.2f: Gauging enrolment before and after FQSEP

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
School pupils covered in the 2017/18 academic year		8018
Male	3,782	
Female	4,236	
School pupils covered in the 2021/2022 academic year		9,032
Male	3,696	
Female	5,336	

Source: Field data on the rapid impact assessment of the Government FQSEP

From **Table 4.2f**, school enrolment in the sampled schools increased by 11 percent from 8,018 pupils in 2017/18 (before the introduction of the FQSEP) to 9,032 in 2021/2022 after the introduction of the FQSEP programme.

While the population's natural growth rate could be a factor for an annual increase in school enrolment (estimated at 2,912 or 12.6 percent), the conscious policy effort of the Government of introducing the FQSEP could have a significant contribution to this increase.

Welfare Impact analysis

Estimate of monetary savings from the FQSEP for parents and projected impact on household poverty

Based on the above analysis, we note that the Government's FQSEP has been doing substantially well, with monetary and non-monetary benefits to the parents and households. The immediate three levels of beneficiaries expressed general satisfaction with the programme as related to primary-level school feeding, tuition fee grant, and provision of teaching and learning materials. We note at the same time the need to enhance the regularity and timely delivery of support under the programme to enhance its impact on households and educational outcomes. Against this inference, we are attempting here to estimate the monetary savings parents could have generated through the introduction of the government FQSEP at primary level, considering the following parameters and accompanying assumptions.

- Unit savings a parent could make in government/government-assisted primary schools per pupil per day and per year from the school feeding: - Considering the government school feeding support per pupil at NLe2.7 (Le 2,700 old leones) (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2020) per day, and comparing that with the NLe1.97 (average lunch money per child per day) reported by parents in the data presented above (**Table 4.2b**), then multiply the NLe1.97 by 200 days, estimated to be the total school days per year. This gives a total yearly savings of NLe394 per pupil for a parent⁷.
- Average government spending on tuition, textbooks, and examinations: - Here we will draw from published data on annual average public spending on primary school for tuition, textbooks, and examination for 2019, estimated at NLe242 in the latest Education Sector Analysis⁸.

From these unit estimates, we project that the minimum savings that a parent could make per year per pupil in government or government-assisted primary schools will be equal to NLe636 [which is Le 394 (from school feeding support) + Le242 (tuition, textbooks, and examination)]. This minimum amount, coupled with related monetary benefits from the programme can now be accumulated over time and invested in small business undertakings or towards improving farming; or even used to meet basic health bills in a typical poverty setting. This could make a

⁷ The total number of school weeks per year is 40; multiplied by 5 average school days gives 200 days for the school year.

⁸ See page 63, Education Sector Analysis 2020, Republic of Sierra Leone

considerable welfare difference for the rural households where income poverty is highly concentrated. The increased access to education associated with school feeding, elimination of school fees and reduced household expenditure burden on learning materials also directly contributes to reduction in multidimensional child poverty (SDG1 and SDG2).

Progress at indicator level

Based on the available data from the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS, 2013 and 2019), progress was ascertained on a total of four indicators, each disaggregated by sex, and analysed as follows:

i. Indicator 4.1.2: Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)

Proportion of women age 15-49 completing primary education: The district recorded a decreased completion rate at the primary school level for women, from 4.5 percent in 2013 (Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF, 2013) to 1.8 percent in 2019, whilst the completion rate for the men declined from 4.4 percent to 1.3 percent during the same period (Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL) and ICF, 2020). In both years, the district outperformed the national and regional averages, albeit very low completion rate at the primary level.

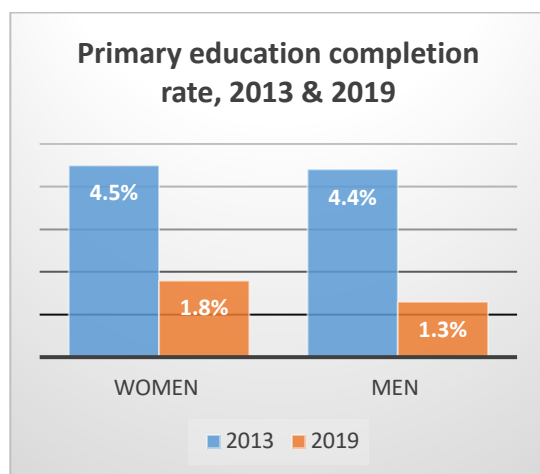


Figure 4.2d: primary school completion rates

Proportion of women age 15-49 completing senior secondary education: Among the women, secondary school completion rate increased from 0.3 percent in 2013 to 0.9 percent in 2019. For the men it increased from 2 percent in 2013 to 3.4 percent in 2019.

Although the secondary school completion rate amongst men is also low compared to the national average, it is higher than the completion rate for women. Similar to the national trend, this is an indication of a higher secondary school dropout rate amongst women during 2013-2019 period

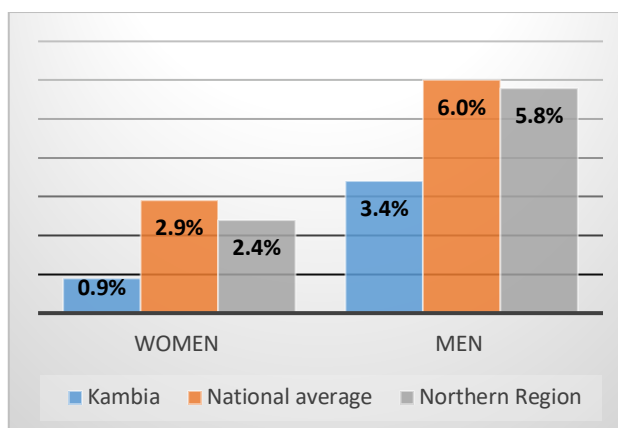


Figure 4.2e: Secondary school completion rates, 2019

ii. Indicator 4.2.2 Participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

At the time of the review, data was not available to assess early childhood education at the local level. In lieu of this, the VLR process assessed the Primary School Net Attendance Ratio for primary-school-age (6-11) years and revealed that the district recorded a positive performance on Primary School Net Attendance Ratio, with an increase in the score from 56.2 percent in 2013 to almost 86 percent in 2019.

iii. Indicator 4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male) for all levels of education

Gender parity was achieved and exceeded at the primary school level between 2013 and 2019, with a score of 1.04 in 2013 and 1.0 in 2019, indicating that more girls than boys attended primary school in 2013. At the secondary level, parity was almost achieved in 2013 with a score of 0.9 in 2013 but further deteriorated in 2019 with a score of 0.75.

iv. Indicator 4.6.1: Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex

Adult female literacy rate (literacy rate ages 15+) decreased from 43.8 percent in 2013 to 33.8 percent while adult male literacy rate (literacy rate ages 15+) recorded a significant improvement from 43.2 percent in 2013 to 67.6 percent in 2019.

Other strategic areas of progress toward meeting the targets for SDG 4:

- i. During the SDGs era, the district has witnessed an increase in the number of schools at the primary, junior and senior levels.
- ii. With the support of Action Aid/ABC-Development, an NGO operating in the district, 10 scholarships were provided for students in tertiary institutions while over 50 government grant-in-aid scholarships were awarded to students in the district.
- iii. The Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and UNICEF, provided massive training for teachers; especially untrained and unqualified teachers to improve teacher quality and classroom delivery.
- iv. The Council and partners have established 45 mothers' clubs in the district and training is provided for them.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. The poor performance of pupils (boys and girls) in public/ externals exams (the Basic Education Certificate Examination, BECE, and the West African Senior Schools Certificate Examination, WASSCE)
- ii. The drop-in school retention rate, especially for girls
- iii. Overcrowding in schools
- iv. Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials and learning infrastructures
- v. The existence of dilapidated school infrastructures and makeshift structures
- vi. Inadequate teacher supervisors and monitoring logistics.
- vii. Unavailability of science equipment in most junior and secondary schools



SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The overall performance on this goal was encouraging and called for sustained policy actions to improve the well-being of the people and to meet the 2030 targets. Among the six indicators reported on (please refer to Annex 2.1A, the Bonthe District SDGs Results Framework), the district recorded a positive performance on four indicators while the others showed retrogression.

i. Indicator 2.1.1: Prevalence of undernourishment

The district's performance on this indicator improved slightly from 16.9 percent in 2013 to 15.9 percent in 2019, and the proportion of underweight women in the district reduced drastically from 3.5 percent in 2013 to 0.4 percent in 2019.

ii. Indicator 2.2.1: Prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviations from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age)

The overall performance on this indicator improved from 36.8 percent in 2013 to 31.9 percent in 2019, which is above the national target for 2020 at 24 percent. The Government's FQSEP school feeding programme is helping to reduce short-term hunger and malnutrition amongst primary school children, especially in poor and deprived communities. The prevalence of severe stunting among those under-5 also recorded a slight improvement by 1 percentage point during the period 2013-2019.

iii. Indicator 2.2.2: Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height >+2 or <-2 standard deviations from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)- Moderate

Performance on this indicator marginally deteriorated from 6.5 percent in 2013 to 8.1 percent in 2019, a similar trend to other parts of the country. Severe wasting however dropped from 3.1 percent to 2 percent between 2013 and 2019 (DHS 2013 and 2019).

iv. Indicator 2.1.2: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the district Using published reports, the general level of food insecurity was assessed, especially to account for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the state of food security in the district. The data shows that the prevalence of food insecurity in the district deteriorated during the period under review, with the proportion of the district population who are food insecure increasing from 67 percent in 2015 to 73 percent in February 2022 (WFP and Government of Sierra Leone, 2022), which is the average score for the country (FAO, 2021)⁹.

Table 4.3: State of Food Insecurity Score (%), 2015-2022

No	Region/Food insecurity	Bonthe			National Average		
		2015	2020	2022	2015	2020	2022
1	Food insecurity	67%	46%	73%	50%	57%	73%
2	Severe Food insecurity	15%	5%	9%	9%	12%	11%
3	Moderate Food insecurity	52%	41%	65%	41%	46%	62%

Source: Compiled from the Food Security Monitoring System and Vulnerability Analysis Reports

⁹ State of Food Security in Sierra Leone, 2015, (MAFS, FAO & WFP), and Food Security Monitoring System Report, February 2022 (Government of Sierra Leone and WFP)

The pre-pandemic period of 2015-2020, however, recorded a decrease in food insecurity from 67 percent to 46 percent, before jumping to 73 percent in 2022 (please see figure 4.3A below). The **proportion of households in severe food insecurity** status (which is an indicator for assessing the worsening situation) nosedived from 15.4 percent in 2015 (FAO, MAFS and WFP, 2015) to 5 percent in 2020 before increasing to 9 percent in 2022 (below the national average score scored of 11 percent). That is an increase from 22,848 severely food insecure population in 2020 to 38,890 severely food insecure population in 2022.

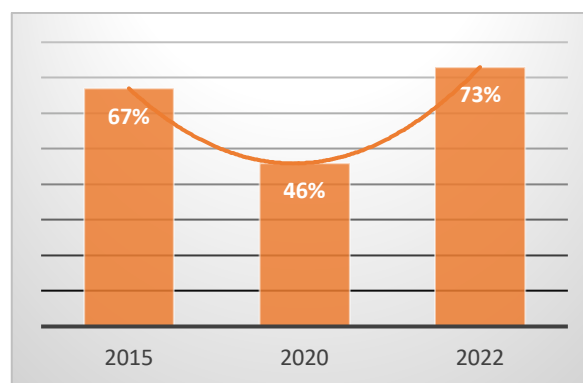


Figure 4.3A: Proportion of the district population food insecure, 2015, 2020, 2022

Consequently, the 2022 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) attributed the worsening food security situation in the country to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout which contributed to a further deterioration in living conditions and reduced access to basic amenities. As agriculture in the district is highly labour intensive, farming households who lack access to sufficient agricultural labourers subsequently end up with low agricultural production. Furthermore, the severe pandemic containment measures also disrupted agricultural activities, leading to low outputs.

Among the other factors contributing to food insecurity are: i) outdated agricultural methods, ii) insufficient and expensive agricultural inputs, iii) the impact of climate change leading to erratic rainfall pattern, and iv) high food prices all contribute

Other strategic areas of progress toward meeting the targets for SDGs 1 and 2:

- 1) In addition to its huge potential for rice cultivation, Bonthe district is also known for livestock farming, reporting the third highest returns for cattle, goat, sheep, and poultry keeping. Key efforts undertaken to enhance livestock farming include:
 - a) Vaccination of small ruminants against PPR (estimated at 2000 goats & 1,600 sheep annually) in five chiefdoms
 - b) Restocking of small ruminants in three communities done in the early part of 2022
 - c) The annual production of livestock is estimated at more than 11,000 cattle, 5,000 sheep, 5,400 goats, and 13,400 chickens
- 2) The district is among the districts that report the highest percentage of farmers who grow rice for their own consumption, only third behind Tonkolili and Kailahun districts.
- 3) Efforts to mechanise agriculture (Ploughing, Harrowing, and Seed harrowing) are ongoing, though at a slow pace, with the annual cultivation of rice farmland estimated at 950 hectares.
- 4) Support with improved rice seeds and assorted vegetables to 10 farmer-based organizations
- 5) In response to the government's determination and support to enhance food security in the country, hundreds of acres of rice farms have been cultivated across the district and the period under review has witnessed increased production of crops: In 2020 for example,
 - a) Approximately 3,000 metric tons of rice were produced
 - b) 7,790 metric tons of cassava were produced
 - c) 240 metric tons of cashew nuts produced

- 6) With its fertile land and suitability for oil palm plantation, a number of smallholder/family-owned oil plantations exist in the district. The district also has the potential for large-scale and industrial oil palm farming but this would require private sector investment, which has remained constrained by the lack of capital.
- 7) Transplanting of oil palm seedlings advanced with 4,000 oil palm seedlings raised in each community (ready for transplanting, with pegging and digging of holes completed) in the first half of 2022.
- 8) There is a proposed Bonthe Agricultural Investment Plan with the objective of *“facilitating a sustainable increase in production, productivity and competitiveness of Bonthe District agriculture through building capacity of farmers and institutions, and improving the quantity and quality of public, private and development partner investment and policy alignment”*.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. Poor access to farm implements and seedlings by farmers remains a going concern.
- ii. While it is widely acknowledged that the district has huge potential for rice cultivation and other farming activities, the lack of access to finance and machines to practice mechanised farming is a challenge to the district’s effort to enhance food security. Farming is still done using crude methods and on a subsistence basis.
- iii. The district is also challenged by the apparent lack of farmer-allied intermediaries/farm gates marketing to facilitate seamless linkages to the markets for agricultural products. This absence of reliable farmer-allied intermediaries has resulted in the smuggling of agricultural produce, especially food items to the neighbouring countries through the porous border crossing points in the district.
- iv. The lack of access to finance has constrained growth and limited the participation of the private sector.
- v. Poor road network and connectivity of feeder roads to trunk roads is weak, thereby limiting access to the market for agricultural produce
- vi. The district is constrained by inadequate processing facilities for cash crops (such as cashew nuts, oil palm, mango, and orange), and inadequate storage facilities for vegetables (such as lettuce, tomato, cabbage, cucumber, spice etc), all leading to high post-harvest loss.
- vii. No storage and processing centre for animal products in the district.
- viii. Weak extension services in the communities



SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

The VLR also assessed the potential and opportunities for the blue economy in the district, and the implications for the livelihood of the communities. The assessment covered a sample of six coastal communities in the Scarcies Estuaries, targeting harbour masters, fishing boat owners, and community chief respondents. These targeted respondents are either leaders/ their representatives or direct participants/beneficiaries of the fishing operations of their communities. The specific areas assessed are a) the existence of fish landing sites within the

communities and the contribution of such sites to the overall community livelihoods; b) storage and preservation facilities at these facilities; c) catch/ income during peak and off-peak periods; d) knowledge of mangroves and their preservations; and d) alternative source of livelihoods during the rains/off-peak periods. The following is an analysis of the findings of the study.

Assessing the availability of fish landing sites in the communities

Table 4.4a presents background data on the existence of landing sites in fishing communities and the status of such sites. The data shows that all targeted communities have fish landing sites. Among them, 33.3 percent have one landing site each, 16.7 percent has three landing sites, and 50 percent have four landing sites each. Summing them up, the targeted communities have a total of 17 fish landing sites.

The data further shows that 33.3 percent of the communities have been using their landing sites for 3-5 years; a similar number of communities have used their sites for more than 10 years; and only 16.7% have utilized their sites for more than

60 years. Based on the aforementioned data and inputs from community stakeholders, we conclude that the existence of landing sites is historically, a crucial component of the community infrastructure and livelihoods of any fishing and coastal communities.

Table 4.4a: Availability of fish landing sites in communities

Policy Outcome Area	Number	percentage
Total number of communities assessed	6	
Number of communities has a fish landing site	6	100
Number Fish landing sites in the communities	6	
Two communities	1	33.3
One community	3	16.7
Three communities	4	50
Duration of the community fish landing site (s)		
3-5 years	2	33.3
10-20 years	2	33.3
25-35	1	16.7
More than 60 years	1	16.7

Source: Field data on assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district

Economic Utilisation of the fish landing sites

Table 4.4b: Economic Utilisation of the landing sites

Policy Outcome Area	Number	Percentage
Total number of communities Assessed	6	
Number of fishermen who use the site	458	
Community A	3	16.7
Community B	10	16.7
Community C	15	16.7
Community D	100	16.7
Community E	150	16.7
Community F	180	16.7
Payment for the use the site	3	50
Average amount paid per day per group		NLe23.3

Source: Field data on assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district

From **Table 4.4b**, a total of 458 fishermen were reported to be using the various landing sites in their communities. With an estimated population of 101,890 people (about 30 percent of the district population), fishing, therefore, accounts for the employment of a greater percentage of the population. The assessment however revealed that it is only in three communities where payment for the daily use of the sites is done, with an average daily payment of NLe23.3 per fishing group.

Assessing the general state of the sites and community of level of satisfaction with the landing sites

From **Table 4.4c**, 100 percent of the fish landing sites in the coastal communities were found not to have any storage facilities or cold rooms for the preservation of the fish catch. The sites lack basic facilities such as electricity and value addition (icing and packaging) equipment. They do not meet the minimum required standard for Jetties and Raised Platforms, in addition to their lack of basic safety gears and first aid kits, and search and rescue equipment. These sites are barely used for the boats to dock and for immediate trading with fish mongers and agents, majority of whom are female traders. The study also found out that the communities only use the smoking/drying method for preservation.

We further probed the source of energy for the preservation and smoking of the fish catch and the results shows that about 67 percent of the communities use firewood for drying and smoking, and 17 percent use mangroves and coconut shell each. The communities, like the rest of the district, are not connected to the national grid, neither do they have access to renewable energy to power their homes and the landing sites. The use of this energy source put additional pressure on the environment, including the mangroves, thereby affecting the community’s ability to meet other SDG targets.

Gauging the level of community satisfaction for the various landing sites, only 33 percent of the communities reported some form of satisfaction with the general state of the sites (including the facilities provided), as against the majority of the communities (67 %) reporting not to be satisfied.

A key policy recommendation is to provide a facelift for the fish landing sites, providing them with the requisite infrastructure, ample storage space and cooling systems, which could be powered by a solar power system. All of these could be part of a broader livelihood support for the coastal communities in the district.

Table 4.4c: Facilities at the site and the general level of satisfaction with the landing sites

Policy variable	Number	Percentage
Total number of landing sites in the targeted communities		17
Landing sites with storage facilities/cold rooms to store the fish catch		
Yes	0	
No	17	100
Fish preservation method used by the communities		
Smoking/Drying	6	100
Source of energy used for preserving/ smoking the fish catch		
Wood	4	66.6
Mangroves	1	16.7
Coconut shell	1	16.7
Level of satisfaction with the facilities provided at the landing sites		
Satisfied	1	16.7
Somehow Satisfied	1	16.7
Not Satisfied at all	4	66.6

Source: Field data on assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district

Assessing fishing equipment used by the community

As shown in **Table 4.4d**, we further assessed the fishing gears and equipment used by the communities, and the data shows that majority of the communities (83 percent) use locally made canoes to go out fishing as against one community which uses a fibre boat for fishing. Although the fibre boats are much more durable and sustainable boat for fishing, the communities lack the requisite financial resources to procure them.

Table 4.4d: Fishing equipment used by the communities

Policy variable	Number	Percentage
The kind of fishing boat used by the communities		
Fiber boat	1	17
Local canoes	5	83
The kind of fishing equipment used by the communities		
Fishing towler	0	
Small net	6	100

Source: Field data on assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district

The data also shows that 100 percent of the fishing communities use small fishing net, with a number of undersized mesh net. This could be interpreted as small-scale fishermen who do not go out in the sea for fishing, they rather fish around the shore for household consumption. It could also be a recipe for bad fishing practice that catches juvenile fish as well as fishing done in marine protected areas.

Measuring income generated from the fish catch

We also assessed the income generated from the fishing activities with the result presented in **Table 4.4e**. During the peak period for fishing, the average daily income generated from the fish catch is estimated at NLe1,633 per community and the off-peak period accounts for an income of NLe178.3 per community. Assuming that fishing is done five days a week (this is a very conservative assumption), the average income generated during a month for a peak period is NLe32,660 (that is 1,633 x 5 days x 4 weeks) per community. Now, assuming livelihood support for these communities increases their income by 20 percent in the first two years of the support, their average monthly income could be NLe39,192. This money could be used to address community and family needs for food, education, health, and investment in other community development programmes.

Table 4.4e: Income generation from fishing activities

Policy Variable	Number	percentage
Income generated from the fish catch		
Average income during peak period	NLe1,633	
Average income during off-peak	NLe178.3	
Alternative source of livelihood		
Farming	5	83
Trading	1	17

Source: Field data on the assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district

During the off-peak period of heavy rains, 83.3 percent of the communities go into farming, while 17 percent do petty trading. Thus, any livelihood support for these communities should consider these alternative economic activities.

Assessing the potential for the mangroves

This assessment was based on the community knowledge on the existence and importance of mangroves in their coastal territories, as well as the economic activities and culture of the communities, in addition to the review of existing literature. Nonetheless, to adequately account for the mangroves in the district and their potential for carbon sequestration and overall

value for the coastal ecosystem, it is recommended that a separate study be commissioned while soliciting further policy discussions on the topic.

This notwithstanding, 83 percent of the communities were found to have mangroves in their coastline, of which majority of these mangroves (60 percent) were found not to have any form of protection (**Table 4.4f**). This finding is not surprising as we have earlier established that more than 16 percent of the communities (please see table 4.4c) use mangroves as firewood to dry the fish. The assessment also probed the knowledge of the community on the importance of the mangroves, and the result is largely correlated to the level of protection for the mangroves.

Table 4.4f: Existence of mangroves in the communities

Policy Variable	Number	percentage
Existence of mangroves along the coast line for fish breeding		
Yes	5	83
No	1	17
Perception on the level of protection from being cut down		
Somehow protected	2	30
Not protected at all	3	60

Source: Field data on the assessment of the potential and opportunities for the Blue Economy in the district



This result is in consonance with existing literature on the status of mangroves in the scarces estuaries of Bonthe district. The mangroves in Sierra Leone have undergone considerable decline, with the largest decline estimated to have occurred in the coastal communities in Bonthe district (Johnson, 2020). The national mangrove coverage is estimated to be 90,790 hectares in 2015, dropping from 183,789 hectares in 1987¹⁰. Studies have also attributed these declines to human activities such as agriculture, salt production, logging for fire wood and climate change impacts.

¹⁰ See page 2, Socio-Economic Status and Living Conditions of Coastal Communities: Impacts on the Mangrove Ecosystems in the Scarces Estuaries, Sierra Leone, West Africa, International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, K. J. Konoyima and R. G Johnson

Progress at indicator level

A total of six indicators were localized for tracking the district progress on goal 14 of the SDGs. The lack of data could not permit any trend analysis on these indicators but the data developed now could form the baseline for assessing the district's progress towards the 2030 targets. The following a list of the indicators developed:

- i. Indicator 14.5.1: Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas***
- ii. Indicator 14.6.1: Number of registered and licensed fishing vessels/fishermen in the district***
- iii. Indicator 14.7.1a: Number of small fishing net exchanged with standard fishing net to support sustainable fishing practice***
- iv. Indicator 14.7.1b: Number of coastal and fishing community sensitisation sessions per year to promote sustainable fishing practice***
- v. Indicator 14.b.1a: Number of artisanal fishermen supported with fishing equipment and gears***
- vi. Indicator 14.b.1b: Number of jetties/fish landing sites rehabilitated and provided with basic services***

Summary of the potential and key areas of progress for the Blue Economy

- i. Bonthe district has a coast line of about 35 km with the Atlantic Ocean, in addition to other major rivers, rendering them and the district endowed with huge amount of marine and oceanic resources. The major economic activities of these communities are fishing and sea transportation, with fishing done on both commercial and personal consumption basis.***
- ii. The Blue economy therefore is a relevant component of the district's development aspirations with huge potential for sustainable income generation, flourished trade, improved nutrition and health, and improved standard of living.***

Summary of the challenges and needs

- i. The need to construct jetty facilities in at least 5 riverine communities to facilitate their movement, enhance agricultural production and foster trade in these communities.***
- ii. The entire district has no standard cool room for fish storage, and there is no evidence of value addition initiative and support for the fishing industry.***
- iii. Majority of the existing fish landing sites are not in good shape and they lack basic facilities.***
- iv. Like the rest of Sierra Leone, Bonthe district is plagued with high level of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU), involving both large industrial fishing trawlers and artisanal fisher men. This deprive the local authorities with the requisite revenues and cause damages to the fishing equipment and gears of local fisher folks.***

4.2 Progress on all other goals



SDG 1: End Poverty in all its form everywhere

Owing to data limitation, the assessment could only provide update on two indicators, although we could not ascertain progress on them.

i. **1.2.1: Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age**

The proportion of the district population living in absolute poverty is recorded at 46 percent in 2018 while extreme poverty (*proportion of extremely poor population by national food poverty line*) is only 3.2 percent (Statistics Sierra Leone and World Bank, 2019).

ii. **Indicator 1.2.1: Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions**

Based on the 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household survey data, the proportion of the district population living in multidimensional poverty is estimated at 77.3 percent (Statistics Sierra Leone, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

While there is no recent data to provide any trend analysis on the district poverty situation, it is important to note that the district's performance is average on all poverty-related estimates relative to other districts. The lack of recent data could not permit us to account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.



SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

As shown in the district SDG-specific results framework, the district's performance on goal three of the SDGs is encouraging with the progress made on a number of indicators. The progress reported here is based on data from the demographic health survey for 2013 and 2019 and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for 2017. Among the indicators with positive millstones are:

- i. **Indicator 3.1.2: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel** increased from 40.6 percent in 2013 to 72.5 percent in 2019. Also, the proportion of births delivered in a health facility jumped from 33.9 percent in 2013 to 70.7 percent in 2019, but below the national average of 83.4 percent for 2019.
- ii. **Indicator 3.2.1: Under-5 mortality rate** increased from 131 in 2013 to 140 in 2019, as well as
- iii. **Indicator 3.2.2: Neonatal mortality rate** increased from 24 percent to 33 percent during 2013-2019.
- iv. **Indicator 3.3.1: Incidence of HIV/AIDs among 15-49-year olds** decreased from 0.9 percent in 2013 to zero percent in 2019.

- v. **Indicator 3.3.3: Proportion of households with at least one mosquito net** improved massively from during 2013-2019 from 66.8 percent to 81.5 percent. This would help in reducing the incidence of malarial in the district.
- vi. **Indicator 3.7.1: Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods** improved from 5.4 percent in 2013 to 12 percent in 2017 (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018);
- vii. **Indicator 3.7.2: Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group** increased from 22.9 percent in 2013 to 29 percent in 2019. However, the **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for women of childbearing age (15-49 years)** declined from 8.5 percent in 2013 to 8.3 percent in 2019;
- viii. **Indicator 3.b.1: Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme**
 - The Proportion of children 12–23 months who received their third dose of DPT containing vaccine (DPT3) by their first birthday** improved from 65 percent in 2013 to 77.6 percent in 2019.
 - Proportion of children 12–23 months who received the first measles containing vaccine at any time before the survey** decreased from 74.6 percent in 2013 to 73.8 percent in 2019
 - The proportion of the population with access to affordable vaccines on a sustainable basis also decreased from 52 percent to 48 percent during 2013-2019.

The good performance on the **Proportion of births delivered in a health facility** could be attributed to the imposition and enforcement of a bye-law against delivering babies outside of a certified health facility. This bye-law was endorsed by the paramount chiefs, who are ensuring its implementation to the letter.

It is also important to note that performance on a number of other indicators deteriorated between 2013 and 2019, including the proportion of infants ever breastfed. Details are found in the attached Bonthe District SDGs Results Framework as Annex 2.1A.

Other strategic areas of progress towards meeting the targets for SDG three

The district development plan identifies the health sector as one of the priority sectors with the strategic objective of strengthening infrastructural development for health service delivery. With the overall goal of reducing maternal and child mortality in the district, a strengthened partnership is key to achieving this goal and meeting the SDGs targets.

- i) The health sector of Bonthe district continues to attract huge investment from development partners and the central Government, including support for the implementation of the Government's Free Health Care Initiative for Under-fives, Pregnant Women, and Lactating Mothers.
- ii) Primary Health Care Services in the district have relatively improved, boasting of a total of 68 functioning Peripheral Health Units (PHUs), of which a number of them in four chiefdoms have been rehabilitated and equipped with basic healthcare equipment and provided with Water, Sanitation Hygiene facilities (WASH)
- iii) The District Health Management Team (DHMT) has sustained and consolidated community outreach programmes and Ambulance Referral Services and established 34 OTPs, 59 SSPs, and 1 SP Centre for malnourished children.
- iv) The DHMT has established a district Maternal Child Health (MCH) Aid Training School.
- v) The district has three private health facilities which are complementing the efforts of the district council and the central government to achieve the targets of the SDGs for residents of the Bonthe district.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. Inadequate health infrastructure remains a major concern for the people of Bonthe district, as about 21 percent of the district's health facilities are makeshift structures which require urgent action.
- ii. The district also suffers from inadequate trained and qualified health personnel, with only 2 Medical Doctors servicing a population of more than 300,000 people.
- iii. Malnutrition remains the biggest factor responsible for child mortality in the district
- iv. The need for the provision of modern and standard medical equipment for all medical facilities in the district remains profound as well as the need to scale up of BEMoNCs at the chiefdom headquarter levels.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



SDG 3: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

A total of six indicators are reported on in this assessment, for which progress was made on 4 indicators as analysed below. Details are found in the results framework.

- i. **Indicator 5.2.1a: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by the form of violence, and by age** worsened from 26.8 percent in 2013 to 39 percent in 2019, above the national average of 38.7 in 2019.
- ii. **Indicator 5.2.1b. The proportion of women and girls aged 15-49 years subjected to sexual violence by their spouse in the previous 12 months** dropped slightly from 7.9 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2019, remaining the fifth worst-performing district in the country.
- iii. **Indicator 5.3.2: The proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM)** decreased from 97.1 percent in 2013 to 94.2 percent in 2019. Bonthe has the second highest FGM prevalence rate in the country, only behind Karene district with 98 percent.
- iv. **Indicator 5.5.1: The proportion of the district ward committee members who are women** increased from 17 percent in 2016 to 33 percent in 2020.
- v. **Indicator 5.6.1: Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, and reproductive health care. The Unmet demand for contraceptives** remained relatively unchanged during 2013-2019, at 27.1 percent in 2013 and 28 percent in 2019, ranked the third highest in the country behind Tonkolili district in the north and Bonthe district in the south.
- vi. **Indicator 5.b.1: Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex**
The proportion of men age 15-49 years who own a mobile telephone marginally decreased from 69.1 percent in 2017 to 68.8 percent in 2019.
The proportion of women aged 15-49 years who own a mobile telephone, however, increased from 32.1 percent in 2017 to 36.5 percent in 2019.

Other strategic areas of progress towards meeting the targets for SDG 5, including the illustration of a public-private partnership at chiefdom levels:

- i. The need to provide socioeconomic empowerment for women, children, and persons with disabilities is a development priority for the Bonthe district council as articulated in the district development plan and the Sierra Leone MTNDP. Accordingly, a number

- of policy initiatives and interventions have been implemented and progress areas recorded.
- ii. The Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs and the Bonthe District Council have formulated Child Protection and Education Bye-Laws, and in collaboration with AMNet (locally based NGO), they have established and trained Child Welfare Committees in seven chiefdoms in the district.
 - iii. Since 2020, over 200 reported cases of Child Maintenance, Child Labour, Child Cruelty, Child Abandonment, Unlawful Carnal Knowledge, and Child Trafficking among others, were successfully mediated, and over 25 orphans (with packages) were reunified with their guardians/parents for resettlement.
 - iv. A Women’s Caucus has been established and trained on how to complement the efforts of security personnel, especially for women and children. The Ministry of Social Welfare and other development actors have established and trained in complementing the efforts of security personnel, especially for women and children.
 - v. The district has an established Children Forum Network that is currently conducting community sensitisation on the 2007 Child Rights Act.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. The district lacks Remand/Interim Care Centre for children in conflict with the law
- ii. The Police stations/Posts in the district do not have adequate Family Support Units to address Social Welfare matters.
- iii. The number of street and abandoned children is on the increase in the district.



SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The lack of data at the local level could not permit extensive reporting on this indicator, with only three indicators assessed in this round of SDG review. Out of the three indicators reported, the district made slight progress on two indicators, and a negative performance was noted for the other indicator. A concerted effort is therefore required to ensure the targets of goal six are met in the Bonthe district.

- i. **Indicator 6.1.1: The Proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services.**
Here the percentage of household members with an improved drinking water source without E. coli increased from 13.9 percent in 2017 (using the 2017 MICS data) to 45.1 percent in 2019
- ii. **Indicator 6.2.1a: The Proportion of households with improved sanitation facilities** improved from 21.6 percent to 64.9 percent between 2013 and 2019.
- iii. **Indicator 6.2.1b: The proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water** jumped significantly from 12.7 percent in 2013 to 23.4 percent in 2019
- iv. **Indicator 6.4.2: Freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (%)** improved from 42.2 percent to 45 percent during the period 2013-2019.

Other strategic areas of progress updates in the water and sanitation sector

- i. The current district council development plan has a strategic goal of providing equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities through sustainable management of water resources and promoting good environmental hygiene practices across the district.
- ii. The sector enjoys the intervention of development partners such as the African Development Bank (ADB) which is funding the Rural Water Project, through the rehabilitation of 325 water wells and the construction of 70 water wells in the district. This intervention and many others are collectively expected to increase access to safe and portable drinking water in the district.
- iii. Furthermore, a large number of water wells have been constructed in some communities and over 100 hand-pump water wells have been rehabilitated around the district.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. Most communities rely on highly contaminated surface water sources, resulting in a high prevalence of typhoid, dysentery, cholera, and parasitic diseases.
- ii. The need to conduct water quality surveillance, analysis, and treatment—laboratory test and chlorination—of the various water points
- iii. Rehabilitation and maintenance of existing protected water points
- iv. Construction of protected water points
- v. Undertake regular community sensitisation about the importance of the environment and its impact on environmental hygiene and the availability of safe drinking water for the communities.
- vi. Establish water management boards in the chiefdom headquarter towns.

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

The district stakeholders identified this goal as a crucial goal for stimulating transformational development in the district. The district is, however, yet to be connected to the national power grid system and access to electricity remains a huge challenge for residents of the district.

Due to the lack of data, only three indicators were domesticated during this round of local review on the goal, although we could not track progress on those indicators and the 2030 targets.

The 2017 Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey estimates that less than one percent (0.3 %) of the *population have access to electricity*, largely sourced from private solar companies and generators, while the renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption of the district is 12 percent. As already noted, majority of the people rely on rechargeable lamps and solar-powered lights to light up their homes, and firewood is the major source of energy for cooking.

Potential electricity supply through the Cote d'Ivoire-Liberia-Sierra Leone-Guinea (CLSG) transmission Energy Project.

In January 2022, the President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Julius Maada Bio officially switched on the CLSG electricity interconnection line to bring power to the targeted communities in the country. Bonthe is one of eight districts in the country that stands to benefit from sustainable and reliable power supply through this West Africa Power Pool project. The transmission and engineering are at an advanced stage and the District is expected to be fully connected by the end of 2023. The project is estimated to increase economic activities and provide more and better jobs, and transform lives in these districts.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Three indicators were localized for goal eight, with poor performance recorded for one of the four indicators:

- i. ***Indicator 8.7.1: Proportion of children (5-17 years) engaged in child labour*** undesirably increased by more than 20 percentage points from 30 percent to 54 percent during 2013-2017.
- ii. ***Indicator 8.10.2 Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider***

The proportion of the district population with access to a bank or financial services is very low and below national average, estimated at 31.3 percent for women and 35.4 percent for men in 2019. The district's score is also below the regional average for both men and women.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

The 2021 Sierra Leone VNR undertook a rapid impact assessment of the government legal aid assistance across the 16 districts of the country to gauge the welfare effects on the beneficiaries, especially the less privileged.

This review further noted that the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board has a total of 5 paralegals deployed in the district headquarter town of Bonthe who have been providing legal assistance to indigents of the district.

The VLR process noted that since 2015 when the board was established, more than 700, persons (a lot of them very poor, and freed from long-served prison remand without trial and indictment) from the district have benefitted from legal assistance. These services include the

Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism which the board uses to settle several family and community-related disputes out of the court system.

Furthermore, in 2021, for the first time in the post-war period, the district was assigned a resident magistrate to facilitate the speedy trial of cases, though the magistrate court is in dilapidated shape.

Progress at the indicator level

The district's performance on three indicators was ascertained and analysed as follows:

i. *Indicator 16.1.3: Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence, and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months*

The Proportion of women subjected to physical violence in the previous 12 months increased from 26.8 percent in 2013 to 48 percent in 2019. This performance requires stakeholder's attention and it was indeed discussed at length during the review process.

The Proportion of women subjected to sexual violence in the previous 12 months also increased during the period under review, from 7.9 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2019, putting the district among the worst-performing regions in the country. However, the proportion of young women aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 declined from 43.2 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2019.

ii. *Indicator 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority*

The district's performance on this indicator has been quite impressive jumping from 64.6 percent to 98.1 percent during 2013-2019.

As a district with a vast international border and several border crossing points, strong security and a good governance system are among the strategic priorities of the district. The district boasts of the heavy presence of state security apparatus with the Office of National Security's (ONS) Security Coordinating Office at the District Headquarters Town of Bonthe to coordinate all security institutions in the District.

Additionally, Border Patrol Officers are deployed at strategic border crossing points to curtail irregular migration.

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

A total of four indicators were localized for this goal but for this round of review, progress could only be ascertained on three indicators. Overall performance on those three indicators was encouraging but the district stakeholders should double efforts to ensure, at minimum, the national average is met.

i. *Indicator 17.1.1: Total Own Revenue as % of total annual Funds* increased from 9 percent in 2018 to 27 percent in 2021, then down to 20 percent in 2022. The fall in 2022 could be attributed to a lull in trading and general activities due to the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war. As illustrated in figure 5.17 below, we also note that the period

witnessed a decrease in government transfer to the council from 3.8 billion in 2018 to 2.94 billion in 2022.

Session five on advancing the implementation of the SDGs will further elaborate on resource mobilization and financing for the SDGs in the district.

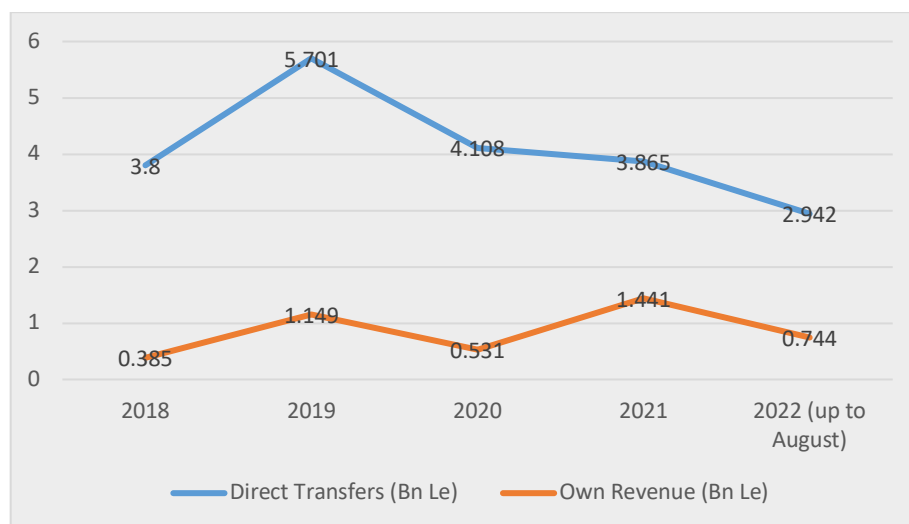


Figure 4.17: Trend in resource flows to the Bonthe District Council, 2018-2022

ii. Indicator 17.8.1: Proportion of individuals using the Internet

The percentage of women aged 15-49 years who use is extremely low and remains unchanged at 2.8 percent during 2017-2019. The men however recorded a massive improvement by 20.4 percentage points, estimated at 25.3 percent in 2019.

iii. Indicator 17.8.3: Proportion of the population with mobile phones

Here the proportion of women with mobile phones in the district increased from 32 percent in 2017 to 36.5 percent in 2019. For men, mobile phone ownership marginally dropped from 69 percent to 68.8 during the same period, although it remains very high.

Other strategic areas of progress updates in coordination and partnership are:

- i. The establishment of a functional District Development Coordination Committee as a platform for enhanced local development coordination and strengthened partnership.
- ii. Through the SDGs Joint Fund Project, the District Council has benefited from capacity-building support on enhanced revenue generation, including the capacity to monitor revenue and expenditure flows.

Areas that require urgent attention are:

- i. Poor local revenue stream and overreliance on direct transfers from the central government
- ii. Poor knowledge and coordination of NGO-supported programmes and projects in the district
- iii. Lack of public-private partnership to advance development programmes

5. Advancing the Implementation of the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial roles of inclusive participation from a wide- range of stakeholders and effective development cooperation for delivering on the goals. It is in this vein that the Bonthe district VLR process emphasises the strategic role of strengthened local partnership and stakeholders' mobilization for accelerated delivery of the SDGs at the local level. This section, therefore, presents a summary of the efforts at both national and district levels toward advancing the implementation of the SDG.

5.1 Mobilisation of local resources, external financing & development cooperation

Since 2019, Sierra Leone has developed and pursued the instruments of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) within the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development*. The Sierra Leone INFF was informed by the outcome of the 2018 Development Financing Assessment which scanned the entire development landscape of the country to identify and assess the different sources of finance for the national development plan and the SDGs (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2020). The Government and the UNDP then secured a catalytic fund (*the SDG Joint Fund Project*) through the global SDGs Fund Window, which initiated implementation of the Sierra Leone INFF.

Through the implementation of the SDG Joint Fund Project which support domestic revenue mobilisation, deepening financial digitalisation, and literacy, the Bonthe District Council has benefited from capacity building support on enhanced revenue generation, including the capacity to monitor revenue and expenditure flows. The district stakeholders have also participated in several stakeholder dialogue sessions on increased partnership and collaboration for the SDGs financing at the local levels.

These efforts, among others, have seen the district councils witnessed improved coordination and collaboration with chiefdom authorities, especially in the area of administration of local dues, which had been a contentious issue. The chiefdom authorities had previously not countenanced the delegation of that mandate to the council. However, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the council and the eleven chiefdoms for the effective administration of local dues.

As part of this VLR process, a quick assessment of the distract financing landscape was done and the following main local revenue streams were identified:

- i. Precept from local taxes
- ii. Property rates
- iii. Licenses
- iv. Fees and charges
- v. Share of mining revenues
- vi. Interests and dividends; and
- vii. Any other revenue due to Government but assigned to local councils by the Minister responsible for Finance by statutes.

Other sources of finance available to the district council for the implementation of programmes and for general service delivery could be categorised as follows:

- i. Grants transfers from the Central Government
- ii. Inter-Governmental Transfers (tied grants)
- iii. Funds from development partners and NGOs

From **Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1**, an analysis of the data from recent financial years shows that by a large margin, direct transfers from the central government account for the largest share of funds for the district council, constituting about 83 percent of the total funds for the period

2018-2022. The local revenue accounts for about 17 percent while funds from the development partners could not be accurately accounted for as they often come in the form of programme or project support. The data also shows that the pre-Covid-19 financial year of 2019 recorded the largest direct transfer from the government while local revenue generation was badly hit at the peak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

The tied grants given to the council are for specific devolved functions and cannot be diverted from one sector operation to the other, no matter the emergency. This, therefore, limits the council from reprioritisation even in the face of emerging needs after those funds have been allocated and tied.

Resource mobilization, especially local dues, continued to be challenged by:

- i. The attitude of the people to tax payment;
- ii. Capacity and logistical constraints;
- iii. Weak private sector; and
- iv. Limited economic activities, inter alia.

Another crucial challenge is the delay in the transfer of funds from the central Government, which affect the effective implementation of programmes.

In order to address these challenges and increase the council's revenue for effective service delivery, the council in 2020 leveraged the property Cadastre System to outsource its tax collection responsibility to a private firm. This initiative, subsequently, saw the council in 2021 record its highest own revenue collected in history, even in the face of the lingering effect of covid-19 pandemic.

Development Cooperation

The district continues to enjoy the strong support and cooperation from the development partners and the NGO community as evident in the volume and number of supports received to complement the work of the council for enhanced service delivery.

The JICA, the European Delegation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) are among the key development partners with direct interventions in the district, in addition to the support through the central government and NGOs. The role of development cooperation remains key to achieving the SDGs, especially the accelerator Goals at both the national and district levels. Key sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, and agriculture continue to receive substantial support from development cooperation, including from NGOs. Annex 3.1A presents a summary of NGOs operating in the district, highlighting their respective sectors of operations.

The district's strategic location as an international border crossing point and an important trade route between Sierra Leone and the Republic of Guinea presents a huge opportunity to be a commercial centre and attractive to private sector operators. The VLR process, however, could not identify significant cases of Public-Private Partnerships. This is indeed an undesired record that should be addressed immediately. As pointed out in previous sessions, a strengthened partnership is key for local communities to deliver on the SDGs.

With the newly revitalized DDCC, the Government has strengthened partner coordination and collaboration at the local level as the local authorities continue to dialogue and engage partners

operating in the district. Indeed, these arrangements have continued to provide confidence in the local governance structure and the use of resources for service delivery.

5.2 The capacity of the Council's Monitoring and Evaluation and Data management

The Bonthe District Council Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Committee is the lead institution for coordinating regular follow-ups and analysis of projects, and it is the strategic management outfit for the effective implementation of SDGs-related intervention on the ground. The council uses a participatory approach to M&E, with the active involvement of different stakeholders at the different stages of project implementation. The different stakeholders involved in the district M&E process include CSOs, Ward Committees, Councilors, Council Administrative and Technical officers, Local Technical Planning Committees, and devolved MDAs.

However, the M&E Committee, like the development and planning committee, has some capacity challenges and lacks well-defined terms of reference for the different players in the M&E process. The capacity to conduct regular field monitoring of projects, data collection and storage, and the council's overall management information system require urgent upgrades. This is indeed critical for ensuring effective follow-up and tracking of district progress on the SDGs.

The implementation arrangement for the district strategic plan made provision for employing the services of an external independent evaluator to conduct annual reviews on the implementation of the plan. The review process however found out that no external evaluation or review of the current plan or its predecessor plan has been done before. One possible reason for this could be the lack of funds to support such an assessment.

5.3 Linking District Council budget processes to the SDGs process

The 2004 Local Government Act mandates local councils to institute a functional Budget and Finance Committee. The first phase of linking the district council budget process with the SDGs is the strong alignment of the District Development Plan with the SDGs. Each priority sector intervention area is strongly linked to a particular goal and indicators of the SDGs. Furthermore, in the preparation of the district's annual budget for submission to the Ministry of Finance, each activity and deliverable is linked to specific SDG indicators and targets.

In the course of the review and approval of budget, the Parliament of Sierra Leone also seeks alignment of council budgets to the SDGs. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development had in 2021, developed a matrix for the parliament to support the parliamentary committee in this direction.

5.4 The role of civil society, the private sector and traditional leaders

As a key governance performance indicator in the operations of the local council, the Civil Society and the private sector representatives are part of the participatory planning and implementation process of the Council. They are included in the DDCC, the development and planning committee and the M&E committee, thereby ensuring their active participation in the general development planning process of the council. This inclusive participation has helped to increase community sense of ownership for projects and improved transparency and accountability. It largely remains a precondition for the disbursement of funds and for certain projects and programmes.

The Ward Committees in each of the 23 wards are made up of local residents and they serve as focal points between the Council and the communities. These committees play central roles in the council development planning and implementation process through community mobilisation and sensitisation, undertaking voluntary community sensitisation activities, collaborating with the council in revenue stream identification and collection, and participation in the project implementation and management committees. Chiefdom authorities provide oversight to the ward committees, they are strategic members of the DDCCs.

6. Recovery from shocks and innovative development initiatives

6.1 Impact and Response to COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine War

The COVID-19 disease reached the shores of Sierra Leone when the country had just begun the 2020 financial year, and the district was commencing the implementation of its current strategic plan (2020-2022). In Bonthe district, like the rest of the country, the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have been pronounced, with the services sectors—including travel and trade—and programme implementations severely hit. However, measuring the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war is complex and constrained by the lack of real-time data at the local level.

The pandemic generally disrupted socio-economic activities, with a wide-ranging impact on the local economy including a fall in resource flows (please see table 5.1); increased expenditure on the covid-19 virus disease prevention and management; a lull in business operations, including cross-border trade; and increased youth unemployment.

At the national level, macroeconomic performance was adversely affected by the pandemic and its accompanying containment measures. The strict containment measures, including the suspension of international flights, restrictions on inter-district travel, partial lockdowns, and night curfews disrupted key economic activities, thereby weakening the growth prospect of the economy.

While the Pre-COVID-19 national economic projections for 2020 were promising estimated at 4.3 percent for the year, the economy however contracted by 2.8 percent in the year. All economic sectors, including agriculture, mining, services, fishery, electricity and water, and construction, recorded negative growth for the year 2020.

Additionally, estimates from the 2022 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis show that the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout contributed to a further deterioration in living conditions and reduced access to basic amenities, with a reported 310,785 district population food insecure compared to 193,982 food insecure people in 2020.

With the lessons and experience from the Ebola Virus disease of 2014-2015, the country proactively formulated and implemented two emergency response programmes.

Russia-Ukraine war

Just when we thought the year 2022 would be a period of socioeconomic recovery, the Russia-Ukraine war broke out at the outset of the new year, with a far-reaching effect on energy prices and supply chain disruptions, leading to devastating impacts on food and commodity prices. The conflict has generally worsened the national food security crisis, especially among rural communities and vulnerable groups.

6.2 Innovative development initiatives

In the spirit of living no one behind, the MoPED and the District Council have operationalised the DDCC as a progressive platform for policy discourse and partnerships with stakeholders. The Bonthe District Descendants Union has also been working to support development in the district but has yet to productively engage the council to advance such initiatives.

There is, therefore, room for closer collaboration and partnerships with the private sector, development partners, the diaspora—through the Descendants Union —, and civil society to invent innovative financing instruments and development initiatives to support district development programmes. The initiative must clearly articulate and promote the effective participation of women in decision-making while ensuring equal economic opportunities for all. The district council should have a window or desk for engendering diaspora support for various development programmes such as housing projects, and supply of agricultural implements to support mechanized farming.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

This report presents the findings from the 2023 Voluntary Local Review on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for the Bonthe district. The review process covered the socioeconomic context of the district and an assessment of the policy architecture and enabling environment for implementing the goals at the district level, including the district's development coordination structures.

In accordance with the national planning and budgeting guidelines for local councils, the 2030 agenda and the SDGs have been integrated in the district's development planning process and the Bonthe district specific SDGs Results Framework produced.

We also undertook an analysis of the district's progress on the goals and targets, accentuating the district accelerator goals in the process. A major part of this analysis covered the progress at the policy and institutional fronts, albeit not necessarily counted as indicators. Given the huge data gaps at the local level, progress was ascertained on a total of forty-three indicators from eleven goals that were effectively localised.

The review also undertook a rapid impact assessment of the Government's Free Quality School Education Programme in the district, as well an assessment of the potential of the blue economy. This was followed by an examination of the structures and mechanisms for advancing the implementation of the SDGs and how the district is situated to respond to future shocks.

7.1 Summary of progress on the goals

Based on the indicators assessed, the incidence of food poverty and prevalence of malnutrition declined on all fronts while the general poverty level in the district remains lowest outside of

the Western area of Sierra Leone. However, the lack of recent data could not permit any plausible trend analysis on income and multidimensional poverty for the district.

The district made progress on a number of indicators for **goal three**. This includes a jump in the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel from 40.6 percent to 72.5 percent between 2013 and 2019; the proportion of women of childbearing age with access to antenatal care from a skilled health provider improved from 93.1 percent in 2013 to 98.6 percent in 2019; and the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for women of childbearing age (15-49 years) declined from 8.5 percent in 2013 to 8.3 percent in 2019; among others. However, undesired performance was noted on four important indicators (Under-5 mortality per 1,000 live births, Neonatal mortality rate, the proportion of infants ever breastfed, and Adolescent birth rate), all of which require immediate policy attention.

Performance on **goal four** was assessed on two fronts; we gauged the impact of the Government FQSEP and assessed progress on a number of indicators, as well as examining the institutional and policy readiness to deliver on the goal. Overall, performance on goal four was encouraging but there is a call for concerted effort to consolidate the gains and improve on the areas of challenge, especially for the women and girls where score was poor.

Based on the rapid impact assessment of the Government's FQSEP, we note that the FQSEP has been doing substantially well, with monetary and non-monetary benefits to the parents and households. We concluded that a parent from government/government-assisted primary schools could save approximately **NLe546 per child per year**. That is, a saving of a) NLe304 from the provision of lunch due to the introduction of the school feeding programme, and b) NLe242 from the tuition fee and supply of TLM by the government. This minimum amount can now be accumulated over time and invested in small business undertakings or towards meeting basic health bills in a typical poverty setting, which could make a considerable welfare difference for rural households where income poverty is highly concentrated.

The increased access to education associated with the school feeding programme, elimination of school fees, and reduced household expenditure burden on learning materials also directly contribute to a reduction in multidimensional child poverty (SDG1 and SDG2). During the SDGs era, the district witnessed an increase in the number of schools at the primary, junior, and senior levels.

At the indicator level, the areas of progress include: i) improved secondary school completion rate for both men and women; ii) improved score in the Primary School Net Attendance Ratio from 56.2 percent in 2013 to almost 86 percent in 2019; iii) Gender parity achieved and exceeded at the primary school level; and iv) adult male literacy rate significantly improved from 43.2 percent in 2013 to 67.6 percent in 2019. Areas of poor performances are: i) decreased completion rate for primary school education for both men and women; ii) gender parity score at the secondary school level deteriorated from 0.9 in 2013 to 0.75 in 2019; and iii) adult female literacy rate decreased from 43.8 percent in 2013 to 33.8 percent

Performance on **goal five** produced mixed results: while progress was made on four of the six indicators assessed, gains on the other two goals were reversed and the district is among the worst-performing districts on this goal. For instance, the **proportion of women and girls aged 15-49 years subjected to physical violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months** deteriorated during the period under review; and the **proportion of women and girls aged 15-49 years subjected to sexual violence by a spouse in the previous 12 months** dropped slightly but remains very high.

The district's performance on **goal six** was encouraging and energy must be maintained to ensure the 2030 targets are met. Progress was made on all three indicators reported so far: i) **the percentage of household members with an improved drinking water source on-premises, whose source water was tested and free of E. coli and available when needed** improved from

6.8 percent in 2017 to 45.1 percent in 2019; ii) **the proportion of households with improved sanitation facilities** improved from 21.6 percent to 64.9 percent between 2013 and 2019; and iii) **the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water** jumped significantly from 12.7 percent in 2013 to 73.3 percent in 2019.

Notwithstanding data limitations for extensive progress assessment, on **goal seven**, three crucial indicators were localised. The district is not connected to the national power grid and majority of the households rely on rechargeable lamps and solar-powered lights to light up their homes, and firewood is the major source of energy for cooking.

Based on the three indicators assessed, performance on **goal eight** was poor and below national average. Child labour remains high and there is more room for improvement towards financial inclusion and provision of decent jobs.

Performance on **goal 14** was done using a rapid impact assessment of the potential and opportunities for the blue economy in the district and the impact on the welfare of coastal communities and the general local economy. We concluded that the district has huge potential for the blue economy, dominated by artisanal fishing and marine transportation. Constraints include the use of crude equipment, poor infrastructure and lack of basic facilities such as electricity and cold rooms. The communities use mangroves as firewood for fish smoking, thereby compromising the level of protection for the mangroves. In light of these constraints, the study concluded a livelihood support for these communities could increase monthly income by 15 percent and promote sustainable fishing operations.

At the indicator level, six indicators were localized for the district, albeit the lack of progress reporting on them. The localized indicators are i) **coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas**; ii) **Number of registered and licensed fishing vessels/fishermen in the district**; iii) **Number of small fishing nets exchanged with standard fishing nets to support sustainable fishing practices**; iv) **Number of coastal and fishing community sensitisation sessions per year to promote sustainable fishing practice**; v) **Number of artisanal fishermen supported with fishing equipment and gears**; and vi) **Number of jetties/fish landing sites rehabilitated and provided with basic services**.

Progress on **goal 16** was also assessed based on three indicators and several other institutional and policy initiatives which have a direct impact on the lives and livelihood of the people. The **proportion of young women who experienced physical violence worsened** during the period under review but the **proportion of women experiencing sexual violence in the district** decreased by one percentage point. **Similarly**, the **Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority** improved significantly from 64.2 percent to 91 percent during 2013-2019. The district was also found to be making progress on the institutional and policy front, with the resumption of periodic magistrate court sittings following the assignment of a new resident magistrate to the district. The Government's Legal Aid Board is also playing a key role in promoting access to justice for indigents of the district.

Four indicators were localized for **goal 17** and performance on three of those four indicators was encouraging. Although the local revenue stream is still weak and small, the **total own source revenue as a share of total annual funds** increased sharply from 9 percent in 2018 to 20 percent in 2022. The **Proportion of individuals using the Internet increased**, especially for men, from almost 5 percent in 2017 to a massive 25.3 percent in 2019. Likewise, the **Proportion of the population with mobile phones** improved for women from 32 percent in 2017 to 36.5 percent in 2019 while mobile phone ownership marginally dropped from 69 percent to 68.8 during the same period. Another strategic area of progress **in partnership and development coordination** is the establishment of a functional District Development Coordination

Committee as a platform for enhanced local development coordination and strengthened partnership.

7.2 Advancing the implementation of the SDGs

The review also shed light on the means of implementation within the district, including the financing mechanism, and the capacity of the district council to effectively deliver service to the people. The council's capacity to lure the private sector into effective partnership and to generate sufficient resources is found to be weak. In the face of unpredictable direct transfers from the central government—the largest source of finance for the council's annual budget—, there is need to urgently diversify the resource envelope through innovative financing instruments, development cooperation and public private partnership.

The DDCC platform has generally strengthened partner coordination and collaboration, albeit the lack of comprehensive data on NGO operations in the district. The Bonthe District Council has functional development and planning committee and an M&E committee for supporting the implementation of development programmes in the district but the dearth of capacity remains a binding constraint.

In line with a key governance performance indicator for local councils, CSOs and private sector representatives are part of the participatory planning and implementation process of the district council, actively included in the DDCC, development and planning committee, and the M&E committee. Under the direct supervision and oversight of chiefdom authorities, the Ward Committee structure plays a central role in community mobilisation and sensitisation.

Finally, we observed that the district does not have any separate strategy for responding to and recovering from shocks such as Covid-19 pandemic and other socio-economic shocks. Rather, it is the Government of Sierra Leone's response and recovery strategies that are rolled out to the sixteen administrative districts, including Bonthe district.

7.3 Summary of challenges

The Bonthe district continues to face challenges that are adversely affecting the effective implementation of SDGs. We note that the district's local economy and its resilient system are not strong enough to adequately respond to shocks, recover and build better. The council continues to face structural and institutional challenges, including partial devolution of functions by the central government. Among the key challenges are:

- i. Lack of funds to support the implementation of the district development priorities as articulated in the council's strategic plan
- ii. The weak revenue stream for the district council due to weak economic activities and poor private sector operations in the district
- iii. No public-private partnership initiative in the district
- iv. No innovative local/community development initiatives and partnership
- v. Use of crude agricultural implements for farming and lack of access to finance for farming households
- vi. Weak knowledge and support for the blue economy-related operations
- vii. Weak infrastructure and connectivity to reach riverine and hard-to-reach communities
- viii. Poor school infrastructure, leading to overcrowding in classrooms, especially at the primary level
- ix. The lack of accurate records/ information on NGOs intervention in the district affects the effective coordination of development programmes

- x. The capacity challenges at the local council
- xi. Lack of disaggregated data to effectively track progress on the goals

7.3 Amongst key lessons learned

- The need to strengthen local resource mobilization and build productive partnerships is profoundly evident as the district council continues to over-rely on direct transfers from the central government to undertake development programmes
- The District Development Coordination Committee has strengthened stakeholder mobilization which is crucial for community ownership of development interventions and for delivering on the SDGs
- The use of an inclusive participatory approach in the district planning process allows for inclusiveness in the design and implementation of the development plans.
- The capacity of the local council to proactively invent innovative development strategies and reach out to the Bonthe District Descendant Association for collaboration and partnership is key to the sustainable financing of programmes
- Agriculture in the district remains weak and unmechanized
- While some goals and indicators were found to be relevant to the district development context, the lack of data constrained their localization
- Increasing public awareness and deepening local knowledge of the SDGs provokes local partnership and collaboration
- Introducing the school feeding programme in only one school in a community will unintentionally initiate a mass transfer of pupils to that school, leading to overcrowding in that school, thereby undermining the quality area of the FQSEP.

7.4 Recommendations and action plan

- The District Council must strengthen its revenue collection strategy and devise innovative financing instruments such as the diaspora bond (working closely with the Bonthe District Descendant Association) and blue carbon to sustainably finance the district development programmes
- There is a need to strengthen development cooperation and explore new partnership opportunities for supporting development interventions
- Stakeholders should transform agriculture to some level of mechanisation and ensure the adequate and timely supply of farm implements and seedlings to support sufficient food production in the district and to enhance food security.
- The district council and the Ministry of Agriculture should institute reliable farmer-allied intermediaries to facilitate seamless linkages to the markets for agricultural products and to avoid smuggling
- The Government should encourage commercial banks and financial institutions to commence operations in the district so that access to finance for farmers and traders will be enhanced.
- There should be immediate sustainable livelihood support for the coastal and riverine communities, including support for climate change mitigation and adaptation mechanisms
- The newly established *Bonthe District Civil Society Integrated platform on the SDGs* should be supported to embark on massive stakeholder and community sensitization on the SDGs and the general development of the district.

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