National Learning Assessment Policy

Liberia

IPA Liberia
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEO - County Education Officers
CWPM - Correct Words Per Minute
DEO - District Education Officers
EGMA - Early Grade Math Assessment
EGRA - Early Grade Reading Assessment
ESP - Educational Sector Plan
EQUAL - Education Quality and Access in Liberia
EVD - Ebola virus disease
G2B-ESP - Getting to Best Education Sector Plan, 2017-2021
LAYS - Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling
LTTP - Liberia Teacher Training Program
LJHSCE - Liberia Junior High School Certificate Examination
LSHSCE - Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination
MOE - Ministry of Education
NCP 2019 - National Curriculum Policy 2019
NCF 2019 - National Curriculum Framework 2019
NLAF - National Learning Assessment Framework
NLAP - National Learning Assessment Policy
PAPD - Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, 2018-2023
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Agenda 2030)
SMT - Senior Management Team of the Ministry of Education
UoL - University of Liberia
USD - United States Dollar
WAEC - West African Examinations Council
WASSCE - West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination

Foreword
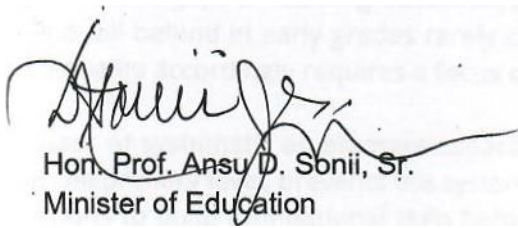
Through the transition from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum, Liberia has placed learning at the center of   its education system. I am proud to announce the development of a National Learning Assessment System for primary grades as the next critical milestone in this process.

The development of the National Learning Assessment Policy (NLAP) and Framework directly aligns with Liberia's 10-year Strategy for Education Reform, responding to the call for the need of an assessment tool to inform curriculum and teacher practice. More generally, it also steps towards Pillar 3 of the Liberia Rising Vision 2030 of eradicating illiteracy and emphasizes the focus on building human capital to reduce the risk of conflict.

The NLAP. Provides the Ministry of Education with a key tool to accurately assess the status of leaning at primary grades in the country, allowing for regional and international comparison as well as providing early diagnostics of leaning outcome gaps. It thus also presents a gateway for the Ministry to embed a culture of evidence-informed decision-making and response.

This policy and framework are the outcome of the Ministry of Education partnering with Innovations, for• Poverty Action and the Global Partnership for Education, as well as numerous stakeholders in the education sector. I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all collaborative partners for their immense contribution.

It is my   hope that a successful implementation of the NLAP will pave the way for the introduction of a series of

targeted and continuously adapted best-fit policies in forming an education system that enables Liberian students to

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reach their potential and strive for excellence.

Executive Summary

In implementing its Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-21 (G2B-ESP) to address the most urgent challenges facing the education sector in Liberia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed a comprehensive National Learning Assessment Policy (NLAP) for primary education. The NLAP serves three key purposes: (i) accurately assess the status of learning at primary grades in the country, (ii) provide early diagnostics of learning outcome gaps, and (iii) inform decision-making and response.

To overcome challenges related to a fragile economy stemming from a long history of instability, as well as effects of twin negative shocks caused by recent health pandemics (Ebola virus disease crisis and COVID-19s) on one hand, and decline in macroeconomic indicators (sharp decline in global commodity prices and exchange rates) on the other, Liberia places human capital development, especially through education, at the center of its commitment to development. However, at the same time, Liberia's education sector faces a myriad of challenges - from high over-age enrollment to the ongoing professional development of the teaching force (see Education Sector Analysis 2016) - which is reflected in worryingly low learning outcomes. This causes many Liberian youths to leave school unequipped with the foundational skills and basic education that could allow them to transition to the world of work or further their education or training. Crucial to effectively addressing these challenges are early diagnostics of the learning gap, especially in foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy. To fill this gap and track learners' progress in terms of learning outcomes, an NLAP has been rationalized in the current education legal and policy framework as a priority tool.

Assessing the challenges and concerns facing Liberia's education system, the MOE's Education Sector Analysis 2016 identified the need for a shift to a competency-based curriculum, improve the quality of education, and a standardized national assessment system to monitor it. There is a general agreement among key MOE stakeholders that student literacy levels in early grades, in particular, are too low. Already in Grades 2 and 3, Liberian learners are far below oral reading fluency, with a significant percentage of students not being able to read a single word. Research shows that gaps in learning outcomes between children emerge early and grow over time. Learners who fall behind in early grades rarely catch up. The ability to address the roots of learning outcome inequality accordingly requires a focus on foundational skills.

A lack of systematic assessment capacity, as well as a lack of nationwide learning assessment policy at the primary level, prevents the system to enforce early detection and timely system-level remedial actions to build foundational skills before the learners exit the system. Presently, the MOE stipulates students be tested at the end of every marking period, semester, and school year. However, final exams developed by school management individually are not standardized and lack explicit guidance on best practices associated with such tests. In this context, the NLAP will be a key mechanism for advancing the country's development, through its role in promoting the improvement of the education sector and beyond. The NLAP strategy is presented with the following structural focus:

To develop an NLAP for the Republic of Liberia, it is necessary to understand the **current status of learning** in the country, as well as the different factors, and developments that could be seen to

influence learning (see Section 1). Section 2 discusses **six key reforms** currently defining the Liberian education sector, drawing attention to a need for a shift in the curriculum as well as the conduct of standardized assessments in primary grades. As the foundational skills in literacy and numeracy serve as the building blocks for later learnings, timely detection of gaps in these skills through a strong system of learning assessments constitutes the **rationale for the NLAP** (see Section 3). The provisions put forth in the NLAP deliver a holistic approach to assessment with an emphasis on school-based assessment of students at two critical time points of primary education (Grades 3 and 6) to particularly capture foundational skills. The **policy purpose**, as outlined in Section 4, is to provide an early warning for immediate feedback to the MOE to design learning programs and reforms that will lead to improvements in students' learning.

In line with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2019), the NLAP must abide by and follow **guiding principles** (Section 5) of validity, reliability, fairness, comprehensiveness, flexibility, standardization, and timeliness. Reviewing existing international assessment initiatives and taking into account the current state of assessment and testing in Liberia detailed in Section 6, the NLAP builds on existing expertise and aims to align with **existing initiatives** to offer the most useful deliverables. Following a cost-effective sampling procedure, the **proposed assessment** focuses primarily on basic foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, while collecting additional information on student well-being and school demographics (see Section 7). In Section 8, a **policy implementation plan** is put forth, designed to provide a framework for the coordination, design, delivery, monitoring, communication, and financing model of the national assessments. In addition, the NLAP must account for and employ tactics to mitigate potential **risks and feasibility concerns** (see Section 9), including resource constraints, policy take-up, reform fatigue, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

To realize the NLAP's purpose and objective, regular evaluations and adaptations, systematic cooperation within the MOE as well as aligning the views, interests, and capacities of regional and international stakeholders should define the **way forward** (Section 10).

Acknowledgements

1. Learning in Liberia: A Background

To develop a National Learning Assessment Policy (henceforth referred to as NLAP) and the companion National Learning Assessment Framework (NLAF) for the Republic of Liberia, it is necessary to understand the current status of learning in the country, as well as the different factors, and developments that could be seen to influence learning. This section provides a brief overview of the Liberian education system and broader development context, focusing on existing data and research on children's learning outcomes, in order to establish a foundational understanding of existing knowledge and related gaps about learning in Liberia.

1.1 Liberian Country Context

The education system in Liberia cannot be viewed in isolation from other social, political, and economic indicators. This broader context is important when considering the challenges related to building a qualified and effective teaching workforce, the role of communities and parents in supporting children's learning, and the threats to children's development both in and outside of the classroom, as well as the design and implementation of an NLAP.

Liberia's blueprint for progress, as envisioned in the Liberia Rising 2030, Agenda for Transformation Pillar III, and the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) considers education as a crucial driver to the country's realization of social and economic development. To overcome challenges related to infrastructure, human capital, poverty rates, and a fragile economy stemming from instability, as well as recent shocks from the Ebola virus disease (EVD) crisis, a sharp decline in global commodity prices, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, Liberia places education at the center of its commitment to development. The country's current Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development aims to empower Liberians through four key pillars: education, health, youth development, and social protection. In this context, an NLAP will be a key mechanism for advancing the country's development, through its role in promoting the improvement of the education sector and beyond.

Set against this backdrop, the Government of Liberia has focused on human development as an essential part of the country's mid-and long-term development plans: The Agenda for Transformation, 2012-2017, PAPD 2018-2023, Strategy for Education Transformation 2018-2028, and Liberia Rising Vision 2030. Taken together, these plans are premised on rebuilding the country's education system. In particular, balancing the post-conflict goal of making education accessible with a focus on improving quality, while continuing to address the challenges of limited access to education. An NLAP can be seen as a key contributor to the realization of these goals.

1.2 National Education Trends

Over the past several decades, the Liberian education system has made significant advances in educational attainment, as indicated by the more than doubling of the share of the population that has attended primary school as well as the share of the population that has attended tertiary education. At the same time, lessons learned through ongoing improved quality-based interventions in the country show that both access and quality remain priorities in Liberia. About 47.3 percent of the population has never attended school, placing Liberia above the regional average of 34 percent

(World Bank, 2016).[1] In addition, challenges such as overage enrollment, low primary school completion rates as well as inequality along the lines of gender, socioeconomic strata, and geography (urban/rural), continue to define **access to education** in the country.

Liberia also faces challenges related to the **quality of education**, aligning the country's experience with other countries around the world that are also struggling to confront the global learning crisis. All levels of the Liberian education system are defined by **low learning outcomes** and **inadequate learning outcomes assessment capacity,** especially in earlier grades to measure performance in developing foundational skills. For example:

● Learners in Grades 2 and 3 are far below oral reading fluency with a significant percentage of students not being able to read a single word.
● Pass rates for the Liberia Junior High School Certificate Exam (LJHSCE) and the Liberia Senior High School Certificate Exam (LSHSCE) dropped dramatically between 2007 and 2014, from 95 to 59 percent and from 81 to 48 percent, respectively (WAEC, 2015).

These low learning levels reflect a number of challenges in the education sector, from school conditions, a lack of learning materials to the teacher workforce. These are fully detailed in **Appendix A**, in addition to descriptions of available indicators and research on access to education, learning outcomes, gender, and other disparities[2]. The challenges are important considerations for the NLAP, as they guide and inform the nature of the assessment (refer to Section 7 for further details on sampling criteria).

At the same time, lack of systematic assessment capacity, as well as lack of nationwide learning assessment policy at the primary level, disables the system to enforce early detection and timely system-level remedial actions to build foundational skills before the learners exit the system. Presently, the MOE stipulates students to be tested at the end of every marking period, semester and school year. However, final exams developed by school management individually are not standardized, with no explicit guidance on best practices associated with such tests. This leads to high reliance on national high-stake exams that often occur much later in Grades 6[3], 9, and 12 in the Liberian education system by West African Examination Council (WAEC). See Section 6.2 for more details on National Initiatives for Assessment.

The current status of the education sector, as well as available data on learning outcomes, indicates that in order to achieve the Ministry of Education's (MOE) goal to provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens and residents, investments in a) Curriculum Amendments, b) Teachers Development, c) School Management and Leadership, and d) Equipped Infrastructure needs to be made (Strategy for Education Transformation 2018-2020). The MOE's particular emphasis on the universal education of the Liberian people and the elimination of

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[1] This percentage has come down from 72.9 percent in the 1980s (World Bank, 2016). In terms of a gender split, 47 percent of women and girls and 33 percent of men and boys have never attended school (World Bank, 2018a). These rates are higher in rural areas where 63 percent of women and girls and 43 percent of men and boys have never attended school (World Bank, 2018a).

[2] To provide a broad overview, literacy attainment in Liberia among the population; those who are poor, female and residing in rural areas are less likely to be literate than their wealthy, male, and urban counterparts (World Bank, 2016).

[3] In 2019, Liberia piloted Grade 6 high-stake examination with WAEC called Liberia Primary School Certification Examination. It follows the WAEC Syllabus that is content-focused for the grade level.

illiteracy speaks to the **need for an NLAP** for **two key reasons**: (i) accurately assess the status of learning in the country and (ii) inform decision-making and response.

1.3 Global Context and Trends

Globally, current trends show that especially low-income countries are not on track to achieve the SDG 4.1 commitment of universal primary and secondary education by 2030. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the school-age population has grown rapidly over the last two decades, still over one in five primary school-age children are out of school (UNESCO). Combining indicators of reading proficiency and out-of-school rates, the World Bank (2019) learning poverty rate finds 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. Due to the lack of standardized assessments, no current country-specific learning poverty data on Liberia are available. However, in the world's poorest countries, estimated learning poverty levels are as high as 80 percent. By 2030, it is expected that globally 43 percent of school-aged children will still be learning-poor.

While school enrolment has grown steadily over past years, school completion and learning proficiency rates remain worryingly low. A 2015 estimation showed 88 percent of primary and lower secondary school-age children in Sub-Saharan Africa not achieving minimum proficiency in reading (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). These shockingly low learning outcomes are a reflection of students either dropping out or not learning foundational skills. Liberia is not exempt from these challenges. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data, acquired through a NORC (2017) baseline study, showed that Grade 2 pupils in Liberia could read approximately only 10 correct-words-per-minute (cwpm), lying significantly under the EGRA proposed national reading benchmark for Liberia of 35 cwpm by the end of Grade 2. This is especially concerning, considering that early grade learning gaps are rarely caught up. A timely detection at an early stage through regular nationwide assessments can play a crucial role to inform curriculum and policy.

There is a general trend towards establishing national assessments of learning outcomes. As of November 2019, 22 Sub-Saharan African countries have adopted a national learning assessment policy, with 7 countries in the process of developing one (TALENT, 2020).[4] Interestingly, only 4 French-speaking African countries have a national assessment policy in place. This is possibly related to the widespread participation of Francophone countries in the Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC), which can be seen as a substitute for national assessment systems. As for the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the majority of the 16 participating countries also have adopted a national assessment policy. This might partially explain the waning participation in the latest round of cross-national SACMEQ assessments. Both PASEC and SACMEQ have significantly contributed to spreading probed quality assessment techniques and establishing a culture of institutionalized learning assessments in many African countries (TALENT, 2020).

While there are a number of regional and international education assessment initiatives (see Section 6.1), there currently is no standardized global assessment of learning outcomes in primary grades. The Rosetta Stone Initiative is working towards linking regional primary learning assessments, such as PASEC and SACMEQ, which are both designed specifically for African contexts, with the Trends in

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[4] It must be noted that the TALENT (2020) Learning Assessments in Sub-Saharan Africa report does not differentiate in this statistic between primary & secondary education.

International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) international benchmarks for numeracy and literacy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2017). The objective of the initiative is to construct a concordance table that translates regional numeracy and literacy scores to ones compatible with international benchmarks. A strong system of standardized learning assessments is a prerequisite for effective monitoring and making informed decisions in achieving desired improvements in learning outcomes that meet international standards. Through absence of a system-wide learning assessment policy in primary education, Liberia lags notably behind in the regional comparison.

A recent study by Angrist et al. (2021), showing that the global progress in learning over the last two decades has been limited, finds that the role of human capital in explaining income differences across countries ranges from 20 to 50 percent. This once more highlights the urgency for a timely detection of gaps in foundational skills and the root causes of low learning outcomes. The need for a NLAP to provide appropriate learning data thus goes beyond only improving education quality itself, but is critical to driving forward the building of human capital and ultimately Liberia's economic development.

2. Education Reform in Liberia

Six key reforms currently define the education sector in Liberia - (i) The National Education Sector Plan (ESP), (ii) The Education Reform Act, (iii) Education Sector Analysis, and the (iv) Getting to Best - Education Sector Plan (G2B-ESP) which led to the development of the (v) National Curriculum Policy (NCP 2019) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2019). Refer to **Appendix B** for further details. Taken together, these reforms draw attention to a shift in the curriculum as well as assessment framework from a content-based to a competency-based. More specifically, they emphasize the lack of standardized assessments in primary grades for early diagnostics of the learning gap, especially in foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy. To fill this gap and track learners' progress in terms of learning outcomes, NLAP has been developed in the current education legal and policy framework.

2.1 National Education Sector Plan, 2010-2020

The ESP was developed by the MOE as part of a series of initiatives to "*revitalize the education sector and improve the quality of education for all students.*" To enable this, the ESP prioritized (i) improving the quality of the teaching staff and programs at the primary and post-primary levels, (ii) increasing access, retention and completion at all levels, and (iii) placing special focus at the primary and junior high school (basic education) levels. The ESP additionally emphasizes *"early childhood development as the foundation of holistic development through which children are prepared to thrive."*

The ESP identified the following objectives for education sector development in Liberia:

1. Ensure that all children achieve their full potential and are ready for primary schooling by providing quality, integrated ECD services and programs for all children from up to age 5.
2. Ensure that all school-age children and others so desiring, receive and complete primary education of a quality that adequately prepares them for the next stage/phase of living and learning.
3. The provision of resources that would allow all school-age children and others so desiring to receive and complete a junior high school program of quality. Further, that as many as can benefit and so wish, move on to and complete a diversified broad base high quality senior high school program or its equivalent in readiness for the next stage/phase of living and learning
4. The provision of increased opportunities for the acquisition of relevant and appropriate technical and vocational education and skills training of quality.
5. The provision of competent, well-qualified, and motivated teachers for all educational institutions in Liberia.
6. Better regulation and monitoring of higher education while ensuring at the same time an improvement in the quality and relevance of programs and institutions of higher learning.
7. Develop monitoring and supervisory mechanisms that will provide useful information to guide the MOE's management of the system and its actions.

The ESP placed few actions as the highest priorities in the short- and medium-term at the primary level, which will lay the foundation for the NLAP in the future. It sought the review and revision of the primary school curriculum to enhance relevance, appropriateness and address major content

and quality concerns including local language issues[5]. It emphasized serious consideration of the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in primary schooling in line with Liberia being a multilingual nation. It highlighted the need to officially develop and endorse a Language and Education Policy for Liberia. Finally, the ESP highlighted the development of a national assessment system to track and monitor progress in learning outcomes.

2.2 Education Reform Act, 2011

The Education Reform Act was a step toward decentralization in the education sector. Its main objective is to govern and regulate the education system and its delivery and management through the provision of quality education, equal access, decentralize the education system, reduce rate and level of illiteracy, promote gender equity and equality and produce good citizens with the necessary skills for the development of the country.

In line with the ESP, it recognized the challenges in the national curriculum with an emphasis on content proficiency and theoretical instruction. It stipulated the revision of the current curriculum to provide greater specificity on learning standards, formative and summative assessment, and evaluation methods. It further sought to establish the Centre for Curriculum Development and Research to develop a new national curriculum for all schools including developing local language curricula. In addition to this, it also recognized Country School Boards' authority to select a local language along with English as the language of instruction and stipulated a local language to be taught in each county beginning at the Basic education level.

At present, the MOE has not developed a curriculum for teaching local languages and the current policy direction appears focused on strengthening teaching and learning in the English language.

2.3 Education Sector Analysis, 2016

The MOE conducted an Education Sector Analysis Study in 2016 to assess the challenges and concerns facing Liberia's education systems. The study (i) compared the existing curriculum with the needs and aspirations of young people in the country, (ii) ascertained whether school subjects are relevant and preparing students with competencies fit for the job market, and, (iii) identified emerging issues based on national realities. Based on the findings and the MOE's larger goal of equipping all Liberian students with competencies required for a knowledge-based economy, the study recommended a revised national curriculum focused on:

1. Competency-based learning standards i.e. academic and skill-set development.
2. Greater specificity on formative and summative assessments.
3. Improving the quality of education, specifically through literacy and numeracy.

Challenges identified in the diagnostic study are important considerations for the NLAP, specifically the Policy Orientation and Implementation Plan (refer to Section 7 and 8 for further details).

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[5] At the time of the ESP 2010-2020 writing, the curriculum being followed in Liberia was last updated in 1990. A revised national curriculum had been drafted but required trial testing before adoption. The revised national curriculum was approved in 2011.

2.4 Getting to Best Education Sector Plan, 2017-2021

With the EVD outbreak that hit the health and education sector hit the hardest, in 2015 the government renewed its focus to rebuild the education system as an urgent priority and developed a four-year education sector plan (ESP), 'Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (G2B-ESP)'. The G2B-ESP was based on key sector priorities identified after the outbreak and was developed following a series of reforms to improve education access and quality, including the Education Reform Act, 2011 (which strengthened the right to quality education), a restructuring of the MOE, implementation of teacher payroll verification in 2015 (removing 1,100 "ghost" teachers), training over 11,000 primary teachers in early grade literacy and numeracy, providing all primary schools with annual grants to replace school fees, establishing a 'B' certificate teacher training program to increase the supply of secondary teachers, Partnerships for School Liberia (trailing innovations) and establishment of the Inter-Ministerial TVET Taskforce (IMTTF).

The Plan identified 9 strategies to be implemented from 2017-2021:

1. Establish an effective school quality improvement and accountability system.
2. Improve the efficiency and performance of the education management system.
3. Improve access to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE); 'period from birth to eight years old' during which a child experiences tremendous growth and development (UNESCO, 2012).
4. Provide quality alternative and accelerated education pathways for overage and out-of-school children and young people.
5. Improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction of the teaching workforce.
6. Ensure that teachers have access to quality instructional materials and assessment tasks.
7. Mainstream gender and school health across the education sector.
8. Improve the quality and relevance of technical and vocational education and training.
9. Leverage regional and international partnerships and expertise, target market demand for critical skills and increase the efficiency of education expenditure.

The G2B-ESP directly informs the NLAP because it calls for a national literacy and numeracy assessment for grades 3 and 6. Its curriculum and assessment program recognizes that learning outcomes are low for foundational skills and hence, prioritizes the development, trial, and implementation of a national assessment system for grades 3 and 6.

2.5 Strategy for Education Transformation, 2018-2028

The 10-year Strategy for Education Transformation was launched at the 2018 National Summit 'Prioritizing Education: Why Should We Care.' The Strategy recognizes that access to and quality of education is critical. It relies on previous reforms and findings from the ESP 2010-2020, Education Reform Act, 2011, Education Sector Analysis (World, 2016), and curriculum reforms to adopt a 10-year strategic roadmap.

The roadmap identifies 4 pillars of (i) Teacher Development, (ii) School Management and Leadership, (iii) Curriculum Amendments, and (iv) Equipped Infrastructure. These are supported by 11 targets:

1. Building functional Centers of Excellence by 2020.
2. Upgrade students' performance (to show passé with credits) on WASSCE and other external assessment exams by 20 percent in 3 years, scaled up to 70 percent in 10 years, 2028.

3. Guarantee job readiness skills to 25 percent of high school graduates in 3 years scaled up to 80 percent in 10 years by 2028.
4. Establish three regional STEM institutions to support the Nation's Agenda on research and innovation for industrialization.
5. Establish eight TVET institutions of 21st-century status in 5 years and scale up one of such institutions to a university by the same timeline.
6. Professionalize teaching and school leadership through certification and licensing to enhance accountability as of 2020.
7. Enforce the Education Law of 2011 on the classification of schools by Grades, by 2019.
8. Facilitate scholarships for a minimum of 100 Ph.D. candidates to support tertiary education and enhance the granting of terminal degrees in key Liberian universities in 5 years.
9. Fulfill the seven primary targets of SDG 4 in education by 2030.
10. Establish a National Education Development Fund in 2018/2019.
11. Identify one indigenous language to be taught in schools and universities as a foundation for developing a second official national language in 5 years, effectively making Liberia a nation with a dual national language regime.

The strategy is closely associated with the NLAP, the NCP 2019, and NCF 2019 as it calls for the (i) development and implementation of a national primary level learning assessment that can be effectively used for informing policies and teaching practices and (ii) the curriculum with a focus on skills and competencies. redesigning the curriculum with a focus on skills and competencies.

2.6 Curricular Reform

The NCP 2019 and NCF 2019 were developed in response to the need for a robust and relevant curriculum that addresses the present and emerging realities of Liberia. The NCP 2019 improves on the shortcomings of the National Curriculum, 2011 by presenting competency-based curriculum reforms at all levels of education in the country.

To achieve these reforms, NCP 2019 prescribes three strategies:

1. Establish mechanisms for conducting both formative and summative evaluations as a means of achieving comprehensive results of learning outcomes.
2. Create an enabling environment for performance-based learning, and transform assessment to check knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the performance of certain tasks.
3. Initiate organizational linkages and networks to promote the adoption and implementation of competency-based assessment.

NCP 2019 lays the foundation for NLAP because it prescribes the implementation of a competency-based assessment for measuring learning achievements and encouraging life-long learning experiences.

3. Rationale for National Learning Assessment Policy

Assessment of learning in the foundational areas of language and math is needed at varying points in the educational process for students. Research suggests that foundational skills in literacy and numeracy serve as the building blocks for later learnings. Learners who fall behind in the development of these skills in early grades rarely catch up. Working to improve foundational skills has the potential to improve learning as well as increase retention and completion rates. Timely detection of gaps in foundational skills at two timepoints - middle of primary education (Grade 3) and at the exit of primary education (Grade 6) - can provide an early warning for immediate feedback to the MOE to take actions based on the results, such as design learning programs, reallocation of resource, curriculum review, re-orientation of teaching and reforms that will lead to improvements in students' learning. Thereby, paving the path for targeted support to the school administration in early grades. Thus, there is a need for a holistic approach to assessment with an emphasis on school-based assessment of students in Grades 3 and 6. As described in Section 2 (and in further detail in **Appendix B**), education reform movements in Liberia have clearly articulated the need for an NLAP. This can be summarized by the following points:

STATUS QUO
- There is currently no system-wide learning assessment policy or guidelines in Grades 1-6, nor standardized tests for diagnostic use. This limits the ability to recognize shifts in educational needs throughout the country and effectively/efficiently respond to them.

EXISTING RESEARCH AND LEARNINGS
- Demonstrates that learning levels in Liberia are low and need improvement.
- Draws attention to key sources of inequality in learning outcomes - particularly in relation to gender, poverty, and geography (urban/rural).
- Focuses on small samples, specific geographies, few grades, and is implemented sporadically.
- Current learning data are either grade-content specific (Liberia Primary School Certificate Examination at Grade 6) or focus on foundational skills using oral assessments (EGRA).

CURRICULUM POLICY
- The transition from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum in the NCP 2019 and NCF 2019 places learning as the central priority of the Liberian education system, requiring an assessment policy and framework.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE
- International experience indicates that countries that have been successful in improving learning usually have in place a strong system of learning assessments.
- An NLAP can be used to:
  - Raise awareness about the importance of learning and stimulate national discussion and debate in such a way as to engage additional stakeholders in and garner support for investment in education and education reform (government, politicians, donors, civil society, educators, parents).
  - Inform policy and practice, as an evidence-based approach that allows for a better diagnostic of the problems and challenges that affect learning and for finding better solutions to overcome them.
  - Ensure accountability to determine if the resources being invested in education at various levels of the system are actually translating into improved learning outcomes.

- Monitor learning outcomes to determine if the large-scale reforms of the Liberian education system, as well as additional policies and programs, are resulting in the desired improvement in learning outcomes.

INTERNATIONAL GOALS

Inform international goals to chart Liberia's progress towards achieving them.

● Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) - Goal 4 (Quality Education); and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).
● Higher Human Capital Index - increases the productivity of the next generation of workers compared to a benchmark of complete education and health (World Bank 2020).[6]
● World Bank Learning Poverty Index.

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[6] Human Capital Index measures the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by age 18. Liberia's HCI is 32 percent i.e. a child born in the country today will be 32 percent productive if she enjoys complete education and health (World Bank, 2020).

4. Policy Purpose

The NLAP is anchored on the aspiration of the NCP 2019 which calls for an assessment development for a competency-based curriculum by (i) creating an enabling environment for performance-based learning, and (ii) transforming assessments to check knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the performance of certain tasks. The objective is to provide a framework for the conduct of assessment and an examination system for Grades 3 and 6 that supports and recognizes achievement described by the revised curriculum framework focusing on competency acquisition. NCP 2019 states:

> *Develop more complete and fair learner evaluation processes, focusing on both cognitive and non-cognitive attributes (different domains), with a fair balance between formative and summative assessments, considering both assessment of and assessment for learning including benchmark assessments.*

Such an acknowledgment comes in response to the *"need for a stronger formative student assessment system to help teachers and principals evaluate and address the specific listening need of their students, and of a summative student assessment system to help the education authorities and managers make informed decisions about resources allocation; curriculum update; and investments as well as improve pedagogical practices"* (Ministry of Education, 2019b , p. 20).

- The purpose of this assessment system as highlighted in the NCF 2019 is to *"assess the extent to which learning objectives including outcomes and competencies have been achieved and to identify which schools and learners need pedagogical advice and strategic intervention"*.

- As highlighted in the rationale, there is no official assessment policy that mandates a standardized form of assessment and nationwide reporting at the systems, school, and classroom level in primary education (Grade 1-6). The current practice involves school management developing primary grade exams for each marking period with no official guidance on best practices to set such tests. Feedback from these exams is provided from the classroom to the MOE in the form of report cards.

- Thus, there is a need for a holistic approach to assessment with an emphasis on school-based assessment of students in Grades 3 and 6 to particularly capture foundational skills. Such a standardized assessment structure in early grades will provide more immediate feedback to the MOE to design learning programs and reforms that will lead to improvements in students' learning.

There are concerns that other assessment and reporting policies could develop, that are not consistent with each other leading to confusion. There is a need for an overarching policy that is coherent and consistent in its philosophy and feasibility that pulls together existing policies to provide a framework for all future policy development and changes to the extent possible.

4.1 Vision Statement

The vision of the NLAP is to provide feedback on the overall health of the system in two critical time points of primary education. It endeavors to give annual feedback to the Liberian MOE and other education stakeholders to inform curriculum/policy revision or reform, professional development of

teachers, and/or targeting a specific area of learning. The NLAP is geared to drive reforms and decision-making that enable all learners in Liberian schools to enhance their learning capabilities and to become fully participating members of Liberian society economically, socially, politically and culturally.

4.2 Mission Statement

The mission of the NLAP is to institutionalize and streamline a competency-based assessment system in primary education for timely detection of gaps in foundational skills at two timepoints - middle of primary education (Grade 3) and at the exit of primary education (Grade 6). The NLAP aligns with and reinforces the priorities and focus of the entire education system in Liberia. The mission is guided by a coherent set of policy statements.

The NLAP must ensure:

- Safe and secure administration of all assessments to generate accurate and honest data to build faith in the assessment system and its results;
- Data are relevant, useful, and accurately reflects children's learning;
- The policy is used, in the long-term, for capacity building of actors at all levels to enable the systemic use of assessment data to improve schools' instructional effectiveness. Establish a common understanding of assessment across various actors;
- Schools are supported in the development of their own assessment policies and procedures;
- Evidence from the assessments is adequately used by the teachers, school management teams, and the MOE to improve teaching styles and target appropriate learning measures for improvement plans;
- Regular and proper conduct of the policy in order to inform decision-making and capture trends and change over time without unduly burdening the education system;
- Information and conclusions resulting from the policy are seen to be useful and are directly connected to the decision-making processes of the MOE;
- Information and conclusions resulting from the policy are widely shared among key stakeholders.

The provisions put forth in this policy are designed to provide a framework for the coordination, design, implementation, delivery, monitoring, and financing model of the National Assessments for Grade 3 and 6. It prescribes fair and just assessment for all students irrespective of gender, ethnicity, belief, ability, social or cultural background, and geographical location.

5. Guiding Principles

The NCF 2019 identifies guiding principles for the revised curriculum framework when administering competency-based assessments. The NLAP must abide by and follow these principles:

1. **Validity**: The strength of assessment tasks and criteria to accurately measure learners' attainment of the intended competencies. There must be sufficient evidence that the learners meet the competencies specified by the curriculum. The learners must not be asked to provide evidence for or be assessed against activities that are outside the scope of the curriculum.
   <u>In practice, this entails:</u>

   ● Designing assessment sections that take into account Liberian cultural values and practices where appropriate.
   ● Adapting international and regional assessment standards with well-defined learning objectives, cognitive domains and backed by prescribed benchmarks and matrices.
   ● Providing a valid framework/rubric on the actual skills, knowledge, processes, products, and values expected of students.

2. **Reliability**: The consistency of measured outcomes through a clear and consistent process for setting, marking, grading, etc. when the task is repeated on a population of learners. The assessment must be able to stand up to scrutiny; that is, other assessors should reach the same conclusion. Evidence-gathering methods can be used to show consistency.
   <u>In practice, this entails:</u>

   ● Sustainably administering the assessment on a yearly basis i.e. the assessment will measure the same outcomes accurately each time.
   ● Ensuring that trained and qualified individuals administer the assessment and are subject to quality assurance systems.
   ● Enforce measures to undertake secured test administration.

3. **Fairness**: The equality in the conduct of assessment; that is, the assessment does not advantage or disadvantage particular learners. Assessment must not discriminate against individuals or groups. Different people and different situations need different assessment methods and, where necessary, reasonable adjustments will be made to meet individual needs.
   <u>In practice, this entails:</u>

   ● Employing an asset-based approach with the assessment: the Literacy and Numeracy tools designed by the NLAP will focus on what children *can* do instead of conventional deficit-based approaches which tend to focus on what they *cannot* do. This approach '*emphasizes strengths over weaknesses, resilience over risk, and assets over deficits'* (Rose, 2006).
   ● Contextualizing the assessment to learning environments by accounting for Liberian school conditions.
   ● Eliminating barriers to participation by minimizing costs, ensuring the participation of learners, with a focus on gender and long-term inclusion of those with disabilities and other minorities, building on the Inclusive Education Policy.
   ● Recognizing existing pressures on children, teachers, school management staff, and other education stakeholders to minimize additional tasks for all involved.

4. **Comprehensiveness**: Collection of enough evidence to determine that learners can confidently perform tasks. Teachers must collect sufficient evidence of competence from learners so as to reach an assessment decision.
   In practice, this would entail:

   ● Covering a range of skills, tasks, and content in order to meaningfully represent children's learning and not a limited or narrowly defined set of skills.
   ● Including a number of different tasks and questions that are not limited to a single indicator or skill, such as oral reading fluency, instead covering a range of skills and levels of proficiency.
   ● Covering additional subjects from the 2019 Curriculum and, especially for the Grade 6 students, give the opportunity for more advanced students to demonstrate the range and extent of their abilities.

5. **Flexibility**: The assessment system must be flexible enough not to disadvantage learners on grounds of physical or intellectual disability, socio-economic background, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, or other characteristics. This should mean making reasonable adjustments to assessment techniques for individual learners and make sure that all learners demonstrate the same evidence of competence. There is no single approach to competency-based assessment. Evidence can be collected using different methods, at different times, and under a variety of conditions. It must be responsive to the needs of the situation and the learners.
   In practice, this would entail:

   ● Changing the sampling strategy with shifts in resource availability and priorities of the MOE.
   ● Having the ability to update protocols and procedures quickly with centralized training.
   ● Regularly soliciting and reviewing feedback from all stakeholders to continuously refine and adapt practices.

In addition to the guiding principles laid out in the NCF 2019, for successful implementation of the NLAP, the following two principles must also be followed:

6. **Standardization:** All students should be subjected to standardized conditions including standardized training for all test administrators, common procedures for contacting participants, test development and administration of the same quality, test timing, strategies for ensuring the security of test materials, as well as scoring.
   In practice, this would entail:

   ● A clear assessment plan is developed and followed for the selection of test items that leverage the existing standardized tests regionally and internationally.
   ● All students must answer the same questions or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions, in the same way, and that is scored in a standard or consistent manner.
   ● The test administrator manual should state those conditions and serve as a basis for quality control.
   ● Standardized protocols for assessment administration, scoring, and reporting are developed and followed across schools as well as across time points.

7. **Timeliness:** The assessment system must take into account that any policy change or adoption takes time for uptake and requires good time management for smooth implementation.

Timeliness refers to whether the assistance was provided in a timely manner at the "right place" and "right time". NLAP requires various processes and coordination among various stakeholders in a timely manner for the success of the implementation.
<u>In practice, this would entail:</u>

- Efforts are made to seek funding that allows smooth administration of NLAP across different stages of the assessment process (preparation, data collection, analysis, and dissemination).
- Timely communication and action with key actors should be emphasized.

6. Insight from Existing Assessment Initiatives

The call for an NLAP across multiple reform movements within the Liberian education sector reflects a global trend of (i) drawing attention to the importance of assessment, and (ii) the need to center learning outcomes at the core of education policy and practice. This trend has inspired multiple international efforts to improve assessment and the coordination of measures of learning.

A starting point for the development of an assessment for Liberia is to consider existing learning assessment policies and initiatives to ensure that the NLAP:

1. Builds on existing expertise and lessons learned in the field of assessment.
2. Aligns with existing initiatives so that the policy results in the most useful deliverables for the greatest number of stakeholders.
3. Enables Liberia to contribute to global indicators and assess its own progress towards global goals.
4. Avoids duplication of existing assessments.

This section reviews international learning assessment initiatives (refer to **Appendix C** and **Appendix D** for further details) as well as the current state of assessment and testing in Liberia.

6.1 International and Regional Assessment Initiatives

Large-scale, system-level standardized assessments as detailed below provide insights on education system performance levels and contributing factors, typically in relation to an agreed-upon set of standards or learning goals, in order to inform education policy and practice. These assessments vary on various fronts: target grades or age levels; target population size (sample or census; focus on national versus international benchmark; content or skill areas covered; types of background data gathered, and the frequency with which they are administered.

ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (ASER)
ASER is a citizen-led household-based annual survey in India, which has been adapted for use in several countries around the world: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Pakistan, Mali, and Senegal. It captures children in and out of school, provides estimates of their schooling status, and measures basic literacy and numeracy levels for children between the ages of 6-16. For the NLAP, insights from ASER's test administration process will help understand how to conduct large-scale reliable rapid assessments to gauge foundational skills at the county and district level.

CORE EARLY GRADE MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT (CORE EGMA)
Core EGMA is a one-on-one oral assessment designed to measure a student's foundation skills in numeracy and mathematics in the early grades of primary school. It functions as a country-level diagnostic tool and identifies gaps in the mathematics education that children are receiving at an early age. For the NLAP, Core EGMA which has been tested in Liberia before will support the development of assessment items and further help mitigate floor-level effects in capturing learning outcomes pertaining to fundamental numeracy skills in mathematics.

EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT (EGRA)
EGRA is a one-on-one oral assessment designed as a diagnostic instrument to quickly assess foundational skills for literacy acquisition in early grades of primary school. For the NLAP, EGRA will

help probe beyond floor-level effects typically seen with large-scale paper-based assessments and identify key gaps in learning.

LEARNING-ADJUSTED YEARS OF SCHOOLING (LAYS)

LAYS incorporate access to education (quantity) and learning outcomes (quality) to measure learning productivity i.e. how much students learn for each year they are in school. It recognizes the limitations of quantity-focused metrics for education-based human capital. For the NLAP, LAYS will help demonstrate changes in Liberia's education sector statistics to illustrate how this double perspective - quality and quantity - is: (i) important and (ii) that only assessing children present in school distorts the understanding of learning by not taking into account those who have dropped out, absent or face barriers to re-enter the school system.

PROGRAMME D'ANALYSE DES SYSTÈMES ÉDUCATIFS DE LA CONFEMEN (PASEC)

PASEC has been administered in 13 countries in Francophone West Africa. It measures student competencies at the beginning (Grade 2) and end (Grade 6) of primary education, in language (oral/listening comprehension, decoding, and reading) and mathematics. Assessment results are intended for use primarily as a diagnostic tool. With the majority of Francophone African countries having participated in the 2019 edition, PASEC has established itself as a well-tested tool for regional comparisons. In many participating countries it has served as a substitute for a national learning assessment policy.

PROGRESS IN INTERNATIONAL READING LITERACY STUDY (PIRLS)

PIRLS provides trends and international comparisons of Grade 4 students' reading achievement and students' competencies in relation to goals and standards for reading education. PIRLS assesses the two overarching purposes for reading that account for most of the reading done by young students both in and out of school: for literary experience and to acquire and use information. In addition, PIRLS assesses four broad-based comprehension processes within each of the two purposes for reading: focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, and evaluate and critique content and textual elements.

SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA CONSORTIUM FOR MONITORING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY (SACMEQ)

SACMEQ is an international non-profit developmental organization of 16 Ministries of Education in Southern and Eastern Africa. It is a regional assessment that assesses the performance levels of students and teachers in Grade 6 in language/literacy, mathematics/numeracy, and health. Despite having a reputation as a well-designed cross-national assessment tool, SACMEQ is experiencing declining participation trends in recent years. From its last edition, which was implemented in 2012-2014, only 4 countries have produced a national report and no regional report has been published so far.

TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE STUDY (TIMSS)

TIMSS is an international assessment of student achievement in mathematics and science in Grade 4 and 8. Countries that participate in multiple cycles of TIMSS can monitor trends in student achievement while assessing changes that have occurred in curriculum, instruction, and other aspects of education that affect learning. TIMSS assessment framework is organized in 2 dimensions namely: Content dimension and Cognitive dimension. For the NLAP, TIMSS will leverage the standardized fourth-grade framework for Math assessment for both Grade 3 and 6 to capture learning proficiency in content as well as cognitive domains.

Uwezo

Inspired and informed by the ASER movement, UWEZO is a citizen-led house-hold based assessment in East Africa. It captures children in and out of school, provides estimates of their schooling status, and measures basic literacy and numeracy levels for children between the ages of 6-16 For the NLAP, Uwezo will help highlight learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy and underscore the importance of communicating findings to foster public understanding and dialogue about the status of Education.

World Bank Learning Poverty

Learning Poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 (World Bank 2019). It was introduced as a learning equivalent to the $1/day poverty line. For the NLAP, Learning Poverty will highlight the importance of reading and mathematics for the 3rd-grade year.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics Reporting Scale

The Reporting Scale aims to create a shared understanding of reading, mathematics, and minimum proficiency across international contexts. Developed as a response to SDG 4 (specifically indicator 4.1.1,), the Reporting Scale accommodates results from different assessments to yield nationally relevant and internationally consistent data, which can be used to improve policy intervention. For the NLAP, the Reporting Scale will allow Liberia to align with indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals.

6.2 National Assessments Initiatives

Liberia has experience in conducting standardized national assessments, predominantly in secondary and senior secondary education through the West African Examination Council (WAEC). The Education Reform Act (2011) of Liberia identifies WAEC as responsible for promotional examinations of students. WAEC exams are based on a syllabus developed by WAEC, which includes components of the national curriculum as well. Currently, WAEC Liberia administers standardized exams to Grade 6, Grade 9, and Grade 12 students. For the NLAP, building on the WAEC assessments will provide a holistic understanding of learning outcomes in Liberia, particularly at the early grade foundational level. Further, leveraging WAEC's existing assessment infrastructure and in-country technical capacity allows for sustainable implementation of the NLAP.

Liberia Primary School Certificate Examination (LPSCE)

The LPSCE is administered by WAEC Liberia to school candidates in the 6th grade once a year. This was administered until 2011 when it was phased out and was recently re-established in 2019. For the NLAP, LPSCE is an important consideration because the goal is to avoid duplication and instead build on it by tracking competencies prior to Grade 6. Both private and public school learners have to pay a fee of about LRD $2,000 to register for the LPSCE.

Liberia Junior High School Certificate Examination (LJHSCE)

The LJHSCE is administered by WAEC Liberia to school candidates in the 9th grade once a year. For the NLAP, insights from the LJHSCE will be drawn from WAEC on administration, given its focus on higher school levels. All private school learners have to pay to register for the LJHSCE.

West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE)

In 2018, Liberia phased out Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination (LSHSCE) administered by WAEC Liberia and ascribed to WASSCE administered by WAEC. WASSCE is administered to school candidates in the 12th grade once a year and twice a year for private

candidates. For the NLAP, insights from the WASSCE will be drawn from WAEC on administration, given its focus on higher school levels. All WAEC exam fees are paid by the government.

Additional Insights from Primary Education Assessments:

- **No system-wide national learning assessment in Grades 1-6** nor standardized tests for diagnostic use currently exist apart from LPSCE by WAEC Liberia focusing on content proficiency at Grade 6.
- **Curriculum statements do not offer explicit assessment guidelines on best practices.** The NCP 2019 outlines learning objectives and competencies to be assessed. At the same time, it also highlights activities for teachers to employ for testing. However, students are tested at the end of every marking period, semester, and school year with tests prepared by school administration individually with no standard administration, procedure, or question bank.
- **EGRA and EGMA assessments** have been adapted for Liberia and tested on a sample of schools in various counties.
- **Diagnostic assessments of early grade literacy** have been conducted on non-representative samples of primary grade students. These assessments have been sporadic based on program implementation by key education partners and catered to a student sample in their target counties. These tested letter naming, phonetic awareness, unfamiliar word decoding, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension. These assessments unanimously showed levels below international benchmarks.

Table 1: Diagnostic Assessment in Liberia

Study Name	Grades	Counties
Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus: Liberia. RTI. (2010). EGRA Plus: Liberia. Data Evaluation Report.	Grades 2 & 3	Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, Nimba
Early Grade Literacy Assessment (EGLA) completed in 2014 (Hobbs, J., & Davidson, M. (2015). Expanding EGRA: The Early Grade Literacy Assessment and its contribution to language instruction in Liberia. Presentation at UKFIET 2015).	Grades 2 & 3	Grand Bassa
Read Liberia Baseline completed in May 2017 (NORC 2017): NORC. (2017). Evaluation. Baseline Report: USAID/Liberia Read Liberia Impact Evaluation	Grades 1 & 2	Bong, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Montserrado, Nimba
Liberian Education Advancement Partnership (LEAP). The program was originally known as Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL).	Grades K1 to Grade 5	Bong, Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, River Cess and Sinoe
Read Liberia Activity: District Education Monitoring Approach (DEMA) with Group Administered Literacy Assessment (GALA)	Grade 2	Bong, Grand Bassa, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba

- **WAEC has raised concerns** about the extent to which the content, pacing, and sequencing of the national curriculum and WAEC curriculum are aligned. An expert group - the Public Examinations Review Committee - was formed in Sept 2016 to review issues around the WAEC results.
- **The WAEC exams might not be representative** of the education system in Liberia for the following reasons:
  - **Opt-in Model** - While the government pays WAEC examination fees for all Grade-12 learners and public-school, Grade-9 learners, all learners from Grade 6 and private school learners from Grade 9 are required to pay around LRD $2,000 and $20 USD respectively to register for the exam.
  - **Biased sample of students** - Apart from public school learners who have WAEC examination fees waived, only those learners who can afford to register from other school types (private, community, and faith-based) can sit for the exam. Looking at the EMIS 2015-16 data, public schools only account for 48% of primary schools.
  - **Language** of instruction limits comprehensive analysis of foundational skills gap - National curriculum and WAEC exams are conducted exclusively in English. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether the data on the acquisition of skills and competencies as described above reveal language barriers, a skill development gap, or a combination of both.
- **Schools set entrance examinations** despite this being prohibited at Grade 1 for all government schools (Education Reform Act, 2011). Such exams exclude many students and have a major impact on grade repetition and overage enrolment.
- **LEAP schools** are encouraged to explore effective, low-cost approaches such as tablet-based curriculum and assessment while following the standards set by the national curriculum.

7. Policy Orientation

7.1 Target Population Selection Criteria

The NLAP identifies the target population at two levels, school and learners. The sampling of students and schools is defined by the following guidelines:

7.1.1 SCHOOL PROFILE
The NLAP sampling procedure aims to ensure the population of sampled schools:

- Represents all regions of Liberia
- Represents the distribution of schools and the population of students across Liberia
- Includes both urban and rural schools[7]
  - Montserrado effect: One-third of Liberians live in Montserrado county, and 38% of the primary school population is in Montserrado. No other county comprises more than 8% of the population of enrolled primary school students.
- Includes all types of schools:
  - By provider: Liberia's 5,178 primary schools are split into 2,494 public (48%), 1,558 private (30%), 822 faith-based (16%), and 304 community (6%) schools (EMIS, 2015). The proportion of school type should be revised based on the most updated School Census data collected by the MOE.

7.1.2 STUDENT PROFILE
The NLAP mandates the prescribed guidelines when selecting the sample:
- Focus on Grades 3 and 6 from primary school to:
  - Regularly assess foundational skills at the primary level.
  - Help identify and remedy gaps at the earliest[8].
- Ensure equal gender representation to achieve gender balance[9].
- Randomly sample students to capture variation by age, education performance, attendance, and other characteristics.
  - If the sample is drawn by randomly selected learners present in school, every effort should be made to ensure attendance on that day is high and that the sample will include learners who are often absent - notifying schools in advance, encouraging teachers and headteachers to inform students and families, placing announcements through various mediums.

7.1.3 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
The NLAP strongly recommends:
- Including a sub-sample of out-of-school learners:

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[7]More information is needed in order to be able to stratify by urban/rural location. If EMIS data categorizes schools by urbanicity, this will be possible. School statistics reveal a cycle of inequality where children from poor, rural and marginalized backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school before acquiring foundational literacy skills.

[8]The importance of third grade as a pivotal point in primary education has been recognized by multiple assessment initiatives. The World Bank Learning Poverty Measure, for example, focuses on the ability to read in third grade. 6th grade also represents an important point, in that in Liberia 6th grade represents the end of primary education.

[9] Girls and women are under-represented at levels of education in Liberia, but to ensure girls are equally represented in the NLAP, the student sample will be stratified to include girls - a sample of 8 students, for example, would include 4 girls.

- ○ Given the large number of out-of-school children[10], a comprehensive understanding of learning would need to incorporate an out-of-school population in some way.
- ○ Possible options include:
  - ■ Conduct a separate assessment of out-of-school children with its own sampling design and possibly assessment design - sampling from the alternative education programs for over-aged persons and out-of-school children[11] such as Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and Alternative Basic Education (ABE).
  - ■ Adjust the results of learning assessments conducted with in-school children to account for out-of-school children in relation to the proportion of out-of-school children by country, for example.
- ● Including learners with disabilities:
  - ○ A random sampling of children should include children with disabilities, but if a disability is correlated with attendance or whether that student has dropped out of school, these children might be underrepresented.
  - ○ If data are available at the school level, the sampling procedure should consider oversampling children with disabilities to ensure representation in the NLAP[12].
  - ○ Additional ministerial efforts should be made to develop, trial, test, and adapt the National Learning Assessments to assess learners with disabilities, with careful consideration to protocol development, administration, and sampling.

7.2 Skills and Competencies to be Tested

The assessment focuses primarily on foundational skills acquisition in **literacy** and **numeracy**. This focus is motivated by three key insights from education research:

1. **Foundational skills serve as the building blocks for later learning:** Learners need to master early competencies to be able to continue learning and to acquire more advanced skills. The critical transition between learning to read and reading to learn, for example, enables children to independently access content on other subjects. Similarly, basic numeracy is needed in order to be able to approach more complex mathematics as well as content in subjects such as the natural sciences. (Belafi, 2020; Hattori, 2017; World Bank, 2018b)
2. **Research shows that gaps in learning outcomes between children emerge early and grow over time:** Learners who fall behind in early grades rarely catch up. The ability to address inequality and its roots accordingly requires a focus on foundational skills. (World Bank, 2018b)
3. **Low learning levels have been shown to be associated with school dropout rates.** Working to improve foundational skills has the potential to improve learning as well as increase retention and completion rates. (Nakajima, Kijima & Otsuka, 2018; Zuilkowski, Jukes & Dubeck, 2016)

Focusing on **foundational skills** serves to support an additional objective of the NLAP - to reflect on Liberia's NCF 2019. Given the new curriculum's emphasis on competencies, there is a need for

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[10] Liberia has the highest proportion of out-of-school children compared with 23 Sub-Saharan African countries. It can be expected that at least 35 percent of the third grade population and 42 percent of children of the 6th grade population are out of school.

[11] The G2B-ESP Strategy 4 prioritizes reducing overage enrollment and increasing access to education for out-of-school learners. It focuses on providing quality alternative and accelerated education pathways for overage and out-of-school children and young people.

[12] The MOE's division of Special and Inclusive Education has a mission to promote the inclusion of children/young people with disabilities in the school system.

strong alignment between the curriculum and foundational skills. The NLAP will reinforce and further advance the reform initiated by NCP 2019 (refer to **Appendix E** for further details). The Liberian NCF 2019 also includes a key standard: that learners should be able to demonstrate a range of reading rates at 100-150 words per minute or above, with 70-100% comprehension. The NLAP must assess progress towards this target, as well as capture the variation in children's learning levels at both 3rd- and 6th-grade levels in a manner that is sustainable and feasible as policy implementation.

7.2.1 ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND COMPONENTS

The literacy and numeracy assessment design is motivated by the following principles:

- Allow mapping of a learner's foundational skills proficiency in the content as well as cognitive domains required to complete test items.
- Use an asset-based approach that captures the acquisition of lower-order foundational skills or proficiency in skills that pertain to lower grades. This helps to better understand where the learner currently stands in their education cycle and to avoid floor-effects[13] in assessment scores.
- Scaffold the complexity of assessment items such that every learner has multiple opportunities to show proficiency in content or skill acquisition. This enables the NLAP to avoid ceiling-effects[14] in assessment scores.
- Ensure the feasibility of a large-scale assessment administration in Liberia for secure test administration. The NLAP proposes to opt for group-administered, paper-based assessments to allow wider participation of schools in remote regions, faster administration in lesser time, and higher compliance of standardized protocols.
- Capitalize on other testing initiatives, investments, and infrastructure, such as the WAEC exam, in relation to building resources for printing, marking, data entry, and general capacity.
- Complement the existing initiatives in Liberia. Written assessments are not able to capture all skills, especially early pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The vision for the NLAP includes a nationally administered exam but is not meant to replace other assessment initiatives and should be seen to be complementary. In particular, existing efforts, such as EGRA oral assessment, Group-administered Literacy Assessment, and LPSCE should continue and be expanded in order to provide additional insights.

For further details, refer to **NLAF Section 4.1** on Test Blueprint for more details.

Literacy Assessment:

The literacy assessment framework has been adapted using elements from two international frameworks - EGRA and PIRLS - to capture a wide range of reading acquisition skills alongside reading inputs. The assessment items, however, have been sourced from various international and regional assessments undertaken in primary grades. The literacy assessment is designed to assess learners primarily on reading and comprehension skills in a scaffolded manner. The assessment will broadly capture learning data on two domains, namely *Skills for Reading* and *Reading Inputs*.

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[13] A floor effect occurs when test items are so difficult that examinees are unable to perform well on the least challenging items on a test.

[14] A ceiling effect is a measurement limitation that occurs when the highest possible score or close to the highest score on a test or measurement instrument is reached, thereby decreasing the likelihood that the testing instrument has accurately measured the intended domain.

In the *Skills for Reading* domain, the NLAF will focus on:
- Vocabulary (picture to word association, picture to sentence association)
- A maze task, i.e. a sentence with two or three alternative words wherein children must select the word that makes the most sense within the context of the sentence (prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, tenses)
- Reading comprehension with assessment items on:
  - Retrieving explicitly stated information
  - Making straightforward inferences
  - Interpreting and integrating ideas and information

In Reading Inputs, NLAF will monitor learner's progress towards:
- The acquisition of reading inputs, such as words, sentences, and paragraphs
- Reading comprehension inputs with respect to informative texts and literary texts.

Refer to **NLAF Section 4.1.1** for further details.

Numeracy Assessment:
The NLAP has adapted the TIMSS Fourth Grade Math Framework to develop a numeracy assessment framework for both Grade 3 and 6. This allows drawing meaningful insights about a child's learning on two types of domains - *content domain* and *cognitive domain.* The content domain assesses subject matter proficiency while the cognitive domain identifies the thinking processes used to complete the test item. Assessment items, similar to literacy assessment, have been carefully sourced from a myriad of international and regional assessments.

Within the content domain, the assessment framework allows the NLAP to cover pre-numeracy foundational skills, scaffolded grade-wise content proficiency, and a wider variety of question types to assesses a range of problem-solving situations within mathematics, which fall under three sub-domains: numbers, measurement and geometry; and data. The assessment aims to cover the following content topics:

- Counting
- Number Sense (place values)
- Basic Mathematical Operations (Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, and Division)
- Geometry (shapes, graphs, angles)
- Measurements (time, weights, currency)
- Word Problems (operations, use of data)

As for the cognitive domain, three processes are assessed: knowing, applying, and reasoning. For Grade 3, the assessment places higher emphasis on the *knowing* domain as opposed to Grade 6, where *applying* and *reasoning* domains are given slightly high emphasis.

Refer to **NLAF Section 4.1.2** for further details.

7.3 Additional Information to be Collected

In addition to the foundational skills outlined in **Section 7.2** that form the core of the NLAP, other useful information can be collected directly from students, such as an indication of students' sense of social-emotional learning, well-being, patriotism, digital literacy, and perception of their school

environment. Such questions could include indicators of students' self-esteem or growth mindset, their future orientation, whether they feel safe at school and similar topics as part of the Well-being Survey **(See NLAF Section 4.1.3)**. It should be noted that these data do not necessarily need to be collected every year, but should reflect the current priorities, objectives, and initiatives of the Ministry.

Furthermore, the assessment could endeavor to collect additional data from school management on accessibility, compliance with national and WAEC curriculum, overall enrollment, percentage of female enrollment, teaching staff, teaching staff certification, and school infrastructure. One possible strategy would be to ensure that the School Census is conducted at all schools included in the NLAP sample. In cases when School Census data is outdated, such information should be directly collected during the NLAP administration.

8. Policy Implementation Plan

8.1 Sampling Methodology

The NLAP sampling methodology is prescribed based on the policy implementation phase (see **Section 8.2**, which details the three phases of assessment implementation). It calls for cost-effectiveness while ensuring a representative sample, to balance the need for additional insights and the cost of reaching a larger sample. The sampling procedure defines the assessment sample to avoid duplication of data while collecting enough to conduct statistical analysis and draw conclusions with confidence.

Keeping in mind this balance between budgetary constraints and ensuring a nationally representative sample, a minimum number of schools should be identified using power calculations, which will depend on the precise analysis that the MOE wishes to conduct. Regardless of this, the NLAP mandates guidelines for a school-based assessment by employing a **stratified two-stage cluster sample design**. The following steps and inclusion criteria are detailed below for schools and learners. For further details, refer to the **NLAF Section 4.5** on sampling guidelines.

8.1.1 SAMPLING STAGE 1 - SCHOOL SAMPLING
- Schools sampled using Probability Proportional to their Size (PPS) from the list of all schools in the country with eligible students from Grades 3 and 6.
- Schools should be stratified by county.
- Schools should be randomly selected proportional to the distribution of all schools across 15 counties using the most updated school census data.
  - In the case of the short-run phase, any county with less than 2% of eligible schools teaching Grades 3 and 6 will be dropped for cost-effectiveness.
- At least 5 replacement schools should be pre-assigned to each sampled school during the sample selection process. Replacement schools must be held in reserve.

8.1.2 SAMPLING STAGE 2 - STUDENT SAMPLING
- Within the sampled school, target grades for NLAP should be considered (Grade 3 and 6).
- Random sampling should be used to select 10 students from each grade with equal gender stratification.
- Random sampling should be done using an updated classroom enrollment log.
- Students present in school at the time of assessment administration should be considered.

8.2 Assessment Administration Model

Catering to the needs of the Liberian context, the NLAP pursues an assessment administration model that strikes the right balance between effectiveness, inclusiveness, and cost considerations: A group-administered assessment model is foreseen for Grade 3, while self-administered paper-based assessments are considered most suitable for Grade 6.

- Assessing a wider range of skills (foundational skills as well as higher-order skills) from a larger group of learners in a cost-effective manner that fits best the country context will require:
  - **A group administration approach**, in which a trained assessor administers the assessment to a group of learners separated only by grade;
  - Using **paper-based assessments** with simple standardized administration protocols.

- Use a group-administered assessment model, which will include:
  - **Grade 3:** Group administered paper-based assessment with assistance from the assessor to read instructions and questions, excluding reading comprehension passages.
  - **Grade 6:** Entirely self-administered paper-based assessments with no assistance from the assessor.
- **Note**: Research in Liberia demonstrates that the majority of Liberian children are not yet fluent or proficient in reading with comprehension. Because of this, certain key indicators, such as the current existing MOE benchmarks on correct words per minute, among others, cannot be addressed by the NLAP alone and will need to be assessed in another format. Direct oral assessments are one such method, but principles of cost considerations and sustainability have driven the recommendation to focus on paper-based assessments.

Refer to **Appendix F** for further comparison between different assessment models undertaken in Liberia.

8.3 Administering the Assessment

Administration of the NLAP will develop across **three team levels and be implemented in short- mid- and long-run phases**. The goal of this phased process is to prioritize the fidelity of the results and secure test administration (STA). Specifically, it is critical to ensure the reliability of data gathered from standardized tests, as governments and stakeholders rely on this data to evaluate, design, and target interventions. Evidence from countries around the world has shown how easy it is for assessment systems to be compromised and how hard it can be to reform them (refer to **NLAF Section 4.6** for further details). For example:

- In India, **grade inflations** were observed on standardized exams as a reflection of student copying, teacher's leaving the classroom unsupervised, teacher's providing 'hints' to the correct answers, and the lack of external monitors.
- **Tablet and computer-based testing reduced cheating** in India and Indonesia, as evidenced by lower exam scores and school integrity indexes.
- **In Honduras,** the presence of trained external monitors, distributing test booklets on the day of or one day before the exam and scoring the tests off-site by a third party lead to **significantly lower scores than the census-based test**, particularly in reading and math.

The assessment will follow STA processes while developing government capacity across various actors to conduct assessments and collect data in the future.

8.3.1 ASSESSMENT TEAM STRUCTURE
- **Centralized team**: A central team consisting of members from the Center of Excellence for Curriculum Development and Research, the EMIS team, and WAEC Liberia will direct and oversee the implementation of the NLAP. This team will coordinate with the Department of Planning and Research, who are then responsible to report to the Senior Management Team (SMT) at the MOE. This team will be responsible for the successful implementation of the NLAP and prioritize assessment quality and STA.
- **Local actors:** Principals, County Education Officers (CEOs), and District Education Officers (DEOs) will be engaged to make the administration process transparent and ensure awareness of targeted skills and competencies.

- **High-level staff**: The MOE, Technical Committees, and other government departments will be engaged to signal the importance of the NLAP and to directly connect decision-makers to the NLAP and ensure that they are personally invested in the results.

8.3.2 PHASED IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

In order to ensure smooth administration of the assessment across the country, the NLAP will be implemented in the following phases as indicated in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Phased implementation plan

Phase	Central team	Local team	High-level actors
Short Run (Three academic years: 2021-22; 2022-23; and 2023-24)	Responsible to hire, train, and manage a centralized assessment agency team to pilot NLAP on a nationally representative sample of schools.	Observe, provide feedback, help coordinate, and spread awareness about the purpose of the NLAP in schools and communities.	
	Responsible for monitoring the implementation fidelity, STA compliance of the assessment process, and the successful roll-out of the NLAP processes (assessment design, administration, analysis, and reporting).		
Mid Run (Three academic years: 2024-25; 2025-26; and 2026-27)	Plan for and direct the training of a dedicated assessment team that may include the participation of local actors, in particular, principals, CEOs, and DEOs. The central team works to build capacity at the regional and district level to lay the foundation for future engagement and buy-in.	Directly trained on how to conduct exams and collect data.	Throughout all phases, officials will travel to a pilot-testing site, directly observe the assessment process, and even personally assess a child in order to understand and experience the assessment.
	Map local capacity and devise a thorough transition plan to transfer ownership, authority, and responsibility partially or fully to local actors and/or separate assessment teams to administer the assessment.		

	Build the capacity of the assessment administrators used in the Short Run phase to act as Central Team Monitors to oversee the compliance of secured assessment administration.		
	Engage in further adapting national assessment and set benchmarks per international standards.		
Long Run (2027 onward)	Oversee, audit, and ensure quality controls, while local actors are more engaged in conducting the assessments and directly collecting data.	Conduct assessments and collect data with accuracy and precision, with support and oversight from the central team.	

8.3 Location of Assessment

- Assessments must be conducted within the premises of the schools to easily access learners at that school and collect the school-level indicators.
- Principals, Vice Principals of Instruction, Registrars, school administrators, and teachers will be mobilized to ensure that there is a safe and secure location where learners can be assessed in privacy and free from distraction.

8.4 Analyzing the Assessment

8.4.1 WHO
- The centralized team in charge of directing the NLAP will conduct all analysis and will need to include key members versed in data management and analysis. The analysis will serve multiple purposes: to determine if the assessments are being successfully implemented and are performing as intended, especially as the specific questions and topics included in the assessments change over time, to draw conclusions on the status of learning across Liberia, to identify key areas for improvement and equity concerns, and to document trends over time, and to inform MOE decision-making.

8.4.2 WHAT
Implementing the NLAP over time will require a range of analyses to be undertaken, which includes but is not limited to the following:
- The initial analysis must provide insights on:
  - The mean and standard deviation of individual questions   and tasks as well as the assessment as a whole.
  - Correlation between different tasks.
  - Correction between individual items and overall performance on the task.
  - Cronbach's alpha for a set of sample questions.

- Advanced analysis could include:
  - ○ Principal components analysis or factor analysis to understand the connection of the assessment to underlying competencies and skills that are being assessed.
  - ○ Item response theory (IRT) analysis to assess the performance of individual questions or items compared to the assessment as a whole.
  - ○ Measurement invariance analysis to ensure that the same underlying concepts are being assessed across both girls and boys and urban and rural students.

Not all analyses will need to be conducted every year. In particular, advanced analysis can be conducted at more infrequent intervals, but will ensure that the assessments are functioning as intended.

Key analytical insights:

- **Comparisons** between the performance of boys and girls, urban and rural students, students of different ages, and students in different regions/districts. The sampling strategy has been designed to enable this exact analysis.

- **Identify skills** where most children falter to inform pedagogy, teachers practice, and how lower-level skills predict performance on more advanced skills.

- **Incorporate** rates of dropout, such as in the Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling approach, to reflect the true nature of learning in primary school-aged children.

- **Conduct** positive deviants analysis[15] to identify and highlight schools or classes that have an above-average performance to inspire future research and investigate the policy and practice that enables those schools, teachers, and students to excel.

8.5 Connecting NLAP to everyday practice

- Discuss needed reforms in teachers' practice and the formative and summative evaluation used in classrooms and schools on an everyday basis.
- Encourage efforts to regularly assess learners' skills and competencies and to target instruction to the level of the student; group children by ability level.
- Foster the connection between learners and teachers.
- Ensure that everyday practice is focused on foundational skills and learning.

8.6 Results Communication Plan

Reporting will be done at the central level and aggregated versions will be shared with county and district offices. Each assessment cycle will publish basic and detailed reports for education stakeholders within and outside the MOE.

8.6.1 CONTENTS OF THE REPORT
- The NLAP will align and follow reporting protocols stated in NCP 2019:
  - ○ Integrate and synchronize School Quality Assessment protocols with data and information from the assessments and EMIS.

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[15] Positive Deviance inquiry identifies individuals who have solved problems that others, who have access to the same resources in the same context, have not been able to solve (Sparks, 2004).

- Reports shall provide:
  - Learning achievement distribution.
  - Benchmarking against regional and international standards, as envisioned by the NCP 2019 (p.37) will uniquely position Liberia as the first Anglophone Sub-Saharan country to take part in international benchmarking efforts put in place by the IEA-Rosetta Stone project. USAID has proposed National Reading benchmarks for Liberia, using the EGRA tool (USAID, 2020).
  - Mapping learning outcomes to competency acquisition.
  - Curriculum alignment.

8.6.2 RESULTS DISSEMINATION

To ensure transparent communication and timely feedback, clear and comprehensible assessment results will be published after each assessment. Refer to **NLAF Section 4.7.2** on Reporting and Dissemination of Results for further information).

How will results be communicated?
- National reports, County reports
- Media reports
- School reports, parent reports, individual student reports
- Workshops for local education actors
- Online communication (Ministry and key partner websites, social media, community fora, civil society)

For whom will results be published / who can access the result?
- CEOs, DEOs
- Teachers, Principals
- Parents, Students
- Education Sector stakeholders (implementing service providers, donor partners, policy-makers, researchers, civil society groups, and public)

When will results be published?
- Aggregate Report: 1 month after the assessment
- Detailed Report: 3 months after assessment
- Teacher and Principal Workshops: Bi-Annual
- Education Sector dialogues to inform decisions: Bi-Annual

8.6.3 TRANSFORMING ASSESSMENT DATA INTO POLICY INSIGHTS

The NLAP's aims to connect results and information from the assessments to decision making in the Education Sector by:
- Integrating the NLAP into larger policy processes.
- Building strong communication and dissemination strategies.
- Developing the capacity of national stakeholders engaged with the assessment.

8.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

The NLAP shall be monitored by the MOE through Curriculum Development and Research. The Center of Excellence for Curriculum Development and Research shall coordinate with the following players to form a monitoring team in line with the implementation phase stated in **Section 8.2.2** above:

- Department of Planning, Research and Development, specifically the Bureau of Planning, Research, and Development
- Department of Instruction, specifically the Bureau of Basic and Secondary Education
- EMIS team
- WAEC team
- CEOs &DEOs
- SMT

Monitoring efforts will be at two levels: National- and County-level:

- **National-level:** The Learning Assessment Technical Committee shall be instituted and headed by the Executive Director of the Center of Excellence for Curriculum Development and Research. The Committee shall consist of various department key members of the MOE (Department of Planning, Research and Development, Department of Instruction, EMIS, and WAEC). The Committee shall regularly meet on a monthly basis to monitor the progress of the NLAP activities at various stages (preparation, data collection to data analysis, and reporting). They are stipulated to report to the MOE and SMT.

- **County-level:** By leveraging the County Monitoring and Evaluation Committee set-up for revised curriculum monitoring, will ensure county-level in-field monitoring through CEOs, DEOs, County Monitoring, and Evaluation Officers.

Table 3: Monitoring and frequency of reporting

Activity	National-level	County-level
Assessment Preparation and Launch	National-level teams shall organize bi-monthly meetings to monitor the progress and facilitate coordination.	County-level teams shall organize monthly update meetings in accordance with the national-level monitoring team.
Assessment Administration	National-level team to organize weekly meetings for rapid monitoring.	County-level team to organize daily meetings for in-field rapid monitoring and course correction.
Data Analysis	National-level team to organize weekly meetings for rapid monitoring.	
Dissemination	National-level teams shall organize bi-monthly meetings to monitor the progress and facilitate coordination.	County-level teams shall organize monthly update meetings in accordance with the national-level monitoring team.

8.8 Financial Framework

The NLAP defines appropriate funding sources, which include:

The MOE:
- The MOE shall be a major source of direct funding and support of the NLAP implementation allocated to the Center of Excellence for Curriculum Development and Research.

- In line with the NCP 2019, the MOE must undertake the following steps:
  1. Identify a multi-year financing strategy to provide adequate budgetary allocation for the NLAP.
  2. Mobilize and engage partners to:
     i. Participate in financing modalities.
     ii. Fund curriculum reforms through a multi-sectoral approach.
  3. Undertake cost considerations and analysis based on evidence. See table below.

The Bureau of Fiscal Affairs and HR Development:
- The Bureau will be responsible for managing budgets and finances, personnel will ensure smooth funding flow within the MOE for unhindered implementation and monitoring.

International Development Partners:
- International Development Partners, such as donor agencies, local and international NGOs, and other organizations should be sought for funding support.

Table 4: Cost Considerations for the Implementation of the NLAP

Cost Categories	Sub-Categories	Cost Considerations
Test Preparation	Creation and editing of test items	● Frequency of assessment and question renewals
	Hiring of a centralized assessment team	● The extent to which question frameworks will remain consistent over time and cost for technical advice
	Consenting process and coordination	● Initial awareness and coordination among schools and local actors
	Training	● Plan for replacements, delays, and additional assessor hiring
	Pilot Testing	● Size and number of assessor teams
Test Application	Test design and editing	● The number and location of schools assessed including replacements
	Test printing	● Anticipate delays due to weather or other logistical challenges
	Printing of other manuals, protocols, consent, and other materials	● Minority group considerations, such as tests for learners with disabilities, out-of-school children.
	Distribution to examiners	
	Field administration expenses	● Printing capacity (e.g. use of WAEC's facilities)
	Quality control and supervision	● System of monitoring (e.g. independent group, teams within the ministry, etc.)
	Test collection	● Timeline for test grading and data entry.
	Test grading and data entry	● Test storage and/or disposal
Processing and	Monitoring of marking process	● System and structures for marking test scores

Analysis	Coding and digital output of test scores	and digitalization of scores
	Additional analysis	● Intended audience of assessment results ● Training needed for staff monitoring, marking process, and analysis ● Number of personnel conducting analysis ● Specific software used
Dissemination	Report to schools	● Intended audience of assessment results ● Indented use of information ● Translation of national results to scores compatible with international benchmarks ● Means of dissemination (paper-based vs. digital)
	Report production and distribution	
	Public relations retainer	
Institutional Costs	Personnel	● System of monitoring (e.g. independent group, teams within the ministry, etc.) ● Frequency of assessment and question renewals ● The number of location of schools assessed ● Relative prices and foreign exchange considerations ● Server and data storage considerations
	Infrastructure	
	Equipment	
	Other (telecommunications, electricity, office supplies, etc.)	
COVID-19 or other pandemic related precautionary costs	Supplies (Masks, hand-sanitizers, face shields, thermometers, etc)	● Level of risk accepted ● Types of masks used (surgical, cloth, M95, etc.) ● Targets for mask use (i.e. assessors only, students, etc.) ● Frequency and targets of temperature checks ● Healthcare and sick leave for assessors and monitors ● Protocol development, both in terms of preventative measures and adverse event contingency planning ● Location of staff and whether they need to travel to schools
	Increases to other activities (Transportation, accommodation, and training)	
	Contingencies	
	Protocol Development	
	Healthcare & sick leave for monitors and assessors	

9. Assessment of Risks and Feasibility Concerns

- **Reform Fatigue:** Educators, particularly those from the school community, can find themselves overwhelmed with simultaneous and multiple changes at the school level. To overcome this, train and direct enhanced support to ease the burden on school-level stakeholders.
- **Resource constraints:** Inadequate budgetary allocation and/or poor access to existing funds due to inefficient transfer mechanisms. To overcome this:
  - o The Central Team must undertake periodic budgeting exercise accounting for all costs considerations as highlighted in Table 3 and potential delays to inform MOE budget allocation for NLAP in a timely manner.
  - o Careful mapping of assessment activity timeline and funding requirements to ensure timely release and availability of funds to the Curriculum Development and Research as the Central Team lead.
- **Policy Take-Up:** Disconnect between assessment results and reforms in education interventions, if data is not used to inform key decision-making processes. A clear dissemination strategy should be developed that accounts for dissemination products that facilitate policy take-up such as media coverage, public release of data, webinars, etc.
- **Updated EMIS Data:** NLAP sampling and execution heavily relies on updated and consistent data on schools. At the time of NLAP drafting, publicly available EMIS data was from 2015-16 with much school information outdated. This could impact the administration process whereby requiring replacements and additional budget. Indeed, the smooth execution of the NLAP and associated NLAF relies on the underlying data that it is drawing from. Current data limitations also present issues for analysis, where accurate information is key. To mitigate this, if updated EMIS data is not available then additional coordination effort to cross-verify sampled schools through local actors (DEOs and CEOs) ahead of the deployment of assessors will be required. On the other hand, the implementation of the NLAP provides an opportunity to engage in systemic reforms to data management within the Liberian education sector to make school and student data more robust and accessible.
- **Secure Test Administration (STA):** Fidelity of the NLAP would be threatened if STA cannot be maintained by employing standardized protocols and procedures. To overcome this, time and budget should be considered for quality control and checks.
- **COVID-19:** It is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic could result in a loss of 0.6 years of schooling, adjusted for quality (World Bank, 2020). It could also lead to falling test scores and an increased share of lower-secondary-aged children who are below the minimum level of proficiency. In the coming year, the NLAP must account for and employ tactics to mitigate against this setback.

10. Way Forward

The purpose of the NLAP is to provide a framework for the conduct of assessment and an examination system for Grades 3 and 6, that supports and recognizes achievement focused on competency acquisition. **To succeed**, the policy must ensure strong implementation processes, backed and led by various initiatives, actions, and stakeholders across the education sector in Liberia. Through these processes, a shared understanding and commitment to the problem and policy solution must be created.

To realize the NLAP's purpose and objective, the MOE's departments, bureaus, and autonomous bodies, in collaboration with external stakeholders, must systematically work together. This includes aligning the views, interests, and capacities of regional and international stakeholders for all levels of the policy. Through regular evaluations involving all stakeholders, the NLAP must be adapted to identify and address gaps at the earliest. To further ensure a holistic and comprehensive change in the primary education system in Liberia, the policy must also align with existing regional and global education sector policies.

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