



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 50th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Liberia

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

April 2025

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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

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I. Introduction

1. The following report has been drafted by Broken Chalk as a stakeholder contribution to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review [UPR] for Liberia. As Broken Chalk's focus is on combating human rights violations within the educational sphere, the contents of this report and the following recommendations will focus on the Right to Education.
2. Liberia's education system is structured into six subsectors: early childhood education (ECE), basic education (primary, junior secondary, and adult education), senior secondary education (academic and technical), junior colleges and post-secondary institutions, universities and colleges, and intermediate institutions for teacher and vocational training. The system follows a 3-9-3-4 structure, comprising three years of ECE, nine years of basic education (six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education), three years of senior secondary or vocational education, and four years of tertiary education. Basic education is offered free of charge, but challenges remain in ensuring access and quality across all levels. ⁱ
3. Liberia's education system, governed by the Ministry of Education, has improved access through school construction and teacher training initiatives; however, disparities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas. Notably, primary enrolment in rural areas is 27.2%, significantly lower than the 40.7% in urban areas, due to limited infrastructure and teacher shortages in remote regions. ⁱⁱ
4. The education sector has seen notable gains in student enrolment at the primary level and in girls' access to schooling, thanks to policy reforms aimed at gender inclusivity and reducing dropout rates. However, variability in educational quality and resources continues to affect academic outcomes nationwide. ⁱⁱⁱ
5. A significant step forward has been Liberia's commitment to global education standards, aligning its goals with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 for quality and inclusive education. This focus is evident in recent efforts to reform the curriculum and adapt school infrastructure to support inclusive learning environments better. ^{iv}
6. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed digital access and resource challenges, impacting learning continuity. The government's response included remote learning initiatives, but resource gaps revealed the need for further digital investment. ^v
7. Despite these challenges, Liberia's dedication to improving educational access and quality is evident in its ongoing reforms. Continued investment and international support are essential to building on this progress and addressing areas where access to education remains limited. ^{vi}

II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR cycle

8. During the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2020, Liberia received 207 recommendations. Of these, 142 were supported, demonstrating the government's commitment to addressing human rights issues, including education, gender equality, and access to justice. ^{vii}

9. Recommendations focused on strengthening educational infrastructure, reducing inequalities in access to education, and improving quality through initiatives such as the “Getting to Best Education Sector Plan” (G2B-ESP). Supported measures included improving rural school accessibility and implementing inclusive education policies for children with disabilities.^{viii}
10. The government introduced free tuition in public universities and covered examination fees for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) as part of efforts to increase education accessibility and reduce financial barriers, particularly for disadvantaged groups. These actions were aligned with recommendations aimed at promoting gender parity in educational outcomes.^{ix}
11. Liberia also advanced its Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track enrollment more effectively and address disparities. Data improvements have enabled more evidence-based policymaking to address gaps, particularly in rural and underserved areas.^x
12. Liberia made progress in teacher recruitment, increasing the number of trained teachers by 22% from 2016 to 2019, though 37% of rural teachers remain unqualified. Efforts included adding 1,500 teachers under the “Getting to Best Education Sector Plan,” yet rural student-teacher ratios remain high, averaging 45:1 in some areas.^{xi}
13. Despite these positive developments, funding limitations and implementation gaps have hindered the full realisation of accepted recommendations. Liberia continues to seek international assistance to address resource constraints, enhance its education infrastructure, and further expand access to quality education nationwide.^{xii}

III. Gender Disparity in Education

14. In Liberia, primary and junior secondary education is compulsory and tuition-free. However, girls still face barriers to attaining an equal education as do students with disabilities. Child abuse, child marriage and even infanticide of children with disabilities are severe human rights violations that still occur in Liberia.^{xiii}
15. Gender inequality in Liberia’s education system is driven by deep-rooted cultural attitudes that prioritise boys’ education while expecting girls to focus on household responsibilities and early marriage. This results in lower enrolment and completion rates for girls, limiting their opportunities for academic and professional advancement. Additionally, gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault, creates unsafe school environments, discourages girls from attending and increases dropout rates.^{xiv}
16. According to UNICEF, less than one-third of children aged 3 to 5 in Liberia have access to early childhood education, and for many, school entry occurs after the age of six. Data from the World Bank and UNESCO Institute for Statistics further reveals a stark gender disparity in tertiary education enrolment, with gross enrolment rates of 15 percent for men and only 9 percent for women.^{xv}
17. According to data from the United Nations, the net enrolment rate for primary school in Liberia was 62% for girls and 68% for boys in 2019. Additionally, the gender parity index (GPI) for primary education was 0.91, indicating a significant gender gap in access to primary education in Liberia. The GPI for secondary education was 0.75, indicating an even wider gender gap at the secondary level.^{xvi}

18. Limited resources further exacerbate the issue, as many communities lack sufficient schools, trained teachers, and essential learning materials. This scarcity affects both boys and girls, but girls are often the most disadvantaged due to societal biases. ^{xvii}

IV. Literacy Rates and Educational Outcomes

19. Despite the establishment of its first higher education institution, Liberia College, in 1862, later renamed the University of Liberia in 1951, the country continues to face significant literacy challenges. ^{xviii}
20. Recent statistics reveal that Liberia has one of the highest illiteracy rates globally. The adult literacy rate stands at 48.3 percent, far below the global average of 84.7 percent. Among the youth population, literacy rates are at 77.46 percent, lagging behind the worldwide average of 91.68 percent. ^{xix} In Liberia, data on learning poverty are not available. In its region, 80 percent of 10-year-olds cannot read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school. ^{xx}
21. A significant weakness in Liberia's education system is the failure of policymakers to implement modern teaching methods. Schools often lack science laboratories and have limited access to essential technologies, such as computers, which hinders effective learning. ^{xxi}
22. A recent official report underscores this issue, revealing that Liberia has 640 junior and senior public and community secondary schools nationwide. Alarming, only 15 percent of these schools have functional science laboratories, with significant disparities in equipment availability across counties. ^{xxii}
23. Liberia, like many other African nations, is grappling with a severe learning crisis. In sub-Saharan Africa, learning poverty, defined as the percentage of children unable to read and comprehend age-appropriate text by age 10, is estimated at 89% (World Bank, UNESCO). While specific data for Liberia is unavailable, the World Bank Human Capital Index highlights concerning trends. Liberian students score 332 on a harmonised test score scale, where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 marks the minimum level. This score indicates significant gaps in educational quality, as reflected in the 2020 Global Education Quality Dataset. ^{xxiii}
24. The lack of learning directly impacts school retention, increasing the risk of students dropping out. According to the 2021/2022 Annual School Census Report, Liberia's primary school completion rate remains critically low, at just 10% for boys and 11% for girls. ^{xxiv}
25. Eradicating illiteracy is a slow process, as it stems from a complex mix of cultural, socioeconomic, and educational factors. Adult literacy is crucial not only for personal empowerment but also for fostering a culture of learning within families. Illiterate parents may struggle to recognise the importance of education, reducing the likelihood of their children developing literacy and numeracy skills. ^{xxv}

V. Limited Funding

26. Liberia spent 2.6 percent of its GDP on government education in 2018. This is lower than both the regional average (4.0%) and the average for its income group (3.6%). ^{xxvi} The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) estimates that providing 13 years of education for a child in developing countries costs approximately \$1.25 per day. However, many developing nations struggle to allocate sufficient funding to meet this requirement. According to GPE, there is currently a \$39 billion shortfall in achieving quality education for all children by 2030. While domestic funding plays a crucial role, it is often insufficient, making foreign aid an essential

supplement. Unfortunately, only 20% of global education aid is directed toward low-income countries, further widening the funding gap.^{xxvii}

27. GPE recommends that developing nations dedicate 20% of their national budgets to education and allocate 45% of that amount to primary education. In Liberia, for instance, the education sector received only 15.8% of the national budget for the 2019/2020 fiscal year, considerably lower than regional counterparts such as Sierra Leone (27%), Ghana (35%), and Senegal (35%).^{xxviii} Considering the large numbers of children not accessing ECE, it is clear the sector will remain under pressure to expand, which will require significant resources.^{xxix}

VI. Teacher Shortages, Qualification Gaps, and Gender Disparities

28. Teacher effectiveness is widely recognised as the most significant factor influencing student learning outcomes. According to a report by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), approximately 130 million children worldwide attend school but fail to acquire fundamental skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Additionally, the United Nations estimates that 69 million new teachers will need to be recruited globally to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030. To ensure that every child receives a primary education, 25.8 million teachers need to be hired. However, in one out of every three countries, fewer than 75% of teachers meet national training standards.^{xxx}
29. In Liberia, teacher qualifications remain a critical issue. Currently, just over half of the teaching workforce meets the minimum required qualifications for their respective grade levels. At the primary level, 62.3% of teachers are considered qualified, while only 33.1% and 33.9% of teachers at the junior high and senior high levels, respectively, meet the necessary standards. Early Childhood Education (ECE) faces even more significant challenges, with only 49.2% of teachers classified as qualified. However, most ECE teachers hold a 'C' Certificate, which is designed to prepare primary school teachers and does not provide specialised training in early childhood education.^{xxxi}
30. Liberia has a critically low number of female teachers at all levels, with gender disparities increasing as the education level rises. EMIS (Education Management Information System) data reveal significant regional disparities, with Maryland having the highest percentage of female teachers, although it remains below 40% at the primary level. Some counties, such as Grand Kru and River Cess, report having no female teachers at the senior secondary level. On average, female teachers make up only 20% of the primary level, 12% of the junior secondary level, and 10% of the senior secondary level.^{xxxii}
31. These figures are among the lowest globally, significantly below the world averages of 66% at primary and 54% at secondary levels. Even within sub-Saharan Africa, Liberia lags, with regional averages of 46% and 24%, respectively. The lack of female teachers is concerning, as their presence has a positive influence on girls' school attendance, parental support for education, and provides role models. Conversely, a male-dominated school environment can raise safety concerns and discourage women from joining the profession.^{xxxiii}

VII. Recommendations

32. Broken Chalk urges the Liberian government to implement nationwide awareness campaigns that challenge cultural norms prioritising boys' education over girls'. This should include strict enforcement of laws against child marriage and gender-based violence in schools.

33. Broken Chalk recommends increasing investment in gender-responsive school infrastructure, including safe transportation for girls, separate sanitation facilities, and mentorship programs led by female role models to encourage higher enrolment and retention rates.
34. Broken Chalk advocates for the establishment of school-based reporting mechanisms and stronger legal protections against gender-based violence, ensuring that victims receive support and perpetrators are held accountable.
35. Broken Chalk suggests strengthening early childhood education (ECE) programs by increasing funding, improving teacher training, and ensuring greater access to learning materials to reduce delayed school entry and improve foundational literacy.
36. Broken Chalk advocates for the modernisation of Liberia's education system by incorporating digital learning tools, establishing well-equipped science laboratories, and providing access to computers and technology-driven education.
37. Broken Chalk urges the government to implement nationwide adult literacy programs, mainly targeting parents, to foster a culture of learning within families and reduce generational cycles of illiteracy.
38. Broken Chalk urges the Liberian government to increase its education budget to meet the recommended 20% national allocation, with at least 45% of the funds directed toward primary education. Additionally, the government should strengthen international partnerships, leverage foreign aid, and promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to bridge funding gaps. These efforts should ensure sustainable financing for expanding school infrastructure, improving teacher salaries, and enhancing educational quality.
39. Broken Chalk suggests the development of intensive teacher training and certification programs to ensure all educators meet national standards. To attract and retain qualified teachers, particularly in underserved areas, the government should offer competitive salaries, career development opportunities, and incentives such as housing or rural allowances.
40. Broken Chalk advocates for gender-inclusive teacher recruitment policies, encouraging more women to enter the profession by offering scholarships, mentorship programs, and incentives for female educators, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels.

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