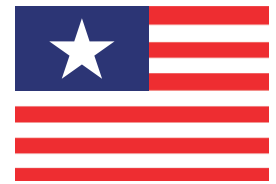




GOVERNANCE COMMISSION POLICY BRIEF



VOL. 2 NO.7

P.O BOX 1757, Monrovia - - www.governancecommissionlr.org

June 2015

REACHING THE MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRY GOAL: THE HUMAN CAPACITY ISSUES

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), the Governance Commission held a major event on 8 April 2015 at the Bella Casa Hotel and Suites that served a two-fold purpose – a Policy Dialogue and launch of its study on “Reaching the Middle Income Country Goal: The Human Capacity Issues”.

During that event findings of the study were presented before a cross-section of education and workforce policymakers, followed by frank discussions on issues uncovered by the study. An eminent panel made presentations moderated by Dr. Togar McIntosh, former Minister of the then Planning & Economic Affairs Ministry and current Vice President of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States). The panellists included Dr. Emmett Dennis, President of the University of Liberia; Hon. Neto Zarzar Lighe, Minister of Labour; Dr. Marcus Slawon, Chairman of the National Commission on Higher Education; Hon Anthony Nimely, Deputy Minister of Education; and Hon Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender and Development.

This policy brief highlights and analyses the issues that emerged from the Dialogue.



Hightable: Hon Julia Duncan-Cassell, Dr. Marcus Slawon, Dr. Emmett Dennis, Dr. Togar McIntosh, Hon. Neto Zarzar Lighe, Hon. Anthony Nimely

BACKGROUND

The National Vision 2030 and the Agenda for Transformation served as the backdrop against which the study on the human resource implications of Liberia's middle income vision was initiated. The theme running throughout the Agenda for Transformation is that the education system should be a major actor in the creation of the workforce necessary for Liberia to achieve its desired goal of a middle income nation by 2030. This view is re-enforced by UNESCO's post-2015 paper which states that “Education should not be understood as one development goal among many, but as the paramount goal”.

REMARKS

The presentation of the findings of the study on the human resource implications of Liberia's middle income country goal was preceded and followed respectively by remarks by Hon. Othello Gongar, head of the Governance Commission's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research & Publications (MERP) Mandate Area that coordinated the study and two legislators – Senator Dallas Gweh, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, and Hon. Matthew Zarzar, Chairman of the House Committee on Education responsible for making budgetary appropriations to the education sector.

H O N . O T H E L L O G O N G A R



Commissioner Gongar, in his opening remarks, re-enforced the point that the setting for the study on human resource implications for Liberia's middle income aspirations and the Policy Dialogue itself was the National Vision 2030, the Agenda for Transformation and the fundamental role that education plays in the process.

He said with regards to workforce requirements and access to education, the Liberian education system was found to be wanting as it had not yet put in place the mechanisms needed to produce the workforce for a middle income nation.

SENATOR DALLAS GWEH

Senator Dallas Gweh, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, agreed that education plays a critical role in the drive to achieve middle income country status but stated that access to education is even more important. He urged Government to go one step further and make education a national security issue, and assured of legislative support for the budgetary request that will enable education to play the role of a catalyst in the middle income country goal.



REPRESENTATIVE MATTHEW ZARZAR



Hon. Matthew Zarzar, who heads the House Committee on Education, spoke of the need for collaboration between the Executive and Legislative branches of Government, especially in ensuring that education gets the funding it requires to make it effective in playing its role in bringing Liberia to middle income level by 2030. Hon. Zarzar expressed the possibility that even if the Legislature made adequate appropriations to the education sector, the Executive Branch may choose not to provide the funding appropriated by the Legislature, in which case the Executive Branch could find itself in violation of Article 6 of the Liberian Constitution.

ACHIEVING MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRY GOAL: THE HUMAN CAPACITY IMPLICATIONS

Matthew Kollie Jr., Program Manager for MERP, took participants through the Governance Commission desk study report which reviewed outputs from key institutions of learning to ascertain whether Liberia was up to the task of propelling this country to middle income status by 2030.

His presentation indicated that the study focused on three areas: workforce requirements, education sector needs and gender imbalance in access to education.

Mr. Kollie disclosed that the output of Liberia's education system was not in the requirements of an economy on the way to achieving middle income status. For example, the study found out that graduates in only three disciplines – sociology, management, and accountancy, represented more than half of all graduates, while those graduating in engineering were only 1% of all graduates and that only 4% of all the graduates majored in Agriculture, the nerve-centre of any developing country.

The research also showed a continuous decline in the number of graduates in Agriculture over the years. For instance in 2011, graduates in Agriculture were 4.61%, 2012 recorded 4.37%, and statistics indicate that agriculture graduates are hovering around 4% of all graduates. Worse still, those graduating in Education accounted for only 3%. At this rate one can only expect a declining education system.

Perhaps the most disturbing part of the findings is the gender imbalance in access to education. There is now a consensus among development specialists about the pivotal role women play in economic development. Yet in Liberia, women accounted for only a third of all graduates between 2009 and 2013.

A further breakdown of those graduating within that period indicated that women account for just 4% in engineering, 11% in agriculture and not a single one in wood technology, physics, mining engineering, history and development studies. Women however accounted for 53% of science graduates because of the female bias towards the nursing profession. On the other hand, males accounted for 90% of all the graduates in civil engineering, electrical engineering, agronomy, geography, and political science.

Another worrying statistic provided by the study seemed to indicate that policymakers were aware of these education gaps but did not show any willingness to address them, as evidenced by their policy decisions. Budgetary

appropriation allocated for foreign scholarships awarded by ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs) fell sharply from \$888,834 in the 2009/10 budget to a mere \$40,000 in the 2013/2014 budget, while the local scholarship budget for MACs dwindled from \$991,955.00 in the 2009/10 budget to \$266,280.00 in 2013/14. Of all the scholarships, 79% went to males and 21% to females, another indication of gender bias in access to education.



Cross session of participants at the Dialogue

PANEL DISCUSSION – THE THEMES

During the panel discussion and presentations, a number of themes emerged. Below are those themes and a summary of the presentation made by the panellists -Hon. Anthony Nimely (Deputy Minister of Education), Dr. Emmet Dennis (President – University of Liberia), Hon. Neto Zarzar Lighe (Minister of Labour), Hon. Marcus Slawon (Chairman – National Commission on Higher Education), and Hon Julia Duncan-Cassell (Minister of Gender and Development).

THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT AND UNESCO'S POST-2015 EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Hon. Anthony Nimely cited Government's "free education" policy as the culprit for the poor quality of education nationwide. He said this policy contributed to creating sub-standard schools but that the trend is being reversed through a tranche of new policies and activities focused on "ensuring quality education". The specific aim was to build and operate a vibrant national education system in which effectiveness, efficiency, access, and education governance were paramount. Hon Nimely conceded that for the reform exercise to succeed, new methodologies and technologies in the education system and learning process needed to change. The critical battle, he concluded, was not to make Vision 2030 void and elusive.

RESTRUCTURING HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE NEED FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

Dr. Emmett Dennis, President of the University of Liberia and the Association of Liberian Universities, said he saw "light at the end of the tunnel" but it was taking too long to get there. He drew attention to a number of reforms which he said contributed to an increase in university enrolment since 2009. The reforms, he said, aimed to "uplift the profile of the University of Liberia and strengthen the learning process, and thereby enhance its credibility levels."

He singled out four areas of importance – paying individual attention to the work of the student; constant management assessment for quality assurance; enhancing productivity; and playing an active role in the success of the student. Dr. Dennis made a distinction between the issues of recognition and accreditation. He said the National Commission on Higher Education was responsible for accreditation and not the University of Liberia. He stressed the need for better understanding of the different but complementary roles of a quality control and regulatory bodies in the restructuring of higher education in Liberia.

THE ROLE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN MEETING WORKFORCE REQUIREMENTS

Labor Minister Neto Zarzar Lighe said a perceived gap exists between human resource supply and demand in the various sectors of the Liberian labor market. He called for the speedy finalization of on-going efforts to conduct the anticipated comprehensive manpower survey so that the magnitude, components, and structure of the mismatch between the two can be established. When this is done, he argued, tertiary institutions can be called upon to deliver the necessary skills and knowledge for the job market. He stressed the importance of adequately preparing the capacities of tertiary institutions to produce the required manpower to fill the gap. The Minister called for effective partnership between concessions and the private sector in the human capital formation process, and additional technical and vocational education for high school goers and school drop-outs tailored to the needs of the economy.

THE NEED TO IMPROVE TERTIARY EDUCATION

Dr. Michael Slawon said investing in human capital was indispensable to national development. He drew attention to the need for an acceptable "student-faculty ratio" in higher education institutions in Liberia. At the moment, the ratio in Liberia was well below the internationally accepted ratio. He argued that for quality and sustainability, every effort should be made to improve this ratio considerably. He recommended that the Liberian higher education system could not and should not be built from outside, particularly if Liberia is to achieve the vision of reaching the middle income status by 2030.

FACILITATING FEMALE ENROLMENT IN POST-BASIC EDUCATION

The Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon Julia Duncan-Cassell emphasized two critical points required to address the gender imbalance in access to education. Firstly, policy makers and all other stakeholders needed to be constantly reminded of the imbalance in the participatory rates between boys and girls in the education system. There was no alternative but to do something about closing the gap as soon as possible. Secondly, women's empowerment was an integral part of the development agenda and should be prioritized. As part of the strategy to close the gap, the Minister called for urgent action to deal with those social, cultural and traditional norms that have constrained the growth of girl's education and employment. She informed the gathering that targeted interventions, including scholarships and girl-focus programs, were now underway to address the situation, and called for greater collaboration for success.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Presentations by the panellists were enriched by the participants' comments. Some of those comments were as follows:

- The existing crises within the 1st and 2nd cycle of the educational system needed to be carefully analyzed and remedied, with the use of incentive packages to create the types and size of a vibrant labor force;
- Budgeting for the education sector is important and budgetary allocations should be made judiciously, bearing in mind the imperative to take education to the people within a national decentralization scheme;
- Training should not be considered as an end in itself. The process must be responsive to the specific needs of the job market. Consequently, it was important to update the manpower survey, identifying the critical gaps and getting the institutions of higher learning to respond to the needs;
- It was time to embark upon life-skills teaching of the girl child and improving on the university's attitude towards gender issues;
- Sports, debates and other activities do provide a strategy not only for improving the quality of education but as a strategy to build character, leadership and competitive citizens;
- The shortage of qualified faculties within institutions of higher learning should be remedied by a sustainable capacity building program for existing and would-be teachers. This is critical if the required knowledge and competencies for realizing Vision 2030 are to be accomplished.
- Going beyond the Policy Dialogue was critical. The next steps needed to be defined and strategic approaches to execute these steps identified and pursued. Effective partnership within other ECOWAS member states' institutions of higher learning provide a useful strategy for advancing the human capital formation agenda;
- Research work has not been prioritized, and the findings of the limited work carried out are far from being implemented;
- The system of higher education is saddled with too many “professors”, most of whom have not met the universally accepted credentials of a bona fide professor. Something needs to be done to rectify the appalling situation;
- There is a need to bridge the gap in the understanding between the executive and legislative branches of government with respect to the policy on establishing universities in the 15 counties;
- Primary and secondary schools are the bedrock of the education system. As such, Liberia needs to put in place a proper primary and secondary school system, just as Science, Engineering and technology are vital and should be factored in the planning process.
- It is one thing to train people but absorbing them in the job market is another thing. Is there going to be an allocation for business start-ups?
- There needs to be a follow-up study to forecast labor market needs for 2030.
- 2030 is only 15 years from now, hence the need for immediate remedial action so that we do not find ourselves in the same position as we did with the Millennium Development Goals.
- The Education Reform Act has not been implemented, although it was enacted some time ago. The Ministry of Education should have been the implementing arm of that legislation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendations that emerged from the desk study and Policy Dialogue were around workforce requirements, the needs of both the education sector and gender imbalance. They were as follows:

1. Undertake a survey of the current skills mixed with a view to bridging the skills gap.
2. Align domestic training programs in institutions of higher learning and foreign scholarships to demands of the economy.
3. Allocate more funding for scholarships in areas consistent with workforce requirements.
4. Make the College of Science & Technology tuition-free for females.
5. The NCHE should implement the Higher Education Strategic Plan.
6. The Ministry of Education should commence an annual National Science Fair and a National Career Week.
7. Scholarships should be provided for female secondary school students desirous of becoming teachers or pursuing disciplines consistent with the workforce requirements.
8. Academic and needs-based scholarships should be given to young mothers, female drop-outs, females with special needs, or females from low-income communities.
9. Improve working conditions, salaries, and image of female educators, health professionals, and those working in agriculture, forestry and the industrial sectors.