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# Liberia

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## Principles and general objectives of education

A major objective of the Government is to make education more relevant to the socio-economic reality of the country, so that the Liberian children will be able to live a productive and meaningful life. One of the cardinal principles guiding reforms in education is the achievement of gender equity and quality in the education system.

In the pursuit of its philosophy and cardinal principles of social and economic development, the Government considers education as the central instrument for the promotion of peace, unity and reconciliation as well as for ensuring overall national social, economic, political and cultural development. To this end, the Government has adopted long-term educational goals which include the following:

- develop the total individual so that he/she will become a loyal citizen and make useful and continuous contribution toward his/her own development and that of the nation;
- provide universal basic education through the formal and no-formal processes, so as to help the masses improve their living standards and tackle the immediate problems of illiteracy, health and sanitation (including HIV and AIDS, population and family life, etc.), food production and preservation;
- stimulate, conserve and promote the cultural heritage and strengthen the national policies of unification and integration;
- ensure equitable decentralization of delivery services and facilities, as well as equitable geographic distribution of educational opportunities; and
- ensure access, relevance and quality at all levels and in all educational programmes and services for all citizens.

## Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Article 6 of the **Constitution** of the Republic of Liberia, which came into force on 6 January 1986, stipulates that “The Republic shall, because of the vital role assigned to the individual citizen under this Constitution for the social, economic and political well being of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens to the extent of available resources. Emphasis shall be placed on the mass education of the Liberian people and the elimination of illiteracy”. The **Education Law** of 1973 recognizes the right of every Liberian child to education. According to the Act to Adopt the Education Law of 2001 (**Free and Compulsory Education Law 2002**) school attendance is compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 16. The law compels parents to send their children to a recognizable school or be fined, and also prohibits the collection of tuition fees in public primary and secondary schools.

The Education Law mandates the Government to finance public education. The law sets aside 2,000 acres of public land in each county to support public schools. At least 25% of royalties from concessions granted by the Government should be used to support education. The establishment of an education and health fund to finance public educational institutions and health facilities is also foreseen through an annual tax on every citizen of Liberia and foreign resident aged 21 years and over. However, it has always been difficult to enforce these measures.

## **Administration and management of the education system**

The **Ministry of Education**, which is directed by the Minister assisted by three Deputies (heading three departments: administration, instruction, and planning, research and development), is the agency which has administrative and financial control over pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education, as well as the training of primary school teachers.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has full responsibility for the direction, supervision, coordination, management and oversight of all public and private primary and secondary schools, as well as for institutions of higher learning to the extent provided by law and permitted by their charters. In the Ministry, the **Bureau of Curriculum and Textbook Research** is responsible for: a) evaluating textbooks and deciding upon an approved list of pupil texts; and b) developing and implementing primary and secondary education curricula. The **Division of Adult Education** is responsible for the planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring and coordination of programmes for adult and non-formal education, which covers not only educational activities for adults, but also for adolescence, young men and women, normally aged 15+ years.

In the provision, improvement and assessment of education, the Ministry is assisted by a number of parastatal autonomous organizations, such as the **University of Liberia**, the **Cuttington University** and the **West African Examinations Council (WAEC)**. The training of secondary school teachers is mostly carried out by the William V.S. Tubman Teachers College, the University of Liberia and the Cuttington University, even though new universities and polytechnics have emerged in recent years. The University of Liberia also offers a graduate programme in educational administration. Tertiary-level institutions are supervised by the **National Commission on Higher Education**.

The administration of education over the years has been centralized at the Ministry's Headquarters, but following the need for reforms in the delivery of education services steps are being taken to decentralize the management of the school system. There has been a devolution of responsibility for the disbursement of salary checks to public primary and secondary school teachers nation-wide. There are 15 **County Education Offices** and 86 **District Education Offices** monitoring and supervising the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools; they are the custodian of both primary and secondary school teacher's salary checks, which makes it easy for those teachers working in the rural areas to receive checks. Because of the strong residual effect of the years of conflict, decisions are mostly made at the national level and instructions passed on to the counties and districts (World Bank, 2009). In spite of the direct control of the Ministry of Education over the system, the



responsibility of providing education is shared among the central government, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private institutions, church-related institutions, and the local communities in which the schools are situated.

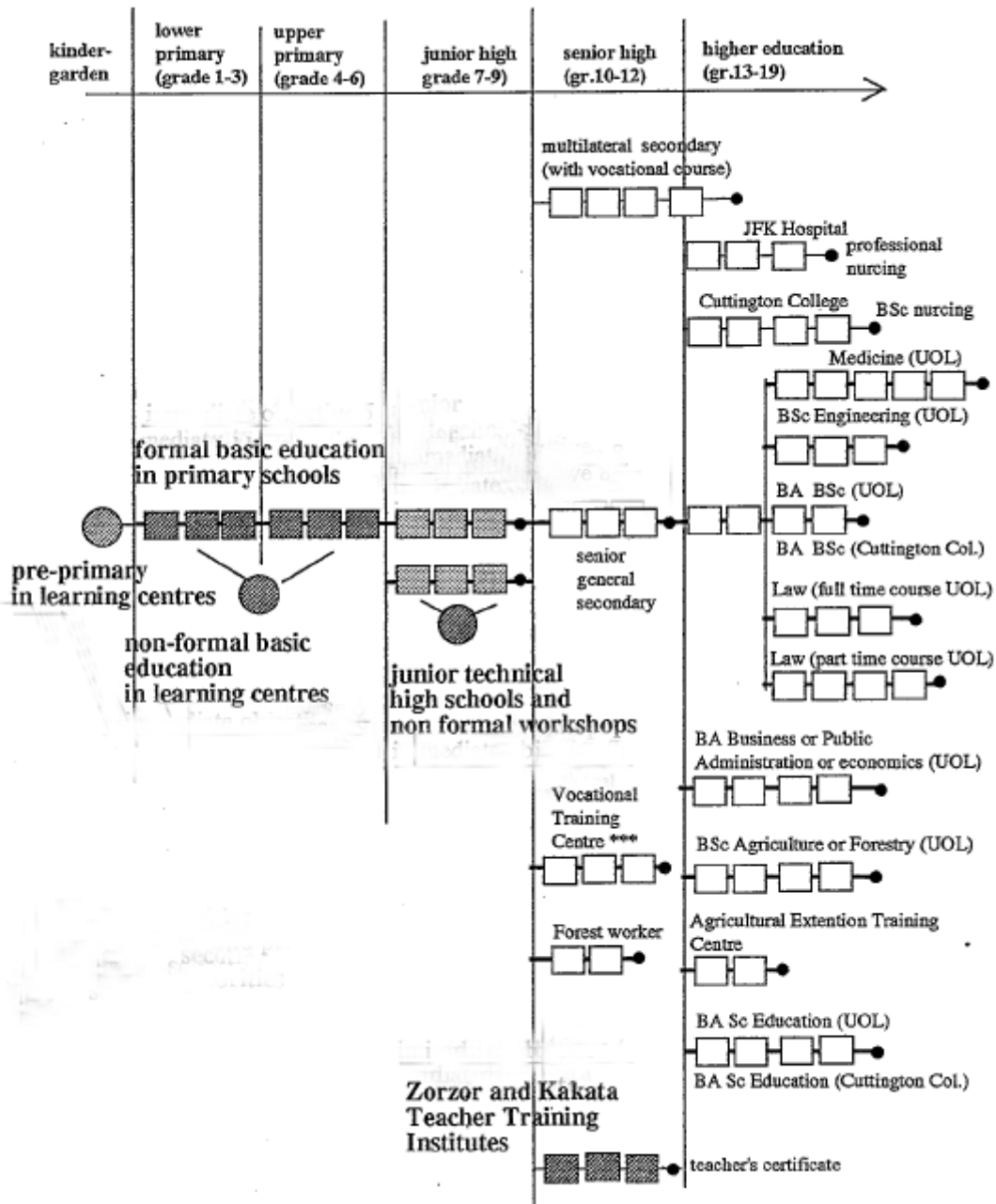
Other ministries involved in the delivery of education are the **Ministry of Youth and Sports** and the **Ministry of Health and Social Welfare**. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare caters to the disabled, orphans and abandoned, while the Ministry of Youth and Sports offers training courses in basic skills, such as art and crafts, masonry, agriculture, carpentry, etc.

In order to ensure grassroots participation, stakeholders' involvement, increased consultation, and optimal resource mobilization, the Ministry of Education in 1998 established three advisory boards/councils: the **National Education and Training Council** (NETC); the **County Education and Training Councils** (CETCs); and the **Local School Management Committees** (LSMCs).

The NETC serves as the highest national advisory body on education in Liberia. The CETCs, established in the 15 counties, serve as the highest advisory body to the Ministry of Education on all educational matters in the counties, with specific focus on policies, location, facilities, funding, staffing and staff welfare. The LSMCs, established in the 72 school districts, deal with issues at the community, village school and institution levels.

## Structure and organization of the education system

### Liberia: structure of the education system



### Pre-school education

Pre-primary education is for children between 2 and 6 years of age, and normally covers three years. The pre-primary or early childhood care and development (ECCD) sector is gradually improving.



## Primary education

Primary education (elementary education) caters to children aged between 6 and 11+ years, and lasts six years. The primary sector has been rehabilitated to a large extent after the civil war. The primary school-leaving certificate examination at the end of grade 6 was abolished in 1970, but plans are underway to reintroduce it.

## Secondary education

Secondary education lasts six years and is divided into two three-year cycles: junior secondary (grades 7-9), and senior secondary education (grades 10-12). At the end of grade 9, students sit an examination administered by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Successful students are eligible to enter senior high school. Upper secondary education culminates in the WAEC Certificate examination. Admission to higher education institutions is based upon the results in the WAEC Certificate examination.

## Higher education

Higher education is provided at the college of business and public administration, colleges of education, universities, professional institutions and polytechnics. At the university level, programmes leading to a certificate last nine months to one year, while those leading to a diploma take two or three years to complete. Bachelor's degree programmes normally last four years (three years in the case of law; five years in the case of engineering and geology). The minimum duration of master's degree programmes is one year on a full-time basis (normally two years). In the case of medicine, the doctorate is conferred after seven years of study.

The school year consists of 180 instructional days, divided into two semesters. The academic year is divided into two semesters (September-December, February-May/June), each consisting of 16 weeks.

# The educational process

## Pre-primary education

The main objectives and goals of pre-primary education are to:

- facilitate a smooth transition from home to school;
- provide adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work;
- provide experiences that will teach the child a positive self-image;
- teach through play the rudiments of letters, numbers, shapes, colours, forms, etc.;
- teach good health habits;
- expose the children to experiences which could enhance their learning process;
- develop in the children basic communication skills (listening and speaking);



- develop in each child the love of others and willingness to share in work and play; and
- prepare the children to live in environment which becomes increasingly complex as the children develop.

The curriculum is broad, and the range of subjects offered at this level is quite wide. It focuses on reading, writing, arithmetic, health, science, religious education, social studies, and music.

Evaluation is an on-going process. The evaluation process really starts from the initial time a teacher comes in contact with the pupils. Therefore, evaluation of children at the pre-primary level covers a wide range of experiences and exercises which necessitate the uses of a variety of oral and written devices. Suggested reinforcement activities are provided at the end of every unit.

According to a survey on early childhood care and development there are 519 pre-schools facilities that house 894 pre-school programmes in nurseries, daycare centres and kindergartens. Montserrado County accounts for over 80% of all the pre-school programmes in the country. The survey recorded preschool population in 1999 to be 441,342 as against a total enrolment of only 55,982; this translates into an equivalent gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 12.6% and a net enrolment ratio (NER) of 4.31%. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The NER at the preschool level was estimated at 38% in 2007/08. (Republic of Liberia, 2010).

## Primary education

The six-year primary education programme strives to inculcate positive attitudes towards co-operation, dignity of labour, national development, and continuous learning.

The goal of the primary school curriculum is to attain universal literacy, numeracy and socio-economic understanding so as to facilitate the betterment of the life of learners and society. These objectives are translated into action terms which make provision for the knowledge, skills and values necessary to permit the individual to: communicate effectively; calculate and numerate with ease; understand the socio-cultural environment and participate in civic life in a meaningful manner; acquire manual skills; develop higher mental processes and lay for continuing education. Accordingly, the core subjects in elementary schools are: language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Other teaching subjects include: health/physical education; music; arts and crafts; agriculture; manual arts and home economics; population/family life education; and Liberian languages. The K-12 national school curriculum was developed in 1980 and was revised in 1996. In principle, the process used was the “Global approach”, and the content was envisaged to accommodate the major directions of policy concerns and developmental goals.

Curriculum reform is an essential part of the primary education reform. It is important to consider carefully the reform of curriculum in a consultative process that involves all stakeholders. The MOE distinguishes the core curriculum (reading,





mathematics, science and social studies) that will be implemented nationwide and the complementary curriculum that can vary by region. Within the science and social studies curriculum there will be innovations that are critical. A peace studies curriculum is being developed to promote social cohesion and national stability. Likewise, the science curriculum will integrate lessons on health and HIV and AIDS in particular. (MOE, 2007).

The Education Master Plan 2000-2010 defines basic education as “that which provides that foundation for continuous and lifelong learning; and which all citizens are entitled. Basic education is defined to include education up to the level of grade 9. It incorporates early childhood education, primary education, adult and non-formal and/or out-of-school education including literacy, oral expression, and productive skills acquisition, among other things. It therefore takes into account the basic learning needs of all those involved in the learning process. Basic education is also a fundamental human right.” (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The primary school-leaving certificate examination (PSCE) was abolished in 1970. As a result, for a number of years evaluation at this level has been carried out by continuous assessment. Recently, the national examination at the end of grade 6 has been reintroduced and is administered by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Liberia Branch. The four basic subjects offered for this examination are: language arts; mathematics; social studies; and general science. The minimum passing mark at the Liberia PSCE is 60% per subject. The final grade of a candidate has two components: continuous assessment score (CASS) or school’s grade and terminal assessment score (TASS) or WAEC’s grade with the CASS contributing 40% while the TASS contributes the balance 60% of the candidate’s final grade. To qualify for a Liberia PSCE, a candidate must pass in at least three of the four subjects offered for the examination. In 2008, a total of 40,746 candidates sat the examination.

The combined gross enrolment ratio (GER) for primary and secondary education in 1999 was estimated at 69.1% for boys and 39.9% for girls. Children in primary and secondary schools are mainly taught by unqualified teachers. It is estimated that only 6.5% of teachers have college or better education; another 28% are certified by the Ministry of Education to teach, and 65% have attained no more than secondary education. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

According to UNICEF estimates, in 2005 10% of Liberian households had a single orphan and 2% had double orphans. Thirty-five percent of households in Liberia had either foster or orphan children, with the percentage much higher (40%) in urban areas than in rural areas (31%). Rural children are more likely to live with both parents than urban children.

According to the 2007 Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire, the net enrolment ratio (NER) was estimated at 37% for primary education and 15% for secondary education. The World Bank reports a GER for primary education of 86% and a NER of 37% in 2007, which suggests that a large number of over-aged children and youth who missed out on years of school during the war have returned to school and that many school age children are not attending school. The pupil-teacher ratio was estimated at 28:1 in 2005/06; the average repetition rate was estimated at 6.9% and the dropout rate in grade 1 was estimated at 7.6%. In the same school year, there





were around 17,442 teachers in public primary schools; female teachers made up around 12.9% of the public primary school teaching force. About 60.4% of public primary school teachers (or 10,526 teachers) were unqualified, e.g. without a teaching certificates from recognized teacher training institutions. (World Bank, 2009). The Government reports an enrolment of 308,748 pupils in public primary schools for 2007/08, with an additional 62,316 pupils in mission-owned schools and 168,823 pupils in other schools, for a total enrolment of 539,887 pupils. (Republic of Liberia, 2010).

## Secondary education

The ultimate purpose of the secondary school (junior and senior high school, technical and vocational school) is to provide educational opportunities to satisfy the common and diversified needs of individual adolescents and society. Secondary schools are therefore responsible for the delivery of quality and relevant education to the youth. Secondary education also has the mandate to develop learning activities that will effectively provide for the needs, interest, and abilities of students. Secondary education lasts six years, divided into two three-year cycles: junior high and senior high school.

Secondary education is provided by public, mission-operated, privately-sponsored and self-help schools. Students who have successfully completed elementary education are eligible to enter junior high school (grades 7-9). A national examination is administered at the end of the grade 9 by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Liberia Branch.) The four basic subjects offered for the Liberia Junior High School Certificate Examination (LJHSCE) are: language arts; mathematics; social studies; and general science. The minimum passing mark is 60% per subject. The final grade of a candidate has two components: continuous assessment score (CASS) or school's grade and terminal assessment score (TASS) or WAEC's grade with the CASS contributing 40% while the TASS contributes the balance 60% of the candidate's final grade. To qualify for a LJHSCE, a candidate must pass in at least three of the four subjects offered for the examination. In 2008, a total of 24,134 candidates sat the examination.

Students who pass the examination are eligible to enter senior high school (grades 10-12). At the senior high school level, the curriculum is intended to: i) provide a broad-based programme that is geared toward the needs of the national economy and train students for middle-level technical and professional positions; and ii) help students learn to be problem-solvers. The core subjects taught at the secondary level are: language arts; social studies; mathematics; and general science (chemistry, biology and physics). At the end of grade 12, students take the Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination (LSHSCE), a national examination administered by the WAEC. Subjects offered for this examination are grouped into three categories: core (compulsory) subjects (English language and mathematics); general subjects (economics, history, geography and English literature); and science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics). All candidates must offer a minimum of eight subjects and a maximum of nine subjects from the three subject groups. Additional subjects such as vocational and technical subjects will be added in the future if the Ministry of Education deems it necessary. The grading system used at the LSHSCE is a 1-9 scale with 1 representing Excellent, 2 Very Good, 3 Good, 4-6 representing Credit, 7-8



representing Pass, and 9 representing Fail. The final grade of a candidate has two components: continuous assessment score (CASS) or school's grade and terminal assessment score (TASS) or WAEC's grade with the CASS contributing 30% while the TASS contributes the balance 70% of the candidate's final grade.

To qualify for a LSHSCE, a candidate must pass in at least six subjects including the core (compulsory) subjects and at least a subject each from the other two groups. Successful candidates are usually placed in either one of the three following divisions: a) Division I: pass at least six subjects from the three subject groups; obtain an aggregate of at most 24 in the best six subjects; and pass mathematics and English language with credit; b) Division II: pass at least six subjects from the three subject groups; obtain an aggregate between 25 and 36 inclusively in the best six subjects; and pass mathematics and English language with credit; c) Division III: pass at least six subjects from the three subject groups; obtain an aggregate between 37 and 48 in the best six subjects; and pass mathematics and English language with a grade of 7/8. In 2008, a total of 19,406 candidates sat the examination.

The WAEC certificate is a pre-requisite to entering any higher institution of learning. Students who have not obtained Division I passes for automatic entrance to the university, can apply to sit an entrance examination to be admitted to higher education establishments.

The primary role of technical and vocational education is to train middle-level technicians. This programme targets young people aged 15+ who have successfully completed grade 6. Training is offered in a wide range of fields, including: elementary agronomy, horticulture, vegetable, tree crop, rice and poultry production, plumbing, carpentry, masonry, metal work and electricity. Courses in home economics and management are also offered. The duration of training ranges between nine and eighteen months, after which certificates of proficiency are awarded to successful students.

In 2007, the GER at the secondary level was estimated at 51.3% and the NER at 15.2%. The student-teacher ratio was estimated at 13:1. (World Bank, 2009).

### **Assessing learning achievement nationwide**

In September 2000, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF carried out a Pilot Programme on Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA). This Programme focused on the selection of a random stratified sample in forty-five primary schools in five districts of Montserrat County, consisting of Grade IV pupils only. Tests for assessing students' achievement were in literacy, numeracy and life skills.

In addition, the Pilot Programme included the administration of questionnaires to students, parents/sponsors, teachers and principals for the purpose of collecting data on their interests, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions concerning schools, classes and administrative and teaching practices. Other criteria considered included: management and school type; demographic classification (rural/urban); and gender.



The mean scores in literacy, numeracy and life skills were respectively 40, 41.8 and 49, and the maximum scores were 73, 84, and 90.

It was clear that the prevailing conditions in rural areas were more favourable to learning than those of urban areas, except in literacy. For example, Todee District proved to be the best in literacy and life skills, and Careysburg District in numeracy, both of which were rural. In the three subject areas tested, private schools performed better except in life skills, where public schools ranked equal with private school. On the average, the desired minimum level was not attained, except in life skills. Boys performed better in numeracy, and girls in life skills, but there was gender equality in literacy.

Responses obtained in the questionnaires were very instructive. They revealed, for instance, that pupils' background at home was seriously deficient. Many parents and sponsors were poorly educated, and hardly provided support to pupils learning at home. Pupils were clear that schools were generally uninteresting to them and teachers reported that few facilities were available in schools, even though parents had the burden of paying expensively to educate their children despite their low incomes. In spite of the fact that many pupils were yet possibly traumatized as a consequence of the civil war, it was reported that violence and sexual abuse cases were almost non-existent in the schools. However, the community was indeed predominantly ignorant, as many still discriminated against the education of girls.

USAID reports that in June 2008 an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) assessment was conducted in a random sample of 47 schools throughout Liberia. It was found that grade 2 pupils on average read close to 18 correct words per minute. Performance of grade 3 pupils, when assessed using the same passage was slightly better – close to 28 correct words per minute. In Liberia, the average level of connected text fluency for a second-grader is less than half of what in the United States would be considered to put the child at risk at the end of grade 2.

## **Teaching staff**

The national policy on education prescribes that the minimum qualifications required for teaching in elementary schools is the Grade “C” certificate awarded by a teacher training institute (Teacher Training Institutes in Zorzor, Kakata and Webbo, all rural-based). The Grade “B” certificate is required for teaching in junior high schools. At the senior secondary level, a Bachelor of Science degree in education is required, even though holders of a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree in other fields are eligible to teach. Teachers who possess a degree/diploma in education receive a higher salary compared to teachers with an ordinary degree or diploma.

For teaching in colleges of education, at least a master's degree is required, while a doctoral degree is an advantage for teaching in universities. Lecturers in colleges of education are required to have a teaching qualification in addition to their degree.

At the University of Liberia in the area of secondary education there are two distinct sets of programmes available. One set consists of four-year programmes of



studies, in the following subject fields of the secondary school: agriculture, English, mathematics, science and social studies. These programmes lead to a degree of Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education, the major teaching subject being one of the basic subject fields. The other set consists of two-year programmes of studies, successful completion of these qualifying the individuals for a Grade “B” Teaching Certificate from the Ministry of Education. Credits earned by students in the two-year programmes are transferable to the four-year programmes. In the area of primary education, there is a four-year programme designed to provide the student with content specialization in one of two combinations: language art, social studies and mathematics, science. This programme leads to a degree of Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the college offers a certificate programme in Elementary Mathematics Education. The general objective of the programme is to develop resource persons who will assume leadership in upgrading mathematics instruction in rural schools. Candidates considered for this programme are experienced elementary school teachers from throughout the country who have demonstrated ability and interest in the teaching of mathematics. These individuals attend the university as students for one year, pursuing specially designed courses.

The USAID-supported Liberia Teacher Training Programme uses an integrated set of policy, support and capacity-building activities to address the critical shortage of qualified teachers and institutional capacity to produce new teachers. This programme supports the MOE in developing a strategy to improve the teacher education system and supports MOE curricula reform. It also trains and certifies primary school teachers with “C” certification through pre-service training at the three rural TTI and through in-service training in six counties;

In-service teacher training has continued to receive priority attention, even though the Government is faced with serious financial constraints. In-service teacher training is provided through: a) seminars and workshops usually organized during long vacations; these usually provide opportunities for the dissemination of new ideas and innovations; b) “crash remedial” teacher-training programmes (1994–2000)—sponsored by UNICEF, UNHCR and UNESCO—in order to address the post-war urgent need for qualified teachers; c) rural teacher-training institutes who are engaged in the training of teachers as a step towards the restoration of their regular programmes.

There are several local NGOs presently engaged in short-term, teacher-training activities. The National Teacher Association of Liberia (NTAL) offers training courses for teachers at the junior and senior high school levels. The Liberian Cooperative Standard Education School System Inc., community-based organization, is engaged in the training of teachers at the Grades “C” and “B” levels.

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Republic of Liberia. *Appraisal of the 2010-2020 Education Sector Plan*. Monrovia, January 2010.

World Bank. *Liberia 2008 Public Expenditure Management and Financial Accountability Review*. Poverty Reduction Economic Management Sector Unit, Africa Region, Report No. 43282-LR, Washington DC, June 2009.

## Web resources

University of Liberia: <http://www.universityliberia.org/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

West African Examinations Council, Liberia: <http://www.liberiawaec.org/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>