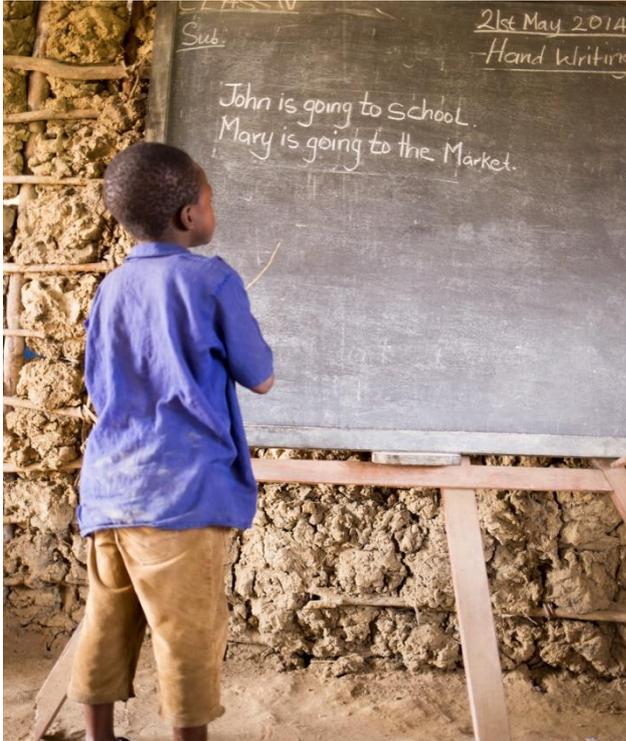


# The Safe Learning Model

CONCERN  
worldwide

ENDING  
EXTREME POVERTY  
WHATEVER  
IT TAKES

## Project Brief



An SLMB Masaba Primary School pupil engages in Literacy, Kunike Barina in Tonkolili, Sierra Leone, Photo Credit: Michael Duff, 2014

### Concern's Education Work

Increasing **access** to **quality** education and supporting child **wellbeing** in extreme poor, fragile and conflict affected countries across Africa, Asia & the Caribbean since 1972.



### Safe Learning Model

**Pilot Period:** Jan 2017- July 2018

**Full Implementation:** Aug 2018- Dec 2021

**Donor:** Irish Aid

**Research Partner:** UCD School of Education

### About the Safe Learning Model

The **Safe Learning Model** adopts a holistic approach to education and brings together interventions on school-related and gender-based violence (SRGBV) within an education programme. This approach to learning seeks to counter the issues of SRGBV and gender stereotypes, which can keep children from learning or cause them to drop out of school. The model, being piloted and evaluated in Sierra Leone, is based on the assumption that children's educational progress will be enhanced when they live in communities that are underpinned by support for gender equality and children's wellbeing.

**“children's educational progress will be enhanced when they live in communities that are underpinned by support for gender equality and children's wellbeing.”**

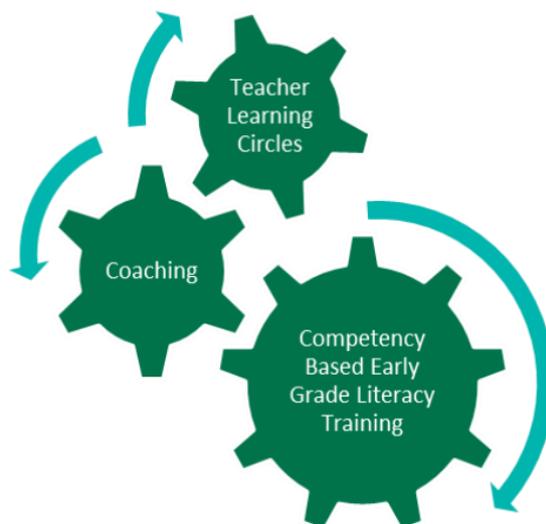
## Interventions within the Safe Learning Model:

The model is being implemented with the Tonkolili District Education Office in 75 communities randomly selected from 100 communities. Communities were randomly selected and assigned to different levels of intervention based on simple stratification criteria. The intervention aims to improve **literacy** learning outcomes and school **attendance**, as well as increase the **protection** and **wellbeing** of children. The model consists of three components: Literacy Activities, School Level SRGBV Prevention & Response, and Community Level SRGBV Prevention & Response.

### Literacy activities

The literacy interventions are implemented in partnership with the District Education Office (DEO). Activities aim to develop teacher competencies related to early grade literacy and are being carried out in 75 communities, reaching approximately 11,000 pupils and 400 teachers. The Literacy interventions are based on a continuous teacher professional development model and include:

- **In-service teacher training** for grade 1-6 teachers with face-to-face sessions on teacher competencies with a particular focus on Early Grades Literacy pedagogy including assessment
- In-classroom **coaching and support** to grade 1-3 teachers using a one to one iterative cycle of pre-visit, observation, analysis, post-visit/feedback
- **Teacher Learning Circles** to allow a community of practice for teachers to exchange experiences and reinforce learning.
- New **teaching and learning materials** developed and existing materials procured for distribution in programme schools to help head teachers and principals provide the necessary tools to enable the children to learn effectively.



### School Level SRGBV Prevention and Response

School level SRGBV interventions take place in 50 of the 75 schools engaged in literacy activities, and utilise a transformative approach to address the different aspects of SRGBV, covering prevention and response programming, incorporating health, education, protection and gender initiatives with children and teachers from grades 1 to 6. Activities include:

- **School Clubs** targeting the most vulnerable 9-14 year old pupils in classes 4-6. The programme aims to reduce the impacts of SRGBV by supporting early adolescents to develop knowledge and skills to be successful and protected from violence and abuse. The curriculum incorporates selected age appropriate modules from the National Life Skills Curriculum (10 week life skills cycle complementing the overall school club curriculum conducted in mixed and single sex groups depending on the topic).
- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** sessions for 6-8 year old pupils in classes 1-3. The programme involves structured play activities for the most vulnerable young children based on five SEL competencies (Brain Building, Emotion Regulation, Positive Social Skills, Conflict Resolution and Perseverance). Direct support is provided to teachers, SMC members or older students to organise and facilitate SEL activities.



School Club skit on gender, UMC Primary, Masengbeh, in Tonkolili, Sierra Leone,  
Photo Credit: Michael Duff, 2014

- **Teachers, head-teachers and SMC training** on gender norms in the classroom, the Code of Conduct and referral pathways based on the gender transformative approach of Living Peace.
- **IEC materials** focused on SRGBV response and referral pathways and preventative messaging reflective of the gender transformative approach.

### Community Level SRGBV Prevention and Response

Implemented in 25 of the 50 communities receiving both Literacy and School Level interventions, these participatory activities use the socio-ecological model; engaging the wider society, including parents and community leaders, on the root causes of inequality that impact school participation, learning outcomes and child wellbeing. Utilising a gender transformative approach, the interventions aim to improve safety within non-education sectors to reduce SRGBV risks for pupils and include:



- **Life Skills clubs** are established at community level and utilise the age appropriate National Life Skills Curriculum. These Adolescent sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH) focused interventions target out-of-school adolescents (mostly from 15 to 19 years old). In addition, the National Life Skills curriculum is utilised in Junior Secondary Schools in target communities for in school clubs with 15-19 year olds.
- **Community Conversations** (CCs) aim to engage community-level stakeholders in the identification of SRGBV, equality and SRH risks in their community and to empower them to take action. Community Facilitators are trained and ongoing supportive monitoring of the roll out at community level is conducted.
- **Living Peace** utilises a gender transformative approach with couples and families of school-aged children to reduce violence in the family and therefore improve school attendance of their children, especially girls.
- **Community Outreach and Engagement of Traditional Leaders** to transform negative gender norms and create a safe and supportive community environment for boys and girls takes place utilising a similar approach to the transformative Living Peace initiative.
- Support and training on **SRGBV referral and response** to ensure all stakeholders within the referral pathway are able to support SRGBV survivors appropriately.



Community Conversations in Mamador and Madusia communities, in Tonkolili, Sierra Leone.  
Photo Credit: Michael Duff, 2014

## Researching the Safe Learning Model

In addition to the interventions, the Safe Learning Model includes a research component aimed at testing whether the different elements of the activities work and how the different levels interact. This research will test the hypothesis that children will learn better if they are in a safe environment protected from SRGBV. The working assumption behind the programme is that children's educational progress will be enhanced when they live in communities where there is more support for gender equality and children's wellbeing. The responsibility for the research is allocated to the University College Dublin (UCD) School of Education. The research institute is engaged in a five-year partnership with Concern and is working with national-level research partners NestBuilders International for data collection and to ensure local expertise is embedded in all stages of design, study and dissemination.

The study is divided into two phases: a **pilot phase** in the first year (2017-2018) and the **main trail** from 2018 to 2021. The pilot phase allowed Concern, in partnership with MEST to develop effective methods of delivering the Safe Learning Model as a comprehensive programme in order to scale up the interventions in phase 2. The pilot, carried out in 10 communities (5 interventions and 5 control) also enabled UCD School of Education, working in partnership with Concern and NestBuilders, to develop research tools for evaluating the Safe Learning Model in the main trial, which is being carried out in 100 communities. Schools were eligible for the main trial based on the following criteria:

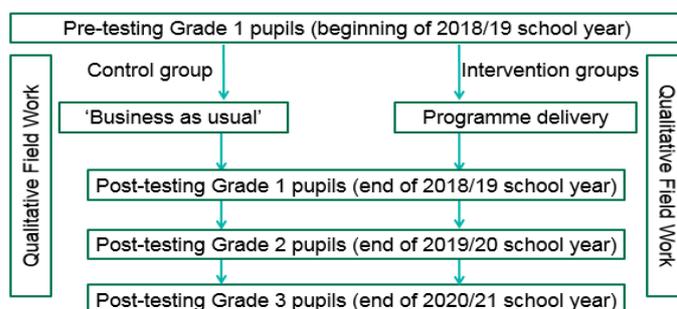
- They were within the selected chiefdoms of Tonkolili District;
- They had classes 1-6 (meaning junior primary schools with only classes 1-3 were excluded).
- They had sufficient enrolment numbers (>15 children in class 3 and on average at least 10 children in classes 4-6), based on enrolment data collected by Concern Sierra Leone staff between March and May 2017.
- Where communities had more than one primary school, one school was selected to participate based on criteria of being an unapproved school with at least one teacher on payroll. If multiple schools in the one community met these criteria, the school with the middle enrolment size was selected.

The participants (around 100 per community) include primary school teachers, pupils, and community members who have agreed to participate in the study. In order to measure the efficiency of the various levels of activities, the communities of the main trail have been allocated to four groups of 25 using a simple stratification process.

Control	Treatment 1 No SRGBV	Treatment 2 Light SRGBV	Treatment 3 Full SRGBV
25 Communities	25 Communities	25 Communities	25 Communities
	Literacy	Literacy + School Level SRGBV	Literacy + School Level SRGBV + Community Level SRGBV

\* All groups receive livelihoods & health interventions as part of an integrated programme; however, these interventions are not directly related to the model or research.

Data is being collected on an annual basis using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods:



**Quantitative**

**Qualitative**

- Participation in school - enrolment, attendance, repetition, retention rates
- Early Grade Reading Assessment designed to measure foundational skills in literacy through a collection of subtests (letter identification, sound identification, familiar and invented word reading, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension).
- Wellbeing Index - will be measured using a culturally-sensitive and relevant measure
- School staff survey – attitudes and practices on SRGBV
- Detailed ethnographic data on 30 children in the study class
- Case study analysis of 4 families (to include parent or primary carer, grandparent or elder, older sibling) to capture trans generational relations
- Interviews with teachers and head teacher in the study school and with parents and community leaders.

By applying rigorous research to the Safe Learning Model, we intend to develop a strong evidence base around the hypothesis that early years' literacy and SRGBV interventions improve the participation in education, the learning outcomes and the wellbeing of girls and boys. The Safe Learning Model research component is, in the long term, a mechanism to influence macro-level change by contributing to the evidence base on what works in improving education outcomes for children at risk of SRGBV.

Evidence generated following milestones in the research (baseline, midline, end-line) will be used to feed into programme design and disseminated to share learning through different information mechanisms. The academic learning from the research will be made accessible and understandable and Concern will work collaboratively with the two key ministries to develop contextually appropriate IEC materials to share research findings on the Safe Learning Model (posters, brochures, radio programmes etc.) at district, community, national and international levels.

## Child Protection, Safeguarding and SRGBV

The Integrated Programme and the Safe Learning Model involves direct work and research with children, exploring sensitive issues of SRGBV. Beyond issues of informed consent, there are safeguarding and protection risks associated with access to children away from their parents or outside of their home setting. The subject matter of the Safe Learning Model, SRGBV, brings further considerations to the welfare of both children and adult participants as researchers ask participants to share and discuss experiences of gender-based violence.

UCD School of Education is embedded in a reputable research institute, with formal and strong ethical review committees and protocols. This research has gone through the formal processes within that institute, including ethical review procedures. Ethical approval was been granted for the pilot phase in 2017 and for the main trial in 2018. In addition, Concern's Code of Conduct and Programme Participants Protection Policy (P4) framework spells out community and staff roles and responsibilities including appropriate conduct. Mechanisms for programme participants to communicate complaints (through community sessions, direct phone calls, letters, complaint boxes, and in person) are in place and Concern ensures that programme participants and stakeholders are aware of this mechanisms.

With regard to the national law, Concern adheres to the Child Right Act (2007) and the National Referral Protocol on Gender Based Violence (3.8 Roles and Responsibilities of Civil Society Organisations NGOs, CBOs, FBOs). In case of any report of abuse, as described in the National Referral Protocol on Gender Based Violence, in the National Policy for Child Well-being (2005) and the Child Rights Act (2007), the initial referral pathway is followed. In the case of a report of abuse, a factual account is provided in written form by the referring agency to the Sierra Leone Police Family Support Unit (FSU), and the MSWGCA. If the victim requires urgent medical attention, he or she will be referred to the local Ministry of Health service provider, then the case will be reported to the FSU for investigation.



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