

DEVELOP A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL GIRLS' EDUCATION POLICY

Written by Aisha Cooper Bruce, Gender and Advocacy Consultant

Overview

The **National Policy on Girls' Education (NPGE 2021 – 2026)** aims to provide adequate access to affordable and quality education and promote gender equity and equality through the educational system. The key purpose of the NPGE is to “establish guiding principles in Liberia's endeavors to eliminate gender disparity and identify priorities for government and stakeholder action”.

“To ensure gender equality, education systems must act explicitly to eliminate gender bias and discrimination resulting from social and cultural attitudes and practices and economic status.” —Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, UNESCO, 2015

As we commit to promoting gender equity and equality in education, it is imperative to create educational environments that not only improve access for girls but also challenge and change the structural inequalities that hinder their progress. Gender-transformative initiatives in education seeks to not only increase girls' access to education but to fundamentally shift the power dynamics, social norms, and systemic barriers that disadvantage girls. By addressing underlying inequalities and fostering environments where girls can thrive, this approach promotes long-lasting, positive change in the lives of girls and society as a whole

With this outlook, strategies within the education sector must go beyond responding to the gender gaps within the education system, and strategically address and transforming social/economic power dynamics that create those gaps.

The goal now, is to work towards a more gender-transformative plan that would challenge structures and ideologies that justify and perpetuate gender inequality in education.

This Policy Brief provides an analysis of a gender-transformative education sector with recommendations of key strategies for action.

OUR AIM is to develop a well-defined operational plan with budget for the effective implementation of the NPGE with clear gender transformative targets and strategies to guide for policy actors, funders, and practitioners.

POLICY FOCUS

Policy Focus: Align the Education Sector Plan to the National Policy on Girls Education to ensure a Gender Transformative Education Sector.

POLICY POINTS

CONSOLIDATE: Map out corresponding strategies to develop a comprehensive gender transformative implementation plan and budget

COORDINATE: Set up a multi-sectoral taskforce of national and international partners to guide the execution of a gender-transformative interventions in a holistic and coordinated manner.

EVALUATE: Support the Planning, Research and Development at MoE to set a comprehensive MEL e-platform and tools for tracking girls' education indicators in Liberia.

See page 8 for more details.

Our advocacy focus is to: **To advocate for the development of a well-defined operational plan with budget for the implementation of the NPGE with clear gender transformative targets and strategies** to guide for policy actors, funders, and practitioners.

Moving Towards a Gender Transformative Education Sector

Understanding the distinction between gender-responsive and gender-transformative interventions

Gender responsive interventions identifies and addresses the different needs of girls, boys, women and men to promote equal outcomes. However, it does not explicitly seek to redress gender inequalities. Gender transformative Interventions goes beyond improving access to education for girls and women. Gender- transformative approaches encourages teachers, principals, parents and wider community members, to reflect on gender roles, practices and power dynamics that prevail and limit learning.

Gender Responsive Interventions¹	Gender Transformative Interventions
Focused on RESPONDING to the effects of the problem	Focused on TRANSFORMING the system and structures that caused the problem
Addresses the WHAT	Addresses the WHY
Usually have short-term results	Usually have long-term results
Does not need sustainable financial investments and high technical capacities	Takes substantial financial investments and technical capacities
Usually need constant engagement and funding to be sustained as it focuses on responsive interventions	Can be sustained in the long term with minimal engagement and funding as it focuses on systemic change

Addressing Gender Disparities

There is relatively gender parity as it relates to enrollment in Liberia. Data from the last two annual school censuses suggests gender parity in gross enrollment ratio (GER) with a slight increase for girls at both JSE and SSE levels (MOE, 2021 & 2022). This is a significant achievement, indicating that efforts to close the gender gap at secondary levels are paying off. But gender parity — which measures the ratio of boys and girls in school, with the goal of having equality — is only one part of the equation. Addressing the barriers to the retention and completion of girls in school, with the goal of equity — is the other.

Education systems often reinforce harmful gender norms by dictating acceptable behaviors and subjects for boys and girls. These biases often lead girls to drop out of school early and not acquiring the necessary skills to enter the job market, especially in the areas of science and technology. Boys also face obstacles when they deviate from traditional expectations of acceptable professions and interests for male students.

Gender-transformative education is also crucial in challenging traditional norms and stereotypes that contribute to the discrimination of pregnant and parenting adolescents; presenting significant barriers in accessing and continuing their education. Despite Liberia having programs that provide for the re-entry of parenting girls to school, clear policies that set guidelines for implementation remain a challenge.

Education systems that are 'gender-transformative' hold huge potential to change the course of such inequities.

¹ Desk Review of Gender-Responsive Interventions in Education: Informing GPE Program Development in Liberia, Educate HER, Making Enterprise, July 2024

Investing in Gender- Transformative Initiatives

A gender-transformative approach, starting from early childhood, has the power to break harmful gender norms and promote fairness. According to UNICEF², including girls in quality education could boost developing countries by \$112 billion yearly. Beyond economics, this shift could support social justice, reduce gender-based violence, and empower women in decision-making.

Key areas for investment should include:

1. Adequate Funding and Technical Capacity for the Development the Systems and Structures to support the Effective Implementation of Laws, Policies, and National Programs.
2. Effective Coordination and Monitoring Systems between CSOs, Community/Traditional Leaders and Duty Bearers.
3. Decentralization of Decision-Making, Financial and Technical Resources
4. Strategic Partnerships with the Media that will engage the public in Gender and Policy Dialogues.
5. Public Forums and School-based Curricula that engage Men and Boys with Women and Girls in Gender Dialogues.
6. Effective Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Processes
7. Strategic Opportunities for Women and Girls to be Well-Positioned at the Decision-making Table

Aligning the National Policy on Girls' Education with Key Gender Transformative Strategies

The goal now, is to develop a well-defined operational plan with budget for the effective implementation of the NPGE with clear gender transformative targets and strategies to guide for policy actors, funders, and practitioners. As we work to develop an effective implementation plan for the NGEF, **key strategies outlined in the NGEF must be prioritized and adapted in alignment with the following gender transformative strategies.** A detailed work plan, with clear targets and an adequate budget should be developed accordingly.

Key Gender Transformative Strategies ³	
Addressing Gender Norms and Stereotypes	Challenging societal norms: A gender-transformative initiative works to confront and shift harmful gender norms, such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and perceptions about the role of women in society.
	Promoting positive role models: Programs emphasize the importance of showcasing female role models in education, leadership, and non-traditional career paths to challenge stereotypes.
Empowerment and Agency	Building girls' agency: Girls are empowered to make decisions about their own lives, including their education, health, and career aspirations. This involves developing critical thinking, leadership skills, and confidence.
	Community involvement: Initiatives focus on engaging not just girls, but also their families, communities, and male counterparts to foster a supportive environment for girls' education and empowerment.
Safe and Inclusive	Gender-sensitive infrastructure: Ensuring schools have safe, girl-friendly facilities, such as separate sanitation facilities, and policies to protect against gender-based violence and harassment.

² <https://www.unicef.org/media/113166/file/Gender%20Transformative%20Education.pdf>

³ Desk Review of Gender-Responsive Interventions in Education: Informing GPE Program Development in Liberia, Educate HER, Making Enterprise, July 2024

Learning Environments	Teacher training: Educators are trained to be aware of gender biases and to use inclusive teaching methods that encourage both girls and boys to succeed without reinforcing stereotypes.
Addressing Systemic Barriers	Policy reform: A gender-transformative initiative advocates for changes in laws and policies that perpetuate gender inequalities, such as discriminatory school regulations or lack of policies addressing early marriage and school dropouts.
	Economic support: Providing financial assistance, such as scholarships or cash transfers, helps reduce economic barriers that disproportionately affect girls' ability to stay in school.
Promoting Girls' Health and Well-being	Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education: Teaching girls about their rights and health, including menstrual health management, helps ensure they can stay in school and make informed decisions.
	Health services: Access to health care, particularly sexual and reproductive health services, ensures that girls can manage health challenges that often disrupt their education.
Leadership and Representation	Girls as leaders: Gender-transformative initiatives focus on promoting leadership opportunities for girls within schools and communities, fostering future female leaders.
	Equal representation in decision-making: Ensuring that girls' voices are included in education policy discussions and decision-making processes at local and national levels.
Monitoring and Accountability	Measuring transformative impact: Initiatives include gender-specific monitoring systems that track changes not only in girls' access to education but also in their empowerment, safety, and the dismantling of harmful gender norms.
	Accountability mechanisms: Governments, schools, and communities are held accountable for creating gender-equitable educational environments.

Conclusion

Gender-transformative education isn't just about enhancing access; it's a catalyst for societal and systemic change, empowering individuals to confront and transform deep-rooted gender biases. Tools need to be developed to strengthen the gender approach in school infrastructure, teacher training, community engagement, and gender-transformative pedagogy. FAWE, in partnership with the UNESCO IICBA and UNICEF, recently launched a digitalized training⁴ to equip teachers with the requisite skills to understand and address the specific learning needs of both girls and boys in the classroom.

Much more scaling of and research in gender-transformative education is needed. Continued monitoring and targeted interventions are crucial to ensure sustained progress and address any disparities that might emerge. **Investing in gender-transformative education is not an option; it's critical to ensuring equality and EQUITY in the education sector.**

Our aim is to develop a well-defined operational plan with budget for the effective implementation of the National Policy on Girls Education (2021-2026), aligned with and supported by the Education Sector Plan (2023-2026), that will provide clear gender transformative targets and strategies for policy actors, funders and practitioners.

⁴ <https://cvi.iicba.unesco.org/>

It is imperative that the Government of Liberia and its partners:

Policy Focus: Align the Education Sector Plan to the National Policy on Girls Education to ensure a Gender Transformative Education Sector

1. **CONSOLIDATE: Map out corresponding strategies to develop a comprehensive gender transformative implementation plan.** The plan will identify the key strategies for promoting girls' education as outlined in both documents and develop gender transformative outcomes that will produce joint results for the ESP and NPGE. This plan will help to consolidate the financial and technical resources to meet joint targets. The implementation will focus on consolidating the financial resources available in reaching the girls education financing target of least 5% of the Ministry of Education budget. The strategies will consider the perspective of diverse education stakeholders.
2. **COORDINATE: Set up a multi-sectoral taskforce of national and international partners to guide the execution of gender-transformative interventions in a holistic and coordinated manner.** There is a strategy in the ESP to develop an inter-sectoral task team to research the gendered root causes for the lack of access and early dropout, such as poverty, lack of parental guidance, cultural practices, SRGBV, school distances or location, and the quality of the learning environment and develop strategies to address these challenges. This taskforce should also be mandated to review and advise on policies and programming, to ensure the collective efforts of education officials and stakeholders are more gender transformative.
3. **EVALUATE: Support the Planning, Research and Development department at MoE to set a comprehensive MEL e-platform and tools for tracking girls' education in Liberia.** The government can ensure its commitment to research and develop in education by approving the National Education Sector Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Policy. Education partners can lend their technical and financial support in developing and managing a comprehensive M&E Tool and system for Girls Education. Tracking of the 16 indicators listed in the NPGE can be supported by the development of a database framework for girls' education. This database will translate into tools like the Girls' Education Report Card which will inform decision-making and adequate financing for Girls' Education.

Educate HER's Current Commitment

Since 2022, Educate HER has worked closely with the Department of Planning, Research, and Development to conduct quarterly data collection and analysis on girls' education. We are committed to expanding that partnership to provide tangible supports that are in line with section 3.1 of the ESP and section 7 of the NPGE. With financial support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Education Out Loud, through Oxfam Denmark, we will partner with MoE to develop, and manage the National Girls Education Dashboard. This dashboard is for stakeholders to access (gender-) disaggregated data needed to inform school policies and gender-specific programming and accelerate the National Policy on Girls' Education implementation. Educate HER intends to make sure data related to girls' education in Liberia is collected in line with the Girls' Education Policy, up to date, and publicly available for education stakeholders to review for program planning, education financing, and policy review.

ABOUT THE EDUCATE HER COALITION

The Educate HER Coalition advocates for the implementation of policies that promote girls' education in Liberia. Their work focuses on leveraging strategic partnerships and strategic advocacy initiatives to promote gender equity and equality in education. The coalition strives to maintain already established relationships with the key stakeholders and builds strategic partnerships with government line-ministries, civil society organizations, donors women's rights groups, autonomous social movements, and media institutions for the promotion of gender equality and equity in education in Liberia. This coalition currently consists of approximately 30 civil society organizations, women's rights groups, media institutions, and allies committed to gender programming and advocacy in the education sector.

The Educate HER Coalition is supported by the Educate HER Consortium, which comprises of two women-led civil society organizations in Liberia: Helping Our People Excel (HOPE), and Paramount Young Women Initiative (PAYOWI). HOPE and PAYOWI are national-level, women-led organizations, with experience in advocacy, education, policy development, and gender mainstreaming. To join the Educate HER coalition, please contact us at: info@educateherlib.com

Visit our website: www.educateherlib.com to access the Girls Education Dashboard and download the electronic copy of this document and the publications listed below:

- Desk Review of Gender-Responsive Interventions in Education: Informing GPE Program Development in Liberia
- Simplified Version and Full Version of the National Policy on Girls Education
- Educate HER Policy Brief: Align the Education Sector Plan with the National Policy on Girls Education
- EDUCATE HER: Increasing Financial Investment for Gender Equality and Equity in Education Budget Policy
- Mapping of National Education Policy and Decision-Making Forums & Platforms

Educate HER

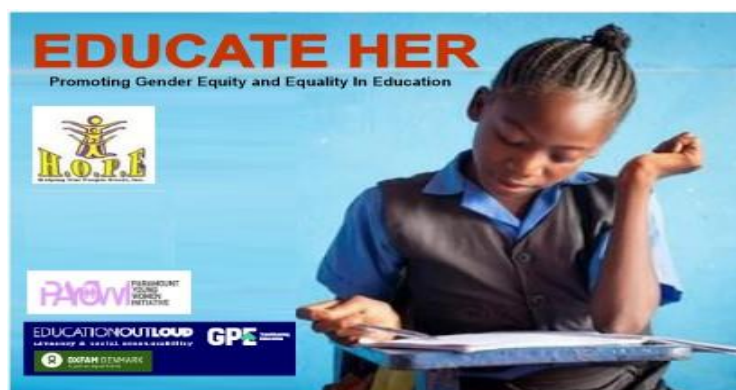
c/o Helping Our People Excel (HOPE), Inc.
Tubman Boulevard/Sophie's Junction, Congo
Town, Monrovia, Liberia

Email: info@educateherlib.com

Website: www.educateherlib.com

Facebook: [Educate HER Liberia](https://www.facebook.com/EducateHERLiberia)

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Educate HER seek to improve the implementation and monitoring of the National Policy on Girls' Education, by focusing increasing the commitment of policymakers and key stakeholders to create an enabling environment and improving monitoring and accountability of county and national stakeholders.