



# Case Study Report

# Save the Children

# Sierra Leone

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# Acronyms

<b>AE</b>	Accelerated Education
<b>AEP</b>	Accelerated Education Program
<b>AEWG</b>	Accelerated Education Working Group
<b>DEO</b>	District Education Officer
<b>MEST</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
<b>NPSE</b>	National Primary School Examination
<b>SC</b>	Save the Children

## Purpose of the Study

The AEWG is a working group made up of education partners working in Accelerated Education (AE). The AEWG is currently led by UNHCR with representation from UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, NRC, Plan, IRC, Save the Children, ECCN, and War Child Holland.

Based on the aim for a more standardised approach to AE provision globally, the AEWG has begun to develop guidance materials based on international standards and sound practice for AE. In 2016, the AEWG developed a set of 10 Principles for effective practice, as well as an accompanying Guide.

The purpose of this case study was to more fully understand the relevance, usefulness, and application of the AE Principles and Guide within the context of Save the Children's (SC) Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in Sierra Leone. This case study sits among three others – two from Kenya and one from Afghanistan – all implemented by different actors and working with different populations of learners.

The research was guided by three objectives:

- 1** Identify the **current and/or perceived utility and relevance of the AE Principles and Guide** to SC's programme in Sierra Leone;
- 2** **Describe the alignment of the SC programme with the AE Principles** by speaking to a range of stakeholders and reviewing programme documentation; and
- 3** **Identify if there is a link between alignment with the Principles and achievement of key AEP outcomes** related to access, completion, and attainment of qualifications.

It is important to note that the intent of this research is not to evaluate programmes or compare them against each other, nor is it to specify recommendations or areas of improvement for SC's activities. Rather, this case study (and others) helps to illustrate the possibilities and challenges of using the Principles and accompanying Guide in the development, refinement, and assessment of AE programmes in Sierra Leone, and with populations and contexts similar to that in which the SC programme operates.

# Programme Background and Context

## Description of the Programme

Save the Children (SC) is implementing a three-year pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) from 2016 to 2019. The project is funded through SCUK's Strategic Breakthrough Investment Fund, which aims to foster innovative solutions to offer all children an opportunity for a better life, at approximately £150,000 per year. SC is piloting the project in six communities in Pujehun District in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone.

SC developed the AEP to address the large number of youth who are out of school and who have not completed primary education in Sierra Leone largely due to poverty, gender norms, civil war, and the recent Ebola disaster. The objectives of the project are to:

- 1 Support 720 students (50% girls) to complete primary education, pass the National Primary School Examination (NPSE), and transition to junior secondary school; and
- 2 Pilot test the 10 Principles for Effective Practice in Accelerated Education (developed by the AEWG).

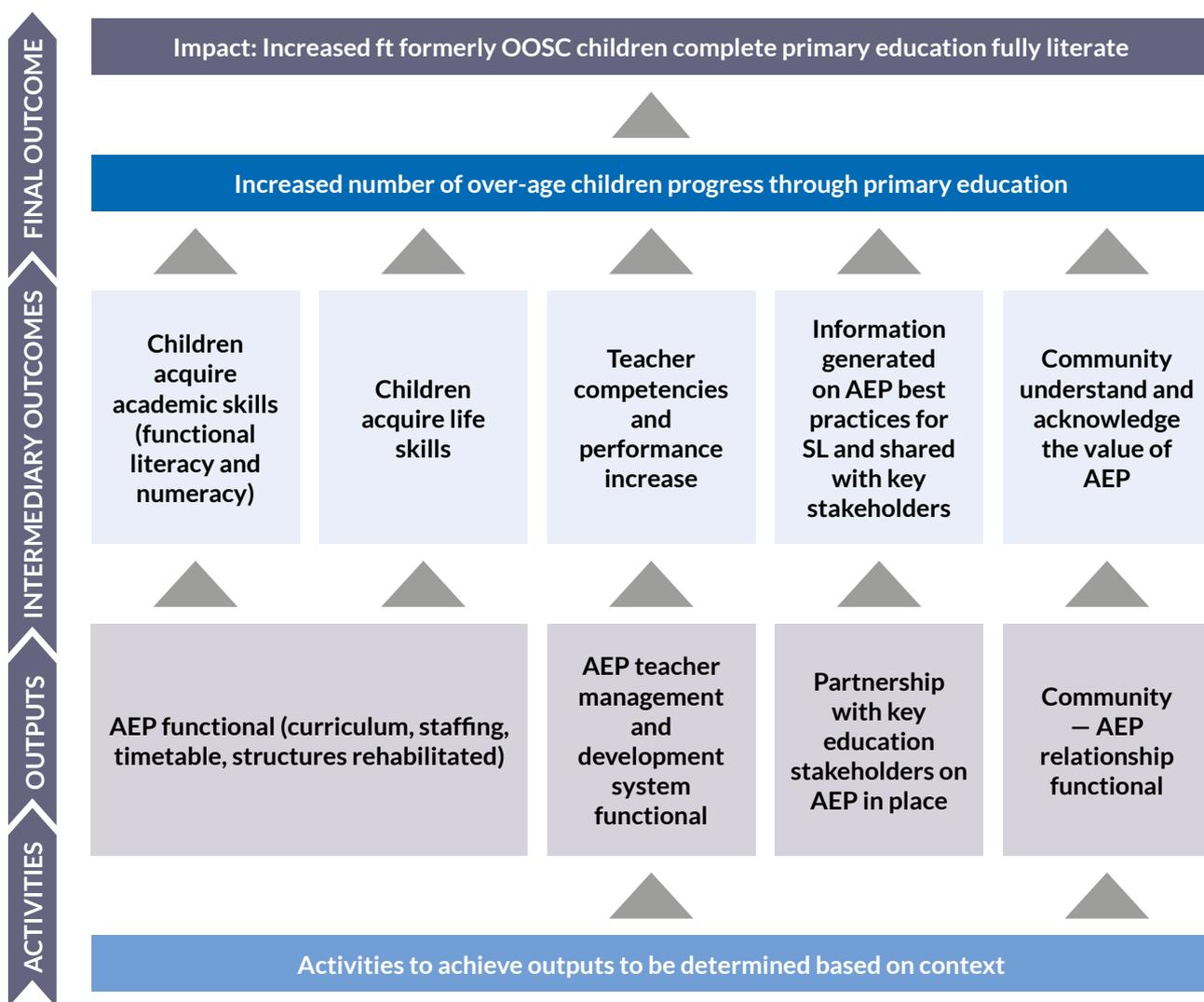
SC staff, Ministry officials, and community stakeholders collaborated to design the project and prepare for implementation during much of 2016. School readiness activities started in September 2016 (with the new academic year) and AEP classes began in November 2016. The programme targeted and enrolled 720 students (335 girls) between the ages of 10 and 16 who were: (a) teenage mothers who were out of school; (b) overage students who never attended school; (c) out-of-school working students; and/or (d) students of (non-formal) Koranic schools. See Table 1 for the enrolment figures by category and gender.

These groups of children were identified by SC through prior research on out-of-school children in Sierra Leone, as well as in consultation with communities. Consistent with research on out-of-school children, SC and other stakeholders identified that children in poverty are very likely to be working and out of school. Additionally, Sierra Leone's policy that prohibits pregnant girls from attending school, as well as the increase in teenage pregnancy during the Ebola disaster, causes many girls to drop out. Finally, SC included children attending only Koranic education, since parents often send their children to religious schools in lieu of formal education when lack of financial resources prohibits parents from sending their children to both the formal school and the Koranic school.

**Table 1.** Number of AEP students by category<sup>1</sup>.

	Boys	Girls	Total
Teenage mothers	N/A	41	41 (6%)
Overage, never attended	42	46	88 (12%)
Dropout, working	157	221	378 (53%)
Koranic students	186	27	213 (30%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>385 (53%)</b>	<b>335 (47%)</b>	<b>720</b>

<sup>1</sup> The data collection method used only allowed students to self-identify as being in one category; however, it is possible that students may actually meet requirements in more than one category. Therefore, it is likely that the number of students in any given category is actually higher than what is represented here.



**Figure 1.** Save the Children AEP Theory of Change.

The project’s Theory of Change (see Figure 1) is threefold, hypothesizing that *if* SC: (1) designs and implements a functional AEP; (2) recruits, trains, and remunerates teachers; and (3) partners with key stakeholders in communities and with the Ministry of Education, *then* they will achieve their goal of increased access to education by youth who are out of school.

## Structure of the Program

SC Sierra Leone’s regional office in Pujehun District, supported by the area office in Kailahun and the central office in Freetown, oversees operations of the AEP project in the six communities. SC is operating one AEP Centre in each community, a total of six AEP Centres. At each of the AEP Centres there is one head teacher, three teachers, and one assistant teacher. Of the 30 teaching staff in the project, there are 18 men and 12 women.<sup>2</sup>

SC collaborates with a highly active and involved AEP Committee at each Centre. The Committee comprises village chiefs, women leaders, non-AEP youth, a Koranic teacher, the head teacher from the formal school, and AEP male and female students – totalling 10 individuals per Centre.

<sup>2</sup> As the program is in the early stages, assignment of students and teachers to levels is still underway, so no exact figures on the deployment of teachers per level are available yet.

## Save the Children AEP and the 10 Principles for Effective Practice

The SC Sierra Leone case is unique from the other cases examined in this research in three respects. First, they have been actively engaging with the 10 Principles examined in this study since the inception of their program and throughout the course of its development. SC has developed their AEP implementation plan based on the 10 Principles, and they are piloting their programme and the application of these Principles by conducting baseline, mid-line, and end-line assessments of their project against the Principles throughout the duration of the project. Secondly, SC has successfully engaged the six communities not only in the implementation of the project but also in the application of the Principles. They have worked hand-in-hand with community members to decide how to contextualize and apply the Principles during the design phase, and community members were heavily involved in the design and implementation of the baseline assessment. Thirdly, as SC staff noted, they are different from other AEPs in that they are operating in a recovery context, not crisis and conflict.

### Description of the Context

Sierra Leone ranks 181 of 188 on the Human Development Index and scores consistently low on education and gender equality. In Sierra Leone, education is free and compulsory for six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school (Wang, 2007). As of 2010, 21% of primary age school children (6-11 years) and 29% of secondary school age children (12-17) were out of school (FHI360, 2014). (See Table 2 for percentage of out-of-school children by gender, urban/rural, and financial resources.)

**Table 2.** Percentage of children out of school.

	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Richest Quintile	Poorest Quintile	Total
Primary age (6-11)	22%	19%	15%	23%	7%	37%	21%
Secondary age (12-17)	26%	33%	22%	34%	15%	53%	29%

Poverty is ranked as the primary reason why children are out of school. Families find themselves unable to meet their own basic needs, so children must remain out or drop out of school to work and supplement the family income. Additionally, while schools are mandated to be free, costs associated with school materials, uniforms, and other indirect costs keep children out of school (Coinco, 2008).

Following poverty, death of a parent was the second leading cause of children being out of school in Sierra Leone. Children who have lost their parents – due to the civil war from 1991 to 2002, the Ebola crisis in 2014 and 2015, or other crises – face challenges associated with a decline in economic resources and trauma. This is particularly true in Pujehun District, where this study took place, and where there are large pockets of out-of-school children who have lost their parents (Coinco, 2008). Other factors influencing children being out of school include physical and sexual exploitation and abuse, child trafficking, early and forced marriage, disability, homelessness, and involvement as a child soldier. Teenage pregnancy also pushes girls out of school in large part because of the national policy that prohibits visibly pregnant girls from attending school. Then, once the baby is born, girls often cannot afford to return to school (Coinco, 2008).

SC also notes that large numbers of students who attend Koranic education are not attending the formal schools or completing basic education. Most parents who send their children to Koranic schools want to send them to formal schools as well, but many cannot afford to do so. Additionally, the Ebola virus outbreak in 2014 to 2015 closed the schools for 10 months. For many students, 10 months out of school meant never returning again. For girls, being out of school for 10 months increased vulnerability for sexual assault, and Sierra Leone saw a spike in teenage pregnancy. This was also related to the need for girls to “sell sex” to support themselves financially if they lost parents in the outbreak (SC project proposal, 2016).

Finally, school-related factors including high direct and indirect costs associated with schooling, child protection issues in school, and long walking distance to school also affect children's ability to attend (Coinco, 2008).

## Structure of the Education System

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For children and youth aged 3-17, the education system in Sierra Leone consists of three years of pre-primary (age 3-5), six years of primary (age 6-11), three years of junior secondary (age 12-14), and three years of senior secondary (age 15-18). Parallel to the formal system, children and youth can also attend Community Education Centres for primary and junior secondary ages and technical/vocational centres for senior secondary ages. After completion of senior secondary or technical/vocational education, students can attend undergraduate, teacher training, or technical/vocational institutions (UNESCO, 2013).

While in policy the education structure is in place, a lack of schools and teachers, personal factors such as poverty, and a recent national history of crisis and conflict make completing even basic education for many students a challenge. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) has previously relied on AEPs as a temporary response to address the needs of the high number of out-of-school children and youth. For example, after the civil war, and again after the Ebola crisis, MEST supported AEPs and other non-formal programmes to address the needs of those children who were out of school because of the crises.

Historically, in Sierra Leone, while such programmes have existed to increase access by children who are out of school, there has been no institutional framework or policy regarding non-formal education, nor for supporting out of school children. This has led to the non-formal system being fragmented and lacking quality control (UNESCO, 2013). Only recently has the government incorporated AEPs into their education strategy as a focus to address the needs of out-of-school children and youth (MEST, 2013), yet SC staff explain that there still fail to be policies that explicitly address the needs of overage, out-of-school learners except in situations of crisis and conflict.

## Pujehun District

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Field work for this study was completed in Pujehun District. Located in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone, Pujehun has a population of 346,461 (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2016) and is one of the poorest districts in the country, partly due to a history of conflict. As described above, Pujehun is one district that has particularly large pockets of children and youth who are out of school who lost parents in the civil war and who were passed around between family members, so AE is particularly relevant to this context (Coinco, 2008).



# Methodology and Approach to Fieldwork

This research used a case study design and was conducted in partnership with Save the Children Sierra Leone. Prior to departing to the field, the researcher conducted a comprehensive desk review that included reviewing the project proposal, theory of change and logical framework documents, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, AE Principles checklist, and AE Principles pilot assessment methodology.

SC staff who participated in the study included the Freetown-based Education Advisor, and the Pujehun-based Project Manager, MEAL Officer, AEP Project Officer, and Assistant AEP Project Officer. SC staff participated in two workshops, focus groups, and interviews and were asked about the perceived relevance and utility of the Principles and Guide, the AEPs alignment with the Principles, and the link between program outcomes and the Principles.

The AEP Center in Gbondapi section of Kpanga-Kabonkeh Chiefdom was selected for this study based on its proximity to the regional office and its relative success in implementing the AEP. In Gbondapi, the AEP serves 120 students – 74 boys and 46 girls – in Level 1 (Grade 1), Advanced Level 1 (Grade 2), and Level 2 (Grade 3). Most students are in Level 1 (approximately 91 students), and the fewest number of students are in Level 2 (approximately 12 students)<sup>3</sup>.

Three teachers, one female and two male, participated in a focus group; the teacher assistant was unavailable. The female teacher teaches Level 1, and the male teachers teach Advanced Level 1 and Level 2. The head teacher participated in a key informant interview. A sample of the AEP Committee (5 of 10 members, one woman) – chosen based on availability, interest in participating, and level of engagement with the AEP – participated in a focus group. All were asked questions that indicated alignment of the AEP to the Principles.

Six female students aged 13 to 15 in Advanced Level 1 and Level 2 participated in a focus group, and six male students aged 13 to 16 in Levels 1 and 2 participated in a separate focus group. Students were selected to ensure a balance of levels in the program, as well as based on availability and interest in participating in the focus group. Older students were selected to ensure similarity of ages in the focus group and because it was thought that older students could provide more information. Student focus groups were two-part, including an interactive timeline activity followed by a discussion. All students were asked questions related to alignment of the AEP with the Principles.

Finally, the researcher conducted a “walk-through” of the school facility to observe the school facilities, set-up of the classroom, materials and resources available, pupil-teacher ratio, and to look for evidence of the use of AE pedagogy. The walk-through was intended to provide further information about alignment with the Principles.

**Table 3.** Description of participants by stakeholder group.

Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants
SC staff	1 Off-site (Education Advisor) 4 On-site (Project Manager, MEAL Officer, AEP Project Officer, Asst. AEP Project Officer)
Teaching Staff	1 Headmaster (male) 3 Teachers (2 male, 1 female)
Male AE Students	6 (all current students, ages 13 to 16, in Levels 1 and 2)
Female AE Students	6 (all current students, ages 13 to 15, in Advanced Level 1 and Level 2)
AEP Committee	5 (4 male, 1 female community members)

<sup>3</sup> Students were placed in the levels based on scores on a placement test. However, recognizing the high number of students in Level 1, SC staff in Pujehun indicated that they are still working to divide up the students in a way that keeps them in their appropriate level but also ensures an appropriate pupil-teacher ratio.

For a full list of sources by objective, see Table 4.

**Table 4.** Information collected by source.

Objective	Document Review	Off-site Staff	On-site Staff	School Staff	AEP Committee	Youth	Walk-through
Perceived relevance of the Principles and utility of the Guide		X	X				
Alignment to the Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AE Checklist</li> <li>• Proposal</li> <li>• M&amp;E Framework</li> <li>• AE Principles Baseline</li> </ul>		X	X	X	X	X
Linkage of outcomes to Principles		X	X				

## Analysis

The researcher used a deductive approach to coding the data. The data collected through document review, interviews and focus groups, and the “walk through” were coded thematically against the Principles.

## Limitations

The following are limitations to the research:

- **Meeting with District Education Officer.** Because of time constraints and prior commitments, the District Education Officer (DEO) was unable to meet with the researcher. It would have been useful to understand his perspective about the alignment between the AEP and the Ministry, effects that policies have on the AEP, and the perceived benefit of having a set of 10 AE Principles and Guide.
- **Objective 1:** The researcher was able to deeply understand the application and contextualization of the Principles, as well as SC’s perception of utility of the Principles. However, because SC staff had not seen the Guide before the case study, it was difficult to ascertain their perception of the utility of the Guide beyond the hypothetical.
- **Objective 3:** Linking outcomes to the Principles is challenging in this case. This is largely because SC’s AEP in Sierra Leone is new, so few outcomes have been observed thus far. Additionally, the design of this study makes it difficult to conduct a rigorous analysis to compare outcomes to individual Principles. However, because SC Sierra Leone is so actively engaging with the Principles and collecting much accurate data, it would be useful to continue to work with them to learn about how adherence to the Principles is related to outcomes in the future.

# Current Programme Alignment to the AE Principles

The researchers re-categorised the AE Principles thematically into four areas: learners & learning environment, teachers, programme management, and alignment. These areas were seen to broadly reflect the different domains which the Principles and accompanying guidance focus on. Under each category discussed, the researchers listed the associated principles within this category, to make clear how this was done. It should be noted that these categories are different to those presented in the original Guide, where there are only three categories – learners, systems/policy, and programme management. The researchers felt that some greater specificity was needed, particularly around issues of teachers/teacher management and alignment.

## Learners & Learning Environment

### Principle 1:

AEP is flexible and for older learners.

### Principle 4:

Curriculum, materials, and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable, and use relevant language of instruction.

### Principle 8:

AE learning environment is inclusive, safe, and learning ready.

## Learners

SC worked with members of the six communities (community leaders, parents, and youth), as well as with MEST to identify the inclusion criteria for the program. They concluded that children aged 10 to 16 who were out of school and fell into at least one of the following categories would be eligible: (a) teenage mothers; (b) overage children who never attended school; (c) children who have dropped out and are working; and (d) children who are attending Koranic education<sup>4</sup>. Once the inclusion criteria were identified, they worked with communities to identify and enrol students and create a waitlist for those who were not admitted.

“ I am happy because if it weren't for this program, I wouldn't know how to write.”

– Girl Student

SC was successfully able to enrol the target number of overage, out-of-school children. Focus groups with students showed that boys were engaged in farming activities before attending the AEP, and most still do this work. Girl students were working in the home or doing petty trading before attending, and continue to do these activities while enrolled. Of the girls in the focus group, one dropped out during pregnancy, one had never been to school, and three had dropped out because of school fees. All students report having the goal of continuing their education after completing the AEP.

SC and AEP Committee members did note, however, that they faced two primary challenges regarding learners. First, the target number of beneficiaries (720) is low given the number of children in need. SC noted that it was difficult to explain to the community why the programme could only admit a limited number of students. Secondly, many children who qualify for the AEP are not able to attend because they live in far-away communities. SC is not able to make provisions for these children, and because of risks associated with travelling long distances, some children in distant communities are excluded.

<sup>4</sup> The criteria for inclusion was based on research and prior experience, and is described above.

## Flexibility

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In order to ensure that the schedule and location of classes was appropriate for the target learners, SC conducted a participatory activity in which adults and youth representatives completed timetables for girls and boys in each community. Youth and adults mapped girls' and boys' responsibilities from the time they wake up to the time they go to bed, and then SC engaged participants in a discussion about what time classes should be held. The timetables were combined to identify that 2 to 6pm was the best time in all communities for the Centres to run for both boys and girls. SC then conducted the exercise with boys and girls in one community, who confirmed the times worked for them.

## Curriculum and Teaching/Learning Materials

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A technical consultant was hired by SC to adapt an already-accelerated version of the national curriculum that was developed after the Ebola disaster to meet the needs of the AEP target students. The six-year primary curriculum was condensed into 3 levels, each level to be implemented during one academic year. Teachers report that the adapted curriculum is age appropriate, but SC notes that some of the readers are more appropriate for younger learners and note that further materials need to be developed that are appropriate for adolescents. All teaching and learning materials are in English, the official language of instruction in Sierra Leone. However, policy allows for teachers to explain material in the mother tongue, which in Gbondapi is Mende and Krio. This structure reportedly allows students to gain proficiency in the languages they need. The curriculum, which was adapted from the national Ebola curriculum, focuses on building literacy and numeracy skills. Table 5 shows the amount of time spent per week on the core subjects. Literacy and math are taught more than double the time of social studies and science, demonstrating the primary focus on these subjects.

**Table 5.** Amount of time spent per subject per week.

Subject	Minutes/Session	Sessions/Week	Time/Week
Literacy	45	5	3 hrs 45 mins
Math	45	5	3 hrs 45 mins
Social Studies	45	2	1 hr 30 mins
Science	45	2	1 hr 30 mins

Additionally, SC, the head teacher, and students report that the programme incorporates some important health and life skills content, although it does not incorporate social-emotional learning.

## Challenges

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In Gbondapi, there is a set of curriculum and learning materials for the three AEP levels currently being implemented: Level 1, Advanced Level 1<sup>5</sup>, and Level 2. Each teacher has a copy of the curriculum to use as his/her own teacher guide, and students use the Sierra Leone standard textbook as their learning materials. However, there is an insufficient supply of textbooks, particularly at Level 1, which has the most students, where approximately 10 students share one book. In Level 2, there are approximately four students to one book.

While the development of curriculum and materials was largely successful, SC noted that the short timeframe allotted for curriculum and materials development was a constraint. Only Levels 1 and 2 have been developed thus far, and no AEP timetable has been developed. Additionally, while the consultant did design a training module, which project staff delivered to teachers prior to classes starting, the consultant was not able to train

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<sup>5</sup> There is no separate curriculum for Advanced Level 1. Rather, the teacher uses the Level 1 curriculum and starts teaching approximately half way through.

project staff. Therefore, project staff needed to train teachers without receiving a Training of Trainers. SC notes concern that these challenges affect the delivery of quality instruction using the materials.

Finally, while health and life skills were integrated into the curriculum to some extent, SC staff noted that it has not been possible to incorporate livelihoods training, social-emotional learning, or psychosocial support into the curriculum or teacher training, largely because of time and funding constraints, but that it is needed.

## AE Pedagogy

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SC staff understood AE pedagogy primarily to mean: (a) using child-centred teaching techniques, including facilitating learning activities that built on children's prior knowledge, having them work in groups, and having them answer questions and explain to their peers; (b) using teaching methods that are appropriate for older learners still while teaching the primary curriculum; and (c) condensing the curriculum from six years into three.

Staff explain that their approach to teaching is a mix between child-centred AE pedagogical practices and traditional teaching styles. Their curriculum is certainly condensed, and they attempt to use child-centred teaching techniques. They acknowledge that they struggle with knowing how to teach older learners. SC staff explain that they integrate AE pedagogy with more traditional methods because their primary goal is integration with the formal school system. They want to ensure that students who leave their programme are prepared to integrate into the formal schools, including knowing how to cope with the more traditional teaching approach that is used there.

## Challenges

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SC notes that all AEP teachers are certified and that in Sierra Leone teacher training includes child-centred teaching techniques. However, further discussion with SC staff and teachers, as well as classroom walk-throughs, indicated that it is difficult to apply these techniques. One barrier noted was that teachers are most often exposed to the traditional lecture format, and this is their default teaching style. Some teachers are able to implement a more learner-centred approach, but others struggle. SC staff note that it is a process of learning and change that teachers must go through, which will take time.

Another barrier is lack of training on AE pedagogy during the teacher orientation. Class start-up was already delayed – the school year begins in September, but AEP classes only started in November – because of curriculum development, rehabilitation of the Centres, and readiness courses. Therefore, when teacher orientation finally took place, SC thought it better not to delay classes further and focus primarily on orienting teachers to policies, attendance, and logistics. Training on AE pedagogy and related issues such as psychosocial support will be conducted in the second year of the project.

Finally, in order to train teachers on AE pedagogy, SC staff report that they first must be trained. While some SC staff are trained teachers and teacher trainers, AE pedagogy is new for them. They explained that the biggest challenge is knowing how to teach older learners, as most teachers and teacher trainers are trained in how to teach younger children.

## Physical Space

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Each of the six communities has identified and donated a community space for use by the AEP program. In Gbondapi, it was a large building formerly being used for storage. Three of the six spaces have been rehabilitated for the start of this school year, and three are still in the process of rehabilitation. All of the spaces will include separate latrines for girls and boys, safe and quality facilities and furniture, and provision of water buckets and cups.

One challenge SC is facing is that the three Centres that are still being rehabilitated were in poor condition, and funding for rehabilitation is limited. Additionally, in Gbondapi, the temporary space that they are using (the formal school) lacks separate latrines for girls and boys. However, this challenge will be overcome once they are in the rehabilitated AEP Centre. Finally, funding constraints make it difficult to purchase supplies beyond basic curriculum and learning materials that could contribute to more child-friendly teaching techniques. SC is working with the six communities to determine how the communities can support the development of the AEP Centres to meet these needs. Additionally, they are planning to advocate for additional funding to complete development of the Centres.

## Other

Additional successes and challenges related to curriculum and learning environment include:

- A mechanism for reporting child protection issues has been established in collaboration with the child protection team. Students know to report abuses to a teacher. Additionally, a child welfare committee is in place that can provide further support to students.
- There are no fees for attending the AEP. The AEP provides all needed materials, including the uniform, whereas the formal schools have extra charges and fees.
- The pupil-teacher ratio varies greatly between the levels. At Level 1, it is very high, approximately 91:1, while at Level 2, it is very low, approximately 12:1. This is largely due to the high number of students who have never attended school before, and SC is continuing to work to determine the best way to divide up the students by level while ensuring an appropriate pupil-teacher ratio. Naturally, a high pupil-teacher ratio such as this makes it difficult to implement any sort of AE pedagogy.

## Key Findings: Learners & Learning Environment

### Successes

- Successfully enrolled the target number and type of students
- During design workshop, involved adults and youth to consult on scheduling of classes
- Have developed curricula for Levels 1 and 2
- All teachers are certified, and they aim to integrate traditional and AE pedagogical practices
- SC has renovated three buildings to use as AEP Centres
- A mechanism for reporting abuses is in place
- SC ensures there are no fees for attending the AEP

### Challenges

- Inclusion of students in more distant communities is difficult
- Timeframe for curriculum development not sufficient to develop curriculum for Level 3, create a timetable, or train project staff
- Insufficient materials due to lack of funding
- Time and funding required to integrate livelihoods, SEL, and PSS into curriculum and training were lacking
- SC staff lack the knowledge/skills in AE pedagogy to train teachers
- Renovations of Centres are costlier than anticipated and are delayed
- Pupil-teacher ratio varies greatly between levels

## Teachers

### Principle 5:

**Teachers participate in continuous professional development.**

### Principle 6:

**Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated.**

In collaboration with the AEP Committees and MEST, trained teachers who were not employed by formal schools were recruited from the communities. The AEP Committee identified those teachers, and SC and the MEST reviewed the qualifications and selected and hired teachers. All teachers hired have some higher education, and two are pursuing a Teaching Certificate. SC identifies the recruitment of teachers as a success of their program.

To date, teacher training and professional development has been a challenge. All teachers and head teachers participated in teacher induction, focused primarily on logistics, Centre management, classroom management, lesson planning, and code of conduct. In the initial induction, there was some discussion of teaching methodology (AE pedagogy), but this was not a primary focus. Further trainings, particularly on AE pedagogy and psychosocial support, are anticipated but have not yet been implemented because the project is still in the initial phase. Additionally, coaching and mentoring is planned but has not yet begun. SC staff explain that this is largely due to time constraints, geographical distribution of the Centres, and lack of training of SC staff in AE pedagogy. Finally, there is not sufficient funding to link to teacher training institutions for further teacher certification, nor is there specific training on AE in Sierra Leone.

Teachers do support one another to develop, however. SC explained that teachers participate in Teacher Learning Circles monthly. Teachers and the head teacher in Gbondapi also explained that amongst themselves they support each other. The head teacher provides guidance, particularly regarding lesson planning, teaching methods, classroom management, and treatment of students. Additionally, teachers compare lesson plans amongst themselves, and they rotate classrooms so students are exposed to different teaching styles and so they can develop as teachers. Finally, SC intends to rotate teachers between Centres so they are able to learn from their colleagues by working in other communities.

SC and teachers, including the head teacher, agree that teacher remuneration is not sufficient. Due to funding restrictions, SC is not able to pay the equivalent of the government teacher salary; they can only pay an incentive payment that equates to less than half the salary of a formal school teacher<sup>6</sup>.

### Key Findings: Teachers

#### Successes

- Teachers participated in induction training
- Teacher training, supervision, and coaching is expected in AE pedagogy and psychosocial support
- Teachers find ways to support each other, such as comparing lesson plans and rotating classrooms

#### Challenges

- Delays in start-up forced teacher training to be delayed
- SC staff's lack of knowledge of AE pedagogy makes training teachers difficult
- Teacher remuneration is insufficient

<sup>6</sup> SCUK staff noted that since the case study was conducted, AEP teacher salaries have been increased to match government teacher salaries.

## Programme Management

### Principle 7:

AE centre is effectively managed.

### Principle 9:

Community is engaged and accountable.

### Principle 10:

Goals, monitoring and funding align.

Each AEP Centre is overseen by an AEP Committee, and teachers are supervised by the Committee and the head teacher. All of the six Centres are overseen and supported by SC in Pujehun.

SC claims that one of the greatest successes of their programme thus far has been the engagement of the communities. SC explains that communities truly have ownership over their AEP Centres, and Gbondapi AEP Committee members state that the AEP is a true partnership between SC and the community.

The AEP Committee, which comprises 10 community members including men and women leaders, formal school and Koranic teachers, and youth, is highly involved in all aspects of the AEP. After member selection, the AEP Committee was oriented to their roles and responsibilities, including centre management and monitoring, linking to the community, effective committee participation, feedback mechanisms to SC, and child protection. The Committee acts as the bridge between SC and the community, informing the wider community about AEP issues, as well as collaborating in the management of the AEP. The involvement of youth in the committee, in particular, has allowed students to have a voice in the design and management of the AEP.

“ We are glad that [SC] came to the community to ask us about [implementing the program], rather than ‘going up’ [to SCUK first]. They consider us in implementation.”

– Gbondapi AEP Committee Member

Committee representatives participated in the 3-day design workshop in which they contributed to design of the program, as well as reflection on the application of the Principles. Specific tasks that the Committee was involved in included conducting a needs assessment; defining the student inclusion criteria; conducting a stakeholder analysis; defining teacher selection criteria; determining the AEP learning environment, including site selection and timing of classes; and ensuring engagement of the community.

During start-up, the Committee was involved in identifying, enrolling, and testing students and recruiting and enlisting teachers. Now, while the AEP is in session, Committee members regularly visit the Centre to monitor teaching and student attendance, and they oversee and manage projects within the Centre, such as construction. SC explains that teachers are accountable to the management committee. One SC staff explained, “We are guiding the process [of the AEP implementation], but [the Committee is] leading the process.” They plan to further train the Committee to use different tools to monitor teachers and teaching, as well as students and learning.

SC noted that one challenge they faced is that too many community members wanted to participate in the Committee, so they had to work with the community to identify an appropriate number of members. Additionally, there is a high level of illiteracy among community members, which makes it difficult for some committee members to fulfil their responsibilities. While no challenges related to lack of payment for the AEP Committee were reported, it was noted that a Memorandum of Understanding was not signed because that implies a paid position.

At the start of the program, communities were reportedly sceptical about the program. However, now that they have seen tangible change, such as the Centres being rehabilitated and students going to school, they recognize the AEP as a credible education option and are happy that their children have the opportunity to attend school.

SC attributes their success engaging the community to working with the communities since project inception to understand their needs and expectations, as well as to convey the objectives of the project. Additionally, SC staff explain that highly involving the community in the project makes the project more successful and easier to implement, suggesting that in their context it is one of the most critical Principles.

A MEAL system has been developed to measure progress on indicators; however, SC has only begun collecting enrolment data as the programme was recently begun. At the school level, teachers and the head teacher collect and maintain records of student and teacher attendance and student enrolment. Throughout the project, data will be collected on student progress, completion, and transition. SC aggregates this data in their Pujehun office. SC will do a final evaluation of the project in 2018 and hope to conduct tracer studies to track students' progress after completion of the AEP.

A parallel system for monitoring alignment with the Principles has also been established. In Pujehun, SC is conducting a baseline assessment of their program against the Principles, and will conduct a mid-line and end-line assessment. This process, which is discussed in further detail below, is intended to support SC in reflecting on and improving their program, as well as assessing the extent to which alignment with the Principles is associated with outcomes.

As discussed throughout, funding has largely been a challenge. There is not enough funding earmarked for materials, rehabilitation of Centres, or supporting student transition, for example.

## Key Findings: Programme Management

### Successes

- Community engagement is said to be one of the project's biggest successes
- AEP Committees have been established and oriented; they contributed largely to the design of the program, student recruitment, and continue to contribute to monitoring and management activities
- Communities recognize the AEP as a viable education option
- SC has developed and begun collecting data towards a MEAL framework
- SC is conducting baseline, mid-line and end-line assessments of their program against the 10 AE Principles

### Challenges

- Low literacy rate poses a challenge to involving the community
- SC faces challenges with funding, which limits supplies and materials, rehabilitation of Centres, further research and needs assessment, and support for student examination and transition

## Alignment to Government Education System or Humanitarian Architecture

### Principle 2:

AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education.

### Principle 3:

AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture.

## Alignment

SC has worked with MEST throughout the life of the AEP at both the national and district level<sup>7</sup>. SC reports that MEST recognizes a need for AEPs to address the needs of overage, out-of-school children.

Before beginning the AEP, SC engaged MEST at the national level to explain the programme and to ensure collaboration, particularly around curriculum alignment with the national curriculum. MEST is also well-informed and engaged at the local level. They were involved in the design workshop, contributing to identifying the target group; conducting an in-depth needs assessment; conducting a stakeholder analysis; testing, selecting, and training teachers; developing the curriculum, aligning with student accreditation pathways, and planning for student transition to formal schooling; and planning for sustainability.

“*Transition is one of our core values. When children’s transition [to formal schools or vocational training], it means we have succeeded.*”

– SC AEP Staff

The primary goal of SC’s AEP is that the 720 students enrolled achieve certification in primary education by passing the NPSE and transition to junior secondary school or technical/vocational training. To achieve this goal, SC has aligned their programme timetable to the formal school calendar and the national exam schedule. In Level 1, students complete the equivalent of grades 1 and 2. Halfway through the year, students sit the Grade 1 exam, and upon completing the year, they sit the grade 2 exam. Level 2 is similarly aligned with grades 3 and 4, and Level 3 is aligned with grades 5 and 6 (see Table 6). When fully implemented, this will allow students to sit exams and be graded in the same way as students in the formal schools<sup>8</sup>, which will ensure students’ successful transition to junior secondary school.

<sup>7</sup> No MoU was signed with MEST, but they have been involved at all phases of the AEP. SC staff explain that in Sierra Leone, signing an MoU is associated with receiving payment. Therefore, in certain cases they do not pursue signing an MoU so as not to create a misunderstanding.

<sup>8</sup> At mid-term and end-of-term, students sit an exam written and administered by the school. There are 6 exams in the academic year. Grades are compiled and divided by six to get a mark for the year. The school maintains records for all academic years. At the end of primary school, before sitting the NPSE, the school sends the marks to the Ministry. A student’s score on the NPSE is a combination of the continuous assessments (through 6 years of primary), which account for 20% of the grade, the score on a mock NPSE exam, which accounts for 30%, and the score on the final exam, which accounts for 50% of the grade.

**Table 6.** AEP alignment with primary school grade.

AEP Level	Grade
1	1 2
2	3 4
3	5 6

To ensure that students can sit the national exam with their formal school peers and to facilitate transition to the formal school upon completion of the AEP, SC has included the head teacher of the formal school on the AEP committee. Additionally, SC uses all the relevant MEST materials, including adapting the Ebola curriculum to meet the needs of the AEPs target students.

Finally, SC is working at the local level with MEST and other NGOs to advocate for the removal of barriers of access (including school-related and systemic barriers) and demonstrate through accelerated education that there is a way that children can be in school. In 2016, SC did a study on the impact of school fees, and they hope to disseminate this information to advocate for the removal of this barrier. Additionally, every month SC participates in an education coordination meeting. MEST, missions, SC, and other NGOs come together to discuss education-related issues and make plans of action.

## Challenges

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There are some challenges with alignment with the national system. While AEP Centres are located in the communities, none are registered to administer the exam. Students of these Centres will need to take the exam at a formal school or other exam centre, and SC will need to coordinate transportation. However, because the AEP Centres have a working relationship with the formal school, the process of registering AEP students at the formal school is likely to be facilitated.

Additionally, there are two constraints related to funding. SC intends to pay student exam fees and provide transition kits for students who transition to the formal school. However, while these items are written into the budget, the budget is too low to support all elements of the project. SC is currently in the process of re-writing the budget to cover these important costs.

Another challenge that SC, the AEP Committee, and several students noted was that because of the costs associated with attending the formal schools, it will be difficult for students who pass the NPSE to continue on in the formal schools. For this reason, SC is beginning to think about the need to integrate livelihoods training into the AEP, and they recommend that the AEWG consider including cross-sector collaboration in the Principles and Guide (discussed further below).

There are challenges with the national education system as well. First, SC explains that while they are aligning with MEST's policies, there is no policy directly regarding out-of-school children or AEPs. Additionally, MEST is understaffed, so there are challenges associated with how highly involved MEST can be. Finally, MEST's EMIS system is still under development. Until recently, they did not have a nationalized way to track students. It has recently been developed and implemented, and SC is trying to align their data collection to the system. However, MEST still does not have any way of tracking out-of-school children.

Finally, SC staff noted that in some communities where the Centre is temporarily housed in the formal school, competition is beginning to arise over a new national feeding program that has been implemented in the schools. The formal schools have begun providing lunch twice per week, and when AEP students arrive, formal

school students are having their free lunch. This has raised concerns of dissatisfaction with the AEP – students and community members have begun to request that the AEP also implement a school feeding program.

## Key Findings: Alignment

### Successes

- MEST recognizes the need for AEPs
- MEST was involved in the design of the AEP, including selecting students, teachers, and designing the program
- Aligned 3 AEP levels with 6 primary grades
- Included local formal school head teacher on AEP Committee to facilitate student transition
- Working with MEST to remove barriers to access to formal schools

### Challenges

- There are constraints to funding important elements of the project, such as transition kits and exam fees
- It will be difficult for students who complete AEP to pay the fees in the formal school
- Challenges within the formal system, such as lack of policy, understaffing, and lack of an EMIS, affect the AEP
- Competition between the AEP and the formal school is beginning to arise

## Utility and Relevance of the Principles and Guidance to the Programme

### Usefulness/Relevance of the Principles

SC's AEP in Pujehun, Sierra Leone is a unique case precisely because they are actively using and engaging in reflection on their use of the 10 Principles. While they explain that the Principles "*are not like a bible to [them]*", the Principles guide SC in their work.

SC Sierra Leone staff were introduced to the Principles by their SCUUK counterpart, the Technical MEAL Advisor UK, who is a member of the AEWG. In designing the project, SC determined that the Principles would serve as a foundation on which they built their project, hypothesizing that adhering to the Principles would improve outcomes for children. They determined that nearly all of the Principles and sub-principles were relevant if adapted to their context. For example, SC staff worked with community members to decide which groups of children to target – those who were working, teenage mothers, and those attending Koranic education. This is reflective of the southern Sierra Leone context, where they see a large number of children out of school due to poverty, many students, particularly boys, who are out of the formal system and studying in religious schools, and saw a spike in teenage pregnancy during the Ebola crisis. The only sub-Principles that were not relevant to their context were those relating to refugees and internally displaced persons.

SC staff explained that there was a great need for these Principles. They were pleased that the Principles were developed for a number of reasons:

- They explained that previously there were no Principles. Programmes are not well aligned with each other around best practices, nor are they integrated into the formal system or linked to the government. For these reasons, programmes often don't work well. The Principles can help programmes **align around a standard**.
- SC staff believe that having Principles **supports sustainability**. They can be used to advocate for integration with the formal system, programme uptake by the MEST, or for additional funding.

- They feel that there is a need for **quality benchmarks**, which the Principles provide, for designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programmes. They hypothesize that if they work towards implementing these Principles, they can better help children in need.
- They explain that the sub-Principles **provide specific guidance** for procurement of materials, teacher training, selection of the committee, etc.
- SC staff explains that **the need for AE will continue to exist worldwide**, and particularly in Africa. Therefore, it is important to have this focus on standards in AE.

## Current Utilisation of the Principles and Guidance

As previously mentioned, SC Sierra Leone are actively piloting the Principles, working towards adherence to them as applicable in their context, capturing data on their alignment to the principles, and reflecting on the application of and impact of using the principles. Some ways in which they use the Principles include:

- **Design Workshop.** During the first year of the grant, SC held a 3-day workshop with a variety of stakeholders from the community and Ministry officials to design the programme based on the 10 Principles. In preparation for the workshop, they considered which stakeholders could speak to which Principles. During the workshop, they facilitated a number of activities to more deeply understand how the Principles would be applied in their context and what next steps needed to occur to move towards implementation. The design workshop was participatory in nature, and SC facilitated a number of activities to encourage equal participation by all stakeholders, including body maps, child timelines, human Likert scales, and plenary and focus group discussions. Following the workshop, they reflected on the success of the workshop and what follow-up information was needed.
- **Assessment against Principles.** In addition to implementing the AEP programme they have designed, they are also pilot testing the Principles by assessing their programme against the Principles with the aim of linking their outcomes at the end of the 3-year pilot to the application of the Principles. At the end of Year 1, in collaboration with community stakeholders, SC designed and carried out a thorough baseline assessment to measure their current alignment with the Principles, identify any challenges, and make plans for rectifying challenges. They will do a mid-line assessment at the end of Year 2 and an end-line assessment at the end of Year 3.
- **Project Implementation Plan.** SC has continued using the Principles as a guide throughout the start of implementation. They used guidance from the Principles in developing the curriculum, hiring teachers, and forming the AEP committee. Their implementation plan is largely guided by the Principles.

## Community Engagement with the Principles

Interestingly, SC has involved the community, particularly the AEP Committee, in the use of the Principles. During the Design Workshop, SC explicitly referred to the Principles, effectively introducing community members to the Principles. Community members provided input on how the Principles would be best adapted to their context<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, community members were heavily engaged in designing and carrying out the baseline assessment against the Principles. Community members collaborated with SC to identify what questions to ask and to whom to ask them in order to measure alignment with Principles.

<sup>9</sup> The description of alignment to the Principles above shows how the Principles were contextualized for the Pujehun context.

## Future Utilisation of the Principles and Guidance

While SC has heavily used the 10 Principles, they have not made use of the Guide to date. They did however, briefly review the Guide during the period of the research and provided some feedback on what they liked about it. They noted that the Guide provided a lot of useful information to support organizations looking to start AEPs. Specifically, they noted that they liked that the Guide offered:

- A **detailed explanation** of each of the Principles and sub-principles, which can help users better understand the concepts;
- Notes about **successes and challenges** faced by other programmes, which can help users learn from others;
- **Case studies** under each Principle, which gives users an example of how the Principle is applied in different contexts; and
- **References** for further research, so users can learn more.

SC staff also noted that they appreciated that the Guide clearly explains how the Principles were developed, that it is visually appealing and user friendly, and that it defines acronyms for those who are new to the education sector. They also felt that the Guide could be useful to other stakeholders, such as donors, MEST, teachers, and the AEP Committee, not just programme staff.

Additionally, SC reflected on ways that they might use the resources, particularly the Guide, in the future, including:

- **Training SC, MEST, and AEP staff** by drawing on information from the Guide;
- **Sensitizing the national government** about the need for accelerated education, which would support them in **applying for further funding**;
- **Advocating for the government to adopt the AEP** or adapt the Principles in various contexts;
- **Training teachers and the AEP committee and fostering awareness** of the need for accelerated education in the community; and
- **Procuring funding and materials**, since the Principles and Guide legitimize the need for such a program.

## Challenges in Utilisation

Challenges to the application of specific Principles and sub-Principles were discussed above. While many challenges suggest a gap, others are simply an effect of the newness of the programme. It is expected that over time, SC will be able to better determine how they will address these issues. Nevertheless, they warrant mentioning. In summary, the greatest factors affecting these challenges include:

- **Funding.** Many of the challenges SC faces are related to funding, including insufficient funds to complete all project activities, such as paying exam registration fees and transportation, obtaining sufficient teaching materials, rehabilitating Centres that are in poor condition, and supporting and tracking student transition.
- **Weak teacher training capacity nationally.** There is no capacity within Sierra Leone to train teachers on AE Pedagogy, and funding is limited within SC for teacher training.
- **Weak education infrastructure nationally.** MEST is just now beginning to implement an EMIS system, and they are largely understaffed. While MEST agrees with the need for AEPs and have been engaged to the extent possible in the program, the weak infrastructure is a challenge.

Additionally, SC has identified additional support they would like, including:

- **Guidance on the timeline and key action steps for developing and implementing an AEP**, such as when and how to engage MEST, the community, and other NGOs working towards similar goals;
- **Training on AE pedagogy**, particularly related to teaching older children;
- **Learning sessions**, so implementers around the world can learn from each other and SC Sierra Leone can share their experiences with other AEPs globally; and
- **Guidance on how to advocate for the integration of AEPs** in the national education system.

Finally, the Freetown-based SC Education Advisor noted that the 76-page Guide was quite bulky. It is more of a manual than a succinct guide, and that it may be difficult for those working in crisis and conflict to have time to read the full Guide. She suggests developing a shorter version, and perhaps putting case studies as annexes.

## Links to Programme Outcomes

As AEP classes started only in November 2016, there are no outcomes measured. However, early indicators show that the target number (720) of students was successfully enrolled in the program. Additionally, students are beginning to show progress on literacy and numeracy. Some children have reported that they are excited they are now able to write their name, and SC staff and teachers confirm that students are beginning to recognize letters and numbers. Additionally, one student reported psycho-social benefits of understanding a new language and getting along with others.

“ I used to live a few miles away. I didn't know anything about the outside world. Now I can understand Krio, and I can get along in crowds and get along well.”

– Boy Student

Since programme outcomes have not yet been documented, the researcher asked participants to what extent they *expected* the Principles to have an effect on outcomes. They anticipate that:

- ➔ **Adhering to student inclusion and flexibility Principles will lead to increased enrolment, completion, and transition rates.** Enrolment figures at each of the Centres by boys and girls is shown in Table 7. SC met their target of 720 students, and enrolled nearly 50% girls. Identifying and adhering to the student inclusion criteria, as set forth by the Principles and adapted by SC, community stakeholders, and MEST, led to enrolment of target overage, out-of-school children. Additionally, building in flexibility of the AEP schedule based on consultation with children and community members, has ensured that these children can attend while also fulfilling their other obligations. These children, who would not otherwise have access to education, will now have the opportunity to complete primary schooling and transition to junior secondary school<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Attendance rates were not yet available because there were problems with the attendance tracking mechanism. SC is working to rectify this problem to accurately capture attendance data.

**Table 7.** Enrolment Figures of Boys and Girls by Centre.

Center Name	Boys	Girls
Potoru	63	57
Zimmi	52	68
Gbondapi	74	46
Bumpeh	67	53
Massam	70	50
Jendema	38	82
<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>356</b>

“ Without [the community’s] efforts, we will not succeed... If we are making any headway, it is because they are highly involved; they are willing to participate; they have owned the project. Without the support [of the community], we will not succeed.”  
– SC AEP Staff

- ➔ **Engaging the community from inception will improve management and lead to better outcomes.** The community’s involvement via the AEP Committee is already proving beneficial. The community is able to handle smaller and some larger management issues, and the AEP is not completely reliant on SC.
- ➔ **Building the capacity of teachers will improve learning.** SC focuses on quality of learning, in addition to access. They believe that focusing on teacher development will improve teaching and learning outcomes.
- ➔ **Child-friendly learning environments will improve learning.** SC believes that creating quality learning environments will lead to more learning. If AEP Centres are child-friendly, students will be motivated to stay and complete their education. But if Centres are not child-friendly, SC believes that children will drop out.

## What can be learned from this case?

The AEP implemented by SC in Pujehun provides an interesting perspective in this research, since they are actively applying and reflecting on the 10 Principles, as well as engaging the community around the Principles. Overall, participants in this case study explain that:

- 1 **The 10 Principles, and most of the sub-principles are relevant, if adapted to the program’s context.** They explain that the Principles were written for crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, which differs somewhat from SC’s own context of recovery. However, they explain that many of the issues they face are similar, and the Principles can guide them in their work.

SC offers some general recommendations for improving the Principles.

- 2 **Incorporate the recovery/post-emergency context in the Principles.** While the recovery/post-emergency context is different from the emergency context, there is a need for Principles and Guide for AEPs in the recovery context, and all of the Principles and most of the sub-Principles identified apply to their context, if contextualized. Therefore, SC staff recommend integrating the recovery context into the Principles and Guide.

They elaborate that programmes in recovery contexts need a greater emphasis on sustainability by the community. Community engagement in the recovery context, where communities are stable, is different. People have returned to their communities and are committed to re-building their lives together. Communities are likely to be more engaged and can take on more management responsibilities in the AEP.

Similarly, AEPs in recovery contexts need to consider how student-level outcomes can be sustained. Children who complete the AEP and return to the formal schools will have to pay school fees. AEPs need to consider how to support this aspect of transition, for example, through helping students and families with livelihoods development.

A greater emphasis on inclusion, particularly of children with disabilities, is needed in the Principles and Guide. In formal schools in such contexts, children with disabilities are often excluded. AEPs in post-emergency contexts should be able to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and this should perhaps be addressed in teacher professional development.

- 3 **Include the use of technology for teacher development.** Access to technology is increasing worldwide, and can be used to the benefit of programmes. SC staff recommend incorporating the use of technology, particularly for teacher development, into the Principles. Some examples given include using photos and videos for coaching and mentoring teachers and using tablets to store recurrent lesson plans.
- 4 **Further emphasize critical aspects of the Principles.** SC staff felt that the following aspects of the Principles were very important and should be emphasized:
  - a. Cross-sector coordination, particularly with livelihoods. Many children are out of school because they are working, and they need the support to earn a living for themselves and their families while pursuing their education.
  - b. Link between teacher recruitment and teacher development.
  - c. Sustainability and government integration of the program.
  - d. Advocacy for policy making and integration of AEPs in the formal system.

Additionally, SC suggests that the AEWG:

- 5 **Consider working with governments to advocate for the integration of AEPs** in the national education system, since NGOs, particularly at the local level, have limited reach.
- 6 **Source funds for mid- to long-term implementation of AEPs** in countries with high dropout rates<sup>11</sup>.

Upon reflecting on the research process, the researcher recommends that the AEWG:

- 7 **Continue to work with SC Sierra Leone to understand how the Principles have affected achievement of the objectives** of student certification in NPSE and transition.
- 8 **Consider more deeply examining how SC Sierra Leone is able to engage the community** around the use of the Principles.
- 9 **Conduct follow-up field testing of the Guide** after programmes had more time to engage with and use it for a period of time.

SC sees the Guide as a working document that will be updated with new learnings over time. They look forward to their participation in the case study being reflected in the next draft of the Principles and Guide, and they anticipate that over time the Guide will continue to contribute to the improvement of AEPs worldwide.

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<sup>11</sup> One SC project staff member in Pujehun noted the need for long-term funding for AEPs; however, Freetown-based staff explained that AEPs are intended to be short-term responses to a need and not create a parallel system. Therefore, this recommendation was not shared by all.

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