

GlobalGiving Project 2020
Titled: Support Children Education in Rural Liberia
Online fundraising. December 2020

Summary

With an estimated population of 4.8 millions as of 2018, more than half (51.1%) of the Liberian population resides in urban areas (MSU, 2020). Liberia's annual GDP growth rate is 1.2% (about \$6.3B as of 2018), of which education expenditure is about 3.8% of the GDP. Access to education in Liberia is a big challenge. According to UNICEF, Liberia has the world's largest out of school children, with 56% of primary school-age children currently missing out on education. 15-20 percentage of 6-14 years old out of class and 54% of children completing primary school. We address this need by providing school fees and materials such as exercise books, pens, and pencils.

Challenge

Almost all public ECE schools currently charge fees (3,500 Liberian dollars per year -approximately USD 35), with additional costs for uniforms and shoes. The current ECE fees policy contributes to the exclusion of children from poor households. Many schools require that children complete kindergarten before being allowed to enter grade one. Despite ECE fees being abolished in PSL schools, children from low-income families in the rural areas cannot afford the cost of purchasing school uniforms, school fees, and materials such as exercise books, pens, and pencils. The project will identify poor households and support children from these homes, including orphans and vulnerable children from the target communities.

Solution

Learning Squared will partner with 12 schools in seven counties including, Margibi, Lofa, Bassa, Bomi and Cape Mount, Bong and rural Montserrado counties. We seek support to embed sustainable, quality primary education for over 700 children in one year potentially. We anticipate that this project will have a longer-term impact reaching over 2500 children over the next three years

Long-Term Impact

The specific targets under SDG 4 that this program aims to address are **Target 4.1:** by providing that all girls and boys in the target regions in rural Liberia complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; and **Target 4.5:** eliminate all discrimination in education. Under this target, the program will ensure that all girls and boys have equal opportunity to enjoy high-quality education, achieve at equal levels, and enjoy similar benefits from education. Those living in poor and remote rural areas require special attention. Our long-term support will ensure schools and students have the means to continue their education journey as the midst of the pandemic.

Country Context:

Liberia is a post-conflict country with substantial levels of vulnerability and fragility. The protracted 14-year civil war impacted the lives of approximately 250,000 people, which led to mortality, significant losses in material wealth, and social progress. Liberia's post-war Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was strong between 2004 and 2013. The real GDP grew, on average, 7 percent, with significant contributions from agriculture and services. However, hit by a triple shock – the COVID 19 pandemic, the Ebola epidemic, and falling commodity prices -Liberia's GDP growth has declined drastically. Additionally, the country has one of the lowest human development indices globally, ranking 177 out of 188 countries in 2015 (UN Human Development Report 2015).

Liberia's education system

Recovery post-civil war: Since the end of the civil war, the Ministry of Education has rebuilt the formal and informal public education systems to meet the goal of providing equal access to education for all children regardless of age, disability, and gender. Liberia has recognized education as a top priority in its medium and long-term development plan. The Education Sector Plan 2010-2020 aims to provide all Liberians with the opportunity to access and complete affordable and quality education relevant and appropriate to meet their needs and the nation's needs. This was reinforced by the Liberia Agenda for Transformation and Education Reform Act 2011. Through county and district education boards' establishments, the Education Reform Act (2011) restructured the Ministry Bureaus, reformed the student grade structure, and laid out a decentralization pathway. In 2016, the Ministry of Education developed and endorsed a new Education Sector Plan 2017-2021.

However, Liberia's education statistics, both enrolment and learning outcomes, are among the worst in the world. After more than a decade of civil war, the Ebola crisis of 2014/15, and the COVID 19 pandemic, the public education system is simply not able to deliver the quality of education that children need and deserve:

- In rural areas, 65 percent of young women and 35 percent of young men aged 15-24 are illiterate.
- Across the country, 25% of 15-24-year-olds cannot read a single sentence.
- Just 20 percent of children who enroll in grade one go on to complete grade 12.

The rationale of the proposed program:

Despite the significant progress that has taken place in the sector post the conflict, bold and progressive reforms are needed if things are to change for Liberia's children. Recognizing the limited capacity of government to deliver better outcomes, the proposed program "*Support Children Education in Rural Liberia* " will bring expertise in education monitoring and performance management; innovative learning models; and additional resources aimed at bringing Liberia to the investment level of many neighboring countries while the economy recovers from the external threats.

The overall aim of this program is to contribute to improving learning outcomes for rural children in Liberia.

The proposed program will address some of the following key challenges facing Liberia's education sector today.

- **Low enrollment rates:** The Net Enrollment Ratios (NER) are inadequate for all education levels, 29 percent for ECE, less than 60 percent for primary, and 26 percent for secondary. Gross enrollment is higher; in fact, only 17 percent of primary-age children are not attending either Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Basic Education services. The program will actively engage key stakeholders in the education sector to ensure the compulsory enrolment of all rural children to school when they reach school-going age.
- **Late enrollment and overage enrollment:** We will sensitize parents through established community structures to enroll their children to school at the appropriate age, as stipulated by the Ministry of Education.

Approximately 40 percent of primary school students are more than three years older than the appropriate age for their grade. This challenge begins at ECE. Nearly 40 percent of children enrolled in ECE are age six or older; the age for entry into grade one. Systemic late entrance into primary school has a negative ripple effect throughout the sector on learning outcomes, primary completion, and efficient use of scarce resources.

- **Inequitable access to education:** Less than 47 percent of youth aged 10 -19 from households in the lower two quintiles reach Grade 6, compared to 88 percent of the top quintile.
- **Fees for ECE:** Almost all public ECE schools currently charge fees (3,500 Liberian dollars per year -approximately USD 35), with additional costs for uniforms and shoes. The current ECE fees policy contributes to the exclusion of children from poor households. Many schools require that children complete kindergarten before being allowed to enter grade one. Despite ECE fees being abolished in PSL schools, children from low-income families in the rural areas cannot afford the cost of purchasing school uniforms, school fees, and materials such as exercise books, pens, and pencils. The project will identify poor households and support children from these homes, including orphans and vulnerable children from the target communities.
- **Low learning outcomes:** Learning outcomes are dismal. A literacy assessment conducted in 2014 found that grade three students' oral reading fluency was below 20 correct words per minute, significantly lower than the Ministry's benchmark of 45 correct words. Among adult women who reached fifth grade, only 20 percent can read a single sentence. This, in part, has been caused by the fact that most community teachers/volunteers are unqualified. The project will support 14 untrained community teachers to attend college during school holidays to attain the government Teacher Certification.
- **Limited accountability and support at all levels:** School inspection and supervision are inadequate; few schools receive regular, structured visits. District officials are often unable to inspect schools due to a lack of travel budget, difficult transport conditions, and lack of human capacity. The project will provide education leaders with regular training seminars for these leaders on Education Monitoring and Performance Management, innovative learning models, and other additional resources.
- **Lack of a national learning assessment system:** There are no systems for measuring student learning outcomes in grades one to six. While this is not the primary focus of this project, the

Ministry cannot determine the level of student learning in early grades, compare learning outcomes across regions, or track students' progress.

We will partner with relevant authorities and investment partners such as yours [Dubai Cares] to set up school assessment systems in the schools we work in if resources are available.

This program's overall goal is to improve learning outcomes, conditions, and opportunities under which students, especially underserved children in rural Liberia, can have equal access to affordable, quality, and relevant education that meets their needs and that of the nation.

Rural education in Liberia is in a crisis. There is, therefore, an urgent need to support quality education in rural Liberia.

Our approach/strategy: Learning Squared Liberia is addressing the issue of out of school children using an affordable, scalable, and sustainable rural education model that is tested and successful. This model is tailored to the challenge of making an immediate impact in the face of educational crises presented in remote rural areas where no one else is working by reversing the 'concrete first' approach and focusing on quality and sustainability. Learning Squared Liberia has supported over 300 students of the most marginalized rural children in over 35 communities in Liberia: an unprecedented level of national coverage. The progress of our pilot project in the rural parts of Margibi, Bassa, Bomi and Cape mount counties is remarkable. With just two completed primary schools and three trained teachers in 2017, Learning Squared Liberia has brought the prospect of universal access to education in the counties within reach in just three years by supporting schools and community volunteer teachers.

This program is in line with GlobalGiving role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning by 2030.

The specific targets under SDG 4 that this program aims to address are **Target 4.1:** by providing that all girls and boys in the target regions in rural Liberia complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; and **Target 4.5:** eliminate all discrimination in education. Under this target, the program will ensure that all girls and boys have equal opportunity to enjoy high-quality education, achieve at equal levels, and enjoy similar benefits from education. Those living in poor and remote rural areas require special attention.

We seek support to embed sustainable, quality primary education in seven remote, rural communities in West Africa to provide education for over 700 children in one year potentially. We anticipate that this project will have a longer-term impact reaching over 2,500 children over the next three years.