



# Ministry of Education Liberia Inclusive Education Policy



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## Foreword

Since the establishment of the Division of Special and Inclusive Education, the Ministry of Education has sought to advance the educational process and improve the quality of education for all learners including those with disability.

The government of Liberia recognizes the importance of special and inclusive education as a crucial sector for accelerating the attainment for Education for All (EFA). The inclusive education policy defines the strategy path of the government for the education of all children with special educational needs.

This policy is the outcome of a series of discussions and consultations between numerous stakeholders in the education sector. The contribution of state actors, particularly the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of gender, Children and Social Protection, the National Commission on Disabilities and the Office of the Human Rights Protection of the Ministry of Justice are acknowledged.

The involvement of non-state actors such as Sightsavers, Handicap International, the Carter Center and the National Union of the Organizations of the Disabled have been crucial to the development of this policy. We want to acknowledge and appreciate them.

There is no doubt that the promotion of this policy towards child-friendly inclusive education requires concerted efforts of education stakeholders in the public sector and civil society through effective and constant coordination

We are hopeful that this policy will contribute to making significant achievements for the interest of all students in general and those with disabilities and the marginalized in particular.

I therefore wish to thank the Director and Staff of the Division of Special and Inclusive Education in MoE and all those who took part, for their commitment and efforts during the preparation stages.

I urge all partners who support education in Liberia to read this policy document and give us their comments. I also appeal to you all to support us in our efforts to equalize educational opportunities for all Liberians, while taking into consideration individual differences and responding to individual needs.



Hon. Latim Dathong  
**Acting Minister for Education**

## Preface

Education is the prerequisite to national development. As such, every person in Liberia must be given equal opportunity in acquiring quality Education. Most so, it also serves as an indispensable means of unlocking human potential and protecting human rights by providing the environment that is required to secure good health, liberty, security, economic well-being and participation in social and political activities. **The Ministry of Education overall goal is to provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens and residents to the extent of available resources and that emphasis shall be placed on the mass education of the Liberian people and the elimination of illiteracy.**

Significant gains have been made in the last ten years by the Ministry of Education, stakeholders and partners. Among those milestones are the establishment of the Division of Special and Inclusive Education in 2011 (then called the “Special Education Division”); training of office staff from the Division of Special & Inclusive Education; and the training of teachers in Special Education methodology from 2012-2016. There has been the establishment of 6 pilot and 12 cluster schools which use inclusive methodology and the production of a Special and Inclusive Methodology teaching manual in 2013.

**The overall objectives of this policy is to ensure that all Education Stakeholders provide adequate and quality education to all Liberians, irrespective of your creed, religion, tribe, gender, and especially your mental and physical well-being. This policy seeks also to enhance the educational management and delivery services needed to respond to the continual diverse educational needs. It is expected that this policy will bridge the gaps of disparity among learners and ensuring that education is provided to all.**

It is imperative for all providers in our educational sector **especially our Universities, training institutions and the Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) to read and comprehend the rationale of developing this policy with the expectation that their programs will continue to be aligned with the vision an expectation of our Pro-poor Government Agenda.**

## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

CEO	County Education Officer
DEO	District Education Officer
EFA	Education for All
GoL	Government of Liberia
G2B-ESP	Getting to Best - Education Sector Plan 2017-2021
IE	Inclusive Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PWD	Persons with disabilities
SMC	School Management Committee
SPIP	School Performance Implementation Plan
TTI	Teacher Training Institute
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WASH	Water and Sanitation for Health

## Definition of key terms

**Disability:** the lack or restriction of the ability to perform an activity in the manner within the range considered normal within the culture context of the human being.

**Economically Disadvantaged children:** Children whose parents or guardians cannot afford to provide their basic needs

**Education Sector Plan:** a systematic orderly plan aimed to provide all Liberians with the opportunity to access and complete affordable, quality, relevant, appropriate education that meets the needs of the nation.

**Ethnic Minority:** A group of people who are of a different ethnicity, religion, language or culture from that of the majority of people in the place where they live.

**Inclusion:** The process that involves adjusting homes, school and it's environment, and society so that everyone, regardless of their states can have the opportunity to interact, play, learn, work and experience the feeling of belonging and experiment to develop into accordance with the potential and abilities.

**Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education asserts the rights of all students to receive an education that is appropriate to their strengths and needs, regardless of age and disability are provided with appropriate education within the regular school setting.

**Integrated education** does not mean the same as inclusive education. Integrated education refers to the process of bringing excluded children (usually those with disabilities) into the regular education system. It is also defined as children with disabilities in mainstream schools but educated entirely in self-contained classrooms with minimal interactions with their peers.

**Integration:** This is a process through which students with and without special needs are taught together to maximum extent possible in at least restrictive environment. The student or child is expected to adapt to the environment.

**Mainstream school:** popularize or normalize institutions that accommodate both disabled and non-disabled students learning in the same classroom.

**Marginalized children:** Children, who are knowingly/unknowingly denied of the opportunity to interact, play, learn, work at all levels of education.

**Nomadic:** a habitually wandering person or group of people; inconsistency in living a particular area for a long period of time.

**Regular school:** these are institutions referred to as mainstream schools and normally admit students who are not disabled.

**Resource Teacher:** A teacher who is trained in special and inclusive education methodology to advise or assist teacher in the teaching of student with disability.

**Segregated:** Institution that are separated or isolated from others which is set aside for the education disabled students.

**Sign Language:** this is a visual and or tactile language which uses manual signs that have structure and meaning like other languages.

**Special Education:** Concept that assumes there is a distinctly separate group of learners who have 'special educational needs' and for whom special, often separate/segregated services are needed. It is a specifically designed instruction in the regular education curriculum with the appropriate supports and accommodations to support children to reach their full academic potential.

**Special School:** these are schools set aside to offer education to children with special need in education, based on their respective disability.

**Universal design:** involves designing products, facilities, systems, buildings etc so that they can be accessed by all persons (rather than designing and making separate provisions for separate groups of people).

## Acknowledgement

The Division of Special and Inclusive Education through the Ministry of Education immensely acknowledge the invaluable efforts and supports from partners and stakeholders of the Ministry of Education. With gratitude, we appreciate the input, guidance and expertise provided during the development of this Special and Inclusive Education policy in 2018.

The involvement of non-state actors such as Sightsavers, Handicap International, the Carter Center and the National Union of the Organizations of the Disabled have been crucial to the development of this policy. We want to recognise and appreciate them. The Ministry of Education wants to particularly recognize Sightsavers and Handicap International for their financial support during the writing and completion of this Inclusive Education Policy Document. It also pointed out the tireless efforts of some divisions and staff from the Ministry of Education and other Ministries and Agencies.

**Special thanks goes to Mrs Adoley Sonii, County Director Sightsaver, Mrs. Rebecca Stubberfield of Handicap International, Mr. Mohammed konneh, former Director of the Division of Special and Inclusive Education, Mr. Edwin kakia, Director for the Division of Policy and Evaluation, and the current team at the Division for Special and Inclusive Education headed by its acting Director, Mrs. Theresa w Garwo.**

We appreciate all of your meaningful contributions to this document, and look forward to more future cooperation from you all.

Alton V. Kesselly



Deputy Minister for Planning, Research and Development



## Executive summary

The most disadvantaged and marginalized group of people in the world are persons with disabilities (PWDs). PWDs face many challenges: access to education, discrimination of all forms, environmental, and societal barriers. Liberia is a post-conflict country with substantial levels of vulnerability and fragility. Education statistics in Liberia, both enrolment and learning outcomes, are among the worst in the world. After more than a decade of civil war and the Ebola crisis of 2014/15, the public education system is simply not able to deliver the quality of education that children need and deserve. In rural areas, 65 percent of young women and 35 percent of young men aged 15-24 are illiterate. Across the country, 25 percent of 15-24-year-olds cannot read a single sentence. Just 20 percent of children who enrol in grade one; go on to complete grade 12. What all students need to be able to learn is not only a teacher but a trained one. In Liberia, most if not all teachers lack the basic skills and knowledge on inclusive teaching approaches.

Though there is no up-to-date data obtainable on disabled persons in Liberia, a 1997 experimental survey funded by UNICEF and conducted by the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Injured and Disabled (CRID) established that more than 16% of the Liberian population lives with a disability<sup>1</sup>. Of this population, 61% were found to be “physically challenged” (persons with physical impairments), 23.9% had visual impairments, 6.8% had hearing impairments and 8.3% had intellectual or cognitive impairments. Currently, it is projected that these numbers have increased as a result of the Liberian civil crisis. The vast majority of Liberians who do not attend school have disabilities and are left out or excluded from schools, leave school prematurely and do not obtain opportunities to work. Moreover, the social stigmatisation associated with disability results in relegation and isolation. The failure to enforce human rights law to which Liberia is a signatory and the lack of an inclusive education policy disenfranchises individuals with disabilities. As a result, thousands of persons with disabilities in Liberia are illiterate, unable to fend for themselves, lack independence and self-esteem and are among the poorest citizens.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), stresses the need for children with a disability should be given equal opportunity to attend any school of their choice. Therefore, all societal barriers must be mitigated to strengthening the commitment of providing opportunities for all. Though it can be known that there are challenges, some of which may include awareness, stigmatization, discrimination, universal design and so but inclusive education much be a matter of must for all countries and its government.

The Ministry of Education through the Division of Special and Inclusive Education and partners identified the gap and produced this policy mandating educational institutions and stakeholders for

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Piloted Survey on the Disabled and Injured in Liberia

implementation. Despite the many barriers and challenges faced by our post-war country, we anticipate their action to create an enabling environment for the accommodation of everyone.

# 1 Introduction

This policy, which is set within the context of national and international legislation, outlines the commitment to inclusive education made by the Liberian Ministry of Education (MoE).

Inclusive education (IE) is about making fundamental changes to the entire education system, following a principle of universal design<sup>2</sup>. This means making changes to policies, resource allocation, teaching practices, curricula, assessment, infrastructure, etc, so that education/schools become flexible and able to adapt to the needs of every learner. Inclusive education improves the education of all children. This can be achieved through changing social attitudes and culture to be more accepting of disability and diversity.

Education is the prerequisite to national development. Seen in this light, education is an indispensable means of unlocking human potential and protecting human rights by providing the environment that is required to secure good health, liberty, security, economic well-being and participation in social and political activities.

The policy contains seven overarching objectives, and each objective contains several specific strategies (see Section 7). Many of the strategies are directly aligned with the strategic objectives in the Liberia MoE ‘Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021’ as detailed in annex 1 ‘Mapping IE policy objectives against ESP strategies and objectives’. A separate IE policy implementation plan will be produced, prioritizing and detailing the actions to be taken towards raising awareness of, and achieving, these objectives.

The Policy development process involved participatory consultation with key stakeholder groups from public institutions (including teachers and students), civil society, the private sector, and the community, and built on a compilation of resolutions adopted at a consultative IE meeting with stakeholders, education partners and the MoE in February 2017.

The overarching goal of this Inclusive Education (IE) Policy is to expand and enable the education management and delivery services to respond to the diverse needs of learners in Liberia.

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<sup>2</sup> Universal design involves designing products, facilities, systems, buildings etc so that they can be used by the widest range of people possible (rather than designing and making separate provisions for separate groups of people).

## 2. Statement of commitment

This policy sets out the commitment to inclusive education made by MoE and the expected commitments of other ministries, and of international and local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working on education in Liberia. It is our intention that this policy will be regularly reviewed and that, over time, its core messages about inclusion will become integral to all other MoE policies and future Education Sector Plans.

The details for the implementation of this policy will be developed in a separate document through which we will outline how the MoE will:

- Ensure that the policy is effectively disseminated
- The policy will be shared with all MoE departments, and discussions will be held to identify the ways in which the policy is relevant to the work of each department.
- Civil society organisations and grassroots education stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, etc) will be made aware of the policy, so that they can play a role in promoting it, and can carry out activities that contribute to the policy's implementation, as well as having a role in monitoring the implementation of the policy.
- Develop and prioritise a detailed implementation action plan. This will involve understanding what has already been done/achieved in relation to each policy objective, and conducting participatory consultations within the ministry and with civil society/ grassroots stakeholders to gather ideas for the most relevant actions for moving forward with each objective.

### 3 Guiding principles

**Defining Inclusion:** Within Liberia there are varied understandings of inclusive education, therefore it is vital that this policy clearly articulates the interpretation upon which the policy commitments, objectives and strategies are based.

Inclusive education asserts the rights of all children and youth to receive an education that is appropriate to their strengths and needs. It promotes the attendance of all students in age-appropriate classes in local schools and other education institutions, where they are encouraged and supported to participate and to make both academic and social progress regardless of their needs or abilities. In other words, inclusive education should build on a child's strengths and not only address the child's educational needs.

The promotion of inclusive education has particular importance for those individuals and groups who have been marginalised within society as a result of poverty, gender, disability, linguistic status or social class. Inclusive education takes into account the individual teaching and learning needs of all marginalized and vulnerable children and young people, including street children, girls, children from ethnic minorities, children from economically disadvantaged families, children from nomadic/refugee/displaced families, children with HIV/AIDS, Ebola survivors and children with disabilities<sup>3</sup> Inclusive education aims to ensure that these children and young people are afforded equal rights and opportunities in education.

While inclusive education is clearly defined as applying to *all* marginalised children and youth, this policy paper has a bias towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities as there currently exists a severe lack of capacity within the Liberian education system to cater for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. In order to ensure their inclusion, it is necessary to make a greater number of changes across the sector (e.g. to teachers' education and teaching style) than with some other marginalised groups.

Special and Inclusive Education in Liberia currently only acknowledges the following categories of students with disabilities; students with visual, hearing, cognitive and physical impairments and individuals who are gifted and talented. This IE Policy, recognizes the wide range of learning needs and categories of persons with disabilities, including, persons who are blind or have low vision; persons who are deaf or hard of hearing; persons with intellectual disability; persons with mobility-related disabilities; persons with learning disabilities; persons with speech, language and communication disabilities as well as persons with multiple disabilities. In keeping with universal learning conventions, the policy requires all educational stakeholders and providers to respond appropriately to the wide-ranging needs of diverse groups of citizens in the Liberian educational system.

This policy makes a clear distinction between the concepts of segregated education, integrated education and inclusive education, and seeks to ensure that this clarity is extended to all MoE documentation.

**Special Education** is a concept that assumes there is a distinctly separate group of learners who have 'special educational needs' and for whom special, often separate/segregated services are needed. Special education tends to perceive the problem as located within the child, rather than within the education system. It does not acknowledge that many of the 'special' needs that learners have can in fact be addressed by

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<sup>3</sup> This list is not exhaustive

making fundamental improvements to the quality of teaching and learning within the regular education system, without the need for parallel or segregated provision. Therefore, special education is a specifically designed instruction in the regular education curriculum with the appropriate supports and accommodations to support children to reach their full academic potential.

In Liberia, many children who could be participating and learning effectively in regular schools (if the quality of those schools/teachers were improved) are instead placed in ‘special education’ settings. As a result, many children with the most severe impairments, who may need more specialized support, are not able to access places in specialist settings, and are thus missing out on education entirely. This IE policy recognizes the significant role that many special education schools in Liberia play in terms of provision of specialist expertise. As a result, many special schools will be supported to transition to resource/assessment centres with the function of accompanying mainstream schools and education institutions to become more inclusive, whilst still retaining the capacities and resources. An exception would be the role of schools for the deaf which serve an essential role in language development and cultural immersion as required by Article 24 of the UN CRPD. Those schools must be promoted to increase enrolment of deaf students in regions nearby each school and to ensure hiring of qualified deaf adults at every level. By providing fully accessible education in the deaf children’s native language and the country’s written language, the schools for the deaf will promote inclusion in everyday life, with the children’s families at home and in the community, including after the completion of schooling.

**Integrated education** does not mean the same as inclusive education. Integrated education refers to the process of bringing excluded children (usually those with disabilities) into the regular education system. Integrated education, however, does not involve fundamental changes to teaching and learning approaches or to the overall education system. The child is expected to adapt and ‘cope’ with the existing education system, but steps are not taken to change the system (i.e. change the way teachers teach, change the curriculum, etc.). Integration is also defined as children with disabilities in mainstream schools but educated entirely in self-contained classrooms with minimal interactions with their peers.

**Inclusive education** acknowledges that when children are not accessing, participating in or achieving in education, it is not their fault. Rather it is a problem with the system. Inclusive education is therefore about making fundamental changes to the entire education system (policies and resource allocation, teaching practices, curricula, assessment, infrastructure, etc.) so that education/schools become flexible and able to adapt to the needs of every learner – they become learner-centred.

The following values and guiding principles underpin this policy, which presumes that given the opportunities, all children regardless of their disabilities can be achievers and that children with disabilities need many different related services that require inter-ministerial support to deliver those services:

- Every student has a right to quality education; therefore, no student should be excluded from or discriminated against within an education system on grounds of race, color, sex, language, age, class or social group, religion, ethnic origin, birth, poverty, disability or any other status.
- All students can learn and benefit from education; hence, changes need to be made throughout the education system and with communities, to ensure that the system adapts to the learner, rather than learners adapting to the system

- Accessibility is a key component of education and all facets of education, including the curriculum, the teaching methods, assessment, school culture and environment, should uphold inclusive education principles through being made accessible for all learners.
- Individual dissimilarities among learners are a basis of richness and diversity, and not a strain.
- The diversity of needs and patterns of development of students should be addressed through a wide and flexible range of responses.
- The most effective means of building an inclusive society and realizing education for all are through inclusive educational environments and orientations.

#### **4. International and national legal and policy framework**

This IE Policy is based on a series of national and international commitments to the EFA agenda. Nationally, it endorses the GoL commitment to the 1986 Constitution of Liberia “General Principles of National Policy” Article 6, which states “equal access to opportunities and facilities for all citizens to the extent of available resources.” It utilizes and aligns with other national and legal instruments including the Education Reform Act of 2011, the Agenda for Transformation (Aft) and the G2B-ESP (2017-2021). It is also grounded in the international commitments to education to which Liberia is a signatory, including: the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990); the World Declaration on Education for All (1990); the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1993); the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

The post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (particularly goal 4), is explicit about achieving “inclusive and equitable quality education” for all, including the most vulnerable children (specifically mentioning children with disabilities).

The 2006 UN CRPD makes a clear commitment to the principle of inclusive education. Article 24 asserts that “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels”. Article 24 has been used as one of the bases for the framework for this inclusive education policy. It is not, however, the only basis, since this policy assumes a broad definition of inclusive education as a process of education system improvements to enable everyone (including those with disabilities) to access, participate in and benefit from/achieve in education.

## 5. Liberian context: state of inclusive education

Liberia is a post-conflict country with substantial levels of vulnerability and fragility. Education statistics in Liberia, both enrolment and learning outcomes, are among the worst in the world. After more than a decade of civil war and the Ebola crisis of 2014/15, the public education system is simply not able to deliver the quality of education that children need and deserve. In rural areas, 65 percent of young women and 35 percent of young men aged 15-24 are illiterate. Across the country, 25 percent of 15-24-year-olds cannot read a single sentence. Just 20 percent of children who enrol in grade one, go on to complete grade 12. What all students need to be able to learn is not only a teacher but a trained one. In Liberia, most if not all teachers lack the basic skills and knowledge on inclusive teaching approaches.

While there is no up-to-date obtainable data on disabled persons in Liberia, a 1997 experimental survey funded by UNICEF and conducted by the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Injured and Disabled (CRID) established that more than 16% of the Liberian population lives with a disability<sup>4</sup>. Of this population, 61% were found to be “physically challenged” (persons with physical impairments), 23.9% had visual impairments, 6.8% had hearing impairments and 8.3% had intellectual or cognitive impairments. Currently, it is projected that these numbers have grown as a result of the Liberian civil crisis. The vast majority of Liberians with disabilities do not attend school, are left out or excluded from schools, leave school prematurely and do not obtain opportunities to work. Additionally, the social stigmatisation associated with disability results in relegation and isolation. The failure to enforce human rights law to which Liberia is a signatory and the lack of an inclusive education policy disenfranchises individuals with disabilities. Consequently, thousands of persons with disabilities in Liberia are illiterate, unable to fend for themselves, lack independence and self-esteem and are among the poorest citizens.

Since the end of the 14-year civil war, the Government of Liberia has made efforts to rebuild the education system to meet the goal of providing equal access to education for all children regardless of age, disability and gender. Liberia recognizes education as a top priority in its medium and long-term development. The Education Sector Plan 2010-2020 aimed to provide all Liberians with the opportunity to access and complete affordable, quality, relevant, appropriate education that meets the needs of the nation. This was reinforced by the Liberian Agenda for Transformation, the Liberia Education Law of 2001 and the Education Reform Act of 2011.

The Liberia Education Law of 2001 made primary education free and compulsory for all students, while the New Education Reform Act of 2011 established free and compulsory primary education and free and compulsory basic education through to ninth grade for all Liberian citizens. Liberia has also developed a number of policies to guarantee gender equality and non-discrimination in education, which include measures to encourage girls to attend schools without social discrimination, and strategies to safeguard curriculum content from gender bias. While the legal framework is in place however, the operationalization and implementation of these policies is still a pending subject for the GoL. These efforts also stop short of improving access to education for persons with disabilities. Children and young people with disabilities in

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Piloted Survey on the Disabled and Injured in Liberia

Liberia are still struggling for inclusion in education eight years after the signing of the CRPD and its Optional Protocols in 2007 and the passage of the Children’s Law in early 2012.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the numerous challenges faced by Liberia’s education system, the Government of Liberia (GOL) has in pursuant to the values and goals of the Global EFA and the National Agenda for Transformation (AfT) made some progress in improving education. The Government, in 2015, initiated the new Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (G2B-ESP) with the agenda of delivering on identified priorities that emerged through several stakeholders’ consultations via the Joint Education Sector Review and Education Round Table. Through the above-mentioned initiatives, the GOL prioritizes the goals of the Agenda for Transformation (AfT) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Under the G2B-ESP, the GOL intends to gradually remove fees for early childhood, train thousands of teachers, regularly inspect schools and develop a new national curriculum among other key priorities.

The G2B-ESP explicitly includes the need to develop an inclusive education policy and guidelines for children and young people with disabilities as well as listing other strategies to ensure support to learners with disabilities across the education sector. While these strategies (below) are linked to other programs within the ESP they are only included in article 11.6 *Chapter 11: Student Well-Being Program*, creating an ‘add-on’ approach to supporting children with disabilities rather than referring to and including children with disabilities across all programs. Hence the need for a more comprehensive IE policy and implementation plan.

## **Support for children with disabilities<sup>6</sup>**

1. *Develop an IE Policy and Guidelines for children and young people with disabilities.*
2. *Ensure new syllabuses and instructional materials take into account children and young people with disabilities (Curriculum & Assessment Program).*
3. *Improve teacher preparation and CPD with a compulsory module on teaching children with disabilities (Teacher Education & Management Program).*
4. *Train principals in effective management strategies to include children with disabilities in school (School Quality Program).*
5. *Include special education in school quality assessments and reporting, including regular inspections of schools for the physically disabled (Education Management & Accountability Program).*
6. *Improve data collection on children and young people with disabilities by updating the EMIS data collection form to include inclusive education indicators that reflect not only data on students but also on the school environment (e.g. accessible schools, assistive devices, trained teachers on inclusive method and approaches etc.).*
7. *Include children and young people with disabilities in interventions to improve school attendance (Overage & Out-of-School Program).*
8. *Train school-based counsellors and school health advisers in special education socio-emotional support*

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<sup>5</sup> Promoting the Right to Education for Children with Disabilities in Liberia

<sup>6</sup> G2B-ESP 2017-2020; chapter 11 ‘Student Well-Being Program’ article 11.6

## **6. Overall goals for the Inclusive Education Policy**

- 6.1 Increase access to education for all children and young people, by making systemic changes that eliminate the environmental, attitudinal, policy, practice and resource barriers that prevent some students from attending their local school with their peers.
- 6.2 Increase active participation of all students in the learning process, and improve their social and academic learning outcomes, through the use of child-centred approaches, and by developing flexible curricula, teaching and learning materials and assessment mechanisms that can be adapted to the individual needs of learners.
- 6.3 Develop a cadre of teachers, support staff and school leadership who have the right attitude, practical skills and theoretical knowledge, to implement quality, child-friendly, inclusive education within the mainstream education system.
- 6.4 Promote sustainability and equality in the wider society, by ensuring the active participation of local communities, parents/caregivers and children in supporting access to and the development of child-friendly, inclusive education settings.
- 6.5 Ensure that efforts to advocate for and implement inclusive education cover the full range of education from early childhood to vocational, non-formal and higher education, including alternative and accelerated education pathways for over-age and out of school children.
- 6.6 Ensure that all education provision is free from violence and provides a protective environment for all students
- 6.7 Contribute to overall improvements in quality throughout the Liberian education system, by highlighting the inherent connections between quality education and inclusive education, and promoting a universal design for learning approach to all education system changes

## 7. Policy objectives and strategies

### I. Promote access to education for all children and youth

**Policy Objective 1.** Increase access to education for all children and young people, by making systemic changes that eliminate the environmental, attitudinal, policy, practice and resource barriers that prevent some students from attending their local school with their peers.

#### Strategies

1.1 Assess all schools against inclusive school quality standards, ensuring accessibility for all students, including attention to physical infrastructure, personnel, educational and classroom resources and make modifications to facilitate accommodation and learning of all students as needed.

1.2 Ensure that all new school infrastructure designs and constructions are built based on the principles of universal design and made accessible to all learners, including those with physical and sensory impairments.

1.3 Transition existing “segregated education” institutions to serve as resource/assessment centers to assist the mainstream system to become more inclusive. The lack of funding for inclusive education is having serious consequences on getting children with disabilities into school and learning.

1.4 Review and strengthen the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to reflect students with disabilities and other marginalized learners both in and out of school, providing disaggregated data that can inform the planning and provision of better services. The EMIS data should include not just information about the number of students, but valuable information about the inclusive education environment.

1.5 Expand, improve and sustain the delivery of social protection programmes such as the school feeding programme and allocation of school grants, free sandals, uniforms and books, capitation grant and the cash transfer programmes to ensure the most disadvantaged schools and the most disadvantaged learners receive additional resourcing.

1.6 Ensure inclusive gender-sensitive WASH facilities are available in all schools at all levels

## II. Ensure participation and achievement for all children and youth

**Policy Objective 2.** Increase active participation of all students in the learning process, and improve their social and academic learning outcomes, through the use of child-centred approaches, and by developing flexible curricula, teaching and learning materials and assessment mechanisms that can be adapted to the individual needs of learners.

*For the purposes of the policy, assessment covers the processes of assessing students with disabilities so that they are effectively supported to make best use of their potential for learning and living within their communities. The idea of assessment includes within it, formative as well as summative assessment and acknowledges that the development potential of children can change and improve over time and with the right support.*

### Strategies

2.1 Review, revise and adapt national curricula content for basic and second cycle institutions to ensure that content is representative of and methodology is responsive to a diversity of learners and learning needs. The revised curriculum will emphasize four key principles namely; setting suitable learning targets; a focus on diversity and its strengths and benefits in relevant subjects and/or curriculum themes; responsive to learners' diverse needs and ensuring accessibility for learners with disabilities; overcoming barriers to learning for individuals and specific groups of learners.

2.2 Review and align learning outcome assessment tools and processes, benchmarks and methods to ensure equity for all learners including adapting examination procedures to the needs of students through the provision of extra time, and appropriate special assistance (sign language, scribes, and readers) as required. Individual Education Plans should be used as a tool of assessment for children with intellectual disabilities.

2.3 Ensure that teaching/learning materials are made available to all learners and that they mirror and complement the diversity of Liberian society.

2.4 Ensure relevant equipment and assistive devices are made available to school students where needed to enable them to access and participate fully in the learning process.

2.5 Build capacity in schools and learning institutions to undertake early identification, referral and intervention through periodic screening of all learners, and that the referrals are dealt within a streamlined, efficient and effective manner by the complementary support services

2.6 Support schools to establish a system of individualized education for children with disabilities as appropriate or special educational needs who have difficulties accessing education including assessment, creation of an individualized educational plan (IEP) and individualized family service plan (IFSP) which is reviewed on an annual basis.

2.7 Establish resource/assessment centers in all counties and districts including provision of tools and protocols (to be developed by the MoE) for assessment to assess students with special needs so that they are effectively supported to make best use of their potential for learning and living within their communities. The assessments should take place in the classroom with a multidisciplinary team over a period of time.

2.8 Coordinate with and promote the availability and training of relevant professionals and facilities for medical assessment; educational assessment, psychological assessment, occupational therapy,

physiotherapy, sign language, braille and speech and language therapy through the newly established resource/assessment centres. However, no assessment should be carried out outside the classroom by people who do not know the child.

### **III. Develop inclusion-oriented human resources**

**Policy Objective 3.** Develop a cadre of teachers, support staff and school leadership who have the right attitude, practical skills and theoretical knowledge, to implement quality, child-friendly, inclusive education within the regular education system.

*For the purposes of the policy, professional development is defined as covering teacher training (both pre-service and in-service), continuous professional development for teachers as well as orientation, modular courses for other educational personnel (Principals, Vice Principals for Instruction, school support staff), and related administrators at county and district levels.*

#### **Strategies**

3.1 Deliver compulsory training to all pre-service teachers on inclusive education equipping them with the appropriate attitudes, pedagogical skills and adequate knowledge on educational policies to meet diverse learning needs using child-centered approaches.

3.2 Establish mechanisms and policies to support candidates with disabilities and from other marginalized groups to undertake teacher training.

3.3 Design and deliver in-service training modules on inclusive classroom practices for existing teachers including creating a diverse learner-friendly classroom environment, and being a positive role-model for non-discrimination, tolerance and respect.

3.4 Train all education personnel at decentralised regional and district levels including CEOs, DEOs, school inspectors, head teachers, and other education managers on inclusion and inclusive policy and practices.

3.5 Build the capacity of school leadership, including head teachers and SMCs to develop and implement inclusive School Performance Implementation Plans (SPIP).

3.6 Working collaboratively with the teacher training institutes and colleges of education, train and deploy inclusive educational needs resource teachers/specialists to all schools to support school heads and teachers to conduct basic screening, develop Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), and provide teacher and pupil support in schools, including providing support on transitional programmes to guide learners who are transitioning from out of school into school or from a special school into a mainstream environment.

3.7 Build the capacity of support services, resource teachers, assessment personnel, health workers, child protection workers, psychologists, and careers advisors to identify and work with learners with diverse needs and ensure that they are encouraged to perform to their full potential.

## **IV. Participatory development of sustainable inclusive education**

**Policy Objective 4.** Promote sustainability and equality in the wider society, by ensuring the active participation of local communities, parents/caregivers and children in supporting access to and the development of child-friendly, inclusive education settings.

### **Strategies:**

- 4.1 Ensure parents and communities are encouraged and supported in challenging and changing attitudes that are detrimental to the well-being of learners who are marginalized
- 4.2 Train teachers and school officials to empower parents/caregivers of marginalised learners through engagement in PTAs and SMCs to advocate for all learners' rights to access and participate in inclusive child-friendly learning environments, holding local education authorities to account.
- 4.3 Orient parents and community in the use of strategies to enhance students' learning abilities that circumvent the potential barriers caused by various disabilities.
- 4.4 Engage traditional leaders and opinion holders in the community to support and promote inclusive attitudes and behaviors in all aspects of community life.
- 4.5 Engage the media in debating and helping to dispel myths surrounding students with disabilities or from minority groups (religious, ethnic, or linguistic) and promote the awareness of the rights of all students.

## **V. Inclusive life-long learning**

**Policy Objective 5:** Ensure that efforts to advocate for and implement inclusive education cover the full range of education from early childhood to vocational, non-formal and adult education, including alternative and accelerated education pathways for overage and out of school children

### **Strategies:**

- 5.1 Support early identification and stimulation of students with disabilities as well as coordinated guidance and counselling services and other support services for families of children with disabilities
- 5.2 Ensure that the same support systems outlined in objectives 1 and 2 will be available in the early stages of education, including the creation of inclusive child-friendly learning environments, use of inclusive teaching and learning materials and creation of IEPs for all children with disabilities
- 5.3 Ensure all personnel working in the early stages of education will benefit from the same inclusive education professional development commitments outlined in objective 3 particularly orientation in early detection techniques
- 5.4 Ensure that Alternative Education policy and guidelines are inclusive of the needs of marginalised learners and that AE teachers, facilitators, and school administrators receive the same professional development opportunities outlined in objective 3
- 5.5 Create targeted holistic supportive pathways (linking with other service providers) enabling out of school (and often overage) learners with disabilities to transition either onto alternative or accelerated education pathways

5.6 Improve access to employment opportunities for marginalised learners, particularly young people with disabilities, through improving the inclusivity and accessibility of formal TVET and creation of non-formal vocational training opportunities such as establishing apprenticeships with local employers

5.7 Ensure that the same support systems outlined in objectives 1, 2 and 3 will be available in higher education institutions, including the creation of inclusive learner-friendly environments, use of inclusive teaching and learning materials and all higher education personnel trained in inclusive education.

## **VI. Safe, protective learning environments**

<b>Policy Objective 6:</b> Ensure that all education provision is free from violence and provides a protective environment for all students
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### **Strategies:**

6.1 Ensure that the learning environment is free from discrimination, safe and friendly for all students within the school and that sanctions are in place for those who contravene this requirement including for teachers who breach the Liberia Teacher code of conduct.

6.2 Promote school health programmes as an intervention to increase health promotion and protection; encourage attendance and facilitate effective learning; and strengthen detection and referral pathways for those requiring additional care.

6.3 Ensure that child protection programmes and services are inclusive and conscious of the extra vulnerabilities of students with disabilities or learning difficulties or other special needs, and are able to safeguard such students and serve their needs at the school level.

## **VII. Embedding principles of inclusive education throughout the education sector**

<b>Policy Objective 7:</b> Contribute to overall improvements in quality throughout the Liberian education system, by highlighting the inherent connections between quality education and inclusive education, and promoting a universal design approach to all education system changes
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### **Strategies:**

7.1 Promote an inter-sectorial approach to resolving cross cutting issues, strengthening linkages between educational institutions and social protection, health and community-based rehabilitation as well as data collection.

7.2 Mobilize adequate funding (national budgets and requests for development assistance) for excluded learners.

7.3 Initiate and facilitate national consultative processes to develop national standards for inclusive education and for enhancing the quality of learning outcomes.

7.4 Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress of Inclusive Education (IE) within the context of wider data collection on schools, institutions, communities and citizens.

7.5 Explore and promote local (Liberian) low-cost production and repair of assistive devices for learners with disabilities.

7.6 Develop relevant guidelines for inclusive education policy implementation at all levels of the education system, including national, county, district and school levels, including proposed design of structures and capacity building of personnel, and specifically enabling school inspectors and school principals to implement inclusive SPIPs.

## 8. Institutional framework

The implementation of the IE Policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and its respective bureaus. In this effort, the Ministry will collaborate with relevant sector Ministries, Agencies and Departments, Non-Governmental Organizations, Private Sector Organizations, Associations, human rights and child protection organizations implementing education programs in Liberia.

The implementation of the IE Policy requires well-defined structures at all levels, and specific roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. The functional structures must ensure effective supervision, timely delivery of inputs as well as monitoring and evaluation of policy performance.

A variety of key public institutions within their obligatory directives have considerable influence on the quality delivery of Inclusive Education in Liberia. Their collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) in critical areas of interest will be an important undertaking under this policy.

The Policy Review, Coordination, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Impact Assessment will be the responsibility of the Government through its relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). The various MDAs will perform the functions mentioned above as well as other responsibilities that will be assigned during the development of the policy implementation plan. The MDAs will make annual budgetary provisions for carrying out set of activities defined in the annual work plans. They will also ensure provision of adequate financial resources and ensure compliance of mandatory financial commitment.

The MoE will provide overall leadership for Inclusive Education. The MoE will have the responsibility of:

- Overseeing policy implementation, review, coordination, monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment.
- Leading the submission of budget proposals for inclusive education financing while working closely with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) to ensure inflow of funds to Inclusive education programmes
- Assessing progress against targets.
- Coordinating reporting on inclusive education to relevant stakeholders.
- Overseeing the review of curriculum, training and professional development of all educational personnel in collaboration with all key stakeholders.

## 9. Monitoring, evaluation and review

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) component of the policy will provide opportunity for strengthening and for effective planning and support by the MoE. M&E will happen at various levels of the education system and in alignment with M&E mechanisms and data collection tools used as part of the overall M&E of the G2B-ESP. Decentralized Monitoring and Evaluation will allow for monitoring of disaggregated set performance indicators in equity issues and provide opportunities for district level and school level performance evaluation of indicators. The issues of learners with special educational needs will be mainstreamed into the current monitoring and evaluation practices.

**Central Level Monitoring:** At the Central level, the current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for evaluating education sector performance will be strengthened and include issues of inclusive education.

- M&E of the IE policy will be aligned with overall M&E of the G2B-ESP, using the same data collection mechanisms and quality assessment tools as appropriate. The SIE division will work closely with the MoE M&E department to ensure this happens.
- The implementation plan of the IE policy will have an in-built results framework (aligning with the G2B-ESP results framework) for easy monitoring.
- An annual review of delivery on inclusive education will provide a platform for addressing the issues in this policy across sectors such as Health, Social Protection and the Local Government.

**County and District Level Monitoring:** Personnel from county and special schools will be included in the District Inclusive Education Team (DIET), along with school inspectors for the monthly monitoring and supervision of the implementation of school reforms to achieve inclusion.

- Overall progress of the IE policy will be monitored on a routine basis through the rigorous use of monitoring and evaluation tools in the education sector by Principals, Instructional Supervisors, District Education Officers (DEOs) in charge of supervision, and National Special Education Officers.
- At the decentralized level, various institutions from pre-school to tertiary will include in their plans, programmes and activities for addressing IE issues.

**School Level Monitoring:** The current monitoring tools namely the Inclusive Education Monitoring Tool, will be strengthened to ensure disaggregated data that takes account of the diverse educational needs of learners and incorporated into the School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIPs) and the School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) for support.

**Community Level Monitoring:** At the community level, communities will be encouraged to form Inclusive Education Committees to monitor the level of school participation of parents and report during PTAs and or SPAM, the composition of which will be made up of persons from Women's Group, District Assemblies, Town/Village Development Committees, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), NGOs, Teachers and Community Health Staff.

**Data Collection and Research:** Inclusive Education practice will require an on-going data collection and research to ensure that learner at risk of exclusion and all those with special and additional needs have access to quality education and related support services. Research will be conducted and the findings used for the formulation and implementation of strategies.

## 10. Financing

The alignment of the IE policy strategies with activities already planned and budgeted for in the G2B-ESP operational plan will facilitate financing of many activities within the IE policy implementation plan. Through discussion with relevant departments across the MoE, it will be possible to ascertain if extra funding is needed to implement specific activities. The mapping of IE policy objectives against G2B-ESP strategic objectives will also help identify where there are potential funding gaps and highlight areas to advocate for funding from development partners and donors.

The provision for the following inclusive education activities in the annual G2B-ESP budget allocation will cover such costs as:

- Training cost for key staff (including teachers, principals and school inspectors), special education specialist and other key national stakeholders that will support mainstream schools.
- Procurement of some equipment for schools
- Procurement of some relevant instructional materials
- Supervision, monitoring and evaluation
- Data collection, management and analysis
- Liaising with other MDAs to implement IE

The following broad inclusive education activities have been identified as requiring funding and unlikely to be funded under the current G2B-ESP:

- Supporting schools to establish a system of individualized education for all children with disabilities including individual educational plans (IEP)
- Transition existing “special education” institutions to serve as resource/assessment centers to assist the mainstream system and special units/schools for those with severe disabilities.
- Promote the availability and training of relevant professionals and facilities
- Scholarships / supports to learners at the risk of exclusion
- Physical and environmental accessibility of educational facilities (existing and new facilities)
- Parental and community awareness raising and engagement activities
- Promotion of local (Liberian) low-cost production of assistive devices for learners with disabilities
- Development of relevant guidelines for inclusive education policy implementation for all levels of the education system.