

Improved safety and wellbeing of learners

Information brief

How Girls' and Boys' Clubs build safer, inclusive schools in Sierra Leone



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

Background

During adolescence, young people undergo many emotional and hormonal changes while simultaneously encountering new peer pressures and social challenges. The decisions they make during this time can echo throughout the rest of their lives, so it is vital that they have the tools, information and opportunity to discuss and think through their choices. However, Sierra Leone has a long-standing culture of silence with many social and emotional topics being considered taboo.

Girls' and Boys' Clubs (GBCs) were first established in 2020 to give secondary school learners the space to learn and speak openly about topics such as wellbeing, sexual and reproductive health and violence. Learners meet every week after lessons for sessions consisting of a pre-recorded radio programme and facilitated discussion that allows them to learn, absorb, ask questions and share opinions and experiences.

Since the initial GBCs were set up, the format and approach have evolved to reflect learning and feedback from teachers and learners. By the end of the Leh Wi Lan programme (LWL) in summer 2026, they were operating in 1,658 schools across Sierra Leone and reaching thousands of learners.

Between 2016 and 2026, a total of
1,658
schools received Leh Wi Lan's support to operate Girls' and Boys' Club



Photo: Leh Wi Lan



The role of GBCs

GBCs bring learners together in an informal but structured setting that gives them access to accurate, age-appropriate information that has been approved by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MBSSE), reflects the Radical Inclusion Policy and reinforces child protection messages.

Led by peer mentors or teacher mentors, the sessions are designed to be engaging, interactive and focused on a specific topic, such as violence prevention and reporting, sexual health, early pregnancy, drug prevention, disability and gender inclusion or Child and Adolescence Health and Life Skills (CAHLS). Firstly, learners listen to radio episodes played on a wind-up radio, then they discuss what they have learnt, reflect on its relevance in their own lives and ask questions in a safe, peer-focused space. The approach ensures that learners become more informed on issues that may directly affect them or their peers - discrimination, disability inclusion, gender equality, their rights – and more confident about resisting peer pressure and making positive life choices.

1,000

additional radios distributed to

500

schools



Improving and expanding GBCs

GBCs were initially gender-segregated and limited to 20 pupils per school with all ages receiving the same content. They were facilitated by volunteer teachers who were provided with a lengthy manual to follow. Feedback on these first GBCs showed that sessions were held infrequently and received limited engagement.

Starting in 2024, a new model for GBCs was tested in 300 schools, in collaboration with MBSSE at national and district level.

GBCs became mixed-gender, included a greater number of participants and were built around more interactive radio content. Teachers are now trained on facilitation and safeguarding, then pass training on to learners who become peer mentors and lead sessions – this relieves the burden on teachers. Key features of the new model include:

- **Peer-led model:** Teachers conducting learner training on radio use and facilitation of sessions, equipping them to lead discussions.
- **Mentors' Guide:** A new resource to provide structured session instructions.
- **Age-specific clubs:** Each school now has separate clubs for students in each grade.
- **District support:** SQAOs providing regular coaching and WhatsApp monitoring of radio functionality, frequency, challenges and participation.

- **Specialist sessions:** Health professionals, and representatives from Family Support Units, Rainbo Centre and One-Stop Centres are encouraged to visit schools to speak with learners.
- **Inclusion:** Disability Inclusion Champions, trained under the programme's disability inclusion workstream, collaborating with GBCs to identify and support learners with disabilities to join and participate fully.

600

teacher mentors from



300

schools trained to
establish and run GBCs



"My self-esteem has grown as a result of the Club. I am not afraid to speak in front of a large group."

Zainab, pupil



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

Looking to the future

Evidence shows that teachers successfully cascade learning to peer mentors and are establishing functioning clubs as a result of practical training, mentoring support and clear guidance. This has resulted in a model backed by MBSSE and owned at school level by teachers, peer mentors and school leaders, with Club facilitation embedded within the routine responsibilities of trained school staff.

Key outcomes include improved mentor confidence, greater awareness of referral mechanisms, and stronger preparedness to support affected pupils. However, a key challenge that remains is limited time allocated for club meetings within the school schedule. To address this, LWL engaged school leadership to allocate dedicated time during co-curricular periods.

Sustaining GBCs for the long-term will require continued support for radio maintenance and provision for new schools by development partners and donors. For example, UNFPA and UNICEF have worked with LWL technical teams on GBC tools and materials to explore opportunities to scale up and ensure Clubs continue to function and support young people in Sierra Leone.



Photo: Leh Wi Lan



Listen to the Girls and Boys Clubs episodes here:

<https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/material/girls-and-boys-club-radio-transcripts/>



mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/



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The second phase of the Leh Wi Lan programme is part of the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme II (SSEIP II), which is funded by UK International Development. This five-year programme supports Sierra Leone's Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to deliver improved education outcomes at secondary level, with a focus on schoolgirls and learners with disabilities. Leh Wi Lan is implemented by a consortium of national and international organisations led by Cambridge Education.

