

## THE NATIONAL POLICY ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

### Summary of Sections that Most Apply to Adolescent Girls

In 2005, the Liberian Ministry of Education (MoE) issued the National Policy on Girls' Education. This brief summarizes the sections of the policy that are most relevant to adolescent girls.

#### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Girls' Education Policy seeks to consolidate national and international laws to promote girls' education and to advance priorities that will accelerate progress in improving girls' education (Chapter 1).

#### Its concrete objectives include (Chapter 2.3):

- Ensuring that girls have equal access to school at all levels and in all educational programs and services by 2015.
- Achieving equitable geographic distribution of educational opportunities for girls by 2015.
- Eliminating the gap between the girl child and the boy child in completing primary, secondary and tertiary school by ensuring that girls are provided scholarships and other supports.
- Decreasing the school dropout rate of girls by 50% by 2015.

#### Some of the policy's top priorities are (Chapter 2.4):

- Implementing a nationwide awareness campaign to sensitize citizens about the importance of girls' education.
- Strengthening the MoE's capacity for budgeting, financial management, and staff and facilities management in support of girls' education programmes.
- Increasing budgetary appropriation for education to 25% of Liberia's annual revenue intake and ensuring that laws regarding public and private education funds are properly carried out to provide adequate support for girls' education.
- Establishing school-based gender monitoring groups in all counties to monitor intimidation, sexual harassment, and school recruitment and retention of girls.
- Conducting an awareness campaign for teachers and community leaders on the girls' education policy.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the primary body in charge of implementing the policy (Chapter 1). The MoE has three regulatory bodies for the implementation of education policies at the local level, including: the National Education and Training Council (NETC), the County Education and Training Council (CETC) and the Local School Management Council (LSMC) (Chapter 5.3). The CETC is also responsible for engaging Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), women's groups, child welfare committees, and other community structures to carry out community mobilization and gender sensitization for girls' education.

#### POLICY PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 outline a number of policy provisions and strategies to achieve the goals laid out in the Girls' Education Policy. *Key areas of focus include:*

**Creating gender parity (Chapter 4.2):** To achieve gender parity in education by 2015, schools should enroll and retain the same proportion of boys and girls within the same age bracket in primary and secondary schools. Several actionable items throughout the policy support this goal:

- Chapter 3.3 calls on the Government of Liberia to provide funding so that the MoE can ensure that education is free and compulsory, and can monitor enforcement in all learning institutions.
- Chapter 5.3 specifies that the MoE's three regulatory bodies (NETC, CETC, and LSMC) should:
  - Work with all schools to reduce gender disparities using quota systems.
  - Conduct a survey to obtain data about the number of girls and boys admitted in every learning institution each academic year.
  - Maintain a database on girls' school enrollment to monitor progress. The database should include every girl child enrolled in school, from elementary school to high school.
- The CETC, which serves as a policy advisory body to the MoE, should also (Chapter 5.3):
  - Make sure that free and compulsory education is viable and well-implemented.
  - Ensure that schools are located between towns to reduce the distance between home and school, thereby also minimizing the risk of sexual abuse and harassment.
  - Provide boarding facilities for girls in the three Education Regions (North Central, South Eastern, and South Western) to increase access to school and enhance family values.

**Providing scholarships and grants (Chapter 4.3):** The Ministry of Education holds central responsibility to provide scholarships and grants to enable girls to attend school (see also Chapters 3.1 and 3.3).

*The following measures will service this goal:*

- A separate budget line should be established in the education budget for this purpose, based on the target set by the government to achieve education for all.
- Every educational institution must undertake additional fundraising efforts for scholarships and grants to supplement the government's efforts.
- Chapter 5.3 specifies that the MoE's three regulatory bodies (NETC, CETC, and LSMC) must also ensure that additional annual fundraising supports girls' education. The CETC should also lobby for and allocate bursaries and scholarships to help girls access secondary and tertiary education.
- Chapter 3.3 stipulates that the girl child should receive a 50% reduction in education fees at the secondary level.

**Providing free textbooks and learning materials (Chapter 4.6):**

The Government of Liberia, in collaboration with other partners, is responsible for making learning materials free and accessible. Additionally, every girl should have access to her own (not shared) textbooks.

**Creating a gender-sensitive school environment (Chapter 4.4):**

In order to establish a gender-sensitive learning environment conducive

to girls' learning, the government (in collaboration with other educational institutions) must:

- Review learning materials to eliminate gender bias in language, pictures, and thinking.
- Mainstream life and economic skills in school curriculums. (See also Chapters 3.1 and 3.3. Chapter 3.1 adds mainstreaming a girls' focus into the academic curriculum.)
- Improve school physical grounds and premises for girls by providing separate toilet facilities and well-lighted and secure areas to protect girls from sexual abuse.
- Employ full time guidance counselors to advise on curricular and educational advancement, as well as on girls' health, including their reproductive health.
- Provide safe drinking water.
- Chapter 5.3 specifies that the CETC should develop more gender-sensitive curricula and other programs such as psychosocial skills, guidance and counseling, and school feeding (which serves as an incentive for parents to send their girls to school).

**Offering guidance and counseling (Chapter 4.7):** Special programs for girls should be established at schools to reduce and treat sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and teenage pregnancy.

*These programs include:*

- Peer education, school nurse service, remedial classes for poor performance, academic and social counseling on a one-on-one basis (chapter 3.4 calls on the MoE to train and provide counselors and peer educators in all learning institutions), and weekly sessions for all girls focusing on HIV/AIDS reproductive health and relations between girls and boys.

#### **Establishing and strengthening girls' clubs (Chapter 4.8):**

Because engaging girls in extra-curricular activities strengthens their self-esteem and provides life skills, schools should offer activities such as girl scouts, girls' school clubs, and other similar groups. The Government of Liberia and other partners must provide grants and support to these groups.

#### **Improving girls' entry into and retention in school (Chapter 5.2):**

*This section specifies that:*

- When a girl drops out of school due to pregnancy, she should be encouraged and allowed to re-enroll in the school of her choice.
- The MoE, in partnership with other ministries and stakeholders, should conduct national campaigns to promote girls' education.
- Anyone who impedes a girl from entering school or completing her education will be prosecuted by the MoE or another concerned individual through the court of competent jurisdiction.

#### **Addressing sexual abuse and harassment (Chapter 3.4):**

*This section calls for the following:*

- The MoE should increase national awareness that sexual abuse is a punishable crime.
- Any male teacher investigated and convicted of impregnating, abusing, or harassing a female student or teacher (unless the pair chose to get married "out of remorse of conscience") will be dismissed and suspended from teaching for five years. If a second offence occurs, he will be dismissed and his teaching license terminated indefinitely.
- Any student convicted of sexual abuse will be expelled from the regular school system (but can be admitted to adult literacy school or other intermediate learning institutions). These students' transcripts will carry the label of expulsion, and their names should be forwarded to the MoE for monitoring.

**Reducing harmful cultural practices, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy (Chapter 3.2):** *This section outlines the following policy provisions:*

- Create awareness to enact and enforce the law that no man or boy should take a girl under 18 years of age as his wife. Any man or boy who does so commits a statutory offence and must be dealt with according to law.
- Any man or boy who impregnates a girl should be punished in court according to Liberian education law.
- Community leaders and school administrators should conduct awareness and sensitization workshops for parents regarding teenage pregnancy and early marriages in Liberia.
- Chapter 5.3 also specifies that the Ministries of Education, Internal Affairs, and Gender and Development should ensure that once a girl is of school age (3-18 years), she should be exempted from all cultural and religious restrictions that prevent her from attending school.

#### **Recruiting, training, and employing female teachers and administrators (Chapter 4.5):**

Because women teachers and senior managers serve as positive role models for girls and can encourage parents to send their girls to school, schools should employ, train, and retain more female teachers. This includes the following steps:

- Design strategies to increase and sustain the number of female teachers.
- Recruit and employ 50% women teachers and administrators in the counties.
- Provide incentives and additional training commensurate with the teaching position. Chapter 4.13 calls for the government to institute periodic in-service training for female teachers to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Chapter 5.3 also specifies that the CETC should take a role in encouraging and training more female teachers.

**Engaging local government (Chapter 4.11):** To improve girls' access to education in rural areas, programs and policies on girls' education must be decentralized to local authorities. Local government, with support from the MoE, will:

- Identify local government and community resources for girls' education.
- Enforce existing laws in the interest of girls' education.

**Strengthening PTA and regulatory bodies (Chapter 4.9):** Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) should be active in all schools. Their roles and responsibilities should include:

- Conduct gender sensitization to strengthen their own capacity.
- Resist negative socio-cultural norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that impinge upon girls' education.
- Chapter 5.4 also states that PTAs and other community structures should provide awareness to discourage parents from sending their girl children out to provide for their homes (for example, to sell goods or find older men to support them).

**FOR A COPY OF THE POLICY ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND RELATED RESOURCES PLEASE VISIT:**

**Ministry of Education, E. G. W. King Plaza Broad Street,  
Monrovia, Liberia**

#### **ABOUT LET GIRLS LEAD AND AGALI**

*The Adolescent Girls' Advocacy and Leadership Initiative (AGALI) is a program of Let Girls Lead. AGALI improves the health, education, and lives of adolescent girls in Latin America and Africa. AGALI strengthens the capacity of leaders to advocate in favor of girl-friendly policies and programs and provides seed funding to support their work on behalf of adolescent girls.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:**  
[www.agaliprogram.org](http://www.agaliprogram.org) | [www.letgirlslead.org](http://www.letgirlslead.org)