



The University of Northampton
Faculty of Education and Humanities

**Report on Research to Inform the Development and Production of a Policy
document and a Strategy on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities
in the Republic of Sierra Leone**

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1. Acknowledgements

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2. Introduction

2 (i) The Project Aims

The aim of the study was to support the establishment of an inclusive environment for all learners in the Republic of Sierra Leone by developing a policy to promote Inclusive Education. This aim was intended to promote access of quality education and training which meets the needs of children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

2 (ii) The Objectives of the Study

1. To provide advice on aspects of early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools and intervention /rehabilitation.
2. To suggest potential strategies to promote awareness of the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community in order to support the development of inclusive education.
3. To make recommendations concerning the practical ways of promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.
4. To make recommendations regarding the promotion of a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions in the Republic of Sierra Leone.
5. To provide advice and make recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology concerning potential uses of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.
6. To make recommendations regarding the training and professional development of school staff and associated professionals to enable them to deliver quality services for learners with special needs and disabilities in inclusive environments.
7. To provide advice regarding potential approaches to enhancing collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including the relevant ministries, parents of children with disabilities and other special needs,

Disabled People's Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

8. To provide advice and recommendations on a potential research agenda to support the further development of inclusive education in the Republic of Sierra Leone.

To make recommendations for the promotion of effective management and coordination of services to support learners with disabilities and other special needs.

3. Executive Summary

This summary highlights the main findings and recommendations from this research. It provides a brief overview of the study, further details of which are contained in the main body of the report.

Research was conducted to identify those factors which will need to be addressed to inform the development of inclusive education policy and practice in Sierra Leone. Data were collected through a review of the literature, and interviews and focus groups conducted with a wide range of service users and providers across the country.

3 (i) Findings

- A lack of accurate diagnostic and assessment presents difficulties for parents in respect of having confidence that their children's needs can be met in school.
- Inadequate assessment information restricts ability of teachers to plan effectively to address the needs of all children.
- Limited availability of assessment data means that it is difficult to make accurate measurements of the progress made by children in school
- Limited of teaching resources inhibits effective teaching and is a major obstacle to the development of inclusive schooling
- Poor physical access is currently inhibiting school attendance for some pupils
- At present there is insufficient understanding and availability of assistive technology to enable appropriate support in this area to be given
- Models of good practice in developing post-school provision in the country need to be widely recognised and disseminated.
- The poor infrastructure and provision for children and young adults with disabilities requires a significant increase in funding to support initiatives.

- There is an urgent need to provide both existing teachers and those being trained with the understanding, skills and knowledge to address the needs of a diverse school population
- There is a need for NGOs to disseminate their knowledge and understanding of disability to those professionals working in front line services, including schools.
- There is currently a limited empirical base to provide sound foundations for understanding the development of effective inclusive policy or practice. This requires that support be given to research focused in these areas and to increasing research capacity within the country.
- The current system of school recognition needs to be reviewed if equal opportunities are to be addressed through national inclusion policy.
- It is essential to recognise that inclusion is not only an issue for those children with disabilities, but that attention will need to be given to issues of gender, poverty and culture.

3 (ii) Recommendations

- On the basis of the findings from this research the following recommendations, each of which is elaborated within this report have been made.
- Regional multi-professional teams should be formed with responsibility for developing national and local policy to provide initial screening and assessment of all infants. A focus upon training that ensures high quality assessment procedures should be an early priority for these teams.
- A national forum of disability focused organisations, which includes individuals with disabilities and parents should be established to share information and to identify good practice in providing support to disabled children and their families. The National Commission for Disability should play a central role in co-ordinating activity beyond the regional level by bringing people together to develop a plan for the provision of support at each phase of an individual's life.
- A priority should be given to the development of initial teacher training and post-graduate professional development that ensures increased competence and confidence in the management and education of students with disabilities and special educational needs. In addition consideration should be given to utilising current expertise in special schools to act as a resource for teachers and to share expertise with those who are endeavouring to provide for children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.
- An audit of a stratified sample all schools should be conducted to assess issues of access and support for learning. The sample should be representative of urban and rural

areas, and should include schools from across all phases. The audit should be conducted through a collaborative process that enables information to be gathered from service providers and users. This should review the availability of essential learning resources, the approaches adopted by teachers to include all children in learning, and those barriers which currently deny children opportunities to learn.

- Training provided to teachers and other professionals should include aspects of using both basic teaching resources and technology to support communication and learning. An investment in providing schools with assistive technology is essential. The development of classroom and outdoor spaces and specialist teaching areas should be prioritised with a consideration of the provision of minimum national standards which ensure the development of good learning environments for all children.
- A critical mass of skilled providers of initial teacher training and professional development of teachers and other professionals should be created as a priority. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should invest in the provision of a series of short term courses aimed at supporting teachers in developing inclusive approaches to assessment, curriculum development and classroom management. School inspectors and district education officers could play a significant co-ordination role in facilitating such courses and should be available to assist in the interpretation of priorities and supporting initiatives for the enhancement of provision.
- At ministry level leadership roles should be more clearly defined and established points of contact clarified in order that disabled persons organisations and other stakeholders can gain direct access to policy makers. A core team of individuals working in appropriate ministries should be formed to oversee a co-ordinated approach to policy development and implementation. These individuals should have expertise in the education of welfare of individuals with disabilities and should assume an advisory role. In addition they should play a critical role in gathering information for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to inform changes in provision and policy, and to assure the quality of education provided.
- At NGO level, efforts should be made to ensure a more co-ordinated response to the needs of children, families and schools by identifying those actions which are most likely to have a positive impact upon encouraging greater awareness of disability, the promotion of professional skills and changing attitudes towards children who are currently marginalised and discriminated against.
- Research capacity in the area of inclusive education should be achieved alongside increased provision of teacher training.

4. Methods

An initial review of the literature related to the development and provision of inclusive schooling was conducted to provide both a context for the research and to gain insights into successful practices from situations similar to that in Sierra Leone. The limited availability of in-country specific literature required that the research team considered research from a wider African and international context which was then considered in relation to data and wider information gained through field work conducted in country.

Data were collected through a series of interviews and focus groups (N=119) conducted with key stake holders including service providers and users in four regions of Sierra Leone (see table 1 below). Interviews were semi-structured in order to encourage probing of respondents, with questions formulated in direct response to the research questions provided by Sightsavers. Semi-structured interviews (Gillham, 2005), were conducted by the principal investigator, and by a team of field workers who were familiarised with the data collection instrument and the principles of working at a meeting held in Freetown. All interviews were either recorded digitally or through the collation of field notes.

Data were collated and analysed through a process of thematic coding (Creswell *et al.*, 2003), in order to identify key issues emerging from the interviews. Initial themes were scrutinised and subjected to a process of code reduction to ensure that those issues which were most commonly emerging from the data could be emphasised and then organised thematically. This enabled a total of sixteen codes, each of which recurred throughout the data to be highlighted as those most representative of views expressed. These were then grouped under four themes as presented below.

Table 1 Four Regions from which data were collected

Region	Districts	Population (2004 census)
Western	Western Urban	772,873
	Western Rural	174,249
Eastern	Kailahun	358,190
	Kenema	497,948
	Kono	335,401
Northern	Bombali	408,390
	Kambia	270,462
	Koinadugu	265,758
	Port Loko	453,746
	Tonkolili	347,197
Southern	Bo	463,668
	Bonthe	139,687
	Moyamba	260,910
	Pujehun	228,392

Following analysis of data an initial research report was issued along with recommendations for the formulation of a National Policy on Inclusive Education for the Republic of Sierra Leone. These documents were considered by representatives of the Education for Children with Disabilities Network (ECDN) in Sierra Leone and comments and points for clarification were returned to the research team.

A second visit to the field of 1 week’s duration was made in order to conduct a further round of consultations with service users and providers. Four meetings were held as illustrated in table 2 below. The purpose of the meeting was to seek further data regarding the feasibility of recommendations made by the research team, to provide clarification of these recommendations, and to ensure that the final policy document produced would be in a format accessible by all parties.

Table 2 Second Field Trip Consultancy for Data Collection

Region	Location of Consultation	Number of participants
Western	Freetown	40
Eastern	Kenema	45
Northern	Makeni	54
Southern	Bo	45
N=		184

Following this final stage of field work, the research team analysed the comments provided and produced a final document titled: *Proposed Policy and Actions for the Promotion of Inclusive Education within the Republic of Sierra Leone*, which was forwarded to ECDN and the sponsors of the research. This report and the policy document will be provided to the Minister of Education and considered by the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

4 (i) Ethical Considerations

The initial research proposal was approved through the University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the research process prior to collection of their data. During the analysis process all data has been anonymised and data maintained securely in encrypted files that can be accessed only by members of the research team.

5. Review of the Literature

5 (i) Literature Overview: Developments in Inclusive Education

Introduction

This literature overview presents an analysis of the main themes that have emerged internationally and in a country-specific context in the provision of educational and social learning opportunities for children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities (SEND). The approach we have adopted is purposive in its selection of literature, so as to provide an indication of where useful guidelines or landmarks exist that can support policy and provision developments in Sierra Leone.

The overview is divided into two clear sections. The first outlines in brief the key characteristics and developments on an international scale, as a background to what is currently being attempted in Sierra Leone. The purpose of this section is to point to the 'state of the art' in inclusive education, and to the lessons that policy-makers might take from such initiatives. The second, albeit briefer, section summaries the characteristics of existing policy and practice for all children with SEND in Sierra Leone, and offers a mapping of the extent to which what has been implemented thus far can act as a starting point for future development, leading to 'education for all'.

Prior to consideration of these two substantive sections, we first offer our perspective regarding terminology, by providing a set of clear definitions for those terms used throughout the overview. Next, we make a brief commentary regarding the methodology we adopt in undertaking this component of the tasks set out in the agreed tender.

Definitions

At the outset it is essential to clarify the two principal terms that we interrogate in this short scoping of the literature.

SEND - a child having Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a young person who has a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special education provision to be made for him or her. In this respect, a 'disability' is a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (adapted from Department for Education, 2015 page 16).

A learning difficulty occurs when a child:

- Has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than most others of the same age; or
- Has a disability that prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.

Disability

Disability describes those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006)

Inclusive Education - 'Inclusive education refers to the right of all children to attend school in their home community in ordinary/regular classes with peers of their own age. All children have a right to quality and meaningful education. This means including children who are usually left out' (Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa, 2014)

5 (ii) Literature Review Methodology

A purposive approach has been adopted to secure illustrative material to highlight the key considerations in inclusive education as it connects with SEND, both from an international perspective and from the position of Sierra Leone itself.

The research team made use of the University of Northampton's own e-catalogues of published research and scholarship in the identified fields (SEND and Inclusive Education). In addition, the team made use of a small group of trusted and experienced practitioner colleagues in the field of SEND and inclusive education to act as discussants (Thomas and Harden 2003). Their function was to highlight any issues which, based on their experience of work in these areas, have not been adequately covered in the literature overview.

5 (iii) International Dimensions in the Development of Inclusive Education

The concept and practice of inclusive education has emerged in the last 30 years (Mittler, 2000). It has grown as a global trend from its beginnings in the integration movements of the 1970s and early 1980s (Thomas and Loxley, 2007; Norwich, 2008), which enshrined an understanding that pupils with SEND should be educated alongside the rest of the school population and enjoy all the benefits that follows from this. It has developed as a more

child-centred approach to meeting the needs of SEND than the earlier term 'integration'. Integration, unlike inclusion, placed no emphasis on teachers, other adults, non-SEN pupils and the culture and ethos of a school to change. The pupil with SEN had to 'fit-in' to existing arrangements (Hegarty, 1993a; 1993b).

The emergence of inclusive education proper can be traced to several landmark international actions, heavily influenced by the progressive developments of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, 1975) in the United States, which determined that all children should be educated in the 'least restrictive practice'.

The concept and practise of educational inclusion has become the prevailing initiative in education systems in most countries globally (Mitchell, 2005; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009; UNESCO, 2015). Its emergence has been based on recognition of the rights of all learners to have opportunities to enable them to function as equal participants in 21st Century society.

The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) set the goal of Education for All (EFA) and heralded a quickening international movement towards inclusive practice and a more widespread agreement on key principles first defined in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). These principles have now been reinforced by many conventions, declarations and recommendations on an international scale. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which explicitly emphasises that establishing an inclusive system of education ought to be a policy imperative of all nation states. Subsequently, the UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (2009) set out an overt educational, social and economic justification of the need of nation states to work towards inclusive practices, so that all children are educated together.

The international literature in support of inclusive approaches for SEND populations is now extensive (Ainscow, 1997; Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou, 2010; Alur and Timmons, 2009; Rose, 2010; Timmons and Walsh, 2010). It covers all aspects of policy and practice, including educational leadership (Burnett, 2005; Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; ASEPA, 2017), curriculum planning (Davis and Florian, 2004; Tilstone and Lacey, 2000), identification and assessment (Frederickson and Cline, 2002; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Department for Education and Employment, 2001), training and professional development (Dwyfor-Davies and Garner, 1997; EADSNE, 2009; Rose and Garner 2010), inter-agency collaboration (Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Lacey, 2012) and extensive coverage of the challenges, debates and controversies that consistently for part of the educational landscape in the 21st century (Hornby, Howard and Atkinson, 2013; Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Mitchell, 2004; Norwich, 2008).

Attention has been directed towards the ways that inclusive education has been adopted in those nation-states described by Daniels and Garner (2000) as being 'systems in development'. These country locations face challenges in implementing inclusion, in part because of the demographic, economic, social and political circumstances that they are experiencing (Hammer, 2013; Mariga *et al.* , 2014). Amongst the challenges currently being

faced are poor infrastructure (especially accessible school buildings and inclusion-friendly classrooms), inadequate initial and in-service training, greater integration of support for SENDs, refinement in identification and assessment and curriculum modernisation. These observations are supported across a wide and expanding body of international literature: see, for example, Eleweke and Rodda (2002), Peters (2003), Miles (2009), Acedo *et al.* (2008), Whilst recognising the size of the task faced by those less advantaged country settings, Mariga *et al.* (2014) suggest that an optimum point of departure on an inclusion 'journey' is to 'Start with what you can change: one child, one class, one school at a time. You may not transform the world but you will have transformed that school' (p.132).

5 (iv) Education for Children with SEND in Sierra Leone

The literature specific to Sierra Leone ranges from governmental reports, research conducted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and peer reviewed research articles. To retain a sharp focus on recent policy and practice, the sources utilised cover the period from 2007 to the present. Eight documents were scrutinised for specific within country data that met a criterion for a high weight of evidence (Gough, Oliver and Thomas 2012). The existence of such a modest body of literature is not unusual, given the relatively recent policy focus on inclusive education in many countries in Africa (Mariga *et al.*, 2014).

Several themes have emerged from these literature sources that resonate with findings from international sources (Ajuwan, 2008; Mariga *et al.*, 2014). The broad themes identified relate to educational, social and political circumstances in general and the impact on the education system of the period of internal conflict between 1991-2002) and which have been acknowledged by UNICEF (2014). Further, more specific issues of school accessibility emerged as subsidiary themes in the more recent literature (see, for example, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, UNESCO & Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, 2013; UNICEF 2010).

As in most other country-locations, provision for children with SEND is directly related to policy and practice developments in general education. This is an indication that the concept of inclusive education is becoming embedded within education systems, resulting in structural shifts in the way that provision is reformulated, so that every child can receive an appropriate education.

Wang (2007) outlined the status of the education sector and highlighted issues that policy makers needed to address to move the sector forward. It also simulated a few policy scenarios and their financial implications to facilitate discussions about future feasible, affordable, and sustainable policy options. The implications of such scenarios appear highly relevant in respect of the research findings outlined in the body of this Report. Wang's study, a stock-taking exercise based on data, previous studies, official reports, and documents available up to the 2004/05 school year, addressed certain key factors, including access, quality, equity, management and finance, whilst placing an emphasis on basic education.

The United Nations Development Programme report (UNDP 2010) comprised information on the situation in Sierra Leone from 2008. It was uncompromising in stating that the root cause of the country's situation was due to poor governance. Because of this, political and economic isolation existed, which was coupled with corruption at all levels during the time being reported. Furthermore, gender discrimination was a notable issue at all levels of society.

The Report indicated that lessons learned from previous evaluations of interventions by the UNDP indicate many sectors of provision were involved. However, there was a lack of government ownership of the programmes of intervention. There was also an absence of substantive data and statistical analysis, making any progress in intervention difficult to track. Several areas were identified for development. These included: improved political processes and democratic governance, decentralized policy and improved participation of women in society, increases in gender equality and the participation of women at all levels, improved human rights concerning peace and the recovery of the community and human security. It should be noted that several these themes are subsequently identified as significant considerations in the research that is the core component of the present research. A later report (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2013), indicated little progress or change since 2010, with the average expected years of access to formal schooling remaining at 7.3, a figure that had not changed since 2005. This latter report indicates that in 2012 Sierra Leone's Human Development Index of 0.359 is below the average of 0.466 for countries in the low human development group and below the average of 0.475 for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the same report the national Gender Inequality Index which assesses the opportunities, including education provided for girls ranked Sierra Leone in 139th place out of 148 countries.

The free primary education policy, introduced in Sierra Leone 2000, led to rapid progress in terms of access to schooling, itself an important dimension of inclusivity for school systems. However, fieldwork research by Nishimuko (2007) based on observations of schools, interviews with teachers, and questionnaires from pupils, parents and teachers in 27 schools in five towns, showed that the quality of the education provided had been compromised due to the rapid increase in the number of enrolled children. He noted that high teacher-pupil ratios, shortages of teaching and learning materials as well as school buildings and furniture, and low motivation on the part of teachers were quite common. Nishimuko (2007) also argued for the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in supplementing government efforts to expand educational access of acceptable quality, especially when the government's capacity to deliver education was weak. Each of these issues, in whole or in part, are characteristic of emergent inclusive education systems, and are revisited at various points in the present Report. Similarly, in line with findings from the research discussed in this report, a recent study conducted by Foran (2017 in press), has emphasised the additional challenges and disadvantages confronting girls with disabilities in respect of accessing and completing education in Sierra Leone. As Foran states in her research, gender issues have been largely overlooked and so long as this remains the case, discrimination and marginalisation will continue to obstruct opportunities for girls to receive an appropriate education (2017 in press).

Even though considerable effort had been directed in both policy and practice terms to secure 'education for all' in Sierra Leone, by 2006 the World Bank (2007) stated that 20-30% of children were out of school and also reported that the additional costs at primary school level, made school unaffordable for some. Later, UNICEf (2014) stated that 23% of children were out of education and that basic primary education for all had yet to be realised. Further issues comprised poverty and those of health such as the high percentage of teenage pregnancies. Children in poverty tend to drop out of school after the primary phase of schooling, with this being far more common for girls than boys. A further, ongoing issue is that of poverty. The Sierra Leone Education Country Status Report (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, UNESCO & Regional Bureau for Education in Africa 2013) highlights that the biggest hurdle to children's access and ability to finish education is poverty.

The Sierra Leone Education Country Status Report (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, UNESCO & Regional Bureau for Education in Africa 2013) is of particular note in as much as it directed some consideration to two issues at the heart of inclusive education. In the first instance, it indicated that child mental health and wellbeing is under reported: this has become a major focus of attention for many national systems, and is viewed as being a core aspect of inclusive provision.

The second theme mentioned in the report is that of special educational needs and disability (SEND). Few issues concerning children with SEND are mentioned in the report. However, what references there are made are directed towards the National school for the deaf, Cheshire homes, the union for disability issues and the school for the blind. These are only mentioned en passant and no substantive detail is given.

The report, nevertheless, is important in other respects, as it signalled other areas where indicators of effective educational inclusion can be identified. One crucial dimension of support for inclusive systems is that of teacher education. Here it is noted that poor remuneration does not attract the best candidates into teaching, and that, as a consequence the education system does not produce as many qualified teachers who have a commitment to educating all children. For instance, UNICEF (2010) points out that 40% of teachers are under-qualified, whilst there is a notable shortfall in the provision of in-service training generically, and of specialist SEND inputs in particular. Furthermore, the Afri Map study indicates the possibility of corruption concerning the recruitment, retention, teaching and training of staff (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, UNESCO & Regional Bureau for Education in Africa 2013)

In the concluding years of the period under scrutiny, Pai (2014) presented a scoping study which surveyed the potential for universalizing education in postcolonial Sierra Leone during from the early 1950s to 1990. His paper indicated that there has never been a universal conception of universal education, and recommended that education needed to be adapted to different subpopulations, as the Bunumbu Project (Banya, 1986; 1989) did for rural Sierra Leoneans in the 1970s to 1980s, to better meet the needs of all children. Pai's (2014) recommendation, echoed in the present report, was that only by well defining the specific constituents of a target group and fulfilling their precise needs can myriad small-scale

programs ultimately aggregate to meet the diverse demands and desires of Sierra Leonean society at large.

5 (v) Concluding Overview from the Literature

This contextual overview of some of the pertinent international and Sierra Leone specific literature suggests that first, many of the policy, practice-related and cultural challenges experienced in Sierra Leone reflect to a lesser or greater extent those which have been (or currently are being) experienced by many other systems. Lessons learned from comparison, or 'borrowing' from other countries can assist in stimulating practical actions in support of more inclusive education, however it is essential that cultural and contextual differences across countries are considered before taking actions based on the experiences of other nations. Second, there has been a tendency, in what little literature is available relating to Sierra Leone, to focus almost solely on categorical 'needs' of SEND populations, rather than on issues regarding whole-school policy, pedagogy, staff development and teacher training. Again, the examples of international literature utilised in this scoping exercise reflect the importance of such topics in stimulating the development of inclusive approaches. Finally, it is apparent that whatever 'educational borrowing' is attempted, such actions have to be located within the cultural and social expectations of Sierra Leone, and in doing so need to present as 'inclusive' in engaging all stakeholders, local as well as national, in the process of educational change.

6. Findings from the research

Analysis of data from interviews and focus groups (N=119) with key service providers and users indicate that there are 16 key issues which may be seen as inhibitors of progress towards the promotion of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The data collection process enabled the research team to gain the opinions and insights of 267 individual respondents. The qualitative data collated through this research has not only enabled the researchers to identify where these pressure points upon current provision exist, but also in some cases to identify practices that have endeavoured to address these and strengthen provision for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

The findings presented here are discussed in relation to each of the emergent 16 key issues which have been grouped together to provide four related themes. The definition of each issue and the organisation of themes is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2 Organisation of Themes

Theme 1: The Teaching and Learning Environment	
Key Issue	Definition
Initial Assessment of disability/SEN	Limitations of early assessment and provision of information for schools
Pedagogical resources	Lack of adequate teaching resources, to provide appropriate access to learning for children with disabilities
Physical access	Physical access a problem for some students
National Curriculum	Limitations of the National Curriculum in providing for children with disabilities
Assistive Technology	Limited access to assistive technology (including hearing aids)
Post school provision	Need for further development of vocational education and training
Budget	Allocation of Government budget to education is inadequate to support development
Theme 2: Professional Development and Support	
Teacher Training	Training deficient at both initial teacher training and continuing professional development level in equipping teachers to address the needs of children with disabilities
Teacher confidence/competence	Teacher lack of skills inhibits confidence in addressing disability/SEN issues
Support from NGOs	NGO support is currently critical in providing support for learners with disabilities and their families
Theme 3: Dissemination of Information and Expertise	
Communication	Communication across agencies (including ministries) responsible for supporting children with disabilities/SEN is limited
Research	Limited research base to inform development in the area of disability/SEN
Theme 4: Other Exclusionary Factors	
Regional Variations*	An indication that there are variations across regions that may impact upon provision
SEN excluded	Children with disabilities are known to be <u>not attending schools</u> and only a few SEN/Disabilities are recognised – (thesetend to be sensory or physical). No recognition of intellectual difficulties, ASD, SEBD

School recognition	Some schools not recognised and teachers in non-approved schools are not paid. These have a good number of learners with disability/SEN
Exclusion of girls from education	Difficulties in enrolling and retaining girls in education

**No significant difference was seen across regions in respect of provision for students with SEN or disabilities, though several respondents indicated that they felt these might exist. Where variations were found they are indicated in the text below.*

It is important to recognise that each of the key issues identified are interrelated. For example, limited financial support through the education budget inevitably influences the availability of pedagogical resources, and the positive support provided by NGOs is likely to impact teacher confidence. The themes and key issues have therefore been isolated within this report as a means of enabling a discussion of specific factors to be provided, rather than suggesting that one issue is necessarily of greater significance than others. In any proposal to make improvements in provision and thereby to promote a more inclusive approach to the education of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone it will be important to address the key issues as a whole rather than seeking to effect change in individual areas. In addition, attitudinal issues related to low expectations of children with special educational needs and disabilities and persistent discrimination arising in some instances from beliefs that some children are cursed or possessed are serious inhibiting factors in achieving a more equitable education system and need to be confronted as a matter of urgency.

The emphasis placed upon each of the sixteen key issues identified through analysis of the data varies considerably as is shown in Chart 1 below, which indicates for example that the issue of teacher training was regarded as an area of concern emphasised during the majority of interviews and focus groups with 92% of respondents stating that teacher training was inadequate in addressing the needs of teachers in order to enable them to address issues of disability and inclusion, whereas the exclusion of girls from educational opportunities was given prominence in only 6 of these. However, it is important to recognise that all of the 16 key issues were seen to be having an impact upon the challenges of making equitable provision for children, and present inhibiting factors in terms of the national agenda of ensuring education for all.

Other issues were evident in the data, these included the distance required to travel to school, and the availability of therapeutic services for children with physical and sensory disabilities. However, these did not occur as regularly and cannot therefore be stated as having as great a significance as the 16 key issues discussed in this section of the report. Similarly, whilst there were regional variations in response to the provision made for children with disabilities and the approaches adopted to meeting these, the 16 key issues discussed here can be seen to those that are having the greatest impact in all regions. Where variations across regions were seen these are discussed in this section of the report and can be seen in charts 2 – 5 in Appendix 2.

6 (i) Theme 1: Teaching and Learning Environment

Initial assessment of disability/SEN

Procedures for the early assessment and diagnosis of disability are important in enabling children and families to gain access to appropriate school placements and resources. Where children do not receive such assessments, or a diagnosis is made only late on during education provision children often struggle with learning and may lose confidence in their own abilities. This was recognised by many respondents to this research who were able to describe how the availability or lack of facility to provide such assessments had impacted the lives of specific children and families. Parents in particular emphasised the difficulties of obtaining diagnoses and knowing where to go for support in beginning assessment processes. This difficulty was recognised by representatives of NGOs, many of whom are currently supporting the development and delivery of assessment procedures but are unable to reach all families in need. The situation is further exacerbated through a lack of confidence and competence amongst teachers in assessing the causes of learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or characteristics of autism spectrum disorders which are usually recognised only after children have entered school.

Interviews were conducted with a number of medical professionals who have a good understanding of diagnostic procedures, but not necessarily sufficient understanding of the classroom environment to be able to offer pedagogical advice. Committed professionals working in the area of visual impairment in Freetown and in Bo were seen to have developed a systematic approach to assessment and the provision of advice and resources to families and schools. In many instances this has been well supported by NGOs, more especially Sightsavers. However, this facility was less in evidence elsewhere in country and this level of professional expertise in areas other than visual impairment was not recorded.

Concerns for the lack of expertise in assessment were presented by the representatives of disabled people's organisations, many of whom had personal experiences of the difficulties of obtaining adequate resources because of a lack of formal diagnosis or assessment. The need to provide schools with accurate assessment information was emphasised in several interviews, as a failure to understand the needs of individual children results in poor provision and in some instances children being labelled as difficult or lazy because of their inability to access learning in the same way as their peers.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- A lack of accurate diagnostic and assessment will present difficulties for parents in respect of having confidence that their children's needs can be met in school.
- Inadequate assessment information impacts negatively upon the ability of teachers to plan effectively to address the needs of children who experience difficulties with learning

- Limited availability of assessment data means that it is difficult to make accurate measurements of the progress made by children with disabilities or special educational needs in school

Pedagogical resources

Observation during visits to schools in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Pujahun indicated that committed teachers were usually working with limited pedagogical resources. The availability of text books, teaching aids and materials was seen to be inadequate to enable access by all children. This impacted not only upon those with special educational needs or disabilities, but also on their typically developing peers. In some schools teachers demonstrated innovative approaches to ensure that children with disabilities or special educational needs could access lessons. For example, teachers made audio recordings of lessons for children with visual impairments in order that they could access these at home and reinforce learning. In schools for blind children braille copies of text books, key texts and reference works were available in libraries that were well maintained by the staff. Children in these schools where appropriate had access to Perkins Brailleurs and frames, though the lack of availability of serviceable typewriters was described as a problem by teachers in these schools. A school for the deaf was making effective use of sign language to support children, though specialist resources to teach this approach were limited.

In interviews and focus groups the majority of respondents identified a lack of sufficient and appropriate resources as an inhibiting factor in providing an inclusive learning environment. It was emphasised by teachers that this was not only an issue in terms of children with special educational needs or disabilities, but impacted negatively upon all learners. Education officers and local government officials concurred with suggestions that schools were inadequately resourced to meet the needs of children with difficulties, though most suggested that the situation has improved in recent years and that this continues to be an area which is receiving attention.

Parents were less concerned about the lack of resources for children with disabilities and more anxious that opportunities should be provided for their children to attend school. Those children with disabilities who were interviewed expressed their appreciation for teachers who they saw to be working hard to accommodate them in schools, and were less likely to mention pedagogical resources. This may be because of a lack of awareness of what could be made available. However, disabled people interviewed during data collection reflected upon the limited opportunities provided to them during their school years and recognised that poor resourcing of schools was a factor in denying educational progress.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Limited access to basic teaching resources inhibits effective teaching
- A lack of specialist resources for addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs is a major obstacle to the development of inclusive schooling

Physical access

There is evidence that some schools have made significant efforts to improve physical access to buildings. During field visits it was apparent that a number of schools have provided ramps to enable wheelchair users and other's with mobility difficulties to access buildings more easily. Similar attention had been given to providing accessible toilet facilities in some schools, though in most schools visited this was not the case. The data suggests that those most closely associated with schools, teachers, head teachers, pupils and parents were acutely aware of difficulties caused by poor physical access. Interviews with policy makers and education officers indicated that they too were aware, but that there was a common belief that this is an area that has improved significantly in recent years and that there has been ongoing investment to maintain progress.

The interview data suggests that many professionals have a narrow interpretation of access focused upon the provision of ramps and improved toilet facilities. Few respondents discussed other environmental factors, such as appropriate lighting, or the provision of suitable acoustic facilities. At some schools visited, the lighting conditions were poor, and children with some visual difficulties were placed in a position of disadvantage.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Poor physical access is currently inhibiting school attendance for some pupils
- Assessments of the suitability of the school environment have to date been limited to understanding implications for pupils with physical disabilities

National curriculum

A regional disparity exists with regards to the way in which the appropriateness of the National Curriculum model for children with disabilities is interpreted. In Freetown and the Southern Region, little concern was expressed about curriculum access and content, whereas in other regions there was a suggestion that the curriculum is an obstacle to effective inclusion. In particular, head teachers and deputy head teachers in the Northern Region perceived the curriculum to be problematic and restrictive of access for many children with disabilities and those with learning difficulties. Parents across the country saw limitations in the curriculum and expressed a view that their children struggled to demonstrate their learning and progress within the current system.

It is not possible to gain an overall impression of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum provided in schools or its accessibility for children with disabilities on the basis of the data provided. Many respondents have a limited experience of the curriculum, being at a distance from classrooms. It would be advisable to conduct a more detailed review of the school curriculum in view of the concerns expressed by some groups and individuals

Implications for inclusion policy development

Access to an appropriate curriculum is clearly essential if all children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities are to succeed in schools. It is therefore necessary to review current curriculum provision and to consider issues of access, content and balance in relation to the needs of this population.

Assistive technology

The availability of assistive technology in schools is severely limited. During field visits to schools there was little evidence of the use of computer assisted learning, the exception to this being in a school for children who are blind. Whilst access is limited, addressing this issue was not seen as a major priority by most of participants in interviews. Awareness of the potential of assistive technology was limited amongst interview respondents.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Assistive technology could enhance the lives of many young people with disabilities in Sierra Leone but at present there is insufficient understanding of this to enable appropriate support to be given

Post school provision

Several respondents referred to the availability of skills training courses and workshops being within Sierra Leone, some citing examples of where young people with disabilities have been supported in developing vocational skills post-school. However, the overall picture is one of inconsistency of provision in respect of both availability and access. A focus group (N=12) convened during a visit to a co-operative organised and managed by disabled people and providing a valued service within their community indicated that each one of these individuals had struggled to find either appropriate training or employment. Most had experienced negativity during their school lives which resulted in them leaving education with minimal formal qualifications and ill-prepared for employment. Similar concerns were expressed by representatives of disabled persons' organisations who believe that opportunities for training and employment are limited. In the opinion of these groups a direct consequence of this deficit is an unacceptably high number of people with disabilities begging on the streets of cities in Sierra Leone.

Whilst major concerns were expressed by people with disabilities and some parents about the lack of post-school provision, the majority of respondents appeared to be unaware of those facilities which were available or of the difficulties experienced by individuals. Interviews with representatives of universities revealed recognition of the need to provide better access for students with disabilities, but no specific plans to address issues of access or curriculum modification.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- A holistic approach to developing inclusion is essential if the Education for All goals are to be achieved. This should include action on the part of all parties who provide education, training and employment.
- Models of good practice in developing post-school provision were seen in the country and these need to be more widely recognised and disseminated in order to provide a starting model for future developments.

Budget

Concerns regarding inadequate budget provision at national level were expressed by some government officials during interviews. The limited available of teaching materials and other pedagogical resources in the schools visited reinforces a belief that they are inadequately financed for addressing the needs of current school populations. In particular, the inadequate allocation of funding to support modifications to school buildings, provide transport to school for children with disabilities and to train teachers were all issues highlighted by these respondents. In other respondents, whilst there was a general consensus that funding in the education system is inadequate, little specific reference was made to this financial shortfall. Surprisingly, the issue of the budget was not discussed as a major concern amongst parents of children with disabilities who appear to be accepting of the fact that little provision is available to them. Where discussions related to budgetary matters did take place, this appeared fatalistic with many respondents seeing financial difficulties as a common feature of the economic state of the country as a whole.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- The poor infrastructure and provision for children and young adults with disabilities cannot be addressed without a significant increase in funding provided to support initiatives.
- Such funding will need to be provided through a sustainable model as short term provision will not serve to address the broad range of needs that currently exist within the system in a manner that will ensure future security of education and social support.

6 (ii) Theme 2: Professional Development and Support

Teacher training

The greatest consensus achieved across all respondents from each region related to the inadequate provision of teacher training in equipping schools to address the needs of children and particularly those with disabilities. 92% of respondents asked about how prepared teachers are to teach children with special educational needs or disabilities believed that teachers were ill prepared. This lack of preparation was seen to be at both pre and post service levels. It was suggested that only one university in the country provides a focus upon special educational needs issues and that most teachers have had very little or no preparation in this area. This lack of teacher education was seen to be one of the greatest obstacles to achieving a more equitable and inclusive education system with respondents who work in schools suggesting that this is not only an issue in relation to training teachers to work with children with difficulties, but also in respect of all children.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- The implementation of any policy aimed at promoting inclusive education will falter if teachers are ill-prepared.
- There is an urgent need to provide both existing teachers and those being trained for the profession with the understanding, skills and knowledge to address the needs of a diverse school population
- In order to improve teacher training there is an urgent need to provide those who work in universities and teacher training establishments with increased knowledge and practical skills in addressing special educational needs and abilities in classrooms

Teacher confidence/competence

Unsurprisingly teacher confidence and competence in addressing the needs of children with special educational needs or disabilities was also seen to be low, though with 79% of respondents identifying this issue it may be that some teachers who have gained experience through working with children with disabilities have gained their confidence through this direct experience. In some schools visited, teachers who have not received formal training were seen to be making significant efforts to enable children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to participate in their classrooms. In the case of at least two of these teachers who were interviewed, they were able to describe the measures they have taken in order to provide for children with disabilities in their classes, though both expressed a desire for further training in this area.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Teacher confidence and competence will be most readily addressed through the provision of improved training. Any policy aimed at the promotion of inclusive education will need to address this issue

- There is a willingness on the part of many teachers in Sierra Leone to provide a more inclusive approach to teaching in schools. This will be built upon through effective policy if supported by training and improved access to pedagogical resources.

Support from NGOs

The support of NGOs plays a critical role in the education and welfare of children with disabilities in the country. This was acknowledged by 69% of respondents who spoke of the role played by NGOs in training, the provision of resources, support for specialist assessment and advocacy for marginalised groups. In educational terms organisations such as Sightsavers have played a major role in providing facilities and training, and continue to be a primary supporter of families. Representatives of disabled persons' organisations and parents of children with disabilities were able to provide examples of support provided by NGOs when this has not been forthcoming from government agencies. Representatives of NGOs when interviewed were able to provide examples of the support which they provide. In some instances this was focused upon specific disabilities or social issues, though all were aware of the need to address holistic needs which interact to cause exclusion and deprivation.

In some instances NGOs have been involved in providing training to teachers. This has been well received and was seen to have impacted positively upon teacher confidence. However, the numbers of teachers to have benefited from such opportunities remains small and co-ordination with other training providers is currently limited.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Much of the expertise in addressing issues of marginalisation and exclusion is currently to be found in the professionals working with NGOs. In order to promote inclusive education, there is a need to not only disseminate this knowledge, but to ensure that it is passed on to those professionals working in front line services, including schools.

6 (iii) Theme 3: Dissemination of Information and Expertise

Communication

Processes of communication about disability and special educational needs is currently uneven. Disabled persons' organisations play a pivotal role in providing basic information about the availability of services and support for parents, and there is information available through government agencies. However, this is not always readily accessed by parents and schools who are unclear about the roles and responsibilities of those who hold information. Parents in interviews suggested that much of the information which they access comes from other parents, though the formalisation of groups to ensure that such groups are able to function appears variable.

A particular issue relates to the information provided during and after assessment procedures which some parents see as a confusing time during which they are unsure where to go in order to obtain support. Communication between schools and parents was generally described as being good, and several parents saw schools as being their primary provider of information.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- In order to promote inclusion it will be essential to ensure that the aims and objectives of any policy are clearly articulated through channels that are available to all interested parties.
- A database and register of supporting organisations and facilities would enable improved communication and would be supportive of those NGOs and other organisations that are currently attempting to support families.

Research

Whilst 34% of respondents believed that there was a need for greater research in the area of disability and education, there was no consensus about what the focus of this research should be. Some respondents saw the need for studies that would help to identify the current range of needs within the country, whilst others suggested that a greater understanding of how to apply range of teaching approaches and classroom management skills would be beneficial. University staff suggested that there has been little investment in research in this area and that there is a limited number of researchers currently interested in conducting educational research related to disability and special educational needs. However, these colleagues proposed that an empirical base would enable greater understanding of the situation for disabled children in the country and the ways in which educational provision for this population might be improved.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Whilst research into pedagogical practices may currently be of low priority within Sierra Leone, the current lack of understanding of the extent of the challenges of developing a more inclusive education system remain limited and should form the focus of investigations to support development in this area.
- When policy is in place it will be necessary to understand how this is being applied, whether strategies and processes adopted are having the desired impact and what the outcomes for learners are in a changed education system.

6 (iv) Theme 4: Other Exclusionary Factors

SEN excluded

40% of respondents stated that they knew of children who did not attend school. In some instances this was as a direct result of their disability and a reluctance on the part of schools to enrol them. Amongst the parents interviewed were several who reported that their own disabled child had not had opportunities to attend school, and others reported that their children having started school did not complete their education and were required to leave formal schooling early. Some teachers and education officers suggested that there are children within Sierra Leone who may not be suitable for schooling. Others stated that without providing improved access and resources and training for teachers they would be reluctant to see some children included in schools.

When discussing disability it is apparent that many respondents interpreted this term in a limited manner. Physical disabilities and those of a sensory nature were commonly discussed, but knowledge of specific needs, including autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia or social and emotional difficulties was at best limited. It was suggested that in some communities there is a persistent belief that children who display the characteristics of autistic spectrum disorders or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, are possessed and that they should not be encouraged to attend school alongside their peers.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Knowledge of disability is currently very limited and this shortcoming will need to be addressed in order to support greater inclusion.
- As with other issues highlighted in this report the training of teachers and other professionals in the area of disability and inclusive teaching will be critical in addressing this issue.
- Work within communities, through existing networks, including faith organisations will be essential to dispel beliefs that are currently inhibiting opportunities for education.

School recognition

In a few interviews it was suggested that there are a significant number of teachers and schools that have not received formal government recognition. In some cases these schools are addressing a disadvantaged population that requires support and they provide for a number of children with disabilities. This anomaly was recognised by several education officers as a factor that needs to be addressed in order to ensure a more equitable approach to schooling.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- The current system of school recognition will need to be reviewed if equal opportunities are to be addressed through national inclusion policy.

Exclusion of girls from education

Whilst a relatively small number (7%) of respondents discussed the difficulties faced by girls in education, those who did were adamant that they were often at a disadvantage. It was suggested that girls are less likely to complete a full term of education than boys, and that girls with a disability are further disadvantaged. Examples were seen of programmes developed to encourage the education of girls, and some of these, mainly through the initiative of NGOs have had a significant impact upon the lives of a small but important number of individuals. Three education officers (all from the Southern Region) identified this as a priority area and recognised that this was an important issue in terms of creating more inclusive schools. The international literature indicates quite clearly that being a girl with a disability in a poor country is a double disadvantage. The evidence collected during field work for this report indicates that where initiatives have been taken to address discrimination against girls this has had a positive impact.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Equal opportunities will of necessity be an important factor in the development and implementation of inclusion policy. It will be essential to recognise that inclusion is not only an issue for those children with disabilities, but that attention will need to be given to issues of gender, poverty and culture.

Regional variations

Whilst regional variations in terms of response or priorities were minimal, it is apparent that there is a disparity of opportunities available for those who live in the accessible urban areas, and others living in more remote and rural regions. The tables below indicate where regional variations were seen in relation to the 16 issues discussed in these findings.

Implications for inclusion policy development

- Any attempts to implement an inclusive education policy will need to take account of the urban and rural divide that currently exists across the country

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented in direct response to the objectives provided to the research team (section 2(ii) above). These are made on the basis of the data collected during field work and analysis of literature and documentation related to the development of inclusive education in similar national environments.

Objective 1:

Early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools and intervention / rehabilitation.

There is inconsistency in the current process of early assessment and identification of disabilities and special educational needs. Access to well qualified and experienced medical, para-medical and psychological services is dependent upon geographical location, and this has, in some instances resulted in ad-hoc arrangements for assessment. NGOs have in some instances played a critical role in supporting assessment and identification procedures, but their reach is often limited and their limited access to other professionals is at times an inhibiting factor.

It is therefore recommended that:

Regional multi-professional teams which include those from medical, para-medical, social, psychological and educational backgrounds should be formed. These teams should have responsibility for developing national and local policy aimed at providing initial screening and assessment of all infants. A system of assessments to be conducted soon after children are enrolled in schools should be developed, though this will not pick up all children as current levels of school attendance are limited.

Communication between community groups and professionals will be essential in bringing children to the notice of professional teams and consideration should be given to identifying key individuals and groups who may assume a monitoring role.

As with other issues raised in this report, training will be a key factor in improving the quality and availability of assessment and identification. It is apparent from the data gathered during this project that there is considerable expertise in the areas of sensory and physical disabilities, and that in some instances this is being effectively utilised to identify children's needs. However, the availability of these services is currently limited, with families from poorer backgrounds and from rural areas being less likely to obtain access to professionals who can provide assessments. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge around other disabling conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties means that many children are being overlooked or fail to receive accurate assessments and the resources they need. The provision of training related to

specific needs (see recommendation for objective 6 below) will be essential in supporting developments in this area.

Objective 2:

Strategies to promote awareness of the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community in order to support the development of inclusive education.

Knowledge and understanding about disability is currently invested in a limited number of individuals and groups. There are disabled people's organisations in Sierra Leone, and in particular those appointed through the Commission for People with Disabilities who have devoted significant time and expertise to fostering awareness of disability issues. Similarly, a number of NGOs, including Sightsavers and Handicap International have experience and expertise in supporting families and children with disabilities, however, in some instances the brief of these organisations is narrowly focused on specific disabling conditions and there are many marginalised groups within the country whose needs are being insufficiently considered. A particular concern is for those young people who have learning difficulties which are not categorised as disabilities, but who are having difficulties accessing learning and whose teachers have not been prepared to recognise their needs, or address these in the classroom. In addition girls with disabilities present a particular challenge as they currently receive a low priority in respect of the inclusive education agenda. The education of girls is known to have wider benefits for changing expectations and attitudes in communities and it is therefore important that greater consideration is given to the opportunities afforded them through education.

Social stigma remains a major barrier to ensuring equitable provision for both children and adults with disabilities. Discriminatory practices and attitudes arise from ignorance and the perpetuation of superstition and prejudice which unless addressed will continue to inhibit progress towards inclusion. It is imperative that greater awareness of disability, and in particular the provision of positive examples of people with disabilities and their achievements becomes a focus for action across Sierra Leone. During field work for this study meetings were held with a number of high achieving people with disabilities, including head teachers and teachers who were blind and wheelchair users who are holding key positions in national organisations. The achievements of these and other individuals with disabilities should be emphasised and publicised more widely. National government can play an important role here in encouraging national media to support the portrayal of good role models with disabilities to a much wider audience.

During the course of field work undertaken for this study it was evident that some parents of children with disabilities have educated themselves in terms of the needs of their children. Their expertise is not currently being accessed to support others and many families are isolated and have little access to appropriate support. Whilst some of these parents have turned to community organisations and religious groups to seek support, they often find little expertise in these groups and are thus frustrated in their efforts to find the

assistance they need. In some instances groups of people with disabilities have organised themselves effectively to provide for their own needs and support (an example of this is a workers' co-operative of disabled people in Kenema interviewed as part of the research). Such groups are well focused, have good understanding based upon personal experiences and are well situated to provide advice on how support systems could be changed and better organised. The need for improved systems of communication is clear and should be addressed as a priority.

It is therefore recommended that:

A national forum of disability focused organisations should be established to share information and to identify good practice in providing support to disabled children and their families. This forum should include representatives of NGOs as well as individuals with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs. The National Commission for Disability should play a central role in co-ordinating activity beyond the regional level by bringing people together to develop a plan for the provision of support at each phase of an individual's life. This should include the provision of advice on how and where to obtain support for parents of newly identified children with disabilities and special educational needs, information for schools in respect of a wide range of disabilities, and advice for families and young people making transition from school to employment.

A national plan for a campaign presenting positive outcomes and achievements by people with disabilities, co-ordinated through government departments including MEST, alongside disabled people's organisations and NGOs should be developed as a matter of priority. This should be co-ordinated with representatives from national media in order to provide national coverage to raise awareness of disability, including learning difficulties, and to present these in a positive manner to a national audience.

Objective 3:

Practical ways of promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.

Formal schooling holds the key to this issue. A priority must be to ensure that all children regardless of need or ability access schooling. However, an inclusive learning environment will not be achieved until an effective well trained work force has been created (see recommendations for objective 6 below). This overarching objective is dependent upon a well co-ordinated response to all of the others identified in this report. Children need improved access to schools, to be taught by well qualified and trained teachers who understand their needs and to be valued and respected within their communities. The provision of increased training and employment opportunities in the post-school years is important, but will be more readily developed when all children have benefited from an education that is appropriate to their educational and social development.

Schools alone cannot provide inclusion. This requires a co-ordinated approach between education, health and social welfare organisations supported by NGOs. Parents can best support their children's education when they too have a better understanding of the purpose of formal schooling and how this will prepare their children for adult life. Once children are admitted to school it is important to ensure that channels of communication between school and home are effective and well maintained. Parents need advice on how they can support the learning of their children at home, and access to key professionals at critical periods of children's lives, such as transfer across school phases and during transition from school to adult life.

It is therefore recommended that:

Priority is given to increasing the competence and confidence of the teaching workforce (see objective 6 below). This should extend beyond the training of teachers working in schools to include those who are involved in vocational training and further and higher education. Similar raising of awareness should be provided for those professionals who provide career advice to impending school leavers, regardless of their needs or abilities.

Communication with and training to raise awareness of employers will be essential if discrimination and exclusion is to be prevented in the post-school years. Collaboration with national and regional employers organisations should begin immediately and be co-ordinated alongside improvements in the training of teachers and school infrastructure. The expertise and knowledge that is evident in disabled person's organisation and parent groups within the country needs to receive greater recognition and should be drawn upon to both inform employers of the potential of disabled individuals as employees, and to provide exemplification of the successes and achievements of people with disabilities in making a contribution to their communities.

NGOs can play a major role in providing training through workshops for parents and families focused on providing support for children's learning and creating opportunities for advocacy on behalf of their children with special educational needs or disabilities.

Objective 4:

Recommendations regarding the promotion of a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions in the Republic of Sierra Leone

It was evident during the course of field work that staff in many schools are aware of the challenges of providing physical access to schools. Examples were seen of where ramps had been provided to increase accessibility to school for wheelchair users and in some instances toilets had been similarly modified to ensure improved access. However, many schools remain inaccessible and create major barriers for children with physical or sensory disabilities.

Reports from countries around the world indicate that the provision of separate toilet facilities for boys and girls is an important feature of supporting inclusive education. Some schools visited have prioritised this area and report that this has been a move positively received by both children and parents.

In some schools visited space within classrooms is severely limited, and whilst instances were seen of schools that had made significant efforts to enable all children to participate in classrooms, this remains a challenge for many. Similarly, in some classrooms visited the lighting conditions were poor preventing some children from being able to access printed and other materials.

Most schools visited were poorly resourced with limited access to text books and basic teaching and learning materials. Some teachers were observed to be innovative in ensuring access to learning and the provision of support, for example by audio recording lessons for children to take home and revisit key points in lessons, but most were struggling to provide differentiated approaches to learning.

In specialist schools visited for children who are blind or deaf, teachers made good use of specialist resources including braille materials and frames and the use of sign language. These resources have mostly been developed by adults associated with these schools who have demonstrated high levels of commitment and resourcefulness in this area. However, in the mainstream schools visited few specialist resources were available and children who could have benefited from adapted equipment or materials appropriate to their level of learning or need were placed at a severe disadvantage.

Barriers to learning are not only physical but also result from negative attitudes, ignorance and poor understanding. Whilst the majority of teachers interviewed during this study expressed concerns for children with disabilities, some expressed negative views about the learning abilities of children and many were misinformed or lacked understanding of the causes of learning difficulties. The needs of children who do not have diagnosed disabilities, but who were clearly struggling to learn in some schools visited are not understood and teachers do not know how to provide for their needs.

It is therefore recommended that:

An audit of a stratified sample of all schools should be conducted to assess issues of access and support for learning. Such an audit should not be limited to physical access, but should review the availability of essential learning resources, the approaches adopted by teachers to include all children in learning, and those barriers which currently deny children opportunities to learn. A greater understanding of teacher knowledge in relation to the provision of differentiated instruction would be helpful in informing the provision of training opportunities, thereby encouraging more inclusive approaches to teaching and learning.

Objective 5:

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology concerning potential uses of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.

The provision of specialized facilities and resources, including assistive devices and technology is an important consideration if schools are to become more inclusive. However, the provision of such support will be effective only if teachers have the confidence and competence to use these efficiently for the benefit of all learners. This therefore demands a focus upon the provision of training for all teachers in order to develop a professional work force that can utilise resources to maximum effect.

The infrastructure of many schools visited indicates that small classroom space and limited specialist teaching areas is a serious impediment to providing a well-balanced curriculum and variations in teaching strategies. Many classrooms are poorly furnished lacking in space for teachers and children to move around the classrooms, limited storage and poor lighting. Some classrooms visited were poorly ventilated, and whilst several had extensive outdoor space, this was not developed to provide interesting learning opportunities for children.

Accessibility issues are an area of concern as identified in objective 4 (above), and the recommendations made in this area should be addressed as a priority. The research indicated that access to assistive technology, which could enhance learning and communication for some children, was limited. The provision of communication aids would certainly enable some children seen during field work to gain more effective access to learning, however this again will be dependent upon ensuring that teachers and parents are familiar with, and confident in the use of such devices. Investment in such equipment should be carefully considered in order to ensure that the provision of these resources is accessible to as great a number of children as possible, and that they are closely aligned to the curriculum and teaching objectives within the school. In a few instances, computers were seen to be available in schools but were not being effectively used to support learning. Whilst there is insufficient evidence from this study to make definitive observations on why this was the case, it may be that teachers have received little training in the use of educational technology to support and enhance access to learning.

It is therefore recommended that:

The current level of funding allocated to schools by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is inadequate to enable the development of provision that would meet the resource needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities. It is therefore important that consideration is given to models of financing that could support a differentiated allocation of funds according to the needs of individual children. Specifically targeted funding for children with disabilities would enable mainstream schools to gain confidence that they could provide an appropriate education for a more diverse population. The impact of such a measure, coupled with improvements in teacher education (see

objective 6 below) would be to increase confidence in teachers and parents and to ensure a workforce better equipped to address the challenges of educating children with disabilities.

Training provided to teachers and other professionals (see objective 6 below) should include aspects of using both basic teaching resources and technology to support communication and learning.

An investment in providing schools with assistive technology is essential, but should be considered alongside addressing the fundamental need for increased basic material and resource needs evident in all classrooms. This has major financial implications and should be addressed following an audit of current facilities and resources in schools (as recommended above) in order to prioritise that provision which will have greatest impact on ensuring that the curriculum is accessible to all learners.

The development of classroom and outdoor spaces and specialist teaching areas should be prioritised with a consideration of the provision of minimum national standards which ensure the development of good learning environments for all children.

Objective 6:

Recommendations regarding the training and professional development of school staff and associated professionals to enable them to deliver quality services for learners with special needs and disabilities in inclusive environments.

The confidence and competence of teaching and other professional staff in respect of their knowledge, skills and understanding in addressing issues of diversity emerged as a major issue during the research. A general consensus that teachers are inadequately prepared to provide for the education of children with diverse needs and abilities, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, was apparent across the entire sample interviewed during this research. It is also evident that with the exception of one university within Sierra Leone, the availability of initial teacher training courses, or those providing post graduate qualifications in the education of students with special educational needs or disabilities is limited, and insufficient to address the national need. Furthermore, knowledge and skills within universities and other professional development providers in the area of inclusive education is currently inadequate to develop the necessary competence in teachers and other professionals working in or with schools.

It is therefore recommended that:

A critical mass of skilled providers of initial teacher training and professional development of teachers and other professionals should be created as a priority. That actions should be taken to provide professional development initially to a cohort of professionals through their registration on well-established post-graduate courses in the area of inclusive education. The lack of availability of such training in Sierra Leone will require that these key individuals are supported in developing their own skills and initiating new course

opportunities with support from an established university from outside of the country. Colleagues who receive such intensive training should be contracted to work on course development programmes within Sierra Leone and to thereafter develop an appropriate curriculum for initial teacher education and for the development of other specialist short term courses for teachers and other professionals. Any partnership established between Sierra Leonean Universities and an outside of country university should consider the long term sustainability of training by developing a model which sees in-country leaders assume full responsibility for leadership in training within a five year period.

The above recommendation will require a commitment of time for the training of these professional colleagues and it is therefore recommended that as a short term measure, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should invest in the provision of a series of short term courses aimed at supporting teachers in developing inclusive approaches to assessment, curriculum development and classroom management. In addition there is a need to ensure that all teachers are adequately trained in relation to child protection issues. Children with special educational needs are particularly vulnerable and may have specific issues that require close attention to safeguarding which should be emphasised within any child protection training provided for teachers and other professionals. Such provision could be made through a cascade model initially using external consultants to facilitate training, but swiftly moving to a dissemination approach through course attendees who will thereby reach a wider audience of colleague across all districts of Sierra Leone.

On the basis of these actions, a fully costed five year action plan should be established aimed at ensuring that every school in Sierra Leone has access to appropriate training and that by the end of a five year period all schools have at least one teacher who has undertaken such professional development.

Objective 7:

Approaches to enhancing collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including the relevant ministries, parents of children with disabilities and other special needs, Disabled People's Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

This objective is closely aligned to objective 2. There are many organisations in Sierra Leone working in the field of disability and special educational needs. Unfortunately, as evidenced through data collated for this study, communication between these bodies is not always effective. Interviews with representatives of MEST indicate a willingness to move towards a more inclusive approach to education, and it is evident that some progress has been made in this area. However, discussions with representatives of disabled persons organisations, with individual parents and parent groups, with NGOs and with school principals indicates that there is a lack of cohesion in formulating and implementing an effective plan for the promotion of inclusive education. There needs to be greater acknowledgement of the expertise that these support groups and parents have acquired and clearer lines of communication to ensure that these are better used to inform and monitor good practice.

NGOs are very active throughout Sierra Leone and the impact they are having on provision was evident in many schools and other facilities. In some instances these organisations are narrowly focused upon specific areas of disability or other issues of marginalisation (for example the education of girls). Whilst there was evidence of communication between many of the NGOs in the country, it was also clear that most have an individual agenda and that at times this is leading to an ad hoc approach to improving provision or changing attitudes at a national level. Some are working closely with disabled persons organisations or parent groups more effectively than others.

Strategic policies are dependent upon a co-ordinated response on the part of all interested parties and stakeholders. This requires clear leadership and policy statements that are then taken forward through well co-ordinated actions. At present this approach is limited with evidence of action that is having an impact in some areas but lacks an overall strategic lead in order to maximise resources and have a significant impact.

It is therefore recommended that:

At ministry level leadership roles are clearly defined and established points of contact are made in order that disabled persons organisations and other stakeholders can gain direct access to policy makers. A core team of individuals working in appropriate ministries should be formed to oversee a more co-ordinated approach to policy development and implementation. Consideration should be given to the formation of this group into a permanent department specifically focused on advancing the educational rights of young people with disabilities. This group will need to be well informed about good practice in the promotion of inclusive education as currently seen in other countries of similar socio-economic structure, and should formulate a timetable and plan for moving inclusive education forward in the country. Communication with community leaders will be essential in order to gather information and to use their expertise to ensure that any provision developed is appropriate and sustainable within a local context. The expertise that exists in parent groups and disability organisations needs to be utilised in order to inform discussions and to make the most efficient use of their knowledge and experiences when formulating policy.

In line with recommendations for objective 2, a national forum of disability focused organisations should be established to share information and to identify good practice in providing support to disabled children and their families. This forum should provide advice to colleagues working at ministry level and should play a leading role in developing a strategic plan for the development of schools and other facilities for the promotion of inclusion.

At NGO level, efforts should be made to ensure a more co-ordinated response to the needs of children, families and schools by identifying those actions which are most likely to have a positive impact upon encouraging greater awareness of disability, the promotion of professional skills and changing attitudes towards children who are currently marginalised and discriminated against.

Objective 8:

Recommendations on a potential research agenda to support the further development of inclusive education in the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Knowledge about the numbers of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone, and about those actions which currently support or inhibit their progress in schools is currently limited. Similarly, it is known that there are significant numbers of children with disabilities who are not currently in school or accessing education, however the level of understanding of why this situation persists is largely based upon anecdote and speculation. This potentially has a detrimental impact upon efforts to increase enrolment of children in schools.

Within Sierra Leone there are few academic researchers who have been directly involved in research into the education of children with special educational needs or disabilities. The lack of an established research community in this area is problematic in respect of gaining greater insights into education and its impact upon this specific population.

It is therefore recommended that:

Research capacity in the area of inclusive education should be managed alongside increased provision of teacher training (see objective 6). This should be achieved by creating opportunities for research partnerships between university education departments in Sierra Leone and those from already established researchers working in this area from other countries. These partnerships should initially concentrate their efforts upon research training and capacity building, but should then move towards seeking opportunities to conduct focused research into the provision of more inclusive teaching and learning within the country.

As developments towards the provision of inclusive schooling within Sierra Leone progress, MEST should work with researchers and school principals to prioritise a research agenda. This should be used to inform the ministries and service users about the progress made, and should also identify innovative practice in the promotion of inclusion and ensure that these are disseminated nationally and internationally. It will be important for teachers in Sierra Leone to gain an understanding of those practices in Sierra Leone classrooms that are successful in promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It is therefore recommended that an emphasis should be given to applied research that examines current practices and their impact upon the learning of all children in schools. The findings from such research should be disseminated directly to teachers and other practitioners through regional workshops and other events.

Research capacity will only be increased when appropriate training in inclusive research methods is provided to a core of researchers in the country. Such training should be conducted through a partnership between Sierra Leone Universities with an outside

provider and should be clearly focused upon providing researchers in-country with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to develop a research informed agenda for establishing educational development priorities.

8. Concluding Comments

Three overarching factors are apparent from the data assembled for this study within Sierra Leone and relate to all of the above objectives and recommendations. These are:

1. Attitudes towards and beliefs about disability

The recommendations given above all have a common purpose of raising awareness of disability and special educational needs in a manner that will create more positive attitudes and challenge some of the existing beliefs about disability that are evident in the county. Evidence from around the globe indicates that persistent negative attitudes are one of the greatest inhibiting factors in promoting and sustaining the development of inclusive education. The actions recommended above, and particularly those emphasised in objectives 2, 3, 6 and 7 should all support the promotion of a more positive image of disability and should challenge existing negative attitudes and beliefs in this area.

2. The need for training and professional development

Current knowledge, skills and understanding about special educational needs and disabilities within Sierra Leone are extremely limited. This situation will only be changed through the enhancement of training and professional development opportunities for teachers and other professionals. This investment in training should form the foundations upon which all other changes can be built. A plan that brings together the focus identified in objectives 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 could play a significant role in providing these foundations.

3. Funding

The financial implications of the above recommendations are clearly significant. However, a failure to provide adequate resourcing is likely to have an increasingly detrimental effect if the issues identified are not addressed. Those ministry and other policy makers with responsibility for this area will need to prioritise the actions to be taken. It is the opinion of the researchers who have provided this report that training and professional development should be at the top of this agenda.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions used during interviews and focus groups

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE.

Key questions for interview and focus group data collection.

Questions for Government Officers

Section 1: General issues

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	What are the current strengths of provision made for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Can you give me examples of these? Are the strengths evident throughout the country (or stronger in some regions)?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the education of children with disabilities?	Can you give me examples?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the lives of families?	Can you give me examples? How do you know?
	What do you believe the main priorities for improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities are at present?	Why do you identify these? If these priorities were addressed, what difference would it make to the lives of ^a children, ^b families, ^c teachers and schools?
	How do current education policies support and enhance the educational experiences of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	What evidence do you have to support this answer?
	How is provision for children with disabilities currently monitored at national/regional levels?	What processes are in place? To whom do these individuals report? What actions are taken on the basis of their monitoring procedures?
	What innovations could have the	How might these be introduced?

	greatest impact in moving inclusion forward?	
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Issue 1 (from tender document)

To enhance early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools, intervention / rehabilitation to promote awareness on the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	What procedures for the identification of children with disabilities are in place at present?	Who manages these?
	How effective are these procedures?	
	How do children with disabilities and their families access support and resources?	Who manages this process? How efficient is this process?
	How do education officials communicate with families?	How effective is this process?
	How do families know where to go to obtain support?	Can all families access this information?
	How do health and welfare services communicate with families?	How effective is this process?

Issue 2 (from tender document)

To promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	What are the education provision options for children with disabilities at present?	Do these vary across regions?
	How do families know about this provision?	Who is responsible for provision of this information? Does this vary across regions?
	Are there children with disabilities who do not attend schools?	Why is the situation as it is?
	What provision is available for continuing the education of	Does this vary across regions?

	young people with disabilities beyond school age?	
	What post-school provision should be made available?	
	Other than the government, who is providing education for children with disabilities?	How is this monitored? How effective is this provision (how do you know)?

Issue 3 (from tender document)

Promote a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions. To provide and promote the use of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	How accessible are current schools for children with disabilities?	^a physical access, ^b attitudes, ^c locational access
	How easy is it for children with disabilities and their families to access therapeutic services?	Which services? Do these vary regionally? Are they accessed in schools or clinics?
	Do children with disabilities have access to assistive technology?	What kind of technology is available? How are they assessed for this? How is access provided?
	How accessible is the school curriculum for children with disabilities?	Does this vary according to age phase? Are modified resources available?

Issue 4 (from tender document)

To develop the capacity of professionals, specialists and essential service providers to deliver quality services or alternatives to learners with special needs and disabilities.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	How well prepared are teachers to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	How confident are teachers in schools about addressing the educational needs of a more diverse school population?	How do you know? What are the factors that impact most upon teacher confidence?

	What do you believe to be the current professional development priorities for teachers if they are to become more inclusive?	^a current teachers, ^b teachers in initial training
	How well prepared are teacher trainers in Sierra Leone to train teachers to educate a more diverse population?	How do you know?
	How well prepared are other care and welfare professionals to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	What are your immediate priorities for improving the capacity and capabilities of the current workforce to address the needs of children with disabilities?	

Issue 5 (from tender document)

To enhance collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including relevant ministries (e.g. health, social welfare, and development), parents of children with disabilities and other special needs, Disabled People’s Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	What are the current effective systems for ensuring communication between education, health and social welfare departments?	Are there differences at national and regional levels?
	Which are the principle disabled people’s organisations in Sierra Leone?	How are these involved in policy planning and delivery?
	Where do parents of children with disabilities obtain their support?	How are organisations supported? Does this support vary with different child age groups?
	What role do NGOs play in the support of children with disabilities and their families?	Is the balance between government and NGOs about right or should this shift?
	How are parents consulted about their needs?	Who by?

Issue 6 (from tender document)

To support research and development on inclusive education for students with disabilities, documentation and dissemination of relevant information.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	What are the research priorities in respect of the education of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Who identifies these?
	What is the capacity for research in this area in the country?	How do you know?
	What part do universities play in supporting the research agenda?	Can you give me examples?
	How is research currently funded to support development in this area?	Is this adequate? How should research be supported?

Issue 7 (from tender document)

To promote effective management and coordination of services to support learners with disabilities and other special needs

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	Is the current system for managing provision for children with disabilities and their families effective?	If yes – how do you know? If no – what are the deficits?
	If I were to return here in five years' time, what would you hope might have changed for children with disabilities and their families?	

Closing open ended question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about provision and policy for children with disabilities and their families in Sierra Leone?

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE.

Key questions for interview and focus group data collection.

Questions for Parents

Section 1: General issues

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	What are the current strengths of provision made for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Can you give me examples of these? Are the strengths evident throughout the country (or stronger in some regions)?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the education of children with disabilities?	Can you give me examples?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the lives of families?	Can you give me examples? How do you know?
	What do you believe the main priorities for improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities are at present?	Why do you identify these? If these priorities were addressed, what difference would it make to the lives of ^a children, ^b families, ^c teachers and schools?
	How do current education and welfare policies support and enhance the educational experiences of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	What evidence do you have to support this answer?

Issue 1 (from tender document)

To enhance early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools, intervention / rehabilitation to promote awareness on the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	How are children's learning needs and disabilities identified?	Who is involved in this process?
	How effective are these procedures?	Can you provide evidence?
	What information is provided to parents of children with disabilities about educational opportunities for their children?	Is this adequate?
	How do children with disabilities and their families access support and resources?	Who manages this process? How efficient is this process?
	How do families know where to go to obtain support?	Can all families access this information?
	What information do schools provide to parents about the progress of their child with a disability?	Is this adequate?

Issue 2 (from tender document)

To promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	What are the education provision options for children with disabilities at present?	Do these vary across regions?
	Should all children regardless of disability attend mainstream schools?	If yes – why? If no – why not?
	Are there children with disabilities who do not attend schools?	Why is the situation as it is?
	What provision is available for continuing the education of young people with disabilities beyond school age?	Does this vary across regions?
	What post-school provision should be made available?	
	Other than the government, who is providing education for children with disabilities?	How is this monitored? How effective is this provision (how do you know)?

		What contact do you have with these providers?
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Issue 3 (from tender document)

Promote a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions. To provide and promote the use of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	How accessible are current schools for children with disabilities?	^a physical access, ^b attitudes, ^c locational access
	How welcome are families in schools?	
	Do children with disabilities have access to assistive technology in schools?	What kind of technology is available? How are they assessed for this? How is access provided? How well prepared are teachers to utilise this technology?
	How accessible is the school curriculum for children with disabilities?	Does this vary according to age phase? Are modified resources available?
	How do teachers communicate to parents about what their children are learning?	Can you provide examples? What would your preferred way of them communicating?

Issue 4 (from tender document)

To develop the capacity of professionals, specialists and essential service providers to deliver quality services or alternatives to learners with special needs and disabilities.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	How well prepared are teachers to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	How confident are teachers in schools about addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	How well prepared are other care and welfare professionals to address the educational needs of	How do you know?

	children with disabilities?	
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Issue 5 (from tender document)

To enhance collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including relevant ministries (e.g. health, social welfare, and development), parents of children with disabilities and other special needs, Disabled People’s Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	Are you aware of disabled people’s organisations in Sierra Leone?	What involvement do you have with these?
	What role do NGOs play in the support of children with disabilities and their families?	Is the balance between government and NGOs about right or should this shift?
	What interactions do parents have with NGOs?	

Issue 6 (from tender document)

To support research and development on inclusive education for students with disabilities, documentation and dissemination of relevant information.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Parents	N/A	

Issue 7 (from tender document)

To promote effective management and coordination of services to support learners with disabilities and other special needs

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Government Officers	Is the current system for managing provision for children with disabilities and their families effective?	If yes – how do you know? If no – what are the deficits?
	If I were to return here in five years’ time, what would you hope might have changed for children with disabilities and	

	their families?	
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Closing open ended question

Tell me about your child and you experiences with the education system

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about provision and policy for children with disabilities and their families in Sierra Leone?

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE.

Key questions for interview and focus group data collection.

Questions for Representatives of Faith Groups

Section 1: General issues

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of Faith organisations	How aware are you of provision for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Can you provide examples?
	What are the current strengths of provision made for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Can you give me examples of these? Are the strengths evident throughout the country (or stronger in some regions)?
	What do you perceive as being current priorities for children with disabilities and their families?	Why do you see these things as priorities?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the lives of families that you know?	Can you give me examples? How do you know?
	What do you believe the main priorities for improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities are at present?	Why do you identify these? If these priorities were addressed, what difference would it make to the lives of ^a children, ^b families, ^c teachers and schools?
	What role does your church/mosque/other faith provision play in supporting the development of policy for	Who oversees this?

	children with disabilities?	
	What provision might your organisation make for children with disabilities in the future?	Can you give me examples?

Issue 1 (from tender document)

To enhance early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools, intervention / rehabilitation to promote awareness on the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations	Are you aware of procedures for the identification of children with disabilities are in place at present?	
	Are you involved in supporting parents and children during this process?	Can you give me examples?
	How do children with disabilities and their families access support and resources?	Who manages this process? How efficient is this process?
	Do families contact you to obtain support?	Can all families access this information?

Issue 2 (from tender document)

To promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations	What are the education provision options for children with disabilities that you are aware of at present?	Do these vary across regions?
	How do you support families to find out about this provision?	Who is responsible for provision of this information?
	Are you aware of children with disabilities who do not attend schools?	Why is the situation as it is?
	Are you involved in the provision of non-formal education to children with disabilities and their families?	If yes – what form does this take? If no – might you consider such provision?

	What are the most essential services that you provide?	
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Issue 3 (from tender document)

Promote a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions. To provide and promote the use of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations	How accessible are current schools for children with disabilities?	^a physical access, ^b attitudes, ^c locational access
	How easy is it for children with disabilities and their families to access therapeutic services?	Which services? Do these vary regionally? Are they accessed in schools or clinics?
	How accessible is the curriculum in schools that you know for children with disabilities?	Does this vary according to age phase? Are modified resources available?

Issue 4 (from tender document)

To develop the capacity of professionals, specialists and essential service providers to deliver quality services or alternatives to learners with special needs and disabilities.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations	How well prepared are teachers to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	How confident are teachers in schools about addressing the educational needs of a more diverse school population?	How do you know?
	What do you believe to be the current professional development priorities for teachers if they are to become more inclusive?	^a current teachers, ^b teachers in initial training
	Do NGOs (does your NGO) have a role to play in training teachers?	What form does this take? What form should it take?
	How well prepared are teacher trainers in Sierra Leone to train teachers to educate a more diverse population?	How do you know?

	How well prepared are other care and welfare professionals to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	Do NGOs (does your NGO) have a role to play in training these professionals?	What form does this take? What form should it take?

Issue 5 (from tender document)

To enhance collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including relevant ministries (e.g. health, social welfare, and development), parents of children with disabilities and other special needs, Disabled People’s Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations	Do you have regular contact with education, health and social welfare departments?	Are there differences in levels of contact at national and regional levels?
	Do you have regular contact with disabled people’s organisations in Sierra Leone?	What is the nature and purpose of this contact?

Issue 6 (from tender document)

To support research and development on inclusive education for students with disabilities, documentation and dissemination of relevant information.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of faith organisations		
N/A		

Issue 7 (from tender document)

To promote effective management and coordination of services to support learners with disabilities and other special needs

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of Faith Organisations	Do you believe that the current system for managing provision	If yes – how do you know? If no – what are the deficits?

	for children with disabilities and their families effective?	
	In what ways are your faith community improving the situation for children with disabilities and their families?	Can you give me examples?
	What are the greatest obstacles to your work here in Sierra Leone?	
	If I were to return here in five years' time, what would you hope might have changed for children with disabilities and their families?	

Closing open ended question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about provision and policy for children with disabilities and their families in Sierra Leone?

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE.

Key questions for interview and focus group data collection.

Questions for representatives of NGOs

Section 1: General issues

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	What are the current strengths of provision made for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Can you give me examples of these? Are the strengths evident throughout the country (or stronger in some regions)?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the education of children with disabilities?	Can you give me examples?
	What impact has the current provision had upon the lives of families?	Can you give me examples? How do you know?
	What do you believe the main priorities for improving	Why do you identify these? If these priorities were

	educational opportunities for children with disabilities are at present?	addressed, what difference would it make to the lives of ^a children, ^b families, ^c teachers and schools?
	How do current education and welfare policies support and enhance the educational experiences of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	What evidence do you have to support this answer?
	What role does your NGO (do NGOs) play in supporting the development of policy for children with disabilities?	Who sanctions/co-ordinates this?
	What provision does your NGO (do NGOs) make for children with disabilities?	Can you give me examples?

Issue 1 (from tender document)

To enhance early identification, assessment of support needs for learners and schools, intervention / rehabilitation to promote awareness on the educational needs and abilities of persons with disabilities within the education system and wider community.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	What procedures for the identification of children with disabilities are in place at present?	Who manages these?
	How effective are these procedures?	How do you know?
	What part do NGOs play in this process?	Can you give me examples?
	How do children with disabilities and their families access support and resources?	Who manages this process? How efficient is this process?
	How do families contact you to obtain support?	Can all families access this information?
	How do you communicate with education health and welfare services?	How effective is this process?

Issue 2 (from tender document)

To promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in formal and non-formal education and training.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	What are the education provision options for children with disabilities at present?	Do these vary across regions?
	How do families know about this provision?	Who is responsible for provision of this information?
	Are you aware of children with disabilities who do not attend schools?	Why is the situation as it is?
	Are you involved in providing for continuing the education of young people with disabilities beyond school age?	What kind of provision? How widely available is this?
	Are you involved in the provision of non-formal education to children with disabilities and their families?	If yes – what form does this take? If no – might you consider such provision?
	What are the most essential services that you provide?	

Issue 3 (from tender document)

Promote a barrier free environment for learners with disabilities in ALL learning institutions. To provide and promote the use of specialized facilities, universal accessibility infrastructures and services, assistive devices and technology, equipment and teaching / learning materials.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	How accessible are current schools for children with disabilities?	^a physical access, ^b attitudes, ^c locational access
	How easy is it for children with disabilities and their families to access therapeutic services?	Which services? Do these vary regionally? Are they accessed in schools or clinics?
	Do children with disabilities have access to assistive technology?	What kind of technology is available? Do you provide any of this technology? How are they assessed for this? How is access provided?
	How accessible is the school curriculum for children with disabilities?	Does this vary according to age phase? Are modified resources available?

Issue 4 (from tender document)

To develop the capacity of professionals, specialists and essential service providers to deliver quality services or alternatives to learners with special needs and disabilities.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	How well prepared are teachers to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	How confident are teachers in schools about addressing the educational needs of a more diverse school population?	How do you know?
	What do you believe to be the current professional development priorities for teachers if they are to become more inclusive?	^a current teachers, ^b teachers in initial training
	Do NGOs (does your NGO) have a role to play in training teachers?	What form does this take? What form should it take?
	How well prepared are teacher trainers in Sierra Leone to train teachers to educate a more diverse population?	How do you know?
	How well prepared are other care and welfare professionals to address the educational needs of children with disabilities?	How do you know?
	Do NGOs (does your NGO) have a role to play in training these professionals?	What form does this take? What form should it take?

Issue 5 (from tender document)

To enhance collaboration and networking, strategic partnerships and participation of stakeholders including relevant ministries (e.g. health, social welfare, and development), parents of children with disabilities and other special needs, Disabled People's Organisations and organisations working in the field of disability and health.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	How effective is communication between education, health and social welfare departments?	Are there differences at national and regional levels?
	Which are the principle disabled people's organisations in Sierra Leone?	How are these involved in policy planning and delivery?
	How do NGOs (your NGO) work with disabled people's	Can you give me an example?

	organisations	
	How are parents consulted about their needs?	Who by?

Issue 6 (from tender document)

To support research and development on inclusive education for students with disabilities, documentation and dissemination of relevant information.

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	What are the research priorities in respect of the education of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?	Who identifies these?
	What is the capacity for research in this area in the country?	How do you know?
	What part do universities play in supporting the research agenda?	Can you give me examples?
	How is research currently funded to support development in this area?	Is this adequate? How should research be supported?
	Do NGOs support research in this area in Sierra Leone?	If yes – how? If no – why not?

Issue 7 (from tender document)

To promote effective management and coordination of services to support learners with disabilities and other special needs

Respondent group	Key questions	Possible probes
Representatives of NGOs	Is the current system for managing provision for children with disabilities and their families effective?	If yes – how do you know? If no – what are the deficits?
	In what ways are NGOs (your NGO) improving the situation for children with disabilities and their families?	Can you give me examples?

	What are the greatest obstacles to your work here in Sierra Leone?	
	If I were to return here in five years' time, what would you hope might have changed for children with disabilities and their families?	

Closing open ended question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about provision and policy for children with disabilities and their families in Sierra Leone?

Appendix 2: Charts identifying responses to interviews and focus groups: Key themes emerging from the data

Chart 1 the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across all regions

Chart 2 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region A

Chart 3 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region B

Chart 4 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region C

Chart 5 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region D

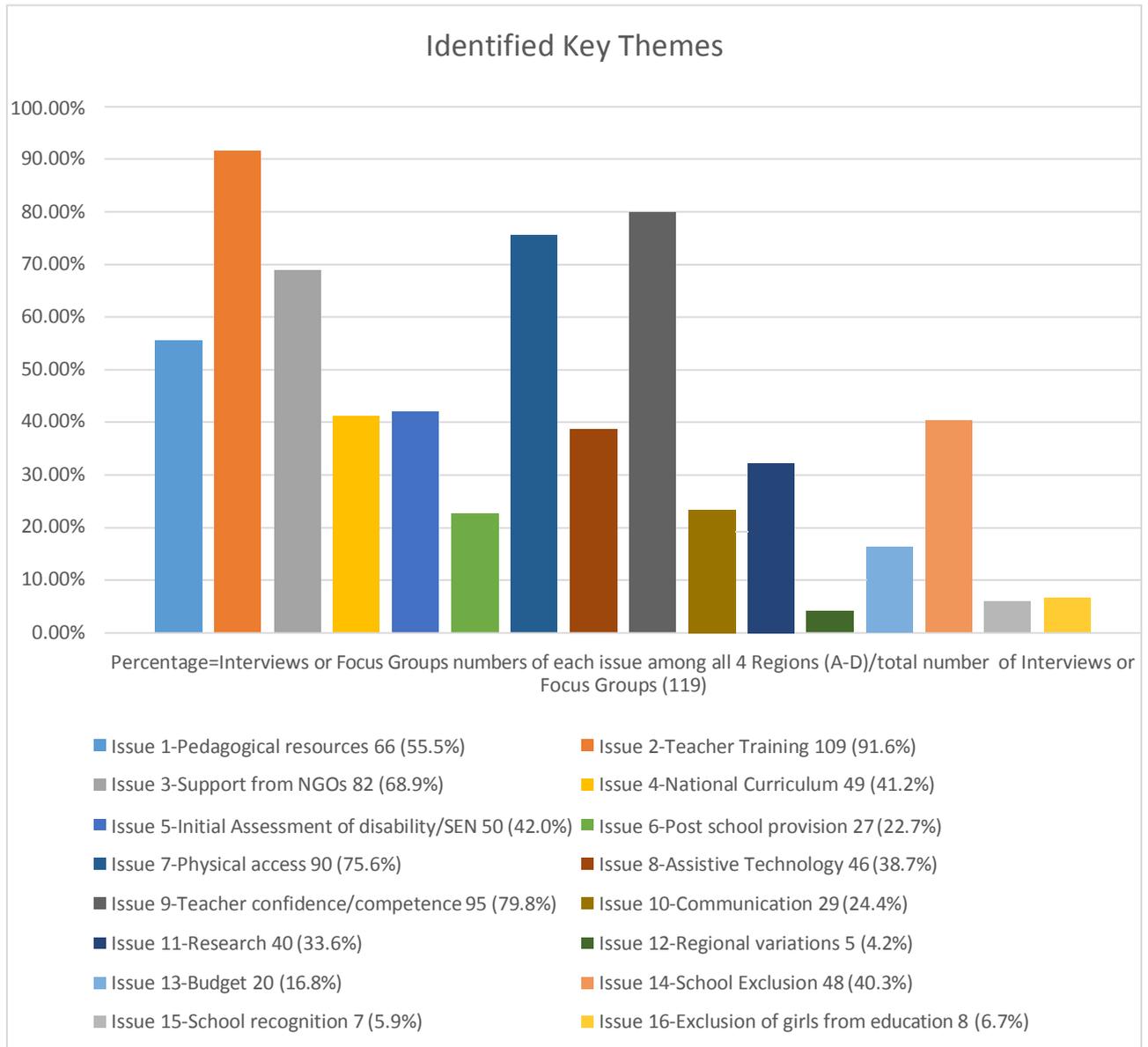


Chart 1 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across all regions

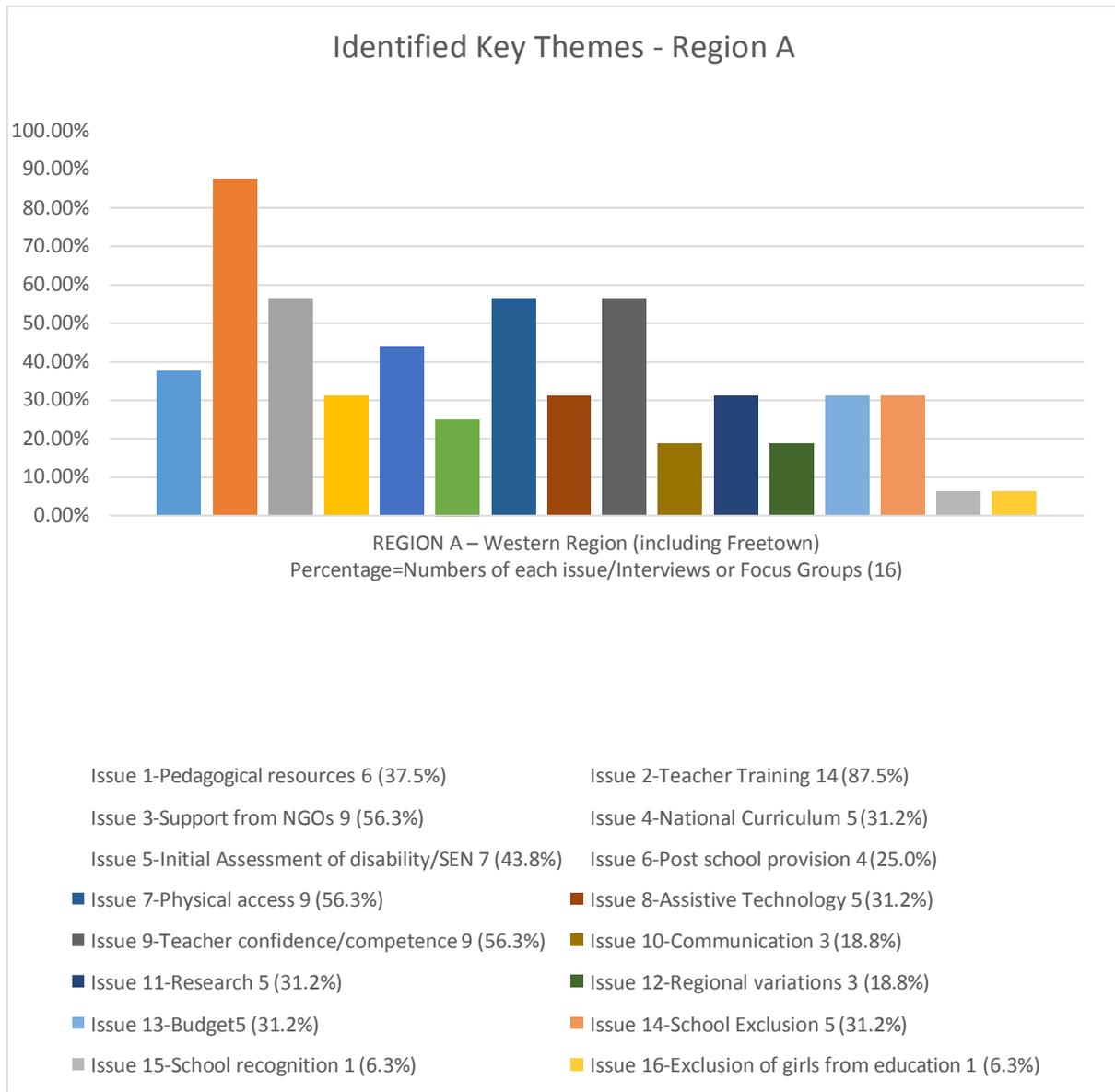


Chart 2 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region A

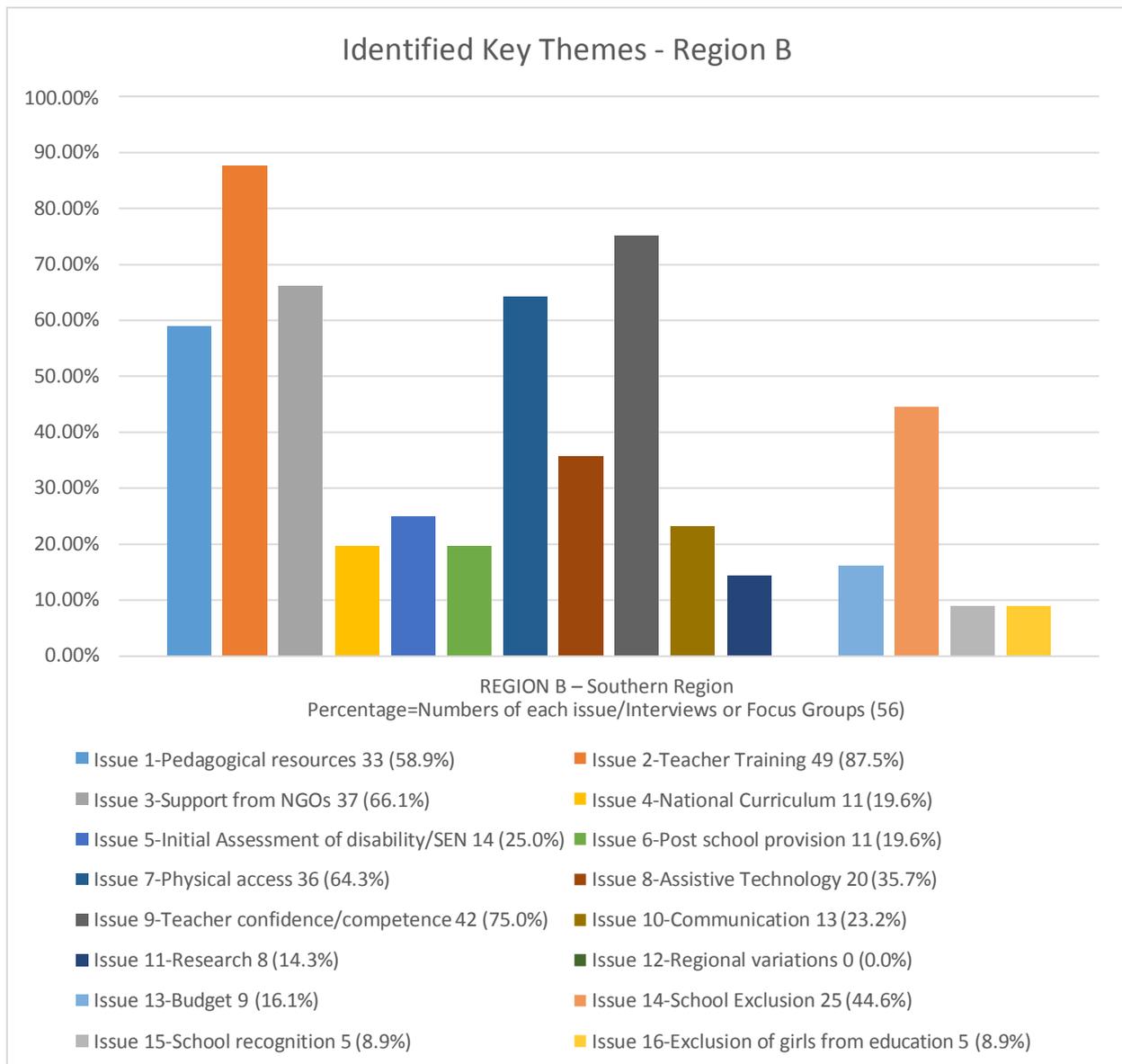


Chart 3 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region B

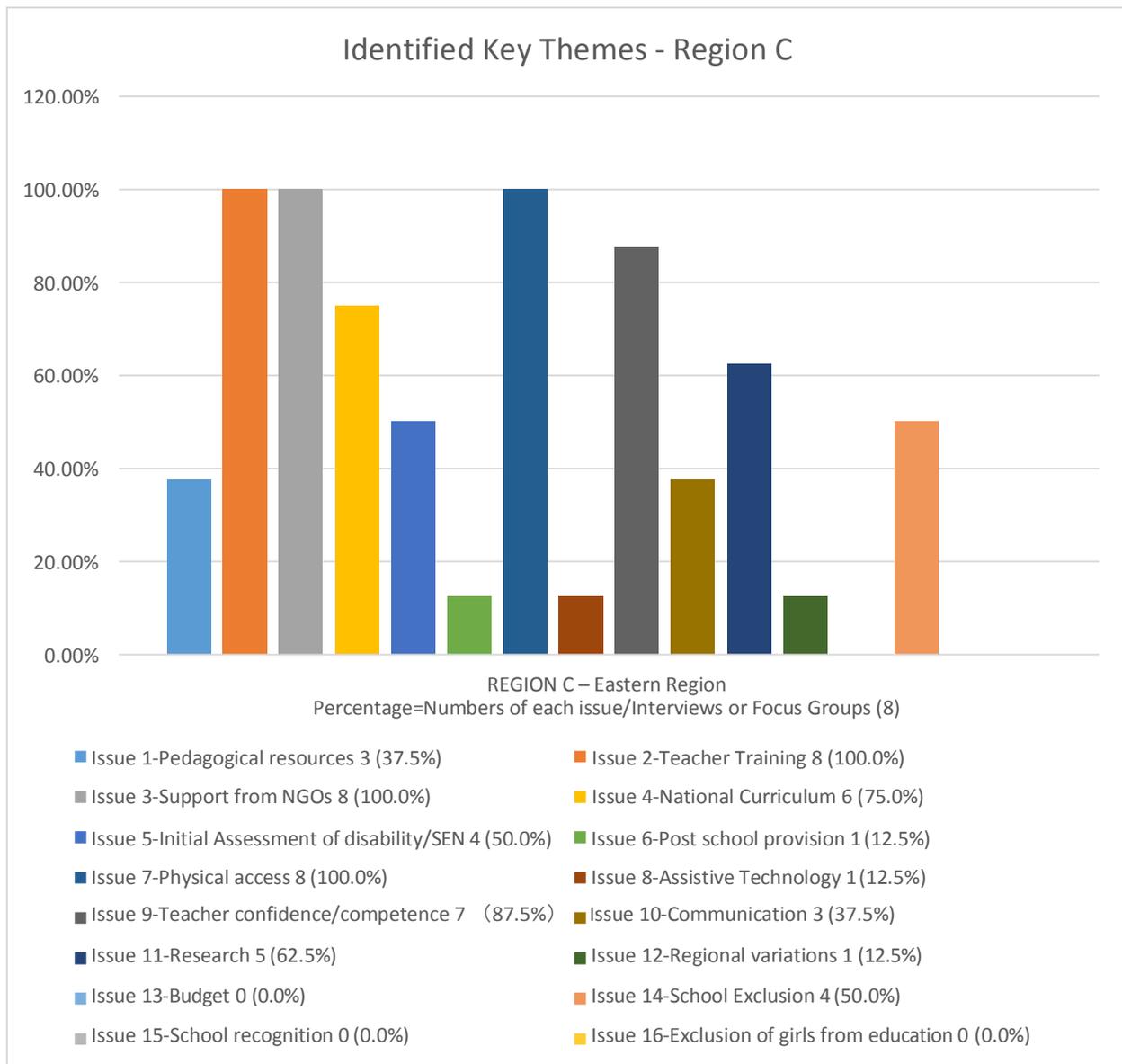


Chart 4 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region C

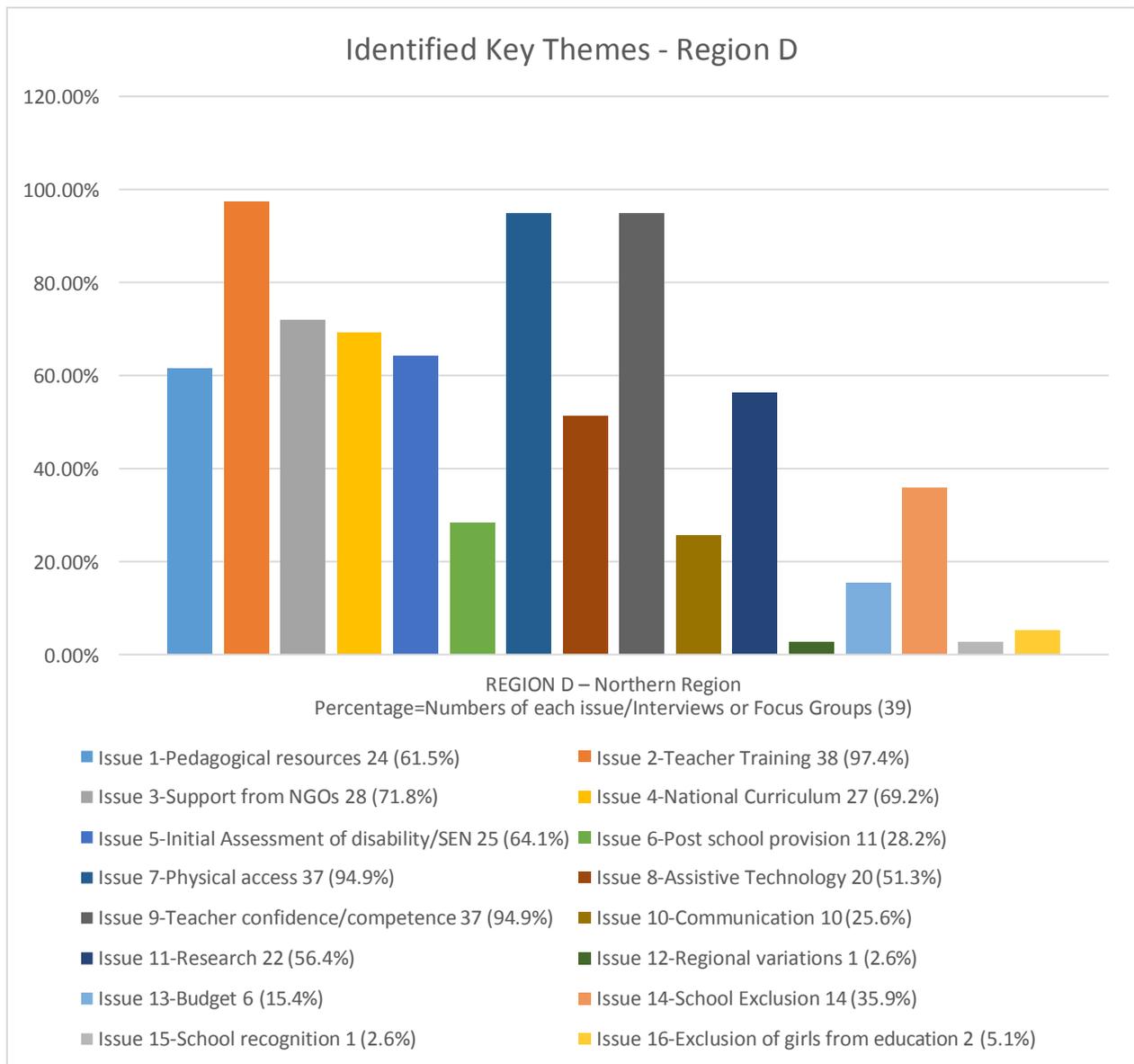


Chart 5 indicates the 16 key themes prioritised by respondents in interviews and focus groups across from Region D