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Project Information Document/ Integrated Safeguards Data Sheet (PID/ISDS)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 13-Dec-2016 | Report No: PIDISDSC20370



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country Liberia	Project ID P162089	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Liberia: Getting to Best in Education (P162089)
Region AFRICA	Estimated Appraisal Date Jun 19, 2017	Estimated Board Date Dec 29, 2017	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Lending Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) Ministry of Finance and Development Planning	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

The Project Development Objectives are to improve equitable access to early childhood education (ECE) and teacher quality in ECE and in primary education in targeted disadvantaged counties, and to strengthen national school accountability systems.

Financing (in USD Million)

Financing Source	Amount
Education for All - Fast Track Initiative	11.07
Total Project Cost	11.07

Environmental Assessment Category
C-Not Required

Concept Review Decision
Track II-The review did authorize the preparation to continue

Have the Safeguards oversight and clearance functions been transferred to the Practice Manager? (Will not be disclosed)
No

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Other Decision (as needed)

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B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$456 in 2015 and, as a post-conflict country, is characterized by significant vulnerability and fragility. The protracted 14-year war ending in 2003 cost the lives of approximately 250,000 people, led to a complete deterioration on key human development indicators and significant losses of material wealth. Since 2003, with the support of various development partners (DPs), including the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), important progress has been observed including: a strengthened state administration; improved governance; reconstruction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure; and some progress on human development indicators. In 2013, the Government of Liberia laid out its *Agenda for Transformation*, which sought to build on ten years of stability and set the country on a course for economic development and inclusive growth.
2. Liberia's post-war GDP growth was strong – until 2013 with real GDP annual growth averaging 7 percent, with significant contributions from the agriculture and services sectors. In 2014 and 2015, however, the country experienced a severe health crisis – with the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), during which around 4,800 people died. As a result of the EVD crisis, combined with a fall in commodity prices, the country's GDP growth sharply dropped to 0.7 percent in 2014 and 0 percent in 2015. The country is in the process of recovering from the EVD crisis and growth is expected to rise to 2.5 percent in 2016. Moreover, in the medium term, economic growth is expected to increase to 5.5 percent on average annually, due to a recovery in mining, improvements in infrastructure, and higher agricultural productivity. Despite these promising projections, the level of poverty is high with nearly 70 percent of the population in Liberia living on less than US\$1.90 per day. Human development outcomes also remain poor in Liberia – with the country ranking as one of the lowest (177 out of 188 countries) on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015).
3. The political context has been relatively stable since the presidential election in 2005. The next presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for October 2017. The transition to a new administration may result in political uncertainty, particularly within government ministries. The support of DPs in efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth and to rehabilitate and strengthen key social services remains significant. At the same time, the withdrawal of UNMIL is scheduled for 2017. While a significant milestone for the country after several years of conflict and instability, it may add to some uncertainty in the security environment.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

4. During the conflict, the formal education system was almost non-existent in Liberia with key infrastructure significantly damaged, limited to no access to any education materials, and a significant loss of the teaching workforce. Since 2003, the Ministry of Education (MoE) with the support of various DPs has rebuilt and strengthened the formal and informal educational systems. In addition to the *Agenda for Transformation*, a key step towards improving education service delivery throughout the country was the adoption of the *Education Reform Act* in 2011.
5. Some of the key challenges currently facing the education sector in an effort to promote equitable access to quality include:
6. **Inequitable access and over-age enrollment at ECE and primary education levels.** The main factors driving



inequitable access to ECE and primary education include: (i) high cost of schooling (e.g., school fees and related expenses); and (ii) long distances to school. At the ECE level, public schools (with ECE or school-based ECE) charge a fee for enrollment in ECE of approximately US\$35. Such fees, along with other costs associated with schooling (e.g., uniforms, materials), constitute an important economic barrier to ECE among poor households. There are also important geographic disparities, including but not limited to disparities between urban vs. rural areas in access to quality education. Counties with high incidence of poverty have lower quality inputs and these supply issues typically lead to worse educational outcomes such as net enrollment rates, completion rates or pass rates in examinations. The distribution of qualified teachers is also skewed with more qualified teachers working in wealthier districts and in urban areas. Furthermore, distance is frequently cited as one of the main reasons that children of primary school-age do not enroll in school.

7. **Low learning outcomes.** Though data on learning outcomes are limited, available data show low learning outcomes at the primary level. A 2014 literacy assessment found that Grade 3 students' oral reading fluency was below 20 correct words per minute, which is significantly lower than the MoE benchmark of 45 correct words. Available data from literacy assessments, show that children in rural areas and disadvantaged regions have poorer performance, enforcing a cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity. The systemic late entrance into primary school has a negative ripple effect throughout the sector on learning outcomes. The limited qualifications among teachers and school management also contribute to the poor learning outcomes.
8. **Weak management and governance.** Three factors contribute to the weak management and governance of the education system. First, there is no system to build the capacities of school and district level management. School principals, for example, have no capacities in managing teacher performance. Second, the system is also characterized by limited accountability, inadequate follow up and insufficient support for individuals across the system to carry out their responsibilities. Third, there is no national assessment for measuring student learning outcomes in grades 1-6 aside from end-of-chapter tests or end-of-semester school-based tests. The lack of this system makes it more difficult to identify challenges to meeting national learning objectives and to determine whether interventions designed to improve student learning are having an impact.
9. **Government's response to challenges faced by the education sector.** In order to address the above challenges, the Government has laid out nine priorities for the sector in its ESP (Getting to Best Education Sector Plan or G2B-ESP) 2017 – 2021, recently endorsed by the ESDC. For each of the priority areas, the ESP lays out a strategy, a corresponding program (components and activities), monitoring indicators, costs as well as relevant roles and responsibilities. Seven of the strategies focus on basic education with a special focus on ECE and primary education.

Relationship to CPF

10. The World Bank Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) FY13-17 consists of three pillars which are aligned with the Pillars of the Agenda for Transformation: (i) Economic Transformation to reduce constraints to rapid, broad-based and sustained economic growth to create employment; (ii) Human Development to increase access and quality of basic social services and reducing vulnerability; and (iii) Governance and Public Sector Institutions to improve public sector and natural resources governance. Areas of capacity development and gender equity are mainstreamed throughout the portfolio. The proposed GPE-funded G2B Project will support the CPS by contributing to the second and third pillars in an effort to achieve improved conditions for learning and strengthen management capacity. Central to the proposed project's design is the establishment of an Education Delivery Unit (EDU) to ensure that "capacity development is at the heart of project preparation and



implementation and monitored at a project, portfolio and sector level.” Gender equality and access to quality education among ethnic minorities will also be mainstreamed in the proposed project, thus furthering its contributions to the CPS.

C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Note to Task Teams: The PDO has been pre-populated from the datasheet for the first time for your convenience. Please keep it up to date whenever it is changed in the datasheet.

The Project Development Objective is to improve equitable access to quality early childhood education and primary grades 1 to 3 in targeted countries.

Key Results (From PCN)

PDO-level (proposed)

- Net enrollment rate (NER) in ECE (Kindergarten 1-3) in the targeted counties
- Share of trained ECE teachers in the targeted counties
- Share of qualified primary teachers in targeted districts
- Share of public schools using SQA tool in targeted countries

Intermediate-level (proposed)

- Grade 3 student assessment for literacy and numeracy piloted
- Number of principals certified
- Number of vacated teaching posts at the primary level filled with qualified teachers
- Percentage of schools visited annually by one DEO and one school inspector

D. Concept Description

11. The following section provides an overview of each of the four components to be supported by the proposed G2B Project.

Component 1: Improving quality of and access to early childhood education in the selected disadvantaged counties of Liberia (Total: US\$3.1 million)

12. The objectives of this component are to: (i) reduce disparities in the distribution of qualified ECE teachers in school-based ECE by financing the in-service professional certification of 1,000 unqualified teachers who are currently teaching ECE in public basic education schools and who are functionally literate; (ii) improve overall enrollment and on-age enrollment in particular in ECE in selected disadvantaged counties by providing ECE school improvement grants and linking grant to changing school practices (which contribute to over-age enrollment); (iii) provide training and support for community-based ECE caregivers; and (iv) increase public information about ECE.



Component 2: Supporting teacher certification, deployment and professionalization (US\$1.8 million)

13. The objective of this component is to: (i) increase the number of certified and effective primary school teachers in targeted areas by financing an in-service certification program targeting 1,500 unqualified public school teachers based in selected counties; and (ii) professionalize the teaching force by supporting the separation package for unqualified teachers that are not functionally literate.

Component 3: Improving school management, accountability and monitoring systems (US\$2.1 million)

14. The objectives of this component are to: (i) establish school quality standards and accountability systems; (ii) strengthen monitoring capacity of school Principals; and (iii) strengthen the EMIS system and develop a national learning assessment system for early grades. Planned activities will build on previous investments and existing materials, and be complimented by planned investments, most significantly those planned by USAID, that also prioritize improvements in quality of schools.

Component 4: Project Management, Education Delivery Unit (EDU) and Sector Program Support and Coordination (US\$500,000)

15. The objectives of this component are to: (i) ensure robust project management; (ii) facilitate sector program support and coordination; and (iii) support these objectives within the MoE Education Delivery Unit (EDU) Specifically, this component will finance a Program Delivery Team (PDT) (adopted from the previous GPE Project Support Team’s design) comprised of a project coordinator and a technical coordinator (who will lead M&E) supported by two staff covering procurement and financial management (FM) /accounting. The project will also finance required consultants, staff, technical assistance, and recurrent costs related to project management, sector program facilitation and coordination and capacity building. The project is expected to facilitate local project coordinating capacities among MoE education office staff in targeted counties.

Component 5: Variable Part/Disbursement-Linked Indicators and Eligible Expenditures (US\$3.21 million)

16. This component would focus on the following result areas: (a) improving the supply and retention of quality teachers in early grades, (b) reducing over-age enrollment in ECE and early grade primary and (c) promoting capacity in effectively monitoring the education system. In line with GPE guidelines, 30 percent of the total grant funding will be considered the variable part. Disbursement of the variable part is linked to the verified achievement of agreed indicators (disbursement linked indicators (DLIs), with specified disbursement linked results (DLRs)), which target the three pillars/dimensions of: (a) learning outcomes; (b) equity; and (c) efficiency. The DLIs annual milestones will be agreed upon during project preparation and will also be closely integrated with the planned activities under the other four project components and component outcomes.

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SAFEGUARDS



A. Project location and salient physical characteristics relevant to the safeguard analysis (if known)

The project activities are intended to improve equitable access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and teacher quality in ECE and in primary education in targeted disadvantaged counties as well as strengthen national school accountability systems. The project will therefore be implemented nation-wide. No safeguards policy has been triggered by the project since the activities to be financed mainly involve capacity building technical assistance, and project management and monitoring.

B. Borrower’s Institutional Capacity for Safeguard Policies

This project is likely to have very minimal or no impacts on the environment. No safeguard policy been triggered and no safeguards instrument will be required during implementation. Therefore, Borrower’s Institutional Capacity for Safeguard Policies implementation is not applicable.

C. Environmental and Social Safeguards Specialists on the Team

Sekou Abou Kamara GEN01

D. Policies that might apply

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Safeguard Policies	Triggered?	Explanation (Optional)
Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01	No	No civil work is envisaged under this project, except minor renovations to existing facilities that are likely to have minimal or no impact on the environment. The activities to be financed mainly include capacity building, technical assistance, and project management and monitoring.
Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04	No	The project activities will not have any impacts on natural habitats.
Forests OP/BP 4.36	No	The project activities will not have any impacts on forests and access to forests.
Pest Management OP 4.09	No	The project will not require financing, acquisition, transportation, distribution, storage or use of pesticides.
Physical Cultural Resources OP/BP 4.11	No	The project will have no impact in physical cultural resources.
Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10	No	This policy is not applicable for Liberia.
Involuntary Resettlement OP/BP 4.12	No	The project will not involve acquisition of land or physical or economic displacement of people.
Safety of Dams OP/BP 4.37	No	Project activities will not involve the construction of a new dam or the rehabilitation of an existing dam, nor rely on dams.
Projects on International Waterways OP/BP 7.50	No	The project does not have any impact on international waters.
Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60	No	The project is not located in disputed area



E. Safeguard Preparation Plan

Tentative target date for preparing the Appraisal Stage PID/ISDS

May 01, 2017

Time frame for launching and completing the safeguard-related studies that may be needed. The specific studies and their timing should be specified in the Appraisal Stage PID/ISD

This project is likely to have very minimal or no impacts on the environment. Therefore, no safeguard-related studies will be required.

CONTACT POINT

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APPROVAL

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