



### Policy Dimensions

#### 1. Vision for Tertiary Education

Liberia adopted a vision for tertiary education in 2012, and recently adopted the Education Sector Plan “Getting to Best”. The challenge is now to implement this vision, to introduce relevant regulatory reforms, to increase capacity to implement, and to align the budget with strategic priorities.

### Status

Established



#### 2. Regulatory Framework

Some key regulation exists but it is outdated and not strictly enforced. There is no overall legislation for the tertiary education sector.

Emerging



#### 3. Governance of system and institutions

There is a diverse set of tertiary education institutions, but the differences are not clearly articulated in national policy. Institutions have significant academic, staffing, and financing autonomy, but have little influence over their own governance structures.

Emerging



#### 4. Financing

Public funding is not provided following transparent and competitive procedures. Moreover, there are no agreed performance targets linked to public funding.

Latent



#### 5. Quality Assurance

There is no independent quality assurance agency. While some steps have been undertaken to establish an accreditation agency, the proposals do not seem to follow international best practice.

Latent



#### 6. Relevance for social and economic needs

Few initiatives have been undertaken to improve the relevance of tertiary education. Steps are needed to strengthen the link with the labor market, to foster research development and innovation, and to improve sustainability.

Latent



## Foreword

Liberia's youth has high expectations for tertiary education. They would like to learn skills that allow them to find well-paying jobs, to gain access to an international network of universities, and to tackle the challenges facing the country. Considering that youth makes up 75% of the country, these are a lot of expectations to fulfill. Indeed, the government equally has high expectations in its vision for tertiary education, as well as the recently adopted "Getting to Best" Education Sector Plan 2017-2021.

Can the universities and community colleges deliver the goods? One of the key questions is whether tertiary education institutions offer value for money. The per student allocations for tertiary education are much higher than in primary and secondary education. There are no performance targets set by the government, and universities do not produce an annual report on how public funding was spent. Standards throughout the sector are low, and there are reports of academic malpractice and corruption. There is no quality control in the system, leading to low accountability of teaching staff.

Using an internationally agreed benchmark, this report hopes to identify policy areas that need attention. It also provides an extensive overview of the laws and regulations in place, and the initiatives that have been undertaken in the last few decades. The report does not give detailed recommendations on what should be done. Rather, it aims to stimulate a dialogue between the government, stakeholders and donor partners about what kind of reforms are desired.

## Introduction

***SABER-Tertiary Education is a diagnostic tool to assess how education systems perform and to identify priorities for reforms at the national level.*** It is part of the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), which aims to benchmark education systems at the country level.

SABER-TE focuses on six dimensions of tertiary education policy (see Box). The general idea is that a strong policy environment is a prerequisite to better performing tertiary education institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and technical and vocational institutes. The diagnostic tool aims to help countries assess best practices, and diagnose which policies need urgent attention. For some policy dimensions, countries are scored on specific "policy levers" to help make concrete recommendations for improvement.

Each of the six dimensions can contribute to the outcomes of tertiary education systems, although they work together in a holistic way. By matter of illustration, a vision without an effective governance structure is just a collection of ideas that will never be implemented; a well-designed governance structure without a vision could be a meaningless bureaucracy.

Six policy dimensions of successful tertiary education systems (World Bank, 2016):

1. A strong vision for tertiary education
2. A clear regulatory framework
3. Modern governance and university autonomy
4. Financing that promotes performance and equity
5. Independent quality assurance
6. Relevance to the country's social and economic needs

The World Bank has identified best practices in each of these dimensions in a review of the world's most effective tertiary education systems (World Bank 2016). The overview of best practice indicators can be found in appendix 1. Countries are scored and then benchmarked on these policy dimensions with four different scores:

1. **Latent:** this topic has received too little attention;
2. **Emerging:** there are some instances of good practice;
3. **Established:** there is systemic good practice; and
4. **Advanced:** the country follows international best practice and is an example for others.

SABER uses an extensive questionnaire to collect data on the policy environment for tertiary education. The questionnaire is populated through an analysis of the most recent versions of relevant legislation, policy documents and reports on the sector. The SABER team also carried out fieldwork in Liberia between 15-27 January, 2017 with visits to several universities, government agencies, and other stakeholders. After data collection is complete, the policy dimensions are scored on a rubric. Both the answers to the questionnaire and the rubric scores are available upon request from the SABER website (<http://saber.worldbank.org>).

This report proceeds as follows. First, we will describe the context of the tertiary education system in Liberia. We will then proceed with a summary of the considerations when scoring the six policy dimensions. Finally, we will conclude with a few general observations about tertiary education in the country.

### Context: Recent Developments in Tertiary Education in Liberia

Tertiary education in Liberia is vulnerable to shocks in the broader social and political environment. Liberia has a fragile political system and an uncertain economic future. The country is currently ranked 177 out of 188 on the Human Development Index (2016 data) and is recovering from a long and brutal civil war between 1989 and 2003 and the more recent Ebola outbreak in 2014 (Hettinger et al 2017). This has resulted in extensive physical damage to tertiary education infrastructure, with dilapidated buildings and broken-down laboratories. However, the country's human capital stock is perhaps even more severely affected. Up-to-date data on higher education in Liberia is scarce, but according to the latest available sources, in the academic year 2011/2012 only 40 out of the 428 full-time academic faculty members in Liberia's master's granting institutions held a PhD, while 124 full-time faculty members had only a bachelor's degree (NCHE 2012a). Liberia does not offer any PhD programs, and this situation is unlikely to change in the near future. As the demand for faculty members surpasses the supply (Sumaworo 2015), universities are not able to hold professors to account for lack of standards. This raises concerns about the general quality of university teaching in the country (Gbollie & David 2014) as well as about the potential for abuse and unethical behavior (USAID 2014). One university leader put this succinctly: "when the qualified were no longer available, the available became the qualified."

Problems in the broader social and political environment translate into low quality standards and poor learning outcomes. In recent years, these issues have become evident during the entrance exams for tertiary education. In 2016, after the university admissions system was reformed with the aim of eradicating cheating, not a single student out of 25,000 examinees passed the entrance examination at the University of Liberia (Ministry of Education 2016a). Two years later, the university put 10,000 of its students on probation, meaning that, on average, around half of its students scored lower than a passing grade (Yenby 2013). Instances of corruption within the school and the higher education system and cases of K-12 teachers with fake qualifications have been reported (Ministry of Education 2016a).

The regulatory framework governing tertiary education offers minimal guidance on licensing, and accreditation. While policy documents have been produced, few of their recommendations have been implemented, including those in the 2012 *Higher Education Strategic Plan* (NCHE 2016b). Also, there is

little quality assurance of higher education. In theory, those institutions that do not receive a license from the National Commission of Higher Education (NCHE)—the key agency in the country focused on tertiary education—are unable to operate in the country. However, the licensing procedure is minimal and is not accompanied by any subsequent accreditation or quality assurance procedures. Licensing is voluntary for private institutions, as mentioned in the *Getting to Best: Education Sector Plan 2017-2021* (Ministry of Education 2016b). Degrees from non-accredited institutions are not recognized for public sector employment, and their students are not eligible for scholarships.

Despite these considerable challenges, Liberia’s tertiary education system is growing in terms of both demand and intake. Since 75 percent of the Liberian population is under the age of 35, the importance of tertiary education cannot be overstated. Student numbers in higher education roughly doubled from 27,954 to 55,000 between 2008 and 2015 (Ministry of Education 2016b). The percentage of the youth population that has some higher education is now 10.4 percent (data from the 2014 Household Income and Expenditure Survey) and has continuously grown since the end of the civil war. While the main public university, the University of Liberia, enrolls about half of all students, new universities are entering the market. Faith-based and private universities, in particular, are expanding to meet the new demand. Out of the 33 higher education institutions that were licensed as of 2014, 9 institutions were public, 5 were private, and 19 were faith-based (NCHE 2014). Unfortunately, little information is available to track the tertiary education market in more detail.

Within this context, the following sections will discuss the main policy dimensions of the tertiary education landscape in Liberia, starting with the government’s vision for tertiary education.

## Policy Dimension 1: Vision for Tertiary Education

### Established ●●●○

*Liberia adopted a vision for tertiary education in 2012, and recently adopted the Education Sector Plan “Getting to Best” 2017-2021. The challenge is to implement this vision, to introduce relevant regulatory reforms, to increase capacity to implement, and to align the budget with strategic priorities.*

The relevant question for this report is whether the government has a vision and a plan for the tertiary education sector, to what extent this vision is shared between stakeholders and what actions are being taken to implement the vision. The SABER-TE diagnostic tool assesses these issues using two distinct “best practice indicators”, one that evaluates the existence of a recent vision or strategy for tertiary education and another that evaluates the extent to which this vision is being translated into policy actions. **The assessment of the SABER-TE team is that the vision for tertiary education in Liberia is established.** A vision is in place, and it addresses some key concerns raised by stakeholders. Nevertheless, some important questions remain about whether this vision will be implemented.

The main strategic documents relevant to the government’s vision for tertiary education in Liberia are the *Higher Education Strategic Plan* (NCHE 2012b) and the *Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia* (NCHE 2012c). These documents were drafted by the NCHE in 2012 after intensive consultations with the main stakeholders in the tertiary education sector. The *Higher Education Strategic Plan* was endorsed by the Association of Liberian Universities. It explicitly addresses the geopolitical, economic, and social issues faced by the country but does not consider any demographic, technological, feasibility, or sustainability challenges. The document adopts a broad vision for the system as “a higher education system producing

intellectual and human resources focusing on national, social, political, and economic development” (NCHE 2012c, p.4).

The strategic plan then sets out a mission and core values for the tertiary education sector. Its main goals are to: (1) deliver high quality and relevant higher education programs; (2) advance relevant research, innovation, and enterprise development; (3) ensure the sustainability of the higher education system; (4) promote equitable access to high quality programs; and (5) meet national and international standards. The plan translates each of these broad goals into operational priorities and actions. For instance, to improve quality, the strategic plan suggests reviewing curricula, pursuing programs for staff development, and developing international partnerships.

In November 2017, the Government approved the “Getting to Best” Education Sector Plan 2017-2021 (see Appendix). The sector plan sets three main priorities for tertiary education: (1) to increase the quality of higher education, (2) to improve equity and efficiency, and (3) to draft a new Higher Education Act. It represents a more focused strategy, and the education budget is being aligned to match these priorities. It also provides a detailed analysis of enrolment patterns and budgetary trends in the sector.

Tertiary education leaders claim that no action has been taken to implement the vision of the government since 2012. They mentioned several reasons for this lack of action. First, the Government budget has not been reformed to create relevant mechanisms or incentives for the institutions. Indeed, the financial bottleneck is not the lack of available resources but the misalignment between the budget and the strategic plan. It is also notable that external financing has been limited to some programs in only a few institutions; mostly at the University of Liberia.

Second, neither the Ministry of Education nor the NCHE has allocated any staff or organized any activities to implement the strategic plan. The Ministry has not assigned staff to oversee or to monitor the sector. Up until this year (2017), the Education Management Information System did not include any data collection on higher education institutions. NCHE has no capacity, mandate or resources to coordinate the implementation of the Plan. For these two reasons, the current deadline for its implementation, in 2023, seems unlikely to be met.

## Policy Dimension 2: Regulatory Framework

Emerging ●●○○

*Some key regulation exists but it is outdated and not strictly enforced. There is no overall legislation for the tertiary education sector.*

SABER-TE measures whether tertiary education is based on an appropriate regulatory framework that supports the work of tertiary education providers to the benefit of students and the public. This policy dimension encompasses seven distinct best practice indicators assessing the regulatory framework, including what types of higher education provision are supported, whether regulatory agencies have the appropriate resources, and whether the regulation is grounded in key principles. ***The assessment of the SABER-TE team is that, in Liberia, the regulatory environment is emerging.*** While the legislation covers the main aspects of the tertiary education system (public and private universities and community colleges), it lacks specificity.

The main regulations are the 1989 *Act Establishing a National Commission of Higher Education* complemented by *the Education Reform Act of 2011*. Universities are established by charters, which form another major source of regulation (see below). In recent months, a bill has been drafted to amend the Act of 1989 to introduce an additional buffer body—the National Accreditation Center—designed specifically to address accreditation and quality assurance concerns.

The market entry and operation of public and private higher education institutions is governed by a licensing procedure. All tertiary education institutions—public, faith-based, and private—must have charters approved by the Liberian Parliament. The charter gives the universities the legal status to operate, a broad mission, and the power to award degrees and sets out the structure of the university. While the country seems to be open to different types of educational providers and institutions, the language of relevant legislation is often not very specific. Because of this, certain types of institutions seem not to be covered by regulation at all, such as teacher training institutions and community colleges (Ministry of Education 2016a).

The main regulatory agency in Liberian higher education is the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE). This agency is accountable to the Ministry of Education and to the legislature, although it is unclear if its activity is actually monitored by the government. The 1989 act grants autonomy to universities, while delegating regulatory powers to the NCHE. This agency has drafted the *Higher Education Strategic Plan* (NCHE 2012b) and the *Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia* (NCHE 2012c).

The regulations contain various references to the key principles relevant to tertiary education. The 2012 *Higher Education Strategic Plan* mentions the need for equitable access, educational quality, and the promotion of relevant research. However, several other key principles such as sustainability, accountability, transparency, and institutional autonomy are harder to find in official policy and legal documents.

There are several problems in the laws and regulation. First, neither the university charters nor the NCHE Act 1989 have been updated since they were initially adopted. The vision behind the provision of higher education in Liberia needs to be strengthened in the legislation. The country has fundamentally changed over the last few decades as has the provision of higher education so a nationwide law to support and regulate the tertiary education system is needed to reflect these changes. A second problem is that the outdated legislation leaves some loopholes in terms of the accountability of universities. For instance, there are no clear standards governing university finances, and it is unclear whether public universities even have a clear budget. In the case of private universities, it is unclear what quality of service they are providing in return for their fees. This is partly due to the non-specific language in the various policies and laws currently in place and partly due to the non-binding legal status of the private universities. While the NCHE has substantial legal authority over tertiary education institutions, it is unclear to whom it is accountable itself. The licensing and accreditation procedures are underdeveloped, and it is unclear how institutions could appeal decisions made by the NCHE. In sum, there is a regulatory regime in place but it is outdated and is open to the risk of mismanagement and academic malpractice.

## Policy Dimension 3: Governance of System and Institutions

### Emerging ●●○○

*There is a diverse set of tertiary education institutions, but the differences are not clearly articulated in national policy. Institutions have significant academic, staffing, and financing autonomy, but have little influence over their own governance structures.*

The goal of this policy dimension is to discover if the tertiary education system has adequate structures, policies, and processes in place that enable tertiary education institutions to operate efficiently and effectively. The tool can be used to find out whether the main tertiary education authority at the central level has sufficient staff and resources to guide, support, and monitor tertiary education institutions. This dimension is comprised of two distinct policy levers: (1) articulation and (2) institutional autonomy. **The assessment of the SABER-TE team is that, in Liberia, the governance dimension of tertiary education is emerging.** While Liberia offers a considerable degree of autonomy to tertiary education institutions, there is no clear governance structure to facilitate the coherent management of its diversified tertiary education system.

#### Policy Lever: Articulation

The first policy lever included in this dimension relates to articulation, which is the formal relationship between all higher education institutions across the country in terms of the academic requirements and coursework that they require of students [**check**]. The lever evaluates whether the legislative framework supports the development of different kinds of higher education institutions [**check**], enables these different types of institutions with different missions to coexist and collaborate as well as strengthening their missions, and facilitate student mobility within the system. **On this policy lever, Liberia is considered to be latent.**

The legislative framework in Liberia differentiates between universities and non-university institutions. This differentiation is not made in the 1989 legislation, but it is specified in the subsequent Education Reform Act of 2011, which distinguishes between junior colleges and other post-secondary education institutions, colleges, and universities and intermediary institutions (including teacher education colleges and seminaries). University and non-university institutions differ in their teaching functions and in the types of degrees that they each award. Teacher education is offered by non-universities and is regulated by the Bureau of Teaching Education (Ministry of Education 2011, p.15). Also, there are differences between individual institutions that are enshrined in their Parliament-approved university charters.

There are also no clear governance structures or incentives designed to facilitate collaboration between tertiary education institutions, enable students to transfer between institutions, or facilitate collaboration between the tertiary sector and other education sectors. For instance, there is lack of clarity surrounding regulation of community colleges. While the President of Liberia has stated that community colleges will be brought under the University of Liberia<sup>1</sup>, no concrete action has been taken to this effect.

#### Policy Lever: Institutional Autonomy

Tertiary education institutions require autonomy to fulfill their missions. The aim of this policy lever is to find out how different types of autonomy manifest within the system. The types of institutional autonomy assessed by the SABER-TE tool for both public and private institutions are the ability to negotiate

<sup>1</sup> President of the Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2017). Annual Message to the Sixth Session of the 53<sup>rd</sup> National Legislature of the Republic of Liberia. Retrieved from <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/ANNUAL.pdf>

performance standards, academic autonomy, staffing autonomy, governance autonomy, and financial autonomy including the freedom to diversify funding sources. ***Institutional autonomy is established in Liberia.***

Often, governments around the world establish performance standards and targets for their tertiary education institutions through quality assurance procedures and funding schemes. By granting institutions the ability to negotiate some of these performance standards in a transparent manner, governments ensure that the diverging needs of individual institutions are taken into account. In Liberia, however, neither public nor private institutions can negotiate performance standards, because these simply do not exist.

Academic autonomy is ensured for both public and private institutions in Liberia. Institutions can design their own curricula, introduce and cancel degrees, determine internal academic structures, decide on the number of students to admit, determine admission criteria and procedures, evaluate programs, learning outcomes, and teaching methodologies, conduct research on topics of interest, award degrees, titles, and certificates, and include practical training and internships in their curricula.

Similarly, staffing autonomy in the country is advanced, as both public and private institutions can hire, promote, and fire academic and non-academic staff, offer performance-based salaries and tenure, and create new academic and non-academic positions.

In contrast, the governance autonomy is less developed. Public, faith-based, and private institutions in Liberia are unable to appoint or elect their leadership, terminate the positions of current leaders, design or change the process through which institutional leaders are selected, or involve internal and external stakeholders as part of their leadership structures. In addition, tertiary education institutions have no autonomy to change their mission without the permission of the NCHE (Ministry of Education 2016a, p. 235). Each university is headed by a President, while a Provost or Vice-President oversees academic affairs. All universities are governed by a Board of Trustees, typically composed of 15 members. This board includes both permanent members (politicians or eminent figures, including the Minister of Education *ex officio*) and non-permanent members. While the university's President is typically appointed by the Board of Trustees, the President of Liberia has an important say in the appointment procedure, even for private and faith-based institutions.

Both public and private institutions in Liberia are able to set and charge their own student fees (NCHE 2016c, p.40) and are also allowed to diversify their sources of funding (Ministry of Education 2016a, p.245) including donations and real estate income (NCHE 2016a) as tertiary education institutions tend to own property and land.

## Policy Dimension 4: Financing

Latent ●○○○

*Public funding is not provided following transparent and competitive procedures. Moreover, there are no agreed performance targets linked to public funding. There is no funding to increase equitable access to tertiary education.*

SABER-TE measures whether public financing is used to steer tertiary education toward established system-wide goals. The dimension is comprised of three distinct policy levers: (1) coverage of resource



allocation, (2) resource allocation, and (3) how resources are used. ***The assessment of the SABER-TE team is that, in Liberia, the financing of tertiary education is latent.*** The process by which public funds are allocated is not transparent, the allocations are not linked to institutions' performance, and auditing standards are unclear.

### Policy Lever: Coverage of Resource Allocation

This policy lever aims to map what types of expenditure (recurrent, capital, and research) are supported by public funding allocations to both public and private tertiary education institutions. ***On this policy lever, Liberia is scored as emerging.***

The 2014 *National Policy on Higher Education in Liberia* stipulates that accredited private institutions are eligible to apply for public funding (NCHE, 2014). In 2012, government subsidies constituted 7 percent of the total budget of private institutions (NCHE 2016a, p.31). Government subsidies can be appropriated for both recurrent and capital spending. In the year 2007/2008, 1 percent of appropriated public funds were allocated for capital expenses, while the rest covered recurrent expenses such as salaries. However, public funds are not allocated for research purposes to either public nor private institutions in Liberia.

### Policy Lever: Resource Allocation

This policy lever aims to map the process through which public funds are allocated to tertiary education institutions and to evaluate the transparency with which funding is allocated and the criteria used for this process. ***On this policy lever, Liberia is scored as latent.***

The allocation of public funding towards tertiary education institutions in Liberia is not always transparent. There are significant variations from one year to the next in the level of appropriations depending on the electoral cycle and the extent of lobbying done by the institutions (Ministry of Education 2016a, p.248). There is no publicly known formula to allocate funds, nor is there a transparent procedure of negotiations. In addition, performance-based funding is not used, so no data are collected to monitor how institutions perform.

It should be noted that the *Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021* recommends introducing performance-based funding for tertiary education institutions (see Appendix). While Liberia doesn't have a national funding scheme aimed at promoting innovation to meet national priorities, the government does support students in pursuing developmental-focused graduate-level studies abroad under the condition that recipients return to Liberia following their graduation (Ministry of Education 2016a, p.249).

### Policy Lever: Use of Resources

With this lever, SABER-TE aims to discover the extent to which public funding is being used to advance a country's equity goals. ***Use of resources in Liberia is latent.*** There are no effective initiatives to increase equitable access to tertiary education.

Liberia used to have a public program providing financial aid to students, but it was terminated in 2012 (Ministry of Education 2016a, p.249). The program awarded scholarships based on achievement, not minority status (NCHE 2012c, p.38). Liberia has no financial cost-sharing mechanisms in place to help students to pay for their tertiary education nor does it provide any incentives to encourage tertiary education institutions to meet the country's equity goals despite the country's substantial gender and economic inequalities (Ministry of Education 2016a, p.39).

## Policy Dimension 5: Quality Assurance

### Latent ●○○○

*There is no independent quality assurance agency. While some steps have been undertaken to establish an accreditation agency, the proposals do not seem to follow international best practice.*

This policy dimension attempts to map the state of quality assurance. Two policy levers are included as part of this dimension: (1) accreditation and institutional quality standards and (2) a tertiary education management information system (TEMIS).

#### Policy Lever: Accreditation and Institutional Quality Assurance Standards

This policy lever evaluates the key actors involved in the quality assurance process, their independence, the jurisdiction of their activity, and how the quality assurance process is implemented. ***Accreditation and institutional quality assurance are latent in Liberia.***

The main quality assurance and accreditation functions are delegated to the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE). The NCHE is tasked with regulating and licensing tertiary education institutions. The commission consists of between 9 and 17 members, which include leaders of the main universities, representatives of key ministries, Parliament, and professional associations, a representative of the teachers' union, and a student. The commission is divided into two groups: permanent members with a mandate of six years and non-permanent members with a mandate of two years. The act gives the NCHE the power to institute "punitive measures" against institutions that violate NCHE guidelines. At the same time, because its mandated composition includes representatives of the Ministry of Education and Parliament as well as representatives of universities, the NCHE has only limited independence from either the government or the tertiary education institutions (Government of Liberia 1989, p.2).

It could be argued that the NCHE already operates a nascent accreditation system, even if it is not formally a quality assurance agency. The 2014 *National Policy on Higher Education in Liberia* states that every institution must obtain written permission from the NCHE to operate. The NCHE issues the permit after undertaking a site visit, although there is no stipulated methodology for such a site visit. Based on its licensing procedure, the NCHE holds a list of "recognized and accredited institutions," which currently consists of 33 tertiary education institutions. The policy also sets out a minimal procedure for the accreditation of institutions. The NCHE receives a yearly budget allocation from the government and has its own staff and building.

The NCHE has national jurisdiction. While its regulation of cross-border providers is unclear, institutions in Liberia need to obtain permission from the NCHE before cooperating with institutions located outside the country (NCHE 2014). The jurisdiction of the NCHE extends to non-universities and universities, as well as full-time, part-time, and distance programs.

The NCHE does not have any Institutional Quality Assurance Standards<sup>2</sup> nor Program Quality Standards.<sup>3</sup> In addition, no incentives exist for tertiary education institutions to create management information systems,<sup>4</sup> and the NCHE's licensing processes do not include key stakeholders such as students. Lastly,

<sup>2</sup> Institutional Quality Assurance Standards measure the desired characteristics of an institution against a reference point..

<sup>3</sup> Program Quality Standards measure the desired characteristics of an academic program against a reference point.

<sup>4</sup> An organized group of information and documentation services that collects, stores, processes, analyzes, and disseminates information on tertiary education institutions that can be used for planning and management.

there are no practical consequences for academic programs that do not meet the NCHE's accreditation standards.

In sum, Liberia does not currently have an institutional accreditation agency or a quality assurance agency. In addition, it is not clear whether its tertiary education system is ready or able to implement an independent accreditation process (NCHE 2012c, p.14). However, some actions have been taken towards establishing an autonomous buffer body solely devoted to quality assurance. National discussions in this direction started in 2011 (Ministry of Education 2011, p.20) when the creation of the Center for Educational Accreditation was proposed. To date, this proposal has not made it into law. A recently drafted bill that would create this center is currently pending in the executive.

### Policy Lever: Tertiary Education Management Information System

A tertiary education management information system (TEMIS) is a management tool for tracking data on tertiary education. It can be used to disseminate information about tertiary education to the public, to plan budgetary allocations, or to evaluate the effectiveness of policy reforms. This policy lever aims to measure the extent to which in any given country there are formal procedures for systematically collecting data on the tertiary education system in the form of a single system-wide TEMIS. **Liberia does not currently have a TEMIS and, as such, this dimension is latent.**

The government plans to include tertiary education institutions in the broader Education Management Information System (EMIS). Indeed, only this year (2017) specific questions on tertiary education institutions were included in the EMIS data collection effort. In the future, a full and separate TEMIS could collect data on students, institutional and student financing, academic performance, graduate outcomes, and the relevance of institutions to the country's broader development goals.

## Policy Dimension 6: Relevance to A Country's Social and Economic Needs

Latent ●○○○

*Few initiatives have been undertaken to improve the relevance of tertiary education. Steps are needed to strengthen the link with the labor market, to foster research development and innovation, and to improve sustainability.*

This policy dimension aims to find out if a given country's tertiary education institutions are incentivized to conduct research and development activities that respond to local conditions, resources, and needs and are oriented towards social development. This dimension consists of three distinct policy levers: (1) economic development, (2) fostering research development and innovation (RDI), and (3) fostering social and cultural development and environmental protection and sustainability. Understandably, the immediate challenges facing the tertiary education system in Liberia make focusing on strategic areas for development a secondary policy priority. **The assessment is that this policy dimension in Liberia is latent.**

### Policy Lever: Economic Development

This policy lever aims to discover the extent to which there is a system-wide or sector-specific policy mandate to strengthen the role of tertiary education in enhancing economic development in Liberia. **On this policy lever, Liberia is assessed as emerging.**

While little attention has so far been given to using tertiary education to advance Liberia's economic development, the *Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021* recommends strengthening and

diversifying the tertiary education curriculum to increase its market relevance. This could be achieved by establishing partnerships between higher education and local businesses and industry. The document also recommends pursuing program accreditation for selected universities and fields of study, including those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), aligned with Liberia's strategic and economic development priorities (Ministry of Education 2016b, p.209). In addition, several other official documents refer to the relevance of tertiary education for economic development (Ministry of Education 2016a). To date, these plans are not sufficiently operationalized, and no steps have been taken to implement these plans. University leaders are not aware of any recent steps to increase the labor market relevance of their programs, except for individual initiatives by universities.

### **Policy Lever: Fostering Research, Development and Innovation**

This policy lever evaluates the support provided to research, development, and innovation (RDI) activities. It also asks whether there is a system-wide strengthened RDI and whether there are any financial incentives or specific programs aimed at encouraging this. ***Fostering RDI is in a latent state.***

The goal to “advance relevant research, innovation, and enterprise development” is set out in the 2012 *National Education Strategic Plan for Liberia* (NCHE 2012d, p.7).<sup>5</sup> However, this aspect of the plan has not been implemented. As described above in the section on financing, no public funding is currently allocated for research activities in Liberia, and no government-led financial incentives or specific programs exist to foster RDI either at the national or local level. The only RDI programs that do exist are supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which has funded a project aimed to “build regionally recognized and competitive academic Centers of Excellence that produce graduates who become leading professionals and entrepreneurs in the fields of engineering and agriculture in Liberia” (USAID 2014). These fields (agriculture and engineering) are also mentioned in the Education Sector Plan “Getting to Best” as promising areas for development.

### **Policy Lever: Fostering Social and Cultural Development and Environmental Protection and Sustainability**

The purpose of this policy lever is to assess policies to increase social and cultural development, environmental protection and sustainability. ***On this policy lever, Liberia is rated as latent,*** as there are no specific programs to advance these goals.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Liberia has established a strong vision for tertiary education, and has made a recent step forward by adopting the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021. However, it seems that little has been done to translate the vision into action since its adoption in 2012; the Getting to Best plan is still too recent to be implemented. Few actions have been taken to improve the regulatory framework, the governance system, or the financing system. The main challenge for the country is thus to deliver on these promises, by increasing capacity for implementation, aligning the budget to strategic priorities, and to update the regulation.

The main policy recommendation that the SABER-TE team would like to make to the government is to work on the financing, quality assurance, and relevance of tertiary education. Liberia is currently considered to be latent in these three dimensions, and some easily implementable policy actions could improve this standing. Financing rules could be made more transparent, and universities could be made

more accountable for their use of public funding. Quality assurance could be strengthened by making it more independent from the influence of both policymakers and tertiary education institutions and by systematically collecting data on tertiary educations in the EMIS. The relevance of tertiary education could be increased by directing research funds and donor investments to productive sectors such as agriculture and engineering.

While Liberia has a challenging social and political environment, this cannot be an excuse to stall implementing the country's vision for tertiary education. There is a sense of urgency, as demand for tertiary education continues to grow and students have high expectations. There is also a clear societal need. Universities and colleges set the standards for the professions in which they educate their students. The tertiary education system trains future leaders, doctors, engineers, and teachers who are desperately needed in Liberia. If standards for tertiary education remain low, it is hard to imagine that the broader development goals of the Liberian government will be met.

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## Acronyms

EMIS	Education management information system
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TE	Tertiary education
TEMIS	Tertiary education management information system
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
RDI	Research, Development and Innovation

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## Appendix 1: Best Practice Indicators included in SABER-TE

<b>1. Vision</b>			
<b>1.1</b>		<b>1.2</b>	
The country/state has a fully developed vision/strategic plan for tertiary education that serves as a guide for steering the system		The creation of the tertiary education vision/strategic plan is relevant and representative, and includes input from key stakeholders and considers key societal factors	
<b>2. Regulatory Environment</b>			
<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>
The country has an explicitly stated tertiary education law for steering the system towards optimal performance.	The regulatory framework includes provisions to adequately regulate the market entry and operation of public tertiary education providers.	The regulatory framework includes provisions to adequately regulate the market entry and operation of private tertiary education providers.	The regulatory framework includes provisions to adequately regulate the market entry and operation of non-university institutions.
<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>	
The regulatory framework includes provisions to adequately regulate the distance and online education.	The regulatory framework includes provisions to adequately regulate the independent agencies and buffer bodies.	The regulatory framework embeds key guiding principles.	
<b>3. Governance</b>			
<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>
The regulatory framework establishes distinct functions for university and non-university institutions in contributing to system-wide goals.	The regulatory framework provides incentives to strengthen the unique mission of different institutions.	The tertiary system has an enabling governance structure that facilitates collaboration between institutions.	The tertiary system has an enabling governance structure that facilitates student transfer across institutions.



<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.8</b>
The tertiary system has an enabling governance structure that facilitates collaboration and/or communication with other educational sectors (e.g. secondary education).	Public TEIs are able to negotiate at least some performance targets with stakeholders, such as the government or tertiary education agencies (TEAs).	The governance framework for public TEIs supports their academic autonomy.	The governance framework for public TEIs supports their staffing autonomy.
<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>3.12</b>
The regulatory framework for public TEIs supports their governance autonomy.	The governance framework grants public TEIs significant freedom to diversify their sources of funding.	Private TEIs are able to negotiate at least some performance targets with stakeholders, such as the government or TEAs.	The governance framework for private TEIs supports their academic autonomy.
<b>3.13</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>3.15</b>	
The governance framework for private TEIs supports their staffing autonomy.	The regulatory framework for private TEIs supports their governance autonomy.	Private TEIs enjoy significant freedom to diversify their sources of funding.	
<b>4. Financing</b>			
<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.4</b>
Public funds are allocated to accredited public and private TEIs.	Public funds allocated to public TEIs cover recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure.	Public funds allocated to public TEIs cover research expenditure.	Public funds are allocated to private TEIs to cover research expenditure.
<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Public funds are allocated to TEIs through a stable and transparent process and using a block grant budget system.	There is a publicly known or publicly accessible formula for the allocation of public funds for TEIs, which specifies the amounts disbursed as fixed and variable funding.	The stakeholders that contribute to determining the different parts of the funding allocation mechanism are clearly identified.	Performance-based funding is used as part of the funding allocation mechanism.

<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.10</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>4.12</b>
There is a mechanism which involves data collection for monitoring the progress of institutions toward performance targets.	There is at least one competitive line of funding accessible to TEIs aimed at promoting innovation or to address national priorities.	There are public programs in place to provide financial aid to students from disadvantaged backgrounds with the goal of advancing equity goals in access and retention.	The financial cost-sharing mechanisms available effectively serve the needs of targeted beneficiaries.
<b>4.13</b>	<b>4.14</b>		
The outcomes of financial aid programs for students are adequately monitored.	There are financial incentives to reward institutions that meet equity goals.		
<b>5. Quality Assurance</b>			
<b>5.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5.4</b>
There is at least one institutional accreditation agency (IAA) or quality assurance agency (QAA) that oversees the quality of individual institutions in the country.	The IAA(s) or QAA(s) is/are independent agency/agencies from government.	The IAA(s) or QAA(s) is/are independent agency/agencies from TEIs.	The IAA(s)'s or QAA(s)'s jurisdiction is nationwide.
<b>5.5</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.8</b>
The IAA(s)'s or QAA(s)'s jurisdiction includes both public and private TEIs.	The IAA(s)'s or QAA(s)'s jurisdiction includes both university and non-university institutions.	The IAA(s)'s or QAA(s)'s jurisdiction includes full time, part time, on-site and online programs.	The IAA(s) or QAA(s) has/have developed Institutional Quality Standards (IQAs) to apply in its/their evaluations.
<b>5.9</b>	<b>5.10</b>	<b>5.11</b>	<b>5.12</b>
The IAA(s) or QAA(s) has/have developed Program Quality Standards (PQAs) to apply in its/their evaluations.	The IAA(s) or QAA(s) provides incentives for TEIs to create Management Information Systems (MIS) through IQAs or PQAs.	The IAA(s) or QAA(s) involve TEI stakeholders, including students, as part of their activities.	There are practical consequences for programs/TEIs that do not meet the evaluation/accreditation standards.

<b>5.13</b>	<b>5.14</b>	<b>5.15</b>	<b>5.16</b>
There is at least one national or regional TEMIS in operation.	The TEMIS collects data on student enrollment, retention/dropout rates, graduation rates, and student transfer rates.	The TEMIS collects data on tuition levels, financial aid, grants, scholarships, and student loans.	The TEMIS collects data on students' academic readiness.
<b>5.17</b>	<b>5.18</b>	<b>5.19</b>	<b>5.20</b>
The TEMIS collects data on graduated outcomes.	The TEMIS collects data on institutional contributions to local economic, social or cultural development.	The TEMIS collects data on institutional RDI indicators.	The TEMIS collects data on faculty related indicators.
<b>5.21</b>			
The TEMIS is used extensively for system evaluation and reform.			
<b>6. Relevance for Social and Economic Needs</b>			
<b>6.1</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.4</b>
There is a system wide or sector-specific policy mandate to strengthen the role of tertiary education to enhance economic development.	There is a system-wide or sector-specific policy mandate to strengthen RDI activity in tertiary education.	There are financial incentives to foster RDI activity across different tertiary sub-systems.	There are programs and/or incentives to enhance the capacity of local and regional actors to contribute to RDI activities in tertiary institutions.
<b>6.5</b>	<b>6.6</b>		
There is a system-wide policy mandate or decree to strengthen the role of tertiary education in fostering social and cultural development.	There is a system-wide policy mandate or decree to strengthen the role of tertiary education in fostering environmental protection and sustainability.		

## Appendix 2: Extract from Getting to Best Education Sector Plan

### Chapter 13: Higher Education Program

#### 13.1 Summary

<b>G2B impact</b>	Young people have the necessary skills for livelihoods and employment	
<b>G2B priority</b>	Young people have the necessary skills for livelihoods and employment	
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The demand for higher skills and degrees are not appropriately linked with the supply of higher education study programs.</li> <li>• Quality of higher education programs is not internationally validated.</li> <li>• Resources are not distributed based on performance, public priorities (e.g. AfT) or equity considerations and are not used efficiently or cost-effectively.</li> <li>• Higher education courses are not affordable for most of the population.</li> </ul>	
<b>SDG targets</b>	<p>4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university</p> <p>4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship</p>	
<b>Strategy</b>	Leverage regional and international partnerships and expertise, target market demand for critical skills, and increase the efficiency of education expenditure to drive quality improvement and increase equitable access in Liberian higher education.	
<b>Program name</b>	<b>Higher Education Program</b>	
<b>Responsible officer</b>	Director General, National Commission on Higher Education	
<b>Components</b>	1. Increase quality and relevance in Higher Education	Director General, National Commission on Higher Education
	2. Improve equity and efficiency in higher education finance	Director General, National Commission on Higher Education
	3. Higher Education Act	Director General, National Commission on Higher Education

## 13.2 Introduction

Liberia's industries, particularly those that depend on natural resources, have expanded quickly in the post-conflict period. Whereas firms in these high demand sectors are able to easily recruit low-skilled labor, it is very difficult to hire Liberian professionals with advanced skills. Producing reliable and productive human capital is important if the country is to fully benefit from its natural resources and effectively develop the economy.

Liberia's civil wars took a heavy toll on the country's higher education system. The most qualified faculty and administrators in universities moved abroad in a massive brain drain, and institutions had to be closed intermittently due to war and student unrest. Infrastructure (including equipment, facilities, libraries, laboratories, and buildings) was severely damaged, looted, and, in some cases, destroyed<sup>6</sup>. In the current context, challenges to rebuilding the sector stem not only from the legacy of war, but also from poor learning outcomes in earlier levels of education.

### 13.2.1 The Higher Education Sector

In 2014, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) recognized and accredited 33 higher education institutions (HEI), an increase on the 30 HEIs accredited in 2012. Nineteen of these HEIs are located in Montserrado County, with the majority concentrated in Monrovia. Remaining HEIs are located in Bong, Bomi, Maryland, Margabi, Nimba, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh and Lofa Counties. Only nine counties can claim the physical presence of at least one HEI. The majority of institutions are small, with only ten institutions – namely the University of Liberia, African Methodist Episcopal University, United Methodist University, African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College, Cuttington University, Smythe Institute of Management and Technology, Grand Bassa Community College, William V.S. Tubman University, Nimba Community College and Stella Maris Polytechnic – enrolling more than students in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

### 13.2.2 Enrolment

In 2012, 43,843 students were enrolled in higher education in Liberia, with the University of Liberia accounting for 54.4 percent of total enrolment (NCHE 2012). Only 16,258 female students were enrolled in higher education compared to 27,585 male students resulting in a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.59. However, GPI vary significantly across institutions, and a number of private institutions enroll many more female than male students. Smythe Institute of Management and Technology, for example demonstrates a GPI of 5.44 and Morris Community College of Airline Studies with GPI at 4.76. Most institutions demonstrate increasing enrolment.

### 13.2.3 Courses

Between 2009/10 and 2011/12, the most popular major in higher education was Business/Management, with the lowest number of students opting to enroll in Education Studies (Table 13-1). Overall, enrolment of students increased across all majors for the period being reviewed. The number of male students enrolled in the Humanity/Art major decreased, and increased substantially in Education Studies. Female enrolment increased across all majors, with the largest growth in the Agriculture/Forestry major.

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank. (2012). Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia. Washington DC: World Bank.

<sup>7</sup> National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). (2012). Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions.

**Table 13-1 Student enrolment by major, 2009/10 to 2011/12.**

	2009/10			2011/12			Male growth %	Female growth %
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total		
Business/ management	10544	5381	15925	11443	7532	18975	9%	40%
Hum/art	5679	3325	9004	5152	4216	9368	-9%	27%
Science	2024	633	2657	2638	967	3605	30%	53%
Engineering	1218	92	1310	2317	256	2573	90%	178%
Agr/Forestry	1202	128	1330	2275	566	2841	89%	342%
Med/Nursing	837	1694	2531	910	2600	3510	9%	53%
Ed Studies	508	205	713	1314	581	1895	159%	183%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22012</b>	<b>11458</b>	<b>33470</b>	<b>26049</b>	<b>16718</b>	<b>42767</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>46%</b>

Source: National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). (2012). Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions

### 13.2.4 Faculty

Student to faculty ratios vary widely across institutions, with a shortage of senior faculty positions evident in some areas (Table 13-2).

**Table 13-2 Student-Faculty Ratio, higher education institutions with more than 500 students, 2012**

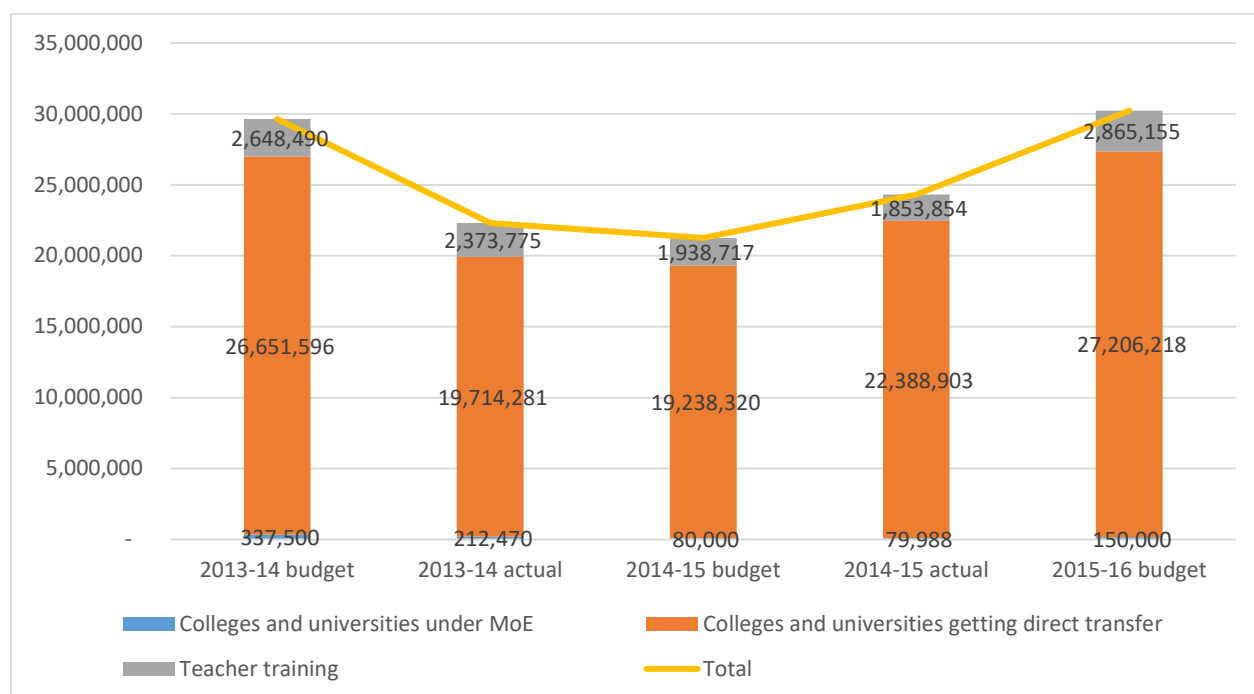
Institution	Ownership	Total student numbers	Student-Faculty Ratio
University of Liberia	Public	23,837	33
African Methodist Episcopal University	Faith-based	3,370	30.1
United Methodist University	Faith-based	3,290	12.3
African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College	Faith-based	2,836	19.2
Cuttington University	Faith-based	2,565	17
Smythe Institute of Management and Technology	Private	1,707	32
Grand Bassa Community College	Public	1,290	21
William V.S Tubman University	Public	757	17.6
Nimba Community College	Public	722	23
Stella Maris Polytechnic	Faith-based	555	Not reported

Source: National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). (2012). *Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions*

### 13.2.5 Funding

Higher education institutions receive funding through direct transfers (also known as subsidies) from the central government, with the amount of the subsidy determined by the national budget. Some additional institutions receive budget allocation through the MoE, but the total amount of these transfers is much smaller when compared to those receiving direct transfers through the national budget. In the 2015/16 budget, only USD 150,000 of funding was channeled to HEIs through the MoE budget, while over USD 30 million was directly transferred to HEIs through the national budget (Figure 13-1).

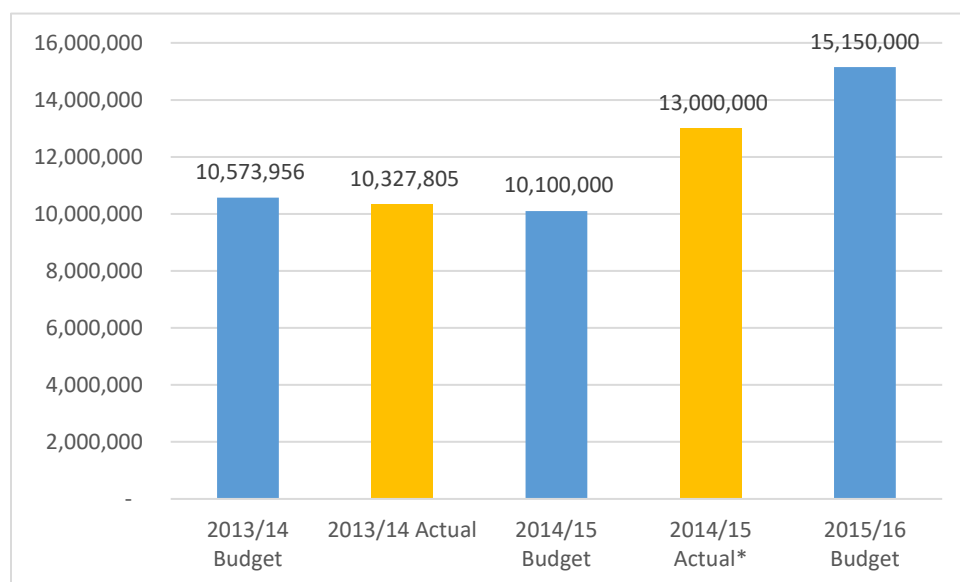
**Figure 13-1 Transfers to HEIs 2013-2016, USD**



Source: National budget 2013/14, 14/15 and 15/16

The University of Liberia receives the largest share of transfers. Since 2010, the annual transfer to the University of Liberia has exceeded USD 10m, and in 2014/15 the university over-executed their budget at a rate of 129 percent. In 2015/16, funding to University of Liberia increased by USD 4m over the previous year. Salaries at the University of Liberia have increased over the last few years from approximately USD 125/month to almost USD 1,400/month for senior faculty, and from approximately USD 45/month to USD 780/month for more junior faculty.



**Figure 13-2 University of Liberia funding, 2013-16, USD**

Source: National Budget, 2013/14, 14/15. Note: Actual\* is GoL projection

Additional financial support to the sector is derived from oil and mining concessional contracts, with prescribed allocations to higher education in important development areas. These funds have been directed for use in the improvement of teaching of engineering and mathematics<sup>8</sup>.

### 13.2.6 Scholarships

The MoE has tightened the focus of scholarship provision to support study in line with development priorities (reducing the number of local scholarships from 5,000 to just over 1,000, and limiting public support for study abroad to the graduate level only). Notwithstanding these changes, scholarships continue to account for a substantial share of the budget, with foreign scholarships alone consuming an average of USD 2.1 million per annum, equivalent to 2.8 percent of the total budget for the education sector.

Recipients of foreign scholarships are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding including a commitment to return to Liberia and work for the government for two years. The program prioritizes certain strategic areas of study such as science, agriculture and education. Advertisements for scholarship applications are published in newspapers, broadcast on the radio, and posted to the MoE website to encourage students to apply. Interviews, in addition to a written test, are conducted to assess applicants. Students supported by government scholarships are subject to academic reporting every semester. The value of scholarships varies based on the destination country.

There is a significant gender imbalance with regard to students receiving international scholarship, and to date no specific interventions have focused on this problem.

Local scholarships cover both undergraduate and graduate study, but this program was halted in 2012. No new students have been selected for scholarship supported study in local HEIs, with support limited to existing students who were previously enrolled in the program. The majority of supported students' focus their studies in STEM subjects.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank. (2012). Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia. Washington DC: World Bank.

Local scholarships cover eighteen credits per student, with costs per credit differing by HEI. On average, one higher education credit costs USD 25, for a total of USD 450 per student. The scholarship does not include social subsidies. In 2014/15, USD 500,000 was provided to students benefiting from the program. However, there was a funding gap of USD 1.5million to cover tuition for all students.

### 13.3 Legal and Policy Context

In 1989, the Act on Higher Education was passed to provide legal guidance on the development of higher education. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established by the Act with responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and accrediting all HEIs. The NCHE coordinates activities related to strategy development and is the primary implementation agency for oversight of strategy and policy recommendations (Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia, 2012).

The NCHE is also assigned with responsibility for licensing and accreditation of HEIs. Before a university can become accredited, it must be licensed by the NCHE. Accreditation is voluntary, but all public institutions must be accredited. Private institutions that are not accredited cannot receive government subsidies, and their students are not eligible for government scholarships or any other form of government financial aid.

Currently only colleges and universities are subject to regulation and oversight on the part of the NCHE. Other institutions, such as RTTIs and TVET institutions, fall under the authority of the MoE, reporting to the Deputy Minister for Instruction (World Bank 2012).

### 13.4 Achievements

- The first comprehensive census of HEIs was completed in June, 2010, resulting in the publication of the report 'A Transformative Higher Education for Sustainable Development: 2009/10 Statistical Report on Tertiary Institutions in Liberia'.
- A second census was completed in 2012, with a corresponding report entitled 'The Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions' (NCHE 2012).
- Stakeholders have been convened for consultation regarding the amending of the Higher Education Act.

### 13.5 Challenges

#### 13.5.1 Recruitment and retention of quality faculty staff

Years of conflict has resulted in a relatively small pool of academic talent. Poor salaries for lecturers and professors at many institutions results in many teaching staff holding more than one job to support their livelihoods (although in recent years there have been substantial salary increases at the University of Liberia). In light of the fact that over two-thirds of HEIs are located in Montserrado County, and that most do not have more than 1,000 students, many institutions share faculty for common courses with negative implications for student-faculty contact time (World Bank 2012).

#### 13.5.2 Poor infrastructure, equipment and curricula

Liberian libraries and laboratories are generally poorly equipped. Sumaworo documented poorly equipped classrooms at the University of Liberia accommodating more than 100 students.<sup>9</sup> Many institutions are too small to achieve economies of scale, increasing costs and compromising quality. There is no national quality assurance or accreditation system, or process for international or national peer review.

<sup>9</sup> Sumaworo, M. D. (2015). Challenges of Tertiary Education in Liberia and Possible Solutions.

### 13.5.3 Students lack foundational skills

Due to poor learning outcomes in lower levels of education, high school graduates are generally incapable of handling the advanced educational programs in HEIs. In 2013, nearly 25,000 school-leavers failed the admission test at the University of Liberia. As a result, graduates from HEIs can be very poor, and much effort must be expended in remedial programs.

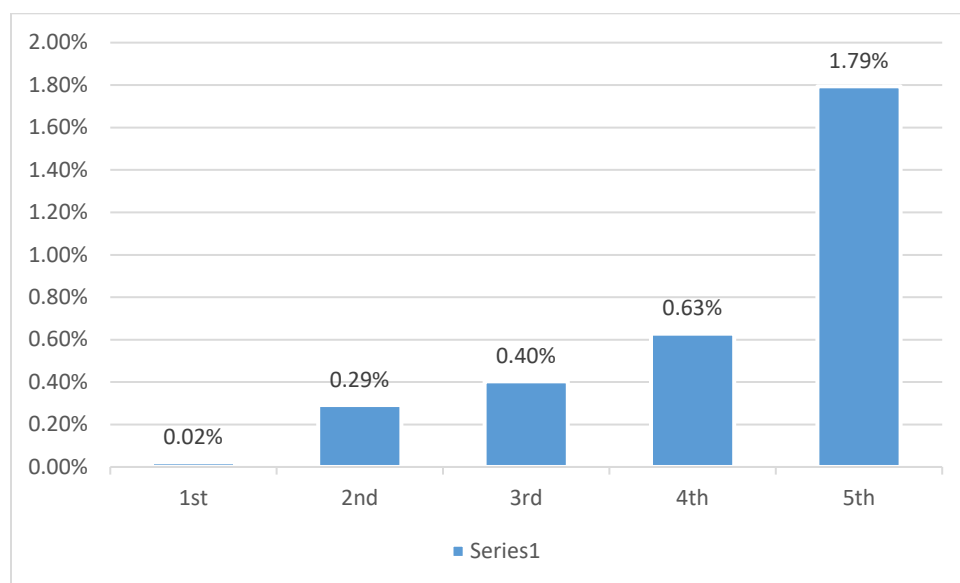
### 13.5.4 Inadequate funding mechanism

Funding allocations are generally based on precedent from previous years and the lobbying power of institutions. Funding allocations can be volatile due to political or economic change, or poor planning. As a result, the execution rates for higher education transfers varies widely: for example, in 2013/14 execution was 75 percent compared to 114 percent the following year. Once approved in the national budget, funding allocations to HEIs is general, and can be assigned to support any expenditure line item within an HEI.

### 13.5.5 Inequity in access

Large numbers of young people cannot access higher education due to long distances between their homes and institutions, poor infrastructure, cultural norms and poverty. According to the 2014/15 Liberia Household Income and Expenditure survey, the GER for tertiary education is 3.14 percent. Students from the richest quintile of households account for 57.14 percent of higher education enrolment, while students from the poorest quintile account for only 0.71 percent of enrolment. Current mechanisms for the assignation of scholarships does not adequately address equity concerns.

**Figure 13-3 Tertiary gross enrolment ratio by quintile, 2014/15**



Source: Liberia Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2014/15

## 13.6 Higher Education Program

### Component 1: Higher Education quality and relevance through partnerships and accreditation

#### ***Program accreditation***

1. Identify three diploma or degree programs at three universities in fields that align with Liberia's strategic and economic development priorities, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), to initiate program accreditation activities.
2. Create a program accreditation task team for each of the three selected programs to design and implement accreditation processes.
3. Integrate accreditation with regional/international partnership activities.

#### ***Curriculum strengthening and diversification for market relevance***

1. Conduct a labor market survey, with a focus on existing fields of study and skills gaps. Draw on the experience of major formal employers and informal industries to identify mismatches between community college programs and labor market needs/employment projections.
2. Establish partnerships between employers and higher education programs or institutions.
3. Convene a Community College Labor Market Relevance Task Force (CC-LMRTF) to review survey findings and recommend the development of new programs, with an emphasis on short-cycle and non-degree programs focused on responding to survey findings.

#### ***Regional and international partnerships for quality strengthening***

1. Build on existing university partnership arrangements to 'pair' universities with regional and international HEIs (for example the relationship between ALU and the University of Ibadan).
2. Partnership arrangements should be designed to focus on quality improvement activities, including (i) the peer review of selected STEM and Agenda for Transformation (AfT) priority programs and (ii) support for academic and student exchange.
3. Partnership arrangements should be designed to provide an institutional foundation and policy framework for the further development of an institutional accreditation system. Partnership arrangements will allow for the exchange of common standards and practices for accreditation.
4. Universities and colleges will develop strategic plans and institute annual reporting exercises.

### Component 2: Realign financing of higher education to improve efficiency and equity

#### ***Driving efficiency in higher education finance***

1. Compare unit costs and the cost-effectiveness of study for three to five priority diploma and degree programs, each of which must be offered at no less than three HEIs.
2. Introduce monitoring indicators for programs and performance monitoring (including indicators for enrolment, admission, graduation, equity, the quality and efficiency of services, job placement and earnings upon graduation) and include all HEIs in the annual school census.
3. Realign the higher education subsidy policy to improve equity in the distribution of public funds across HEIs with a focus on increasing value for money, and the alignment of financing with GoL developmental priorities. Reduce transfers to HEIs by at least USD 1m annually.
4. Gradually introduce performance financing to HEIs, commencing with the introduction of demand driven grant financing for innovation in teaching and learning.

#### ***Improving equity in higher education finance***

1. Continue the reform of international and national scholarship programs to increase the share of enrolment of students from low income households. Reduce total expenditure on scholarships to USD 1.5m annually.

2. Explore options to support the increased generation of second and third income streams for HEIs and pilot programs designed to generate new revenue, including the levying of pro-poor user fees. Best practices could be identified from leading regional and international universities.

**Component 3: Update the Higher Education Act**

1. Revise the 1989 Higher Education Act with support and engagement from key stakeholders, and in alignment with relevant national, regional and international priorities.

The **Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)** initiative collects data on the policies and institutions of education systems around the world and benchmarks them against practices associated with student learning. SABER aims to give all parties with a stake in educational results—from students, administrators, teachers, and parents to policymakers and business people—an accessible, detailed, objective snapshot of how well the policies of their country's education system are oriented toward ensuring that all children and youth learn.

This report focuses specifically on policies in the **Tertiary Education** sector. It analyzes tertiary education in Liberia on six policy dimensions: (1) the strength of the government's vision, (2) the regulatory environment, (3) governance of the sector, (4) the use of innovative financing arrangements, (5) quality assurance, and (6) relevance to the labor market and the broader socio-economic development of the country.

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