



Sustaining and Improving

Professional development for school leaders



Key lessons and recommendations

Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning. Effective school leaders create enabling environments for teaching and learning, support teacher development, promote accountability, and drive improvement in their school.

Recognising the need to strengthen leadership capacity in secondary schools in Sierra Leone, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), with support from Leh Wi Lan (LWL), designed and implemented a year-long, blended professional development programme aimed at school leaders in secondary schools. The goal of the School Leadership Programme (SLP) is to ensure that all Junior Secondary (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) have qualified, capable and professional leaders who can lead safe, inclusive, quality learning for all pupils.

Since the SLP started in 2024, three cohorts of school leaders have completed the four-module programme – more than 800 school leaders. Starting in September 2026, five Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) will assume implementation of the SLP, with the TSC continuing to play a role in quality assuring the programme and the selection of school leaders to take part. A new School Leadership Policy developed by TSC in 2025 is with the Cabinet pending approval. The policy lays out the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and is expected to help drive demand for the SLP.

What we've learned

A process for measuring the impact of the SLP needs to be agreed and implemented

While school leaders complete a self-assessment at the start the SLP, no baseline was established to measure programme impact. This was due to uncertainty about what should be assessed and by whom, alongside the need to start implementation. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's School Quality Assurance (SQA) process, which provides schools with scores across six performance areas, may offer a sustainable and feasible way of measuring the SLP's impact, but other approaches should be explored.

SLP fees will need to be subsidised for the foreseeable future

School leaders apply to be selected to join the SLP, with applications reviewed by the TSC at district and national level against agreed selection criteria. Successful applicants are then invited to start the programme. Cohorts 1, 2 and 3, which were free to participants, received almost twice as many applications as available places, indicating that there is strong demand for leadership professional development. The introduction of fees for Cohort 4 dramatically reduced applications. In response, the TSC introduced fee subsidises for successful applicants, which restored demand and resulted in applications again exceeding available places. Subsidies are likely to be required for the next few years at least.

Offering the SLP to different school leadership roles has advantages and disadvantages

The SLP is open to Principals, Vice Principals, Heads of Department and Senior Teachers. The rationale for this is that in good schools, leadership is distributed. Also, offering the SLP to school leaders helps create a pipeline of competent school leaders and it allows more women to participate. However, participants who are not Principals have sometimes struggled to complete coursework because they lacked support from their Principal.

Over 800

School leaders have graduated from the SLP

Building
on Strong
Foundations

Local Leaders of Learning are key to the SLP's success

School leaders enrolled in the SLP are assigned a coach called a Local Leader of Learning (LLL). LLLs guide school leaders through the programme, visit schools to check progress, provide support and assess coursework. Given their critical role, it is vital to select educators with the right expertise and positive attitude to be LLLs and to invest in their professional development.

Methods for monitoring SLP implementation should be strengthened

A digital system was developed and tested to monitor school leaders' progress LLL activities. This system needs to be refined and rolled out on a platform that is familiar and accessible to TTIs, the TSC and the LLLs. Deploying the SLP through a Learning Management System (LMS) could also improve monitoring implementation and support quality assurance.

Greater effort is needed to attract women to the SLP

Women make up a relatively small proportion of the secondary education workforce, especially in leadership roles. This needs to change. To improve representation in the SLP, additional and targeted efforts are required by the TSC at district and national level to ensure women are aware of the programme and encouraged to apply.

Earlier involvement of TTIs in the SLP could have been beneficial

When LWL began implementation, the decision to have TTIs offer the SLP had not been made. Various options for implementation were under consideration. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to have made this decision before detailed work on SLP design and implementation started so that TTIs could be involved from the start. This may have helped build their ownership of the SLP and possibly eased the transition – especially given that TTIs operate within broader university systems and have limited autonomy, which can slow down decision-making and approvals.

Recommendations

Sustain progress made	Improve progress further
School Level	
School leaders who have completed the SLP to continue to support each other via their established peer networks	TSC to put in place a tracking system to find out if/how SLP graduates are utilising their learning from the SLP
	TSC to establish a network of mentors/advisors to provide ongoing support to SLP graduates to strengthen the transfer of learning into practice
District Level	
Deputy Directors (DDs) to be proactive in promoting the SLP, especially to women in the workforce, and in participant selection	DDs to have greater autonomy, responsibility and resources for promoting the SLP and for leading SLP selection
DDs to visit schools where a school leader is enrolled in the SLP to provide support and encouragement	DDs to record lessons learnt from the Cohort 4 selection process and use them to further strengthen the collaboration with TTIs
National Level	
TSC to promote the SLP, using word of mouth, radio, TV and other channels - especially to women in the workforce, and in participant selection	TTIs and the TSC to establish a shared system for tracking progress of school leaders in the SLP and the support provided by LLLs
The TSC to strengthen coordination with DDs to ensure transparency and consistency in participant recruitment and SLP implementation	The TSC to implement the School Leadership Policy to create long-term demand and provide a stronger policy foundation for leadership development
The TSC to visit schools where a school leader(s) is enrolled in the SLP to quality assure implementation	The TSC and TTIs to deploy the SLP on an LMS
The TSC to meet regularly with TTIs to review implementation for Cohort 4	

Where to get more information

SLP Modules and other information about the programme are available at

<https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/material/school-leadership-programme/>



The second phase of Lehi Wi Lan is part of the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme II (SSEIP II), funded by UK International Development. This programme supports the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to deliver improved education outcomes at secondary level. Lehi Wi Lan is implemented by a consortium of organisations led by Cambridge Education.