



PRIORITÉ À L'ÉGALITÉ
GENDER AT THE
CENTRE



GENDER AT THE CENTER INITIATIVE

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION SERVICE REVIEW - GIRLS' VOICES

July 2023

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The [United Nations Girls' Education Initiative's \(UNGEI\) Gender at the Centre Initiative \(GCI\)](#) is an international collaboration between civil society and international organizations, aimed at promoting gender equality in education across eight pilot countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Sierra Leone, Plan International and Education For All Coalition have partnered to enhance girls' retention in schools by establishing a protective and empowering environment. This initiative operates in four districts, including Moyamba, Port Loko, Western Rural, and Western Urban, in collaboration with eight Ministries, including the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), since November 2021.

Sierra Leone still faces significant challenges with gender discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural, and justice domains, leading to barriers for women and girls in accessing education. The number of girls enrolled in schools decreases as they progress to higher levels of education. This gender inequality is a fundamental cause of obstacles to sustainable development in the country. Schools are common settings for School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV), affecting a considerable portion of the young population. SRGBV encompasses various forms of violence, such as psychological, sexual, emotional, and physical, occurring within schools and during journeys to and from school.

The project tackles these issues through multiple approaches, including training, advocacy, lobbying, coaching, and mentoring, aiming to garner significant support for girls by engaging key stakeholders. In collaboration with MBSSE the focus is on addressing the barriers hindering girls' access to education aligning with MBSSE's Education Sector Plan and Radical Inclusion policy.

In May 2023, a selected group of female students participated in a session to identify and discuss the challenges they encounter while using government-provided school transportation. This aspect is often overlooked, as areas of risk are usually focused on the school or home environment. The recommendations provided by the girls are addressed at the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Ministry of Transportation advocating for an all-girls school bus.



“WE NEED FEMALE TEACHERS OR FEMALE BUS CONDUCTORS TO ENSURE OUR SAFETY ON THE BUSES.”

- A JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPIL, WESTERN RURA

APPROACH

Ten female students from ten junior secondary schools in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, were selected to participate in a one-day session. The primary objective of this workshop was to gather insights into their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of government-provided school buses in meeting their needs.

The session took place in a safe environment, allowing the girls to openly discuss SRGBV issues they encounter within and around schools, involving interactions with teachers and peers. Particular emphasis was placed on their experiences and challenges related to using transportation, such as government-funded school buses. The girls actively engaged in conversations about SRGBV, school safety, and security during their transportation to and from school.

The findings obtained from these discussions are being directed to relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the Ministry of Transport, the Teaching Service Commission, and other policymakers. The intention is to address the identified issues and advocate for improvements in school transportation and overall safety measures to safeguard the well-being of girls in the transport to school setting.

“I DO NOT FEEL SAFE IN THE BUS BUT I DO NEED TO USE TRANSPORT TO REGULARLY ATTEND SCHOOL. SO WE ARE ASKING THE MINISTRY OF BASIC AND SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION TO ENGAGE BUS CONDUCTORS ON OUR SAFETY.”

- A JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPIL, WESTERN RURAL

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The school transportation service review findings emphasized the **safety concerns of girls** while using government school buses. The discussions brought up several key points:

- Girls face **sexual harassment and bullying** from male students, particularly during evening bus rides.
- Male students carry potentially **dangerous items** such as knives, pepper spray, pens, blades, and bottles on school buses, posing a risk to all students.
- Bus conductors sometimes drop off students at locations that are **not their intended destinations**.
- Teachers and school administrators are not allowed to use school buses, leading to a **lack of authorities and supervision** for students during their bus journeys to and from school.
- Some students consume **alcoholic beverages** during school bus rides.
- Children have reported **incidents of theft** by their peers while using school buses.
- **Overcrowding** of buses by drivers and conductors poses health hazards, especially for students with underlying health conditions.
- Bus drivers play **inappropriate songs** while transporting students to and from school.



Girls at the workshop discussing SRGBV on school transport.

LESSONS LEARNED

- School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) is prevalent during school bus journeys, with instances of sexual harassment, exploitation, substance abuse, and bullying becoming increasingly common both within schools and on school buses.
- Effectively addressing SRGBV requires a multifaceted approach, including continuous training, personalized engagement, empowering girls' voices through lobbying and campaigns, ongoing monitoring, and active involvement of young people.
- The safety and security of students using school buses are often overlooked or given limited attention, particularly concerning the conduct of bus drivers, conductors, and fellow students.
- Girls expressed that the presence of a female teacher or conductor on school buses could serve as a preventive measure against such abuses.



Girl presenting the recommendations gathered in the workshop.



Girls discussing their safety on the way to school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made by the girls to address SRGBV issues during school bus rides:

1. The government should increase the provision of school buses and prioritize allocating buses specifically for girls' transportation.
2. The Ministry of Transport should collaborate with Bus Conductors to closely monitor the behaviour of pupils during bus rides and ensure a safe and respectful environment.
3. It is advisable to have a female teacher representative present on the school bus to enhance the safety and well-being of girls.
4. There is a need for enhanced monitoring and supervision of school buses to uphold safety standards and address any issues promptly.

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