



Global Response to Commercialisation of Education

Press Release

Privatisation puts Liberian education system at risk

Liberia's public education system is exposed to grave risks with the planned privatisation project, Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), according to a new study by Education International. PSL places primary and pre-primary education provision into the hands of eight non-state actors, of which US-based Bridge International Academies is the government's preferred provider.

Researchers around the world have been startled by the pace at which the Education Ministry of Liberia, under Minister George K. Werner, has embraced and is expanding the PSL project.

The study, "[Partnership Schools for Liberia: a critical review](#)", by Tyler Hook, PhD candidate in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, commissioned by Education International with the support of Action Aid, raises serious concerns about the project.

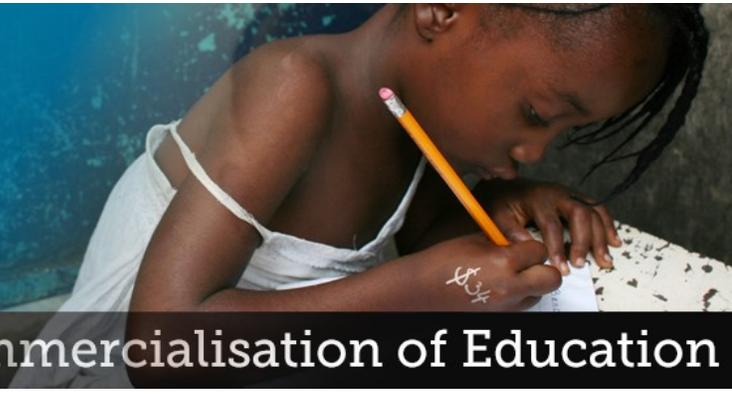
The study finds a striking lack of transparency and independent evidence in the development of the PSL project. The confusion regarding the commissioning process, and how and why specific providers were chosen, leads the researchers to raise concerns about the project expansion, particularly as most providers had no experience operating primary schools in Liberia.

The study also finds that PSL puts increased power in undemocratic, private institutions, that make decisions with little community input and accountability, resulting in inequalities within communities and regions.

This study comes at a time when the Ministry decided to double the number of schools to 202 in the second phase of its pilot project, despite initially claiming that the project would not be scaled-up in the absence of independent evidence.

Significantly, the Education Ministry has denied access to Liberia schools to independent researchers who wanted to analyse the pilot project's first phase. This led to over 30 academics from renowned universities signing an open letter to Werner, expressing their deep concern about "both [his] reluctance to permit independent research of the Partnership Schools for Liberia pilot programme and [his] rush to expand the pilot before evidence is available".





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The Ministry has elected to proceed to expand the programme from September 2017 despite serious shortcomings exposed during the pilot. This includes evidence of children being denied access to their local schools as well as dropping out of school due to a failure to deliver on a promised school lunch programme as part of an extended school day.

EI's General Secretary, Fred van Leeuwen said: "It is quite obvious. Without clear, independent evidence supporting the PSL program, and given the serious issues that have been exposed in the Pilot, the government should cease its expansion. To do otherwise places the future of Liberian education at risk."

Note to Editor:

Education International's study, "[Partnership Schools for Liberia: a critical review](#)", by Tyler Hook, PhD candidate in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, analyses three areas:

- Transparency and accountability
- Students and teachers
- Scalability and sustainability

It identifies issues related to the Ministry of Education's capacity to hold providers accountable, transparency in the commissioning and implementation of the pilot, and potential concerns regarding enrolment, teacher policies, school infrastructure, and funding, particularly between local and international providers.

The study is a document analysis and research proposal that focuses on documents related to the PSL pilot project as researcher Hook – and others – have been denied access to Liberia to conduct on-site research into the first phase of the PSL.

