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**Public Service Performance Contract for Effective Service Delivery: A Case Study of Sierra Leone's Ministerial Performance Contracts (MPC)**

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**Abstract**

This research synthesizes the literature on the new phenomenon of ministerial performance contracts (MPC) and examines the role of performance contracts in promoting effective service delivery, accountability, and good governance in Sierra Leone's public sector. Drawing on the global perspective of public sector reforms and the principles of new public management, the study highlights how performance management measurement has become central to achieving

transparency, efficiency, and citizens' trust in government. The analysis situates Sierra Leone's reform trajectory within the framework of principal-agent theory, emphasizing the president's 2024 initiative to sign performance contracts with twenty-nine (29) cabinet ministers. These contracts, aligned with the Mid-Term National Development Plan (MT-NDP, 2024-2030) and the "Big Five Game Changers," outline measurable targets across food security, human capital development, youth employment, public service reform, and infrastructure. While this initiative was widely praised as a bold step towards accountability and efficiency in public service delivery, the study identifies significant challenges, including limited financial resources, weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and the lack of strong political will, which threaten effective implementation. Using literature review, key informant interviews, and policy analysis, the paper underscores the need for a robust monitoring mechanism, citizen engagement, and institutional establishment and strengthening. The study proposes an institutional framework for effective implementation of the ministerial performance contract (MPC). However, it concludes that for Sierra Leone to sustain reforms and build trust in the public service, such performance contracts should move beyond symbolic gestures to become enforceable governance tools supported by transparent reporting and genuine executive commitment.

**Keywords:** Performance contracts, public sector reform, good governance, accountability, service delivery, Sierra Leone.

## **1. Introduction**

Successful reform processes can be observed in every region of the global community (S. Donner et al., 2024)<sup>[1]</sup>. There are however, no guarantees of immediate successes; so many countries undergoing transformation face stagnation, and power struggle, and in some cases even state failure. The introduction of the new public management (NPM) is serving as an eye opener and a trigger to all governments, national or federal, state or local governments to develop new strategies on how to provide effective services to the citizens (Obong'o, S.O., 2009)<sup>[2]</sup>. The NPM places a strong emphasis on implementing private sector methods in public institutions in order to achieve objectives of performance improvement, increased productivity and effective service delivery (Balogun, 2003)<sup>[3]</sup>. This is why NPM has been viewed as the answer to the problem of declining service delivery in the public sector reform projects in many third world countries around the globe. So, performance contracts have been identified as critical component in the improvement of public service delivery at all level of government (Shirley, M.M., 2017)<sup>[4]</sup>. Good governance is a part of effective service delivery trajectory that is pivotal to reform policies that work. This new paradigm shift has been tagged by many as the one of the open-governments movements (Tereza C. & Vincent M., 2020)<sup>[5]</sup> which has recently emerged and began to impact government policies, which supposedly come with increased transparency that creates public value. Since the primary purpose of the public sector is to render essential services to the general constituents, and not as a measure of its profit margin or an estimation of its capital growth or an increase in shareholdings etc., as it happens in the private sector, effective service delivery and citizens satisfaction are becoming the most widely used measure of performance. These, however, equate to performance measurement in private organizations (Gaitho, P.R., 2017)<sup>[6]</sup>. Service performance is the achievement of set objectives and the implementation of specific

public demands. Since public servants are employees of the citizens of a particular country, service performance is, however, similar to what Van Dooren et al., (2015)<sup>[7]</sup> referred to as staff performance which is understood as the accomplishment of predetermined goals and the realization of particular public values, which are typically associated with the "3Es" (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness) as well as equity. The performance contracts that are signed between a service provider and a principal, becoming (a principal-agent) system are viewed as a way of holding service providers accountable for their actions (M. Aristigueta & L. Foote, 2009)<sup>[8]</sup>. This is gradually becoming the new tool to assess effective service delivery among public servants, a phenomenon that is relatively new in the public sector domain (Donahue, J.D. & Donahue, J.D., 1989)<sup>[9]</sup> but however, not so in the private sector. The management of performance and monitoring of public sector institutions for their effectiveness became the striking focus and evolutionary thrive of public service in the United Kingdom in the 1990s (S. Bird, C. et al., 2005)<sup>[10]</sup>.

To address public delivery performance, one must first ensure effective planning, where expectations and goals are clearly defined, while monitoring and measuring take the form of appropriate action—such as raising it or keeping it at a specific level—and then utilize the performance data to inform future decisions. (Kroll, A. & Vogel, D., 2014)<sup>[11]</sup>. This has become public management's "Achilles heel" (ibid). Because of this, a set of performance indicators is frequently chosen by government or private institutions and monitored to notify management of a staff member's present performance level. This is why the president of Sierra Leone, H.E. Rtd. Julius Maada Bio, in 2024, during the first year of his second-term mandate, signed ministerial performance contracts (MPC) with his cabinet ministers. A ministerial performance contract spanning from January 2024 to December 2024 was signed between the president of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the political head of every ministry. This performance contract is articulated based on the president's second-term manifesto and the country's mid-term national development plan (MTNDP 2024-2030). The indicators set in these performance contracts provide heads of ministries and their agencies with a reference point for goals, priorities, and targets that the government intends to achieve during the year under review.

The president has made this performance contract between him and the ministers a reflection of his five key priority areas mentioned under his manifesto referred to as the five key game changers—food security, human capital development, youth empowerment, revamping the public service, and tech and infrastructure—and the Mid-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) and the core mandates of these ministries.

The Chief Minister, David Moinina Sengeh had said that "each contract is the product of hours and days of careful deliberations, and the targets have been chosen to be ambitious, achievable, tangible, time-bound and relevant to President Bio's five priorities, the MTNDP and the core functions of the ministries" (Performance Contract, 2024:2)<sup>[12]</sup>. This lays the building blocks for the outcomes that point to the long-term targets, which in turn facilitate a thorough assessment of the performance of all government ministries and agencies throughout the year under review. The Chief Minister's role in this service contract between the president and his minister is to

"provide an enabling environment through effective coordination, technical oversight and backstopping to ensure that ministries, departments and Agencies (MDAs) can deliver on their mandates and specific obligations under their respective performance contracts" (MPC, 2024: 2)<sup>[12]</sup>. While the president serves as the chief executive officer (CEO), the Chief Minister is the chief operations officer (COO). This performance contract is in essence a performance measurement for ministries and their agencies in which measurement indicators for the year under review (January 2024 – December 2024) are outlined. However, the president's inclusion of tech and infrastructural development in his five key government priority areas is in alignment with steps taken by other presidents in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and around the world to continue to restore the nation's infrastructural damage that was caused during the eleven-year civil war. Infrastructural development is concerned with the construction and maintenance of rural roads, bridges, and culverts which have a huge impact on uplifting the citizens' quality of life (Rifat, M., 2021)<sup>[13]</sup>. In his research paper, "What Explains Citizens Trust in Public Institutions? quality of government, performance, social capital, or demography", he found that infrastructural development has a significant level of positive impact in enhancing citizens' trust in the government. So, this drive by the current government is a continuity of other past governments' initiatives to restore the nation's lost infrastructural beauty before the civil crisis.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### *2.1. Public Sector Reform for Efficiency and Effective Service Delivery*

In unstable or post-war societies, improving basic services or amenities is treated as a top priority (Noor, M. et al., 2012)<sup>[14]</sup>. The provisions of utilities like water, power, transportation, and communication, and basic services such as education, medical care, etc., are often problematic, either because they are scarce in supply, costly, discriminatory, or of low quality; therefore, people's health, ability to earn a living, literacy, and other vital areas of growth may be greatly affected. This situation has highlighted several concerns regarding the restoration of citizens' trust in government, which is central to the public sector's modernising efforts (Van de Walle & Geert B., 2003)<sup>[15]</sup> especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which has a focus on effective service delivery, a mandate of governance that is seemingly signed between the citizens and any government in power. In this essence, governance becomes the performance, capacity and accountability of the political leadership, that is, of those political actors who have the power and responsibility to shape or determine public policy in society. Such drive does not only encompass government and political elites but also other nongovernmental organizations and international partners that play a key role in the transformation process (Donner, S. et al., 2024)<sup>[1]</sup>. So, there is a common belief that, improving service delivery will greatly help nations become more legitimate and independent (Noor, M. et al., 2012)<sup>[14]</sup>.

However, despite the Sadik-Zada E.R. et al. (2024)<sup>[16]</sup> study findings, which assert that a lower level of socioeconomic development resonates with a greater level of petty corruption, public mistrust is frequently linked to poorly run public services, while in political discourse, it is asserted that efficient public services foster popular confidence in a particular government.

Although most performance management has been focused on the private sectors, under the new public governance (NPG), there is a growing need to understand the problems and difficulties of implementation in the public sector, as these institutions look for ways to enhance their performance management practices ( Ndevu, Z. & Muller, K., 2017)<sup>[17]</sup>. That is why, in Sierra Leone, several reforms and actions to ensure effective performance in both civil and public services have taken place to ensure effective service delivery. These processes have largely been undertaken by the Sierra Leone Civil Service Reform Unit which guides the behaviours and conduct of civil servants and the Public Service Commission (PSC) which facilitates the creation of a lean, performance-oriented, highly motivated, modern and efficient public service that delivers high-quality services to the people of Sierra Leone in a timely and cost-effective manner. The public sector reform unit at the office of the President is however, established to provide leadership, coordination, and technical backstopping in the strategic design, development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of public sector reforms (PSRs). These institutions of government continue to create the enabling environments for effective service delivery.

The Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU) was initially named the Governance Reform Secretariat (GRS), which name lasted for almost two decades. It was transformed into the public sector reform unit under the office of the President in 2008 by His Excellency Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, the country's fourth democratically elected president, who served from 2007 to 2018. President Julius Maada Bio succeeded him, and he is currently serving his second term as the fifth democratically elected head of the country's executive branch. His new drive and singular honour to sign a performance contract with each of the government ministers are a true manifestation of his 2023 manifesto's commitment to revamp the public service architecture and ensure effective service delivery by his appointees at the ministerial level. However, this approach would prioritize delivery, efficiency, professionalism, and a merit-based public service that fulfils its mandates for citizens. This performance contract embodies the president's solemn oath of office and sworn mandate to deliver on his manifesto promises, the dividends of democracy and good governance to his countrymen before his re-election in 2023.

## *2.2. The principal-agent theory perspective in the performance contract*

The principal-agent theory, also called agency theory, has had a significant influence on both the theoretical and practical components of public administration and policy since its inception around the 1970s. The government of Sierra Leone is taking a bold step toward radical reform strategies in the ministerial performance contract (MPC) signed between the president and the political heads of ministries, the ministers. From the standpoint of a principal-agent theory perspective, Robin Gauld (2018)<sup>[18]</sup> in his book "Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance", posited that the implementation of incentive-based contracts between different players could lead to an improvement in the performance of the public sector. Doing so will create clarity of assignments and goals to be accomplished by the agents while the principal stands at a great chance to achieve their targets.

The origin of this relationship between the principal and the agent comes with the resemblance of a contract between two cooperating parties under which the principal delegates work, other assignments and authority for decision-making to the agent (Jensen & Meckling, 1976)<sup>[19]</sup>. However, the focus of the Sierra Leone Government for the establishment of such a principal-agent-like contract between the president and his ministers is an optimal governance mechanism for effective service delivery. What is very clear in this regard is the president's unwavering commitment to deliver on his mandates through this performance contract. The president has the power to hire and fire (appoint or dismiss) ministers according to the country's 1991 constitution. This enshrined clause in the national constitution gives the president the autonomy to appoint ministers to such positions. In such context, however, it's worthwhile to note that the president is faced with what (Wagner, D.N. 2019)<sup>[20]</sup> referred to as a further division of the principal-agency problem; the risk of selecting the wrong agent (minister) for the job before the formalization of the contract between the parties and the risk of moral hazards, that is the risk that the agents (ministers) act in their interest without due consideration of the terms of the contract. This has been the case for underperforming public servants where there is a conflicting situation between self-interest and the purpose for which they were appointed or voted in whichever case is applicable. For such contracts to be implemented successfully, the goals or objectives must be clear and parties should work towards achieving them. However, information on such contracts and delivery road maps should be available to both parties. This will help the agent to focus on the goals and the principal to play the oversight responsibility on the effective implementation of the contract. However, conflicting goals and information asymmetry in the principal-agent relationship have proven to be the key sources of problems (Akerlof, G.A. 1970)<sup>[21]</sup>. There is, however, an unequal distribution of information and power here where the president uses that to force the ministers into obeying his commands and orders failure which may lead to dismissal from office. So, this can resonate with the proposition made by Wagner, D.N. (2019)<sup>[22]</sup> where the principal has the autonomy to coerce the agent to follow his/her orders. The contract established key project trackers, which contingent upon resource availability, the ministry under the supervision of the minister seeks to implement or oversee. Managerial performance indicators are set from which successful implementation is measured. However, the setting of unrealistic goals is one of the various ways that Wagner, D.N. (2019)<sup>[20]</sup> referred to as the principal opportunism drive. The government under the leadership of the current president should however consider putting forward effective monitoring mechanisms that align with the several performance indicators put forward in the contract agreement, especially in the five key thematic government deliverables, referred to as the "Big Five Game Changers".

### *2.3. Monitoring Performance for Effective Service Delivery*

There have been several protests and uprisings against governments around Sub-Saharan African countries and even parts of Europe. The citizens associate the triggers of their actions with bad governance, which cannot be disconnected from the lack of accountability, corruption, and mismanagement of state resources by their highly placed leaders and the connected few that have continued to wreak untold suffering on the masses. It is often acknowledged that strategic leadership is a phenomenon that aims to change the management practices of public institutions. This, however, comes with the complex and burdensome duty of implementing government

strategies in a dynamic and ever-changing socio-economic environment (Ojogiwa, O.T., 2021)<sup>[23]</sup>. In political discourse, there is an assertion that efficient public services promote public confidence in the government, even though poorly administered public services are often associated with public mistrust. This, however, holds in most instances. The world has, however, recently also witnessed instances where high-ranking public officials are forcefully being removed or chased out from their communities for not keeping up with the promises they made during the campaign periods (Thusi, X., and Selepe, M.M., 2023)<sup>[24]</sup>. So, the lack of good governance has not only hampered central government administration but has also metamorphosed into the local council governance system and harmed public service delivery (Thusi, X., and Selepe, M.M., 2023)<sup>[24]</sup>. The academic community, the bureaucrats, and policymakers have sought to unearth the most unique ways of establishing a framework to enable the public sector to put into practice what seems to be entrepreneurial behaviour that involves harnessing the best practices from the private sector and imbibing them into the public sector peculiarities (Funko, I. et al., 2023)<sup>[25]</sup>. However, setting key performance measurement indicators that measure public service delivery resonates with effective governance.

Twenty-nine (29) government ministers signed the ministerial performance contract (MPC) with the president. The ministers' employment is, however, a contract for service employment that involves working for the central government under the direct supervision of the office of the president. So, these performance contracts signed by each minister carefully look at deliverables within these ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). Their contributions and impact are described in the form of outputs that they must achieve within the years from January 2024 to December 2024. However, contingent upon the availability of resources, a comprehensive list of the deliverables to keep track of the contract would be measured using predefined monitoring indicators, including those enshrined in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED), the 2018-established National Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (NAMED) with a national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) agenda, and the 2021 National Monitoring and Evaluation (NME) Policy, which was enacted to set out a clear trajectory and strategic actions in the process of instituting a systemic, coordinated, simplified, fit-for-purpose, and results-oriented tracking system. This system is, however, meant to be reliable to make the public sector more effective while addressing gaps in existing policies, legislation, and administrative practices.

The ministries are responsible for meeting the managerial and operational efficiency of all the targeted indicators and all the performance contract's project trackers, including those enshrined in the Mid-Term National Development Plan (MTND, 2024–2030), the president's five key development priority areas articulated during his state opening address in parliament, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG, 2030), and the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063.

The researchers proposed an effective ministerial performance contract (MPC) institutional framework for effective implementation. This section will provide a description of the fully integrated MPC institutional framework for improving service delivery while addressing the inherent challenges that continue to impede effective implementation. Given the excruciating

reality of the state of the current MPC, this framework is poised to outline institutional strata and a reformed organogram that will create an improved and effective service delivery process. Despite the intensive research work done to propose this framework, when applied, it should be within the context of a ministerial performance contract and cannot be classed as one size fits all; therefore, challenges in the implementation process should not be handled as a customized reality. Figure 1 shows the proposed institutional framework for effective implementation of the ministerial performance contract (MPC).

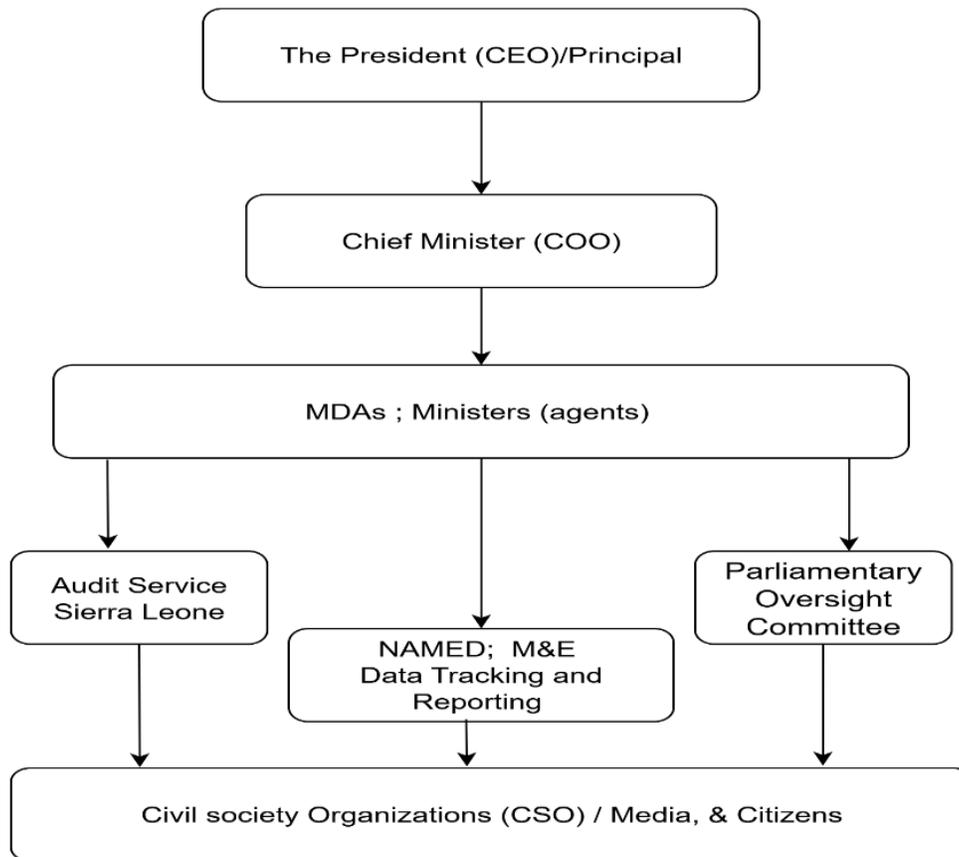


Figure 1: proposed institutional framework for effective implementation of the ministerial performance contract (MPC)

Source: Authors’ construction, 2025

The Presidency: The president serves as the principal and executive head with ultimate authority. He signs the contract with the cabinet ministers and provides political leadership and legitimacy. Therefore, the president holds the power to hire and fire ministers based on performance.

The Office of the Chief Minister: This individual is the central coordinating officer and is simply referred to as the chief operations officer (COO). This person should be responsible for technical oversight, coordination, and backstopping to ensure the alignment of the ministerial targets with

the Big Five Game Changers and the MT-NDP 2024-2030. This officer should give regular reports to the president.

The Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs): With Ministers acting as Agents who are responsible for implementing and executing policy priorities as outlined in the MPC. They should, however, submit reports to the Chief Minister, the COO, and the NAMED. They have the responsibility to ensure that departmental targets are cascaded into operational units.

National Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (NAMED): This directorate should ensure the full implementation of policy guidelines from the National Monitoring and Evaluation (NME) Policy and design ministries' performance indicators' tracking mechanisms. They should be responsible for the collection, analysis, and validation of performance data and publish regular M&E data for transparency and accountability.

Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL): This institution oversees financial integrity and accountability for the ministries. It audits funds related to contract implementation and reports irregularities to the responsible parliamentary oversight committees and the presidency.

Parliamentary Oversight Committees: These are committees set up by parliament for legislative accountability, which review reports from the MDA, NAMED, and ASSL. These committees question the ministers on underperformance according to the contractual agreement they signed with the president.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Media and Citizens: These two institutions and the citizens serve as watchdogs, which should provide independent monitoring and external feedback on contractual terms. They demand accountability through advocacy and public discourse.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study employs a mixed-method approach to critically analyze the implementation and impact of the Ministerial Performance Contract (MPC) in Sierra Leone, specifically between the current president and his cabinet ministers. The research design included a comprehensive literature review, key informant interviews, and policy analysis to examine the governance, performance metrics and the challenges of the MPC.

In the literature review portion, the study involved a detailed review of existing literature on public sector reforms, ministerial performance contracts, and governance in Sierra Leone. The review was structured around the new public management framework, which advocates for the incorporation and adoption of private sector practices within the public sector institutional domain to improve efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Obong'o, S.O., 2009)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Additionally, the principal-agent theory was employed to analyse the relationship between the president (principal) and the ministers (agents), focusing on how performance contracts function as a tool for monitoring and incentivizing ministers' actions (Jensen & Meckling, 1976)<sup>[26]</sup>

The study incorporated qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews. A total of 45 respondents were purposefully sampled depending on their relevance and experience as stakeholders in the implementation and public monitoring and evaluation of the MPC. This includes twenty-five (25) high-ranking government officials comprised of Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officers from major ministries and 20 non-governmental stakeholders, including 10 members of civil society organizations and 10 ordinary citizens representing varied socio-economic positions including youth leaders, market women, teachers, and transport workers.

The interviews took between 35 and 60 minutes, were conducted in person, and were guided by the five themes of (i) perceptions of the MPCs, (ii) institutional as well as collaborational opportunities, (iii) mechanisms of transparency and accountability, (iv) outcomes of the services rendered, and (v) the issues and or proposals to overcome the issues. The semi-structured interviews allowed for systematic and consistent data collection through the use of pre-determined questions while also yielding the flexibility to probe for more in-depth information through follow-ups. These interviews were conducted to gather insights on the perceptions of MPCs and to identify the potential synergies, challenges, and impacts of this performance governance tool. These respondents were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the MPC in promoting transparency, accountability and effective service delivery. The use of the semi-structured format enabled flexibility, while maintaining comparability across users (Bryman, A., 2016; Kallio, H. et al., 2016).<sup>[27,28]</sup>

These semi-structured interviews in broad terms target three main questions:

- i. What does the performance contract between the president and ministers mean to you?
- ii. What are the possible underlying synergies both internal and external that resonate with effective performance in such a public service contract?
- iii. How could this have been done better, if not done in this way, for effective service delivery?

There are however, sub-questions under each of these broad three questions. See appendix 1 below. This is done to allow the researchers to subdivide these broad central questions into smaller, more specific areas of inquiry, thus facilitating a systemic and comprehensive approach to the data collection process (Creswell, 2008)<sup>[29]</sup>. For instance, Creswell notes that sub-questions narrow the focus of the research. They allow the researcher to answer the question in a step-by-step manner which looks less complex, and simplified to give a central focus on the issue under investigation.

Feedback from these interviews which were organized around the five key thematic areas were transcribed and analysed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software tool. This software is used because it allows researchers to code data, identify themes, and perform detailed data analysis. Its capability to support both text and multimedia data while offering advanced tools for visualizing data patterns cannot be disconnected to the reasons for its application in this study.

The policy documents were analysed to assess the clarity, and specificity of the performance indicators, their feasibility, and the capability of the existing institutions to effectively monitor and evaluate the outcome of the contracts (Gauld, 2023)<sup>[30]</sup>.

The study further considers the challenges posed by financial and resource constraints on the implementation of the MPC, as discussed by previous researchers (Simpson & Buabeng, 2013; Sadik-Zada E.R. et al. 2024)<sup>[16,31]</sup>. These issues were critically analysed to determine how they might affect the achievement of the stated objectives in the contracts and the overall effectiveness of such public service strategic reform trajectory.

Additionally, to increase the credibility of the findings, responses from government officials, civil society actors, and citizens were compared to achieve triangulation and member checking was implemented by providing synthesis summaries to a subset of the interview participants to corroborate their summaries.

#### **4. Findings from the Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews with each of the 45 participants in the Ministerial Performance Contracts revealed five themes about the effectiveness of the Ministries' Performance Contracts.

##### *4.1. Theme 1: Performance Contracts of the Ministries as an Expression of Political Will*

Here are the key findings: Most participants thought the performance contracts with the ministries were an expression of the primary level of political will, although an accountability framework was still missing. 18 out of 25 government respondents described the performance contracts as an initiative that brought severity to the ministerial portfolio. 15 out of 20 of the non-government officials described the MPC as an initiative that was "encouraging" but remained at the symbolic level (CSO actors and citizens).

##### *4.2. Theme 2: Increased Operational Level of Transparency, Decreased Public Level of Transparency*

The key findings are that the government was transparent at the operational level, but the public was not, and ministries had an internal brief of the performance contracts. However, citizens reported a lack of access regarding the performance brief and records.

##### *4.3. Theme 3: Accountability Is Limited by Political Interference*

The main finding from this theme is that both officials and CSOs confirmed that political protection weakens sanction mechanisms, and 20 out of 25 government officials accepted that there is no dismissal for non-performance. All 10 CSO respondents pointed out political attachment as the most significant shortcoming, overriding performance. All 10 respondents from the ordinary citizens also confirm the assertions made by the 10 CSOs.

*4.4. Theme 4: Service delivery shows uneven improvements.*

As part of the analysis process, the responses received from the interviews indicated that the influence of the Ministerial Performance Contracts (MPCs) on service delivery was sustained across various sectors, whereby a number of sectors reported improvements of a moderate nature, and on the contrary, others experienced minimal outcomes. Within the scope of these sectors, education and agriculture were perceived to have improvements of a moderate nature, whereas energy, water and sanitation, and roads and works were regarded to have weak improvements performed. The results of these findings report the service delivery discrepancies across multiple sectors. Table 1 below shows the sectoral improvements.

Table 1: The main findings from this theme are that perceived improvements were sector-dependent.

Sector	Perceptions
Education	Moderate improvements
Energy	Weak
Water and sanitation	Weak
Roads and Works	Weak
Agriculture	Moderate

Source: Authors' construction

*4.5. Theme 5: Resource limitations as the greatest impediments to the success of MPC*

The critical finding that emerged from this theme is that in all user categories, the two major barriers impeding the full implementation of the MPC and effective service delivery were the absence of financial and institutional capabilities, delays in budget disbursements, insufficient monitoring & evaluation, and overambitious target setting. Table 2 shows the summary of these findings.

Table 2: Summary Table of findings

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Government Officials</b>	<b>CSO</b>	<b>Citizens</b>	<b>Overall interpretation</b>	<b>References</b>
Political commitment	Strong support	moderate	Moderate	Symbolic but promising	Bouckaert & Halligan (2007) <sup>[32]</sup>
Transparency	Internal Improvement	Weak public access	Weak	Weak enforcement	Fox, J.A. (2015) <sup>[33]</sup>
Accountability	Politically constrained	Politically constrained	Distrusted	Partial transparency	Flore, L. (2004) <sup>[34]</sup>
Service delivery	Sectoral-dependent	Uneven	Uneven	Mixed results	Batley & McLoughlin (2015) <sup>[35]</sup> and World Bank (2017) <sup>[36]</sup>
Resources	Major constraint	Major constraints	Major constraint	Critical bottleneck	Allen, H. & Potter (2013) <sup>[37]</sup> and Toonen, J., et al. (2012) <sup>[38]</sup>

Source: Authors' construction

## 5. Discussion

As transparency is nowadays considered one key feature of effective governance (Tereza C & Vincent M., 2020)<sup>[5]</sup>, the president's bold step to initiate an open-government contract between him and his cabinet ministers showcased his ambition to combat corruption and address key governance challenges. This is why a wide range of international organizations and Sierra Leoneans from various backgrounds, including political analysts, government officials, civil society organizations, the media, and ordinary citizens, enthusiastically welcomed and widely praised the initiative by the president towards accountability and transparency in public service delivery. Ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) and other state-owned enterprises (SOEs) continue to face similar challenges in terms of political interference in their operations (Simpson, S.N.Y. & Buabeng, T., 2013)<sup>[31]</sup>. To ensure that ministers are held responsible for their actions and the effectiveness of the ministries they supervise, this drive for ministerial accountability was well accepted and viewed as a crucial step in a fragile democratic nation like Sierra Leone. This president's bold step came to the fore to unite citizens and civil society organizations, as it was viewed by many as a radical development action that ensured the president would take actions to confront governance concerns head-on and offered his executive support to ameliorate the situation as the fountain of honour and the grand commander of the republic.

*5.1. The Ministerial Performance Contract (MPC) Implementation Challenges*

One of the current implementation challenges of the ministerial performance contract (MPC) signed between the president and his heads of ministries in Sierra Leone, a third-world and donor-driven country, would be enormous financial resource availability to meet financial targets as enshrined in the contract agreement. The performance indicators relied upon a large pool of resources, which many critics identified as bottlenecks in the implementation process. Further to this, the country's pool of financial resources has been staggering since the 2014 Ebola surge that devastated the West African nation's main export resource sector, the mining sector, with excruciating effects that sent the country into austerity measures with excruciating realities. The advent of COVID-19, which hit the country in the early period of 2020, cannot be disconnected from the numerous financial challenges the country would currently face in such an implementation trajectory. The resurgence to a peak of food insecurity from moderate to severe in most areas of the land in 2023 brings about a shift in the narrative of the West African nation's drive towards achieving sustainable development goals (WFP, 2023)<sup>[39]</sup>, especially Goal Two (Zero Hunger) and Goal Seventeen (Partnership for the Goals). Most of the country's resources are now being channelled to curb this challenge the country currently faces. In this regard, other sectors might face challenges of virement or reallocating the meagre available resources to settle more challenging areas that leave the others unattended.

The challenge of the micro-performance theory is that the performance of other government agencies, a minute part of the parent institution, is said to create a negative attitude towards the government in general (Van de Walle, S. & Geert B., 2003)<sup>[15]</sup>, so a ministry's departments whose performance is damaging to the bigger drive of the ministry can cause significant negative impact in the eyes of the public. In this vein, the citizens' perspective can signify an underperformance, which can be related to the parent ministry.

One of the criticisms that has continued to take center stage about the ministerial performance contract (MPC) is that the terms, which were meant to hold government ministers accountable by setting clearly defined targets and indicators, have largely been compromised by a lack of political will (Malena, 2009)<sup>[40]</sup> from the executive and the problem of bribery and corruption (Sadik-Zada, E.R. et al., 2024)<sup>[16]</sup>, which are also mentioned in the country's audit service institution, the Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL), in their 2024 report. However, even findings dated back to the 2023 audit report revealed troubling realities of missing funds and other financial irregularities that have dampened the spirit of citizens' trust and confidence in these government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), cataloguing a systemic problem of financial mismanagement, ineffectiveness, and embezzlement of state funds that these ministerial contracts intend to combat. However, Simpson, S.N.Y. & Buabeng, T. (2013)<sup>[31]</sup> identified financial and human resources as the key contributors in affecting the performance of state-owned enterprises in their drive to implement performance contracts. But the question that continues to be asked by some experts is: would the strive for ministerial accountability be followed by real and stringent actions from the office of the president, or would it fade out and chase the drains as many reform actions have so far witnessed in the past? Subsequently, the implementation of such high-level ministerial accountability requires both high-level political

commitment from the presidency and an effective institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation. Such mechanisms must be robust, as weak enforcement will render the initiative redundant. However, many political analysts and critics have argued that the initiative has faded into obscurity since the ministerial performance contract and its initial set of targets were introduced, and that is in contrast with its historic state launch in April 2024; from then to the end of 2025, little to nothing has been said about its end-of-contract results. Despite the slight cabinet reshuffle, it's still unknown whether these officials were relieved from office due to a failure in meeting the ministerial performance contract requirements or other reasons. Although the actions were praised as daring, many analysts, academics, and critics expressed dissatisfaction as to why the results of the ministerial performance contract did not even form part of the president's speech in the well of the Sierra Leone Parliament on August 7, 2025, during the state opening of the Fifth Session of the Fifth Republic of Sierra Leone.

A newspaper in the country, "Sierraloaded," has on 9th January, 2025, published news headlined "Unmet Expectation..... Maada Bio's Ministerial Performance Contract in Limbo." Figure 2 shows the front page of the newspaper.



Figure 2: the front page of Sierraloaded on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2025.

Source: Sierraloaded.com, 2025 <https://sierraloaded.sl/feature/unmet-expectations-bios-ministerial-performan/>

However, another newspaper magazine, Africa-press Sierra Leone, publishes a news headline on 16th April, 2025, citing the unofficial release of the results of the ministerial performance contract (MPC) on the official Facebook page of the country's current Chief Minister, who serves as the chief operations officer of the MPC. The report highlights six (6) underperforming ministries falling below 35% of the benchmark, including the Attorney General and the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Works and Public Assets, and the Ministry of Tourism. Some ministries, including the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Communication, Technology, and Innovation, performed at 80% and above, while several others achieved some level of moderate performance between 35% and 40%, like the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Défense, the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. Since the set performance benchmark is 50% and above, ministries such as the Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation are considered to have exceptional performance, while others, including the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Ministry of Transport and Aviation, and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, have strong performance with scores The Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs are also classified under the category of underperforming ministries, while some ministries are rated as falling under the category of satisfactory performers-scoring between 50% and 59%. They include the Ministry of Public Administration and Public Affairs, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, and the Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Security. Figure 3 below shows the president and his cabinet after the signing of the ministerial performance contract (MPC).



Figure 3: The president and his cabinet ministers after the signing of the ministerial performance contract (MPC)

Source: <https://www.africa-press.net/sierra-leone/all-news>

## 6. Conclusion

This paper highlights the significant potentials of the ministerial performance contract (MPC) in enhancing public sector governance in Sierra Leone, emphasizing their role in ensuring accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. So, by analysing the ministerial performance contracts between President Julius Maada Bio and his cabinet ministers in 2024, the study underscores the strategic alignment of these contracts with the country's development priorities outlined in the Mid-Term National Development Plan (MT-NDP: 2024-2030). The initiative, grounded in the principles of the new public management and the principal-agent theory, represents a transformative approach to public sector reform in Sierra Leone. The implementation of these maiden contracts faces challenges, particularly with resource constraints, institutional weaknesses, and the political will. So, addressing these thorny issues requires robust monitoring mechanisms, active citizen engagement, and sustained commitment from the executive to ensure successful realization of these performance contracts' objectives.

### *6.1. Research Implication*

The research offers valuable insights into the evolving role of performance contracts in strengthening governance frameworks in third-world countries. It contributes to the deeper understanding of how new public management reforms, particularly performance measurements, can be adopted to local contexts to foster greater public trust, harness citizen participation, and improve service delivery. This paper also informs policy discussions on public sector accountability in this West African nation and other post-conflict nations with fragile democracies, suggesting that performance contracts can be key tools in rebuilding governance structures.

### *6.2. Limitation of the study and future research trajectory*

While the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the ministerial performance contract (MPC), it is limited by several factors, including its primary reliance on secondary data from policy documents and key informant interviews with 45 participants. So, there is limited empirical evidence for the actual outcomes and impacts of these contracts on public service delivery. Additionally, the study focuses on a single country's experience, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. Financial and resource constraints, which are essential for the contracts' success, are addressed superficially without a thorough examination of their direct effects on implementation. Therefore, future researchers should aim to assess the actual outcomes of the ministerial performance contracts (MPC) in Sierra Leone by conducting longitudinal studies across other countries to track the progress of ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in meeting their targets.

A comparative study across other countries that have implemented similar public sector reforms or performance contracts could provide deeper and richer insights into the factors that influence the success or failure of such contracts. Future research could also explore the role of institutional frameworks, political will, and citizen participation in the sustainability of such performance contracts. Investigating the critical interplay of financial resource management and performance outcomes will be crucial for understanding the practical limitations of performance contracts in a resource-constrained and fragile democratic environment.

### *6.3. Recommendations*

For third-world countries like Sierra Leone, where institutions of satisfactory governance and public service delivery are still under establishment or are newly established and have not acquired the needed strength to operate at full capacity, it's, however, satisfactory to measure governance and public service delivery through inputs (in an objective sense) and outputs (results) that resonate with citizens' satisfaction.

Furthermore, measuring performance using publicly available data and by examining outputs or results against inputs will create a synergy between perception (intangibles) and reality (tangibles) in service delivery. For instance, a reduced number in maternal and child deaths signifies an effective government service delivery on the free health care initiative for lactating

mothers, pregnant women, and children under the age of five; a reduced number of homicide can be used as a measurable outcome for increased safety and security measures; increase in exports and decreased in imports of agricultural products can be used as a measure for food productivity and food security; reduced prices of local commodities can be used as a measure for government's efforts in controlling food prices and inflation; an increase in the rate of employment (employed graduates and skilled persons) can be used as a measure of government's drive to create employment for its citizens; and an increased in school enrolment and passes in external examination (all things being equal) can be used as a deliverable measure of the free quality basic and senior secondary education (MBSSE); and a decrease in road accidents also signifies tremendous road safety measures instituted by the Sierra Leone Road Safety Authority (SLRSA) and the road maintenance fund administration (RMFA). All these are transparent indicators (tangibles) that are parsimonious to the citizens. Like stated in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), "political leadership demonstrates exemplary governance when it manages development and transformation effectively, uses resources effectively, builds a broad consensus on reform, and cooperates with international partners" (Donner S. et al. 2024:5)<sup>[1]</sup>. This is what the citizens want to see, especially in developing nations.

The main question being asked by many is whether these ministers would actually support the president's accountability drive or would they try to sidestep or sabotage the initiative? Any performance contract or accountability system set in these ministries needs the full support of these ministers, who enjoyed so much political leverage. There is, however, so much scepticism in the public sphere surrounding the cabinet ministers' commitments, which is rooted in the historical context of reform promises that have not gotten the needed political will and institutional framework to succeed, which has created distrust. So, if the president is ready to improve public service delivery, increase accountability and transparency in governance, better utilize funds, rebuild public trust and confidence, and improve favourable international reception, he must strive to fully implement the ministerial performance contract and ensure that strong institutions are built to support such initiatives. Regular updates to citizens about the performance of these ministers and their ministries should form a core part of the implementation strategy.

Accordingly, because of a lack of political will and strong institutional foundations, political analysts, academics, and the general public believed that the ministerial performance contract has ended up being little more than a paper exercise without any real commitments and enforcement mechanisms. To resolve this, the president should ensure that strong institutions are built and robust actions taken to hold ministers and other officials accountable for their actions and inactions. The continuous scepticism from the public against appointed ministers will not stop until the larger structural problems are resolved.

Finally, as literacy skills and digital transformation improve efficiency (Koroma et al., 2024)<sup>[41]</sup>, citizen participation, and government accountability in public service delivery (Latupeirissa, J. et al., 2024)<sup>[42]</sup>, government ministries, departments, and agencies should continue to introduce and enforce the implementation of basic electronic or e-government systems to track performance

and monitor efficiency and effectiveness, for instance, the use of the biometric fingerprint or face recognition machine in MDAs. Hence, the deployment and implementation of e-government systems offer one of the utmost options for socio-economic development and for the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery.

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### **Appendix 1 - Semi-structured interviews**

#### **A. Perception of the Ministerial Performance Contract (MPCs)- Meaning and Understanding**

What is your understanding of the Ministerial Performance Contract (MPC)?

How does the MPCs differ from previous Ministerial accountability?

Do you believe the MPC changed how the ministers performed their duties?

In your view, is the MPC a genuine reform tool or a political tool in disguise?

Probes: Pressure to perform, fear of sanctions, and motivation

#### **B. Synergies or opportunities created by the MPC**

What positive change, if any, have you observed since the introduction of the MPC?

Has the MPC improved coordination between ministries and agencies?

Do the MPC encourage collaboration with civil society organizations and citizens?

Are there any institutional synergies supporting MPC implementation?

Probes: Planning, inter-ministerial coordination, monitoring efforts, and public reporting

**C. Transparency and Accountability**

Has the MPC improved transparency in government operations?

Are the MPC performance results accessible to the general public?

Are ministers held accountable for missed targets?

What happens when a minister underperforms?

Probes: Sanctions, cabinet reshuffle, media scrutiny, and parliamentary oversight

**D. Service delivery impact**

Has the MPC improved service delivery in your sector/community?

Which sectors show the most improvement?

Which sectors show the least improvement?

How do citizens experience these changes?

Probe: Education, Energy, Health, Roads, water, Agriculture

**E. Challenges to implementation**

What do you think are the most important challenges pertaining to the implementation of MPC?

Are financial constraints affecting performance?

What do you think will be the impact of the absence of funds on the implementation of the MPC?

Is political interference a challenge in the implementation process?

Are M&E systems available and strong enough to track results?

**F. Recommendations for improvement**

How can MPC implementation be strengthened?

What do you think needs to be changed when designing future MPC?

What do you propose, to make citizens participate to a greater extent?

Is it necessary to publish the outcomes of the MPC on an annual basis?

**Appendix 2: Popular quotes from respondents**

(I) Government official respondents:

"Ministers for the first time have targets set in writing. That in itself has brought pressure to perform, albeit very low pressure, but pressure nonetheless."

"Yes, there is the power of the president to fire, but politics also controls who remains and who is dismissed."

"It is not possible to assess progress when the necessary resources to achieve the objectives are absent."

(II) CSO actors:

"It looks good on paper, but we have not yet seen the consequences of failure."

(III) Citizens:

"Schools are better organized now, but energy, roads and water are still serious problems"

"Schools are better organized now, but roads and energy (electricity) are still serious problems."

"We hear about ministerial performance contracts on radio, but how is each minister doing their job we don't know"