

EDUCATE HER: Increasing Financial Investment for Gender Equality and Equity in Education

Budget Policy Brief



Key Messages:

1. Make deliberate efforts to allocate at least 20% of public budget and 6% of GDP to education and ensure proper accountability;
2. Promote equal access and equity to education for all, particularly for women and girls as well as persons with disability and marginalized groups;
3. Address gender disparities, barriers, and social norms that continued to undermine access to education; and
4. Invest in teachers training and professional development to curtail the shortage

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Liberia has made significant strides in rebuilding its shattered education system after a prolonged period of civil unrest that wrecked the country and took a toll on the entire system. The Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Education along with other partners has applied stern efforts in revamping the education system up to standard. Among many initiatives, Government has improved access to education through a declaration of a “free education program” which saw an increase in enrollment; the renewal of the B certificate teachers training augmented the C certificate program to address the shortage of qualified teachers, and a number of infrastructures development have also taken place. In addition, Government has sanctioned key national and international policies on education including the Inclusive Education Policy, Getting to Best Policy and the Education Reform Act. All of which are part of reform efforts that have resulted in increased access and improved quality to a larger extend which are now reflected in schools and learning outcomes of students across the country.

Despite the policy, legal and contextual changes, and improvements, there are challenges that continue to confront the sector. Particularly, inadequate financing, limited trained/qualified teachers, poor infrastructure, retention, and completion rate remain low and the issue of teachers’ salary remains a grave concern. These longstanding issues have and continue to affect students’ learning, especially girls and women including persons with disabilities are the most affected group of people.

To address these issues and make the education system vibrant, Government needs to prioritize and allocate more funding to the education sector to improve infrastructures, train more teachers, develop a standardized curriculum, upgrade libraries and most importantly provide better compensation for teachers. Without adequate funding and budgetary support to education, these issues will continuously affect access, quality, and equity which have the proclivity to undermine students learning and the overall education system.

Introduction

This policy brief reviews and analyses government budgetary allocation to education as share of the national budget and the extent to which it has improved the sector or not. It disaggregates what percentage of the budget goes to education and determines if government is in compliance with 20% public expenditure on education or 6% GDP as recommended by Incheon 2015 Declaration of which Liberia is a party. In addition, it explores budget expenditure level to determine whether approved allocation is in line with actual expenditure or veers from it; and then identify which aspect of education budget gets more funding. This is necessary to help understand the budget process as well as allocation of resources so as to engage in budget advocacy to influence policymakers' decision in terms of allocation of more funding to education.

This is intended to support Education HER and partners efforts to solicit increased funding and budgetary allocation to education. It is geared towards achieving "Incheon 2015 Declaration 20% of national budget or 6% of Government (GDP) to education as well as Sustainable Development Goal four (4) which emphasizes" quality education".

More importantly, it emphasizes on full implementation of National Policy on Girls Education (NPGE) with a view to increase access, equity and improve quality education, mainly girls and women as well as persons with disabilities and marginalized groups across primary, basic and secondary and tertiary school levels. As funding priorities include provision for curriculum development, monitoring and evaluation, development and improvement of education infrastructure, and teachers training government and its partners must also prioritize mainstreaming gender issues. There exists limited funding, institutional capacity and mechanisms for the implementation of NPGE; a lack of technical capacity to mainstream gender and to implement the more technical aspects of the policy; lack of trained educators on gender sensitive education planning and programming; and a lack of coordination among multi-stakeholders, including across Ministries of Gender, Health, Education and Justice, as well as actors within the education sector.

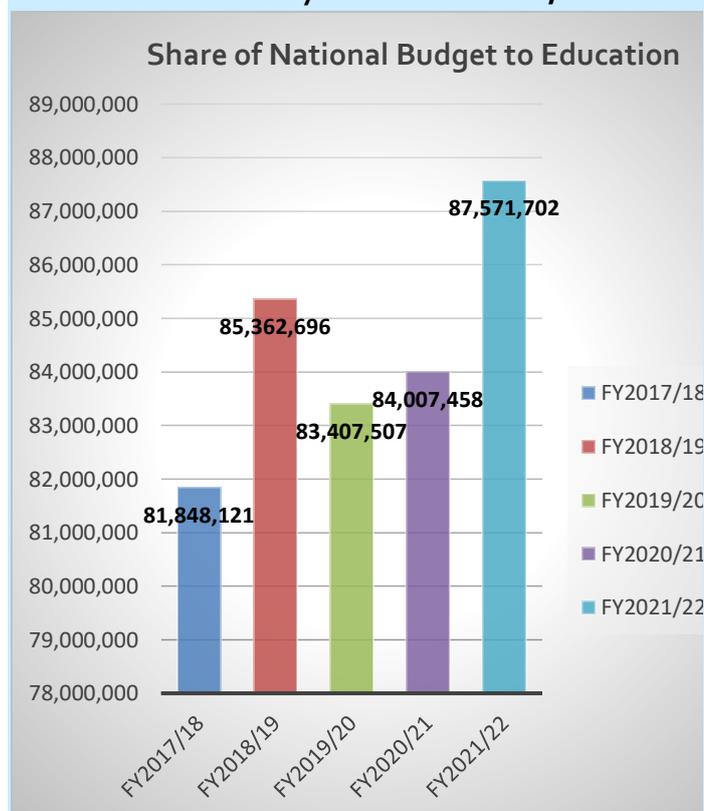
Main Objectives

- Streamline complex budget information to enable stakeholders understand, keep track and as well monitor budget process and execution closely,
- To highlight issue of inadequate funding to education so as to inform policymakers decision making on financing to education;
- Encourage activists and stakeholders as well as CSOs participation in budget decision making processes on education;
- Advocate for adequate budget allocation for the effective implementation of the NPGE and gender-mainstreaming in the Ministry of Education's budget and
- Advocate for budgetary increment to meet internationally recommended 20% of public spending and 6% of GDP to education as recommended in 2015 Incheon Declaration which Liberia is a signatory

What share of Government Budget is allocated to Education

Over the past fiscal periods from 2017 to 2021, the share of the national budget allocated to education has been around 80 plus million with intermittent increases as depicted in the chart below. In 2017/2018, allocation to the education sector amounted to 81.8 million which represents 14.9 % out of the 545.5 million fiscal budget. While in 2020/21 allocation to education amounted to 84.7 million, representing 14.8 % out of 570 million of the national budget. This indicates a difference of 3.5 million upward trends in allocation to education from the previous year. However, from these figures, the volume of public expenditures allotted to education has shown a slight increase but the share of that as a proportion of overall government expenditure has averaged just 12% over the last few years.

Source: Ministry of Finance, Liberia



Despite the slight increased and floating trends in allocation to education, these allotments are

however still not enough to guarantee adequate resources to address longstanding issues of poor infrastructures, limited trained and qualified teachers, and poor salary structure among others that continued to affect and undermine efficacy and productivity in the sector. Lots of schools are still underdeveloped without basic infrastructures such as befitting classrooms with chairs, textbooks and, well-equip libraries. Also trained and qualified teachers remain a huge constraint, while poor remuneration is common and has given rise to exploitation and corruption in schools by some unscrupulous teachers who use their position to take bribes and exploit students. This indicates that the share of budgetary allocation to education remained inadequate to cover basic and critical needs in the sector. If quality, access, and equity in education must be achieved, Government must commit budgetary increment to education.

In addition to inadequate funding to education, the Government of Liberia is yet to achieve the Incheon 2015 Declaration which required at least 20% recommended benchmark of public expenditure to education or 6% GDP to enhance quality education by member countries. This further corroborates the fact that government investment in education has been inadequate and inefficient at both national and international levels. These among others provide genuine and compelling reasons for a substantial increase in the education budget, not only to achieve Incheon 2015 Declaration benchmark, but also Sustainable Development Goal-4(SDG4) on quality education as well as government own commitment. Without adequate funding and support for education, it is difficult to achieve vibrant education system.

Expenditure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to Education

| Liberia - Government Education expenditure | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Date | Education Expenditure (\$M) | Education Expenditure (%Bud.) | Education Expenditure (%GDP) | Education Expenditure P.C |
| 2020 | 68.1 | | 2.31% | \$13 |
| 2019 | 69.7 | | 2.27% | \$14 |
| 2018 | 84.3 | 8.15% | 2.58% | \$18 |
| 2017 | 90.7 | 8.34% | 2.76% | \$19 |
| 2016 | 69.9 | 7.01% | 2.15% | \$16 |
| 2015 | 67.1 | 7.22% | 2.17% | \$16 |
| 2014 | 70.4 | 6.89% | 2.28% | \$17 |
| 2013 | 52.8 | 4.67% | 1.73% | \$13 |
| 2012 | 47.5 | 5.18% | 1.78% | \$12 |
| 2008 | 28.5 | 6.45% | 1.70% | \$8 |
| 1980 | 53.5 | | 6.26% | \$29 |
| 1978 | 50.2 | | 6.99% | \$29 |

The share of Liberia's GDP to education has been pretty low for more than a decade. Since 2008, Liberia's GDP has averaged around ¹ 1.7 between 2008 to 2013, and slightly went up to 2.28 in 2014, and recently increased by a single digit to 2.3 in 2020 as depicted in the far-right table. World Bank also affirmed that, ²in 2020, public spending on education as a share of GDP for Liberia was 2.3 %. This indicates that Liberia's public spending on education in terms of GDP has fluctuated substantially in the past few years but ended at 2.3 % 2020 as displayed in the graph below and remains low among many African countries.

Although there was a single digit increase in 2020 from 2.27 in 2019 to 2.3%. However, Liberia still falls below the 6% GDP recommended by Incheon 2015 Declaration which required every country to commit and undertake steps towards promoting education for all with emphasis on the following: ³the **right to education; equity in education; inclusive education; quality education and lifelong learning**. Liberia is also placed at the lower bottom in Africa with Guinea, Sudan, and others in terms of percentage of GDP to education.

¹ <https://countryeconomy.com/government/expenditure/education/liberia>

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS?locations=LR>

³ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2018-12-gpe-evaluation-report-liberia.pdf>

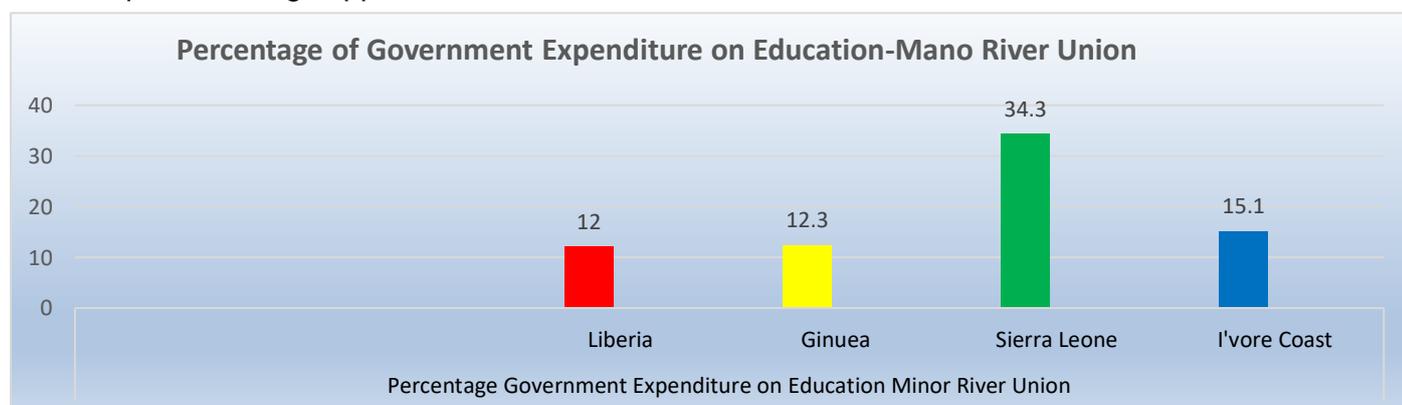
How Does Education Budget Compare to Other Sectors?

Government allocation of resources to various sectors is often based on overall revenue envelop and set priorities. This is usually done during budget formulation and approval stages by the Executive and National Legislature. These two branches of government decide which share of the national budget is allocated to each ministry or agency based on importance or political interest. From the chart below, when education budget is compared with other sectors like security and rule law sector, public administration sector, or health sector, it is placed in the third quadrant. However, it is important to note that despite being in the third quadrant, allocation made to education still has not reached the recommended 20% of Incheon 2015 Declaration and 6% GDP required by member countries globally.

| Sector | FY2017-18 Actual | FY2018-19 Budget | FY2018-19 Est. Outturn | FY2019-20 Budget | FY2020-21 Projection | FY2021-22 Projection |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 01 Public Administration Sector | 175,027,441 | 177,442,775 | 150,188,221 | 178,009,943 | 187,476,465 | 175,846,804 |
| 02 Municipal Government Sector | 17,260,587 | 21,086,194 | 17,805,059 | 20,754,838 | 19,657,396 | 21,085,389 |
| 03 Transparency and Accountability Sector | 44,866,260 | 21,933,442 | 21,638,069 | 19,360,517 | 19,382,183 | 19,723,009 |
| 04 Security and Rule of Law Sector | 89,130,433 | 86,180,273 | 81,121,251 | 77,599,177 | 82,611,203 | 82,597,986 |
| 05 Health Sector | 73,064,527 | 81,704,885 | 73,896,512 | 80,340,072 | 80,647,622 | 84,535,377 |
| 06 Social Development Services Sector | 9,632,499 | 11,824,493 | 8,423,939 | 10,659,407 | 9,414,025 | 10,646,328 |
| 07 Education Sector | 81,848,121 | 85,362,696 | 75,367,917 | 83,407,570 | 84,007,458 | 87,571,702 |
| 08 Energy and Environment Sector | 15,060,621 | 12,337,577 | 11,236,135 | 11,219,703 | 12,747,746 | 12,717,706 |
| 09 Agriculture Sector | 4,879,118 | 7,851,066 | 6,200,179 | 5,812,432 | 5,814,473 | 5,988,296 |
| 10 Infrastructure and Basic Services Sector | 16,582,909 | 57,248,486 | 28,291,708 | 32,830,236 | 26,274,593 | 30,286,129 |
| 11 Industry and Commerce Sector | 8,035,069 | 7,176,113 | 6,836,564 | 5,913,105 | 6,321,467 | 6,322,168 |
| Grand Total | 535,387,585 | 570,148,000 | 481,005,554 | 525,907,000 | 534,354,633 | 537,320,894 |

Source: Ministry of Finance Liberia <https://www.mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/docs/the-national-budget>

Moreover, the current size of the education budget is below the government's target of the Education Sector Plan 2010-20 and Global Partnership for Education minimum benchmark of (20%), and the lowest compared with other countries in the sub-region. Besides, when compared to other countries in the Mano River Union, Liberia is rated the lowest as seen in the table below in terms of allocation to the education sector. As a result of this, there is little or no room for investment in infrastructure development, teachers' training, and curriculum development as well as procurement of textbooks and other essential instructional materials and supplies to foster quality teaching and a conducive learning environment. This undermines access to quality education due to inadequate funding support.



Work Bank/UNESCO Statistics -2021

Education Spending Trends: Where Does the Money Go?

Budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Education is intended to fund key activities and one area that gets huge share is compensation. In fiscal year 2019/20 out of **US\$ 525.91 million budget, education received US\$83.4 million which represents 15.8%. Of that amount, compensation of teachers got \$37,646,893 million which represent 45%. While in FY2020/21 of US\$570 million budget, education got US\$ 79.4 and of the amount, compensation was allotted \$35, 671013 reflecting 44.8%.** From the stats above, compensation of employee account for almost half of education budget. When compensation is minus from education budget, there is nearly nothing substantial left to finance other essential needs such as infrastructure development, teachers' training and curriculum development due to limited resources. According to 2019 data from Ministry of Education, there are about 55,000 teachers across the country. These teachers are on education payroll; however, they have repeatedly complained about low salaries/wages when income is compared to other civil servants.

This has been a critical issue and remains as one of the fundamental reasons to increase funding to education, because teachers are the bedrock and foundation to quality education system. Without teachers helping to mold and transform the minds of students to become productive citizens, achieving quality education could be nearly impossible. Therefore, teachers must be well-paid for their invaluable contributions and services to the education sector.

Apart from compensation, procurement of goods and services in FY2019/20 got \$5,244,484 a share of US\$85,362,696 education budget while in FY2020/21, US\$6,887,686 was allotted to procurement out of \$79.4 million of education budget

Although this may not be that huge, it is also one key area public money is spent to purchase goods, services, and works. Every year, hundreds of dollars are spent to purchase educational materials such as stationeries including textbooks, chalks, copybooks, pens/pencils, yet schools across the country still lack much-needed supplies. Again, this further justifies why budgetary increment to education is necessary to provide needed educational materials and supplies to schools across the country.

Additionally, universities, colleges, polytechnic, vocational and technical institutions as well public schools combined received in lump-sum \$44,158,877 in 2019/20 representing 51.7% while in 2020/21 got \$41, 898, 8181 which accounts for 42.4%, a downward shift from the previous year. These allotments are used for both financial, administrative support and subsidies as part of government efforts to fund public universities as well as complement privately owned universities and faith-based institutions in the country as they help in providing and making education accessible. But many of them get a very little share of the budget as subsidies as they support the Education Ministry in achieving its statutory mandates to provide education.

Early Childhood, Basic and Secondary Education also a get share of the budget, but the amount is far less to make any substantial impact. These three categories of schooling are based on a range of ages. However, students' enrollment has increased at all levels in recent years. According to World Bank data, in 2015, 1.46 million students were enrolled, and more children are enrolled in Junior High School (JH) and Senior High School (SH) than the previous year. With an increased in students' enrollment also comes with cost in terms of qualified teachers and conducive classrooms which also necessitates the need for budgetary increment to education.

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⁴ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-16-Liberia-ESP-IR.pdf>
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/481011575583469840/pdf/Liberia-Education-Sector-Analysis.pdf>

National Instruments

The Government of Liberia has sanctioned several key national and international instruments as part of effort to enhance and provide equal access and quality education, but the application of these instruments somehow remains weak and veer from what is in black and white or hardly get enforced due to lack of interest or political will. For example, the following laws and policies were enacted/approved including **Education Reform Act 2011**, the **Getting to Best Roadmap 2015** the **Getting to Best Priorities 2015-2017** was designed to address the most present challenges in the sector, **Education Sector Analysis 2016**, **MoE Education Sector Plan 2010-2020**. In addition, the **NPGE emphasized provisions to improve girls' access to quality education (3.2); increase girls' retention and completion rates (4.2); and enhance rights and protection for girls (5.2)**. It also sets out the institutional framework for policy implementation (6.1); the mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and reporting (7.1, 7.2); and the overall strategies for resource mobilization (8.1).

These instruments were purposely crafted to compliment the Ministry of Education efforts to increase access to education, improve the quality of schools and ensure children learn relevant knowledge and skills to contribute to societal development. However, enforcement of the laws remains somehow weak and ineffective as many are yet to be realized. For example, section (9.1a) of the Education Reform Law states, "in addition to government recurrent budget allocation, all concession agreements for investment in the extractive and other non-renewable resource sectors as well as in the agriculture sector and major privatization contracts, shall require 60% of any signature fees realized to education budget; and the terms and conditions of all such agreements and contracts shall include a negotiated fixed annual amount as social responsibility fees for education, which when paid shall be available as transfer and or subside to the annual cost of education in Liberia. Interestingly enforcement and compliance remain a challenge in ensuring that companies and concessionaires commit to "60% of signature fees as required".

International Instruments

In addition to existing national instruments, the Government of Liberia is also a signatory to lots of international instruments on education including Dakar Framework for Action, Abidjan Principles, Incheon 2015 Declaration which talks about 20% of public expenditure on education or 6% GDP to education. The Convention on the Rights of a Child as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also emphasized the right to education. These instruments highlight the importance of right to education, eliminating social/societal barriers, norms and disparities, promoting equal access and opportunities to education, bridging gender gap and promoting gender mainstreaming and inclusive education among others. Yet, Government commitment in application, enforcement as well as compliance to these conventions remain slow and most of the benchmarks are far from being achieved. This is as a result of lack of full understanding of a problem, insufficient evidence or data, unclear focus, political manipulation, context differences as well as convolution of laws and policies. From a public policy perspective, policies don't fail on their own, it is within complex, messy polarized political and weak governance system; or one in which there is a lack of political will to ensure effective policy implementation. This is likely the case in Liberia as many laws and policies are yet to be fully implemented

Key Observations and Takeaways

- 1) Budget trends and allocations to education remain one of the least in African and lowest compared to other countries within the Mano River Union. Liberia is yet to be on par with other nations in terms of public spending and lacking behind in achieving Incheon 2015 Declaration;
- 2) Several national and international policies, laws, and protocols on education have been sanctioned and promulgated, but applications often remain weak and ineffective either due to lack of interest and or political will among decision-makers.
- 3) The share of the national budget to education has not exceeded 87 million over the last decade and government expenditure on education in terms of GDP remain low between 1.7 to 2.3 since 1980 when Liberia reached 6.2 GDP;
- 4) Immense efforts have been applied to revamp Liberia's fragile education system, however, poor infrastructure including low salaries as curriculum development, and provision of critical education materials remain a grave concern if quality education is to be achieved
- 5) Spending on education remains below both Government's targets and several key benchmarks of international instruments on education which Liberia is a signatory

Recommendations

- 1) Increase government spending on education to at least 20% of public expenditure and 6% of GDP if quality education including adequate school infrastructures and facilities, conducive learning environment, well-paid teachers, standardized curriculum and availability of textbooks and improved libraries must be achieved. Without adequate public funding to education, it is nearly impossible to achieve quality;
- 2) Ensure gender mainstreaming in Education budget in order to address key gender and cultural issues that affect girls' attendance retention and completion in schools)
- 3) Implement Section 8.1 of the NPGE which outlines strategies for resource mobilization;
- 4) enforce Chapter 9 (A and B) of the Education Reform Act of 2011 on education financing and exert more efforts to mobilize domestic resources to increase education budgetary allocation to alleviate resource constrains and address school-related difficulties that continued to undermine quality education; and
- 5) Address the recurrent issues of infrastructures, shortage of trained and unqualified teachers among others. This means attention should be placed on increment in areas that link to quality and improvement of the education system.

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