



Global Response to Commercialisation of Education

National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL) and partners reject the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) program

In January 2016, in a controversial move, the Government of Liberia announced its intention to outsource its primary and pre-primary education system to a US-based for-profit corporate actor, Bridge International Academies (BIA). Following considerable opposition to this unprecedented move the Government conceived a pilot program, *Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL)*, where eight actors would operate 93 schools in the first year.

Despite claiming that PSL would be subject to a rigorous evaluation through a Randomized Control Trial (RCT), six months into the trial, the Ministry of Education (MoE) decided to increase the number of schools to 202 in the project's second year. Serious unanswered concerns, including children being denied access to their local schools, have not been enough for the government to pause and reflect. This rush to expand the pilot before independent research is available has been rightly criticized by the international academic and research community and the appointed RCT team who questioned the government's capacity to hold providers accountable.

In addition to lack of independent evidence supporting the government's actions, the PSL is also plagued with a lack of transparency. To date not one of the eight current Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between the service providers and the MoE have been made public. Despite the secrecy surrounding the PSL, information that has entered the public domain thus far gives rise to serious concerns about the sustainability of the program.

This lack of independent evidences, transparency and resultant lack of accountability does not make for good policy nor good governance. Furthermore, the increased power put into the hands of undemocratic, often foreign private institutions that make decisions with little community input and accountability undermines our voice and sovereignty over our education system and our nation as a whole.

We fear, once having outsourced our schools through this PSL arrangement we will never be able to get them back. We will be at the mercy of large corporate operators who will seek to maximize profit at the expense of Liberia's children and their future.

The many unanswered questions give rise to genuine concern about the future direction in the provision of quality education for all.

Considering:

- Liberia's 2011 Education Law which guarantees free and compulsory education for all.
- The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Kishore Singh's words which describe the intended outsourcing of Liberia schools as "violating Liberia's legal and moral obligations," and that "such arrangements are a blatant violation of Liberia's international obligations under the right to education."
- The absence of clear, independent, and public research supporting the PSL program.
- Serious ongoing issues including the lack of community input, transparency, and accountability of the program.

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We call on the government to immediately abandon the PSL program.

The children of Liberia deserve evidence based, sustainable improvements in public education, including:

- Free, quality, early childhood education
- Free, compulsory, quality primary and secondary education
- A focus on gender equality and girls' education
- Quality teaching and learning environments and resources
- Quality alternative education for over-age children.
- Policies focusing on the most marginalized children.
- Effective, negotiated school and system monitoring and supervision.

We need:

- Quality teacher training and on-going professional development; and
- Our teachers to be properly supported and remunerated, on time, and respected.

Acknowledging the challenges that continue to impact on the provision of education, we reiterate our preparedness now, as we have in the past, to work constructively with the government and any other interested parties to develop a sustainable Liberian plan leading to the ongoing improvement in the provision of quality education for all Liberian children.

Signed:

National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL)

Civil Society and Trade Union Institutions of Liberia (CTIL)

National Health Workers Association of Liberia (NAHWAL)

Roberts International Airport Workers Union (RIAWU)

Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE)

Diversified Educators Empowerment Project (DEEP)

National Christian Council of Liberia (NCCL)

Union of Islamic Citizens of Liberia (UICL) Monrovia Consolidated School System Teachers' Association (MCSSTA)

Liberia Education for All Technical Committee (LETCOM)

Concern Universities Students of the Ministry of Education Local Scholarship Program (CUSMOP)

United Methodist Church Human Rights Monitor (UMCHRM)

National Association of Liberian School Principals (NALSP)

With the support of:

Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT)

Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT)

South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)

Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU)

Education International (EI)