

BASIC EDUCATION & GENDER EQUALITY

Relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The likelihood of attainment at current implementation rates is:

Goal #2: Universal Primary Education - unlikely

Goal #3: Promoting gender equality and empower women - likely

OVERVIEW

Liberia's civil conflict had a crippling impact on education: 80% of schools were destroyed; 56% of female and 39% of male has never attended school. UNICEF's support over the last four years has been revitalizing the sector.

Accomplishments

- Implementation of a back-to-school programme enabling 800,000 children to return to school
- Rehabilitation and renovation of classrooms and provision of basic school furniture and teaching and learning materials nationwide.
- Implementation of an Accelerating Learning Program (ALP) which compresses a six-year elementary cycle into three years. This has enabled older children (age 8-24), impacted by the war, to complete their primary education.
- 499 ALP schools, operating in 11 of Liberia's 15 counties, have 2,585 teachers and 53,697 children enrolled.
- In-service training of 2,500 teachers to the required 'C-certificate' level.
- Strengthening coordination and supervisory capacity in the Ministry of Education through revitalization of the Education Management Information System, construction of county education offices with transport and equipment.
- Development and implementation of a Girls' Education Policy.
- Support to establishment of a flexible education financing scheme – the Liberia Education Pooled Fund (LEPF).

Challenges

Although enrolment rates in primary and secondary schools have improved considerably, many children are still deprived of their right to quality education. With a net enrolment ratio of 37% much less than half of children of the right age are in primary school. At the same time a primary gross enrolment ratio of 83% indicates the high proportion of older children at primary level. Overall access to secondary education remains very low, with net enrolment at 15% and gross enrolment at 51%. There is near gender parity (based on gross attendance) at primary level (0.92) with significantly less at secondary school level (0.73).

Main reasons given by families for children not attending or enrolling in schools include the inability

of parents to raise school dues, child sickness, excessive distances to schools, lack of qualified teachers and schools not being open, and the refusal of children to go to school. Pervasive poverty, cultural practices, early marriages and teenage pregnancies are factors also contributing to the disparity between girls and boys in accessing education. Many schools are still not implementing the Government's Free and Compulsory Education Policy that removes fees in public primary schools in order to improve enrolment and attendance.

The quality of learning at school is undermined by overcrowding in classes, low salaries for teachers, and an inadequate quantity and skewed distribution of qualified teachers. Over 60% of primary school teachers do not possess the required minimum qualification. The situation is worse in remote areas. Classroom conditions spaces in many schools are extremely poor and the majority lack sanitation, electricity and basic furniture such as chairs and desks. Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) reveals that only 22% of public and community schools have sufficient seats while only one third have functioning latrines. Only one textbook is available for every 27 students.

The Government of Liberia launched the Liberia Primary Education Recovery Programme (LPERP) in July 2007 in an effort to improve primary education. Seeking resources for the programme UNICEF supported establishment of the Liberia Education Pooled Fund (LEPF) - thus far attracting USD 16 million in contributions from UNICEF through a grant from the Government of Netherlands and the Open Society Foundation.

FOCUS AREAS 2008-2012

- Increased access to quality primary education to grade six, with an emphasis on gender parity.
- Improvement of quality education for better retention and completion rates.
- Provision of education services for all school-age children affected by emergencies.
- HIV/AIDS prevention activities in primary schools and for ALP learners.

Other strategic contributors to the National Education Plan

UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNMIL, WB, WFP, WHO; USAID, DFID, EC/U, World Bank, OSI and NGOs including NRN, IRC, JRS, LET, SC-UK, Oxfam, the University of Liberia (UL), CAP, COHDA