

ALIGN THE EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN WITH THE GIRLS' EDUCATION

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Overview

Liberia is ranked 178 out of 191 countries on the UN Gender Inequality Index¹. Poverty, discriminatory social and gender norms, lack of sexual health and reproductive rights, and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence negatively affect girls' access, retention, and completion of secondary school in Liberia.

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. However, low budgetary allocation, gaps in technical capacity, and inadequate coordination, among other issues, have hindered national efforts in prioritizing girls' education in Liberia.

In many instances, promoting girls' education, and gender outcomes are still an afterthought or an add-on instead of a priority in policy design and decision-making in education. Ensuring the availability of existing data evidence and increasing the awareness thereof and accountability for the implementation of the NPGE would be instrumental in providing more context for developing initiatives and programs to promote girls' education.

The **Education Sector Plan (ESP, 2023-2026)** provides a sector-wide strategy for implementing the National Education Act of 2011, corresponding policies, frameworks, and programs, streamlined using a system-based approach. The ESP referenced the NPGE as the national policy for addressing girls' education in Liberia.

A key focus of the ESP is "strengthening MoE's capacity for gender-responsive education management and accountability". According to the ESP, gender is "underlying, cutting across, and guiding these strategic interventions

OUR AIM is to ensure that the indicators and outcomes within the National Policy on Girls Education (2021-2026) are aligned with and supported by the Education Sector Plan (2023-2026), to provide clear gender transformative targets and strategies for policy actors, funders, and practitioners.

POLICY POINTS

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
- 2. 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.
- 3. 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.

¹ Gender Inequality Index | Human Development Reports (undp.org), 2021

are the Ministry's commitment to the fundamental principles of equity, gender equality and inclusion, and the social justice goals of reducing disparities wrought by gender, disability, and geographical location." With this outlook, the strategies developed within the ESP are more about responding to the gender gaps within the education system, than addressing and transforming social/economic power dynamics that create those gaps. As such, the ESP is a gender-responsive plan. The challenge 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 a comparison analysis of the provisions for girls' education as per the ESP and the linkages to the NPGE. The rollout of Education Sector Plan (ESP) can prioritize improving girl-learning outcomes, retention, and completion by supporting of the effective implementation of the National Policy on Girls Education. Our advocacy focus is to ensure that the indicators and outcomes within the National Policy on Girls Education (2021-2026) are aligned with and supported by the Education Sector Plan (2023-2026), to provide clear gender transformative targets and strategies for policy actors, funders, and practitioners.

"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

Challenges in Ensuring Gender Equity and Equality in Education

- Early childbearing and early marriage rates remain high in Liberia, with 25 per cent of women married before the age of 18 and 30 per cent of women giving before the age of 18 the country's adolescent birth rate remains one of the highest 32 in the world, despite showing signs of decrease (LISGIS, 2021). Early marriage is effectively the end of girls' education prospects and heightens their vulnerability.
- There is a low proportion of female teachers at the primary (20%) and junior and senior secondary levels (11.8% and 9.6%, respectively).²
- Despite existing legal protections for equal rights of women, studies have revealed that gender equity is still not broadly supported in Liberia, with 33 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men cited as opposing gender equality in 2021.³
- During the Educate HER project Bi-annual assessment(2023) FGD participants reported that school administrators and education stakeholders are unaware that discrimination against girls due to pregnancy is a violation of their right to education.
- Disparities in access to education are the most prevalent between wealth quintiles. Poor and rural girls are seen to experience the highest levels of disadvantage, with 57 per cent having no formal education and only 2 per cent having attended secondary. ⁴
- Female TVET students make up only 31 per cent of TVET enrollment and are overrepresented in traditionally gendered trades.⁵
- While women's participation in the workforce at 72 per cent is higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa's average, they are concentrated in lower level, lower paid, and often precarious positions that are more likely to be unpaid.⁶

² Annual School Census Report, 2019/2020

³ The Education Sector Plan 2022-2027, pg. 31

⁴ The Education Sector Plan 2022-2027, pg. 37

⁵ The Education Sector Plan 2022-2027, pg. 52

⁶ The Education Sector Plan 2022-2027, pg. 53

- Government spending on education is significantly lower than the international benchmark (20 per cent of the budget to be allocated to education).⁷



Comparative Analysis of the Education Sector Plan and the National Policy on Girls' Education⁸

	Education Sector Plan (2023-2026)	National Policy on Girls' Education (NPGE 2021 – 2026)
Framing	The ESP provides a sector-wide strategy for implementing the National Education Act of 2011, corresponding policies, frameworks, and programs, streamlined using a system-based approach.	The NPGE provides a structure and measures to address the barriers to and improve girls' education in Liberia. It is intended to establish guiding principles in Liberia's endeavors to eliminate gender disparity and identify priorities for government and stakeholder action.
Vision	All citizens across all counties and groups have equitable access to quality, relevant, gender responsive, disability-inclusive education and training at all levels, providing them with the skills to meet the demands of the labor market and contribute to national development and prosperity	A society free from gender disparities in all sectors and an education system in which all children (girls and boys) have equal access to affordable and quality education.
Policy Goal	1. Ensure equal, disability-inclusive access to quality education and training for all, at all levels, 2. Develop capable citizens who possess skills that meet the demands of the labor market, and that contribute to national development and prosperity 3. Improve educational management and leadership that enhances efficient and effective delivery and system resilience	To provide an enabling environment for gender equality in education, training, and management
Gender	The ESP addresses barriers to girls'	The NPGE establishes a legislative

⁷ computations based on National Budget, Ministry of Finance Budget

⁸ To maintain the integrity of the analysis, the information below is quoted directly from the policy documents.

Strategy	education through cross-cutting initiatives that strengthen the gender-responsiveness of the education management and accountability system through the three goals. 1. increase equitable access 2. improve quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and 3. strengthen efficiency and management capacity	and institutional framework to initiate, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate programs aimed at promoting gender equality in education, training, and management to: 1. Integrate gender and girls' education issues into national, district, and community programs and plans and 2. Stimulate collective and concerted efforts, at all levels, to eliminate gender disparities in education, training, and management.
Initiatives to Address Social and Cultural Barriers	The ESP includes commitments to address social and cultural barriers through interventions such as: — defining effective learning pathways for girls who become pregnant to continue their education; — reducing teenage pregnancy through skill-based health education and strengthened role of Girls' Clubs; — rolling out the Teacher Code of Conduct to reduce SRGBV in all education institutions; — recruiting female psychosocial and career counsellors at all levels; — providing scholarship packages to senior secondary school female students; — piloting the provision of uniforms and bags to female students in basic education; — developing a policy that informs incentive packages to attract female teachers into the teaching profession and establishes quotas for female teachers; — increasing the number of women in leadership positions at school, district, county, and national level	Section 2.3 of the NPGE addresses Social and cultural barriers to girls' education through interventions such as: — Mobilize and provide specific funds to promote girls' education in every region. — Mainstream girls focus and life skills training in the academic curriculum. — Provide incentives such as financial aid and scholarships to girls in need. — Modify the practices and calendar of the "Traditional Schools" or Poro and Sande Societies. — Increase awareness on child labor practices. — Implement policies, laws, and programs that will prevent girls from getting married and pregnant at an early age. — Institute policies and programs that will allow or enable parents to encourage their girls to go to school. — Ensure compliance to the age-appropriate enrollment regulation in the academic calendar. — Create awareness on the importance of girls' education and the danger of some cultural practices to all stakeholders
Monitoring, Evaluation, & Measurement	The overall objective of Priority Program 3 (<i>Governance and Management in ECE and General Education</i>) is to strengthen sector governance and management for effective service delivery by prioritizing sector policy	Section 7.2 of the NPGE outlines 16 Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators 1. Population data disaggregated by sex, age, and geographic location. 2. Enrolment data disaggregated by type, sex, and different levels of

	implementation through participatory planning, HR management, and school supervision and management. The specific objective under component 3.1 (<i>Participatory sector planning for improved educational governance, management, and policy implementation</i>) is to strengthen evidence-based, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive sectorwide planning, monitoring, and budgeting with relevant stakeholders at the central and decentralized levels for effective service delivery, as well as adherence to the relevant education sector policies. The activities under sub-component 3.1.2 (<i>Strengthen MEL mechanisms to better track education sector's progress.</i>) are: — Develop and approve the National Education Sector Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Policy, strategy and operational plan — Strengthen the capacity of M&E officers at all levels (develop and improve gender-responsive M&E tools, review and update process and procedures). — . Conduct annual JESR and monitor the implementation of agreed upon actions. — Establish an e-education platform for school mapping and MEL. — Conduct selected annual tracking studies for deeper dives in specific themes	the education system. ▪ Gross Intake Rate (GIR) ▪ Net Intake Rate (NIR) ▪ Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) ▪ Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) ▪ Percent of Girl Enrollment ▪ Gender Parity Index (GPI) 3. School entry age by sex, levels, and geographic locations 4. Number of female and male teachers disaggregated by different levels of the education system and geographic location. 5. Number of female and male school/education administrators 6. Data on performance, repeaters, and completion/retention disaggregated by sex, levels of the education system, and geographic location. 7. Literacy levels of boys and girls, men, and women 8. Prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in schools and communities by geographic location 9. Number of laws and policies that include punitive measures for those acting in opposition to girls' education. 10. Prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriages 11. Number and type of schools constructed per community, district, and county. 12. Public Expenditure on Education as a % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 13. Public Expenditure on Education as a % of Total Government Expenditure 14. National Policy on Girls' Education 15. Public Recurrent Expenditure on Education as a % of Total Government Recurrent Expenditure 16. Unit Cost (public recurrent expenditure per pupil) by Level
Investing in Girls (Education Financing)	The ESP states that the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Youth and Sports will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Finance Development and Planning to	Chapter 8 of the NPGE (Resource Mobilization) lists the following strategies: 1. The Ministry of Education shall commit at least 5 percent (5%) of its

increase the share of the national budget going to education and training by:

1. Advocating for more and more diversified external funding, and ensuring the predictability of external support, both as part of the overall funding commitments.
2. Establishing policies on the disclosure of all educational spending by other line ministries, government agencies, and external partners and strengthening educational expenditure reporting at all levels, across government, as well as by educational partners
3. Fostering public-private partnerships and enhancing the roles of the private sector in funding educational programs, especially in the TVET and higher education sub-sectors.
4. Managing available resources efficiently and effectively through strengthened accountability to increase value for money.
5. Digitizing major administrative functions, starting with EMIS and HR management, as well as increasing reliance on e-fora to foster dialogue.
6. Prioritizing data security and transparency for improved governance

Regarding capital expenditure, specific attention will be given to gender-responsive, disability-inclusive WASH to ensure that public schools are equipped with adequate WASH packages that meet the national quality standards and promote safe, dignified access for girls and children with disabilities

Fiscal Year Budget to projects and programs promoting girls' education.

2. Other sources of funding for attaining girls' education shall include County and Social Development Funds, donors, and community contributions. Parent-teacher associations and School Management Committees shall also be encouraged to make minimum contributions toward improving girls' education in their respective geographic locations.
3. The Ministry of Education and its partners shall always ensure that the allocation of funds, including school grants, and decision-making concerning projects are gender sensitive.
4. Public-private partnerships shall be sought to raise supplementary funding to support girls' education activities within Liberia's borders.
5. Partners and donors shall be encouraged to consider increasing funding for the education and training needs of girls and women as a priority in development assistance programs.
6. Partners and donors working in close collaboration with the Government shall ensure that funding for girls' education is maintained or increased in structural adjustment and economic recovery programs, including lending and stabilization programs.
7. A comprehensive implementation plan shall be developed for the purpose of guiding the execution of interventions in a holistic and coordinated manner.

The NPGE requires the Government to ensure a gender-sensitive budgetary approach throughout the various sectors to foster equal access to education; especially in mathematics, science, and computer technology, to advance opportunities for all girls and women.

Alignment

1. The ESP references the NPGE as the national policy for addressing girls'

	education in Liberia. - Both policy documents reference the Education Reform Act 2011 and the following goals. - Goal 2: promoting equal access to education opportunities for all, without discrimination; - Goal 5) promoting and protecting human rights with respect to access and opportunities for quality education; - Goal (7) promoting gender equity and equality throughout the educational system) - Both policy documents contribute to the achievement of SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG5: Gender Equality by ensuring implementations of national policy frameworks that are supportive of the rights of all children by increasing access to quality education and promoting gender equity and equality in Liberia's education system. - Both documents highlight the Ministry's commitment to the fundamental principles of equity, gender equality and inclusion, and the social justice goals of reducing disparities wrought by gender, disability, and geographical location. - There are many similarities and overlapping in documents in addressing cultural barriers and gender-sensitive programming. - Both documents call for the development of a MEL system to track indicators for promoting girls' education - The timeframes for the implementation the ESP and the NPGE are well-aligned for joint actions (ESP:2023-2026), (NPGE: 2021 – 2026)
Gaps	- The ESP strategies to address social-cultural demand-side barriers to girls' education are considered cross-cutting interventions. Therefore, they are broad and may not attract the needed attention and support. - The NPEG (16 indicators) are not clearly highlighted in the ESP as mandated by the National Girls Education Strategy. Hence, the plan only provides surface-level data through M&E reporting documents like the Annual School Census Report. - There is no mention of the Girls Education Report Card in the ESP's monitoring framework and how this dataset will inform changes and intervention designs within the ESP. - The NPGE does not have an implementation plan or a set budget, therefore the strategies have not been translated into measurable actions. - There are many areas in the ESP where gender outcomes are implied but are not clearly spelled out or adequately accounted for in the planned activities. (i.e. gender indicators like the number of males vs. the number of females were captured, but no intentional interventions to affect those indicators) - The ESP doesn't capture clearly whether the total investment in Girls' Education over multi-years will reach the 5% MoE annual budget minimum threshold as mandated by the NPGE. - As per the ESP, the projected funding gap without external funding is large, totaling USD 325.5 million over the plan period and representing 34 per cent of the total plan cost.

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Gender disparities and imbalances in girls' education are common throughout Liberia. Our aim is to ensure that the indicators and outcomes within the National Policy on Girls Education (2021-2026) are aligned with and supported by the Education Sector Plan (2023-2026), to provide clear gender

transformative targets and strategies for policy actors, funders, and practitioners. These can be done by the imploring the following:

1. the availability of legal frameworks and structures to promote gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and other related efforts,
2. Improved collaboration and partnership among state and non-state actors in promoting gender equality and mainstreaming in Liberia and

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. This will also be crucial in increasing targeted and cross-sector investments for inclusive and sustainable gender mainstreaming and integration efforts.

3. Increased national dialogues and strategic planning for gender mainstreaming and integration efforts, the government and its partners can effectively work towards a gender transformative Education Sector Plan in (Liberia) that will adequately support the effective implementation of the NPGE.

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 IBIS, 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

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.

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 strives to maintain already established relationships with the key stakeholders and build new relationships, where necessary. This coalition 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. To join the Educate HER coalition, please contact us at: info@educateherlib.com

Visit our website: <https://educateherlib.com/documentresource> to download the electronic copy of this document and the publications listed below:

- EDUCATE HER: Increasing Financial Investment for Gender Equality and Equity in Education Budget Policy
- National Budget Cycles & Decision-Making Processes for The National Policy on Girls' Education
- Promoting Gender Equality and Equity in Education Taking Collective Action to Ensure Girls' Attendance, Retention, and Completion (GARC) In Schools in Liberia
- Mapping of National Education Policy and Decision-Making Forums & Platforms
- County Action Plans to Promote Girls Education

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