

## **A SEVEN- MINUTE PLENARY ADDRESS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE**

The President of the General Conference  
Madam Director General of UNESCO  
The Chairman of the Executive Board  
Fellow Delegates  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Greetings and warm felicitations on behalf of the President, Government, and People of the Republic of Liberia. I congratulate the President on his election as President of the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO and reaffirm the faith and commitment of the Government and people of Liberia to UNESCO's ideals and Principles.

Liberia celebrated twelve years of uninterrupted peace this year, and we would like to express our thanks and appreciation for the support of UNESCO and its contribution in the sustenance of peace in Liberia.

Please accept our gratitude for the quick Ebola response under your Emergency Funds. We know that educating more communities on Ebola was essential for changing their behaviors.

I would like to pause here for a parable, a story that both contributed to the Ebola crisis and is representative of the education situation in Liberia which contributes to the challenges we face, and are battling with the help of UNESCO:

There was once a town built just beyond the bend in a large river. One day whilst playing upon the shore, children noticed three bodies floating in the water. They ran for help, and the townsfolk were quick to arrive on the scene and pull the bodies from the river. The first person was dead, and they buried the body. The second was alive, but quite ill, and was taken to the hospital. The third was a healthy child, and the townsfolk, in keeping with an age-old African practice, placed her within a family where she thrived.

From that day forward and for a number of years to come, however, more and more bodies came floating down the river each day. The good people of the town became quite adept at pulling bodies out of the water and tending to them. The practice continued for years and the townsfolk developed even more elaborate ways to reclaim bodies and care for them.

Unfortunately, though, at no time, during all the years that passed, and despite the generous efforts on the part of so many, did anyone think of going up the river, beyond the bend, to find out just why, on a daily basis, bodies increasingly came floating down the river.

Mr. President, Liberia's current state of affairs is representative of the town beyond the bend in the river. If we were to just walk up around the curve, we would discover that at the root of so many of our challenges rests the education emergency. The Liberian Education Sector is experiencing immense stress, and these challenges are obstructing the path forward for our country as a whole.

The Ebola epidemic rendered it necessary to close schools for 6 months. The combination of a 6-month gap in students' learning and continuing hardships linked to Ebola has further weakened an education

system that was still recovering from the 14 year civil war. In many parts of Liberia, the education system has collapsed. **Over 313,000 children aged between 6 and 11 years are believed to be out-of-school.**<sup>1</sup>

- More than 80% of young people aged 15 – 24 are illiterate
- 1/3 of young people are not in employment, education or training
- There are not enough safe and quality schools
- Core literacy and numeracy skills are not taught
- Over a third of our teachers are not qualified
- Girls are less likely to enroll, stay in school and graduate
- Secondary level education is under resourced.

However, one should not forget that huge progress has been made since the end of conflict 12 years ago. With support from our partners, local and international NGOs, Liberians have been rebuilding the education system. We are building schools and improving the quality of teaching. Budgetary allocation for the education sector has had marginal improvement over time. Strong central leadership from the Government of Liberia has resulted in improvements over the last decade.

Much more, however, needs to be done. The current education system is failing Liberia's students and, without prompt and unified action, another generation will lose out on the opportunity to learn. Liberia is determined to overhaul the entire education system.

**We must act now to stop another generation losing out on an education. Here is what is needed and where we require your support:**

### **1. Improvement in Children's Literacy and Numeracy in Schools**

The Government of Liberia is committed to improving children's literacy and numeracy as this provides necessary skills for students to advance to active members of society. We will instate a national assessment to enable us to determine where changes will be most effective in targeting a national literacy target.

### **2. Qualified Teachers with the Skills to Improve Children's Learning Outcomes**

Measures of teachers' training and the time they spend teaching have been found to be the strongest correlates of student achievement. We will invest in increasing math and science teachers, providing qualification trainings for competent and existing teachers, and we plan to go beyond practices of basic training through the provision of constant support and supervision with in-service training. This will be managed by 3 regional Teacher Trainings Institutes (TTIs) to ensure quality training at an estimated cost of \$22.5 million.

### **3. Supported and Motivated Teachers that will Improve Learning Outcomes**

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all statistics are taken from the 'Education Statistics for the Republic of Liberia, Government of the Republic of Liberia Ministry of Education, National Statistical Booklet 2014'. The number of OOSC has been calculated using data of the number of primary school aged children not registered as enrolled in primary schools or ECE classes.

Liberia's children also need motivated teachers if they are to see an improvement in their learning outcomes. A review of the payroll is currently underway, and biometric cards are being issued to teachers to ensure efficient and on-time payment of teachers.

#### **4. School Infrastructure Meets the Needs of Children, Improving Enrolment and Retention**

Well-designed schools with adequate facilities are essential to improving the quality of education. The Government of Liberia plans to both focus on renovating existing structures and building 83 needed structures in the most populated school districts at an estimated cost of \$30.7 million.

#### **5. Schools and Teachers have the Resources to Improve Learning Outcomes**

Desks, textbooks and learning aids are essential for supporting student's learning. With the funding from the Global Partnership for Education, the government is distributing a million textbooks, written by Liberians, for grades 5-9 and high school. Additional textbook costs for grades 1-4 is estimated at \$6.5 million. In addition, an estimated \$8.75 million is necessary for the provision of chairs, and \$1.9 million for the provision of teacher's desks. Learning aids, such as posters and educational games, are also required for ECE classes and secondary schools.

#### **6. Lay the Foundations for Children's Learning with Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

Proven to have the greatest impact on students' future learning, the Government will focus on early childhood education by delivering in-service skills based training for current ECE teachers and caregivers as well as developing a degree-level certificate in ECE. The return on investment for children under six is much greater than investment in later education, and demand for ECE is high in Liberia, highlighted by large enrollment rates. This focus is estimated to cost \$6.65 million.

#### **7. Girls' Learning Outcomes Improve**

With more girls than boys out of school, girls more likely to drop out, and girls less likely to graduate, targeting interventions to enrolling girls in school will be an efficient solution to ensuring all children access basic education. Activities to support girls' participation in education will be included in all the priority projects. Furthermore, the MoE will launch a national communications campaign for girls' education aimed to change social norms holding girls back at an estimated cost of \$260,000.

#### **8. Young People have the Necessary Skills to Secure Jobs through TVET**

The MoE is committed to providing young people, many of whom being out of work due to the civil war, with technical and vocational training to help them secure safe and productive employment. The MoE will develop a national TVET curriculum based on a rigorous market analysis; develop the training package for TVET trainers and conduct a pilot training of the first batch of trainers. The MoE will rehabilitate existing facilities of the strongest institute and equip 4 other multilateral high schools across the country at an estimated cost of \$2.9 million.

#### **9. The Ministry of Education and Schools are Accountable for Children's Learning**

The MoE will continue a process of decentralization which will transfer management and monitoring power to counties. Additionally, the MoE will establish 3 centers of excellence as planned under the

2011 Education Reform Act including a center for accreditation. These two initiatives are estimated to cost \$3.5 million.

**OUR STRATEGY TO transform the educational system in Liberia means that change is necessary and must be immediate.** Our goals are that by 2017, the foundations are in place for a Liberian education system that improves all children and young people's learning. By 2020, we see a significant improvement in children's learning outcomes and national literacy rates.

Furthermore, we fully support the draft program and budget for 2016/2017. We stand firmly behind the program-based medium-term strategy. We look forward to even more active and effective cooperation in the next program period.

We are grateful to UNESCO for the Teachers Education (ITC) capacity-building initiatives through the Chinese Government.

We also want to thank Madam Director General for the process leading to the approval of Providence Island to obtain Heritage Status based upon her recommendation of our sixty-eight (68) historical sites she submitted to the World Heritage Center.

Mr. President, Madam Director General, and fellow Member State Representatives, permit me to conclude my message on this note:

**We re-opened schools, safely, on September 7, 2015, after Ebola.. Post-Ebola, however, we know that 'restoring education' is not enough.** The system was weak before Ebola. We cannot simply restore that; we need to build resilient, coherent systems across all sectors. This is what will allow us to meet the expectations of our citizens.

**This is a massive challenge, but we must be ambitious. We seek partnerships to help us accomplish our ambitious agenda.** We are already taking on the challenge, with the support of partners such as UNESCO. Ambition is vital and valuable - that is the conviction that inspired the MDGs and the SDGs: every single person, every single child, deserves quality education.

Thank you.

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