**RIGHT TO EDUCATION: ADVANCES AND CHALLENGES**

**PART I**

**QUESTION 1:** Sierra Leone as a country had long taken education issues through the lens of human right. We note this as enshrined in section 9 of the ***Sierra Leone Constitution 1991 (Act, no.6***), and other relevant laws and policies (***Education Act 2004, Disability Act 2011, Radical Inclusion Policy etc***). Though there are challenges but the added value to our work is that we are kept on our toes in respect of respecting the rights of every deserving citizen of his/her rights. In fact, priority is given to the girl-child and persons living with disability.

**QUESTION 2:** The 4 A’s framework is taken into consideration in realizing the right to education. Schools are situated in every community for easy and equitable access. On the issue of acceptability, much progress has been made but there is the need to ramp up advocacy in order to redirect the minds of some of our compatriots in accepting the need of educating the girl-child especially. On adaptability, it must be noted that we lag behind, though efforts are being made to adapt our infrastructures for easy accessibility for persons living with disability. In terms of the inclusion of the 4A’s in our legal framework, it must be noted that they are.

During the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, to ensure right to education is maintained, the Ministries of Basic and senior secondary Education ***(MBSSE****)* and Technical and Higher Education ***(MTHE)*** quickly adapted to service delivery of courses/programmes via the internet and other media forms such as radio and television. For students pursuing TVET in the Government Technical institutes right round the country, pre-recorded courses/programmes were developed and sent to those concerned. These adaptable moves ensured continuity of learning by pupils/students at all levels of the educational system.

**QUESTION 3:** ***The Sierra Leone Constitution 1991(Act no. 6)*** and other legislative frameworks clearly spell out one’s right to education (see article 9 of same). In terms of concretizing same, successive governments continue to expand the educational space in every region of the country. For example, we now have public universities and/or campuses in every region. Plans are afoot to expand TVET education to all districts as there are 11 TVET institutions in 10 districts, and a further 6 TVET will be constructed in areas where none currently exist.

Furthermore, all public tertiary institutions have, with the approval of the Tertiary Education Commission, a regulatory body established by an Act of parliament ***(TEC Act 2001)*** , have mounted distance education programmes across the country.

**QUESTION 4:** Based on the stated articles enshrined in international conventions/covenant/legal frameworks, Sierra Leone has made tremendous strides in bringing to fruition that all her citizens enjoy the right to compulsory and free primary education. Currently, free education ranges from primary to senior secondary school level. In terms of higher education, the government continues to provide the highest number of bursaries for students in public universities. It is also free for girls pursuing STEAM Programmes in public universities. The same holds true for persons living with disability.

**QUESTION 5:** The right to education is not justiciable in Sierra Leone. This is categorically stated in her constitution. Article 14 of same states that ***“…the provisions contained in this Chapter shall not confer legal rights and shall not be enforceable in any court of law…..”***

**QUESTION 6:** Both the non-discriminatory and equality principles are fundamentally respected in the application of the right to education for all. For example, even religious schools do not discriminate on the basis of faith, gender, tribe and or cultural differences. To address the needs of the sometimes marginalized, the ***Disability Act 2011*** makes provision for free education for persons living with disability right on to tertiary education. During the war years, the government made a preferential option in the provision of free education (coupled with school materials) for the girl-child.

**QUESTION 7:** Not applicable

**QUESTION 8:** Not applicable

**PART II**

**QUESTION 8:**

In a developing and donor-dependent country such as ours, we are primarily challenged in the implementation of the right to education by some of these factors, viz financial and human resources. In terms of financial resources and due to the tight fiscal space within which the Government operates coupled with competing interest, much is spent on basic and secondary education but less so in terms of Tech-Voc education. Another challenge posed by this financial tight space is the inhibitive effect in the transformation of many old education infrastructure for ease of access by persons living with disability.

Another challenge the paucity of trained and qualified teachers, and the unwillingness of some qualified teachers to offer their services in schools located in hard to reach areas.

Worthy of note in the realization of the right to education is the sacrosanct belief held in some of our traditional communities that schools/tertiary institutions are not meant for the girl child. This position is patently false and untenable and there is a need for continuous robust advocacy to radically change that mind-set.