

# Technical Assistance to Improve Learning Outcomes Through Play-Based Learning in Sierra Leone

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) in Sierra Leone requested to partner with Right To Play to introduce play-based learning. The Ministry wanted to assess how play can be strengthened in primary education teaching and learning.

Between 2022–2024, Right To Play tested an approach to working directly with the Ministry to build their capacity to lead and integrate play-based learning into lower primary teaching and learning. This included training district education supervisors and teachers to deliver child-centred, play-based learning, and development of lesson plans that incorporate play to improve literacy and numeracy. Following the successful uptake and collaboration of the MBSSE introducing play-based, learning through the pilot program, there is an opportunity to scale this work to provide further benefits and support children's foundational learning.

## CONTEXT

Sierra Leone carried out a comprehensive overhaul of the education curriculum for all age groups. The curriculum is built around the 5Cs: Comprehension, Critical Thinking, Computational Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Civic Education. Additionally, the new curriculum was created around a learner-centred approach aimed at empowering students to make choices and embrace the joy of learning.

To support the Ministry through the process of transforming its approach to education, Right To Play was mandated to provide technical assistance in five areas of work: 1) improve Ministerial Leadership to integrate play-based learning; 2) improve access to play-based teaching and learning materials; 3) support teacher professional development by building the capacity of a core group of trainers at national, district and school levels; 4) conduct community engagement to garner support from parents and community members; and 5) quality assurance.

## REACH

4

**pilot schools**

in two districts (Bo and Port Loko) were supported. Four head teachers built their capacity to support their teachers to create an enabling, playful learning environment

19

**teachers**

received training on foundational skills on play-based learning and lesson plan development

45

**leaders**

including 19 government officials, 20 school quality assurance officers, and 6 ECD Master Trainers were oriented to play-based learning and involved as program champions and mentors

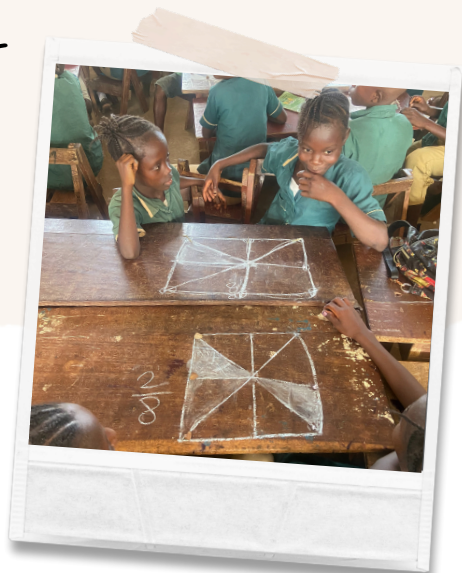
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**lower primary school learners**

benefited from learning through play

# RESULTS FROM THE PILOT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (2022–2024)

Right To Play strengthened the understanding of play-based learning and its relevance and application in improving the quality of education. Results from the pilot program include the following:



**1 Developed and disseminated a Play Context Study.** The first of its kind, the Play Context Study provided MBSEE with a description and analysis of the current practice and capacities at the school level in implementing play-based learning to inform education sector planning.

**2 Conducted an Induction Workshop with MBSEE staff** and education stakeholders to strengthen their understanding of and commitment to play-based learning within the Sierra Leone context.

**3 Facilitated cross-country learning.** The Minister of Education of Ghana invited the Sierra Leonean Minister of Education and key MBSEE staff to an Inter-Ministerial learning exchange to deepen their understanding of how play-based learning is integrated across the education system and increase their appreciation of play-based learning in practice.

**4 Developed play-based learning lesson plans linked to the National Curriculum for lower primary grades.** The lesson plans support the delivery of expected learning outcomes across three targeted subject areas: Mathematics (numeracy), English (literacy) and civic education (good citizenship). They include accompanying teacher training guides and a manual, which can be used for any pre-service or in-service teacher training program.

**5 Developed a group of trainers on play-based learning, targeting education officials at the national and district level.** PBL trainers include School Quality Assurance Officers, Teacher Service Commission staff, and Teacher Training Institute lecturers. These trainers were deployed to train teachers and head teachers at the pilot schools. They have become skilled resources for the education sector to roll out play-based learning capacities to a larger target group.

**6 Built MBSEE's capacity to integrate PBL.** The implementation approach involved working closely with focal points and focal units within MBSEE for each intervention. This approach further built the capacity to integrate PBL and the ownership of key MBSEE policymakers.

# MONITORING, PARTNERSHIP & FUNDRAISING

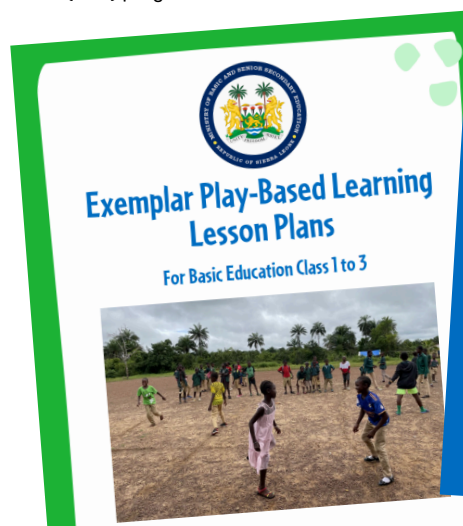
Over the next six months, from July to December 2024, Right To Play plans to undertake the following activities:

## ACTIVITIES (JULY–DECEMBER 2024):

**1 Monitor uptake of play-based learning teaching materials.** During the six-month period, we will monitor the use of the teaching materials developed by Right To Play by MBSSE and other development actors. We will conduct monitoring, coaching and mentoring visits to the pilot schools.

**2 Raise funds for the expansion and scale up program.** We will pursue global funding opportunities. We will continue to explore how we can support the work of UNICEF and the World Bank-funded Global Partnership for Education (GPE) program.

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# EXPANSION & SCALE PHASE: JANUARY 2025–DECEMBER 2026

Sierra Leone is widely recognized for its leadership in embedding foundational learning at the heart of the education system. Right To Play is encouraged by the successful uptake and collaboration of the MBSSE. An expansion and scale up phase will include the following components:

**1 Expand the number of program schools.** Through a cluster approach, using the four pilot schools as hub, build the capacity of eight head teachers and 98 teachers in eight new schools. At least 3,250 lower primary school children will be reached.

**2 Disseminate the five play-based learning materials developed.** Additional schools and other education stakeholders in Sierra Leone will receive copies of the PBL resources. These include the “Play-based Learning Exemplar Lesson Plan,” “Play-based Learning Classroom Observation Tool,” “Lesson Plan Guide for Teachers,” “Identifying and Writing Learning Objectives guide for teachers” and the “Play-based Learning Teacher Training Manual.”

**3 Develop and use additional teaching and learning materials.** Develop additional lesson plans and play-based teaching resources to support the delivery of additional learning units for English (literacy), Mathematics (numeracy) and Civic Education (good citizenship) for lower primary grades. Provide technical support to any organization that would like to make use of the play-based learning materials developed by the program.

**4 Monitor and assess the gains made in teaching practice and learning outcomes.** Set up action research, establish baselines for teaching practice and learning outcomes, and measure the change over a two-year period.

**5 Enhance parental engagement at the school level.** Continue raising awareness on play and play-based learning among parents through activities such as My First Day in School, Literacy Day events, and Read Out Loud initiatives. Build the knowledge of parents and caregivers to engage children at home in playful activities, supplementing their play-based learning in school.

**6 Provide technical assistance to teacher professional development programs as part of the scale up strategy.** Provide technical assistance to UNICEF in developing play-based learning teaching and learning materials for lower primary grades. Provide technical assistance to UNICEF for the integration of play-based learning into the design and conduct of teacher training programs. Strengthen the inclusion and practice of play-based learning in pre-service teacher training programs in partnership with teacher training institutes.

**7 Provide technical assistance to improve quality assurance of play-based learning.** Support the MBSSE School Quality Assurance and Management unit to integrate play-based learning within their school and classroom monitoring tools and practices. Equip additional school quality assurance officers with knowledge of play-based learning and skills to monitor and assess playful learning environments and practices at the school level, integrating play and specific indicators into their quality assurance work.