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Liberia Teacher Training Program, Phase II

# Females Teaching in Liberia

Motivating, Recruiting, and Retaining Female Teachers in  
Basic Education

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Monrovia, 2011

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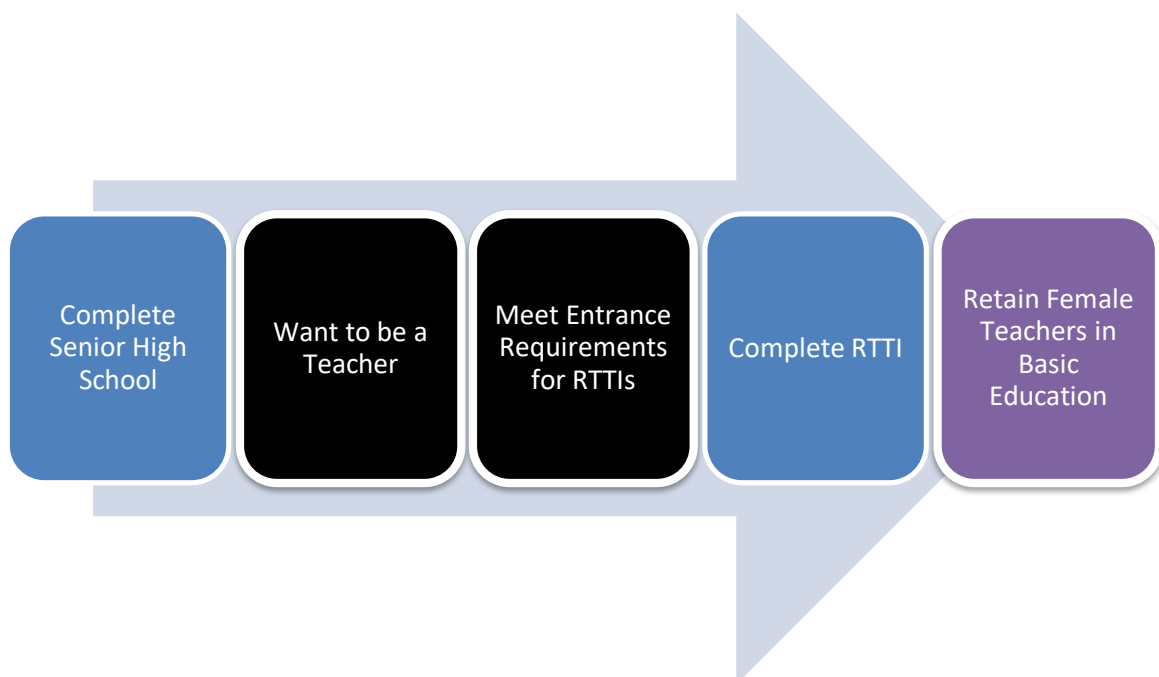
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# Females Teaching in Liberia

## Motivating, Recruiting, and Retaining Female Teachers in Basic Education

The numbers of female teachers in the Liberian Basic Education program is very small, both in quantity and as a percentage of employees. Rebuilding their participation to pre-war and equitable levels entails many levels of the system. The MCC and the USAID Research team is working on the retention of females at the basic education levels. This is only the beginning for increasing participation of females in RTTI attendance and eventual employment in the basic education system. This study will take up the status, reasons, and recommendations for increased participation of females in the teaching corps beginning at senior secondary and following those who enter teaching and are assigned to schools. What motivates females to stay in senior high school and complete it successfully; how can their motivation and feelings of efficacy be engendered to interest them or have them interested in teaching as a career; what is necessary to enable them to complete their RTTI training; and once assigned what is required to keep them in teaching and motivate them to do well.

Figure 1. Path to Teaching for Females



Many problems are known: family apathy or interference, limited finances, inadequate facilities, poor schooling conditions, unsanitary conditions, low salaries, and difficult working conditions. Despite these problems, some females do enter the system. As a starting point, the questions asked are: How do they qualify and why do they join teaching? Before an intervention program can be designed and implemented, it is important to understand the issues confronting Liberian females in the schooling and career decisions and aspirations. Because of the need to do something in the immediate future, the design of the study is cross-sectional, examining the issues at each of the stages of teacher development (following students through the process can be initiated within this study and carried out over the longer term of the investigation to help in the assessment and evaluation of immediate remedies recommended from the cross-sectional analyses). There is little doubt that the only way for Liberia to

improve the quality of education across the country is through the improvement of the teaching cadre. Other changes may or may not penetrate the system or they may prove irrelevant without teacher involvement. It is crucial for Liberia to increase the pool of competent individuals, and that means both general improvements in the educational preparation of everyone and the special enhancements necessary to engage and encourage females to complete their educational preparation and consider the teaching profession, particularly in the rural areas.

The intent of this study is to provide some answers to the following policy and strategy questions, based on the evidence collected on the stages of the path to teaching:

1. Understand the dimensions of the problem and identify those areas that might respond to policy changes, innovative strategies, or better programming.
2. Understand the range of difficulties faced in the diverse Liberian social and cultural environment and the regional and ethnic differences that contribute to low female participation in education.
3. What strategies enhance the learning environments for female students to retain them in school and enable them to complete qualification for the teaching profession?
4. What strategies enhance the appeal and credibility of the teaching profession as a career path for female students?
5. What strategies promote the recruitment and retention of female teachers?

There are studies to draw upon for guidance in answering these questions, but these surveys and policies have not been carried out in developing countries, especially in post-war environments where the situations and facilities are so destroyed. It's also the case that females generally are found in greater numbers in most systems. The civil unrest and disruption, low education rates for females during the instability, plus the notion of male employment after the war when no other opportunities existed in the rural areas, have led to very little female participation in teaching in Liberia. Some of these reasons may pass over time, but there is a need to provide the basic needs associated with encouraging and attracting females to the teaching profession. Some of the strategies will be general principles for attracting and retaining good teacher candidates and teachers. Others will be more specific to females and some will target the specific situation that constitutes the realities of modern Liberia.

Another problem is that very few studies link recruitment and retention with effectiveness in teaching. The interplay of supply and demand preclude absolute policies on providing the very best teachers all the time and the truth is that high quality teachers are rare. Of course, it is the case that teacher quality is difficult to define in any agree-upon fashion, and it is difficult to identify effective teachers and study them, because the search would be extensive and the research long-term. The work in added-value of teaching does support the notion that teachers exert a clear influence on student achievement, but it isn't clear what the salient characteristics are that lead to effective teachers. Variables such as academic ability, certification status, teacher preparation or quality, experience, and others offer mixed evidence of their effects so the answers are not easily formulated into policies and strategies for action.

Variability in teacher quality and ambiguity in the causal conditions does preclude clear policy formulation and places the burden on the entire teacher preparation process -- as depicted above, from schooling preparation (where impressions and attitudes about the classroom are first experienced) to nurturing and continued professional development to promote effectiveness throughout the teaching process. In the Liberian case, the demand for teachers is high, especially high-quality teachers (as always), but the supply is limited and not sufficient to meet the current demands, plus replace the many unqualified and inexperienced, volunteer teachers who came into teaching during the crisis. The Accelerated Learning Program helped many of those who had lost opportunities in education, but the system remains in tatters and mixed quality, even in terms of minimal standards.

There is little doubt that the limited numbers of females drawn to teaching in Liberia does limit the supply of quality teachers through a narrowed talent pool of males who survived the war. Even the male teaching recruits may deserve some attention in the general policy area to ensure that the entire teaching force is improved, as well as the conditions for female recruitment and retention. The continuing shortage of teachers and the lack of female role models in schools weakens the possibilities for a Liberian student to attend a good quality public school. The key ingredient to a great school is a caring, competent, qualified teacher and role model in every classroom.

### Current Status

Over the last 30 plus years Liberia has experienced some degree of chaos and either arbitrary and authoritarian governance or outright civil disruption, with 14 years in serious conflict across the country (1989-2003). Along with the many serious implications of this civil, social, and cultural uncertainty, education has suffered considerably and many children went without any education at all and some received limited and low quality instructional experiences with community volunteers. Even today, most children of school age are not in school, and without significant enrolment increases, low education will characterize much of Liberia, with its consequential development implications.

As the education system recovers from destruction and neglect, one area that has not recovered much at all is the presence of females in the education system. As documented in school census data over recent times, only a small percentage of the teaching force is female. There are a variety of reasons, including safety, security, family income, social, cultural, and educational. This poses serious social justice problems for women in Liberia as well as potentially damaging developmental problems due to the absence of female role models in the classroom and low employment options for females in the rural communities.

The new emphasis on pre-primary education has attracted the largest proportion of females, particularly in the private sector. Only 13% of the primary teaching cadre is female, and that proportion diminishes to 5% and 4% in secondary schools. The full implications of this dramatic imbalance in the teaching work force is unknown but Liberia also faces a shortage of trained teachers, teaching positions clogged with the war-era volunteers, and conditions that remain dilapidated and unsafe for everyone.

Table 1. Number of Teachers and Percentage of Females by Type of School and Level.

School Type	Pre-primary			Primary			Junior High			Senior High		
	Total	% Female	% Trained	Total	% Female	% Trained	Total	% Female	% Trained	Total	% Female	% Trained
Public	5,728	33%	32%	10,975	10%	45%	3,137	4%	66%	983	4%	61%
Private	2,852	66%	39%	5,103	18%	53%	2,491	6%	60%	1,017	5%	62%
Mission	1,554	58%	35%	3,644	14%	51%	2,351	5%	64%	1,368	4%	66%
Community	1,431	48%	29%	2,398	13%	42%	595	4%	61%	119	3%	66%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>11,565</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>22,120</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>8,574</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>3,487</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>63%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010.

Even in the pre-primary programs, where females have been employed in larger numbers, most are not trained for the positions and there is limited progress in improving the situation. In pre-primary education, the private sector leads the way in improvements in hiring and training females.

Table 2. Change in Female Teachers in Pre-Primary Schools by School Type.

Type of School	All Pre-Primary Teachers		% Female	Trained		% Trained	% Change in No. of Teachers 07/08 - 08/09	% Change in No. of Trained Teachers 07/08 - 08/09
	Females	Total	% Fem	Females	Total	% Total Trained	Change	Change
Proprietor								
Public	1,864	5,728	33%	756	1,837	32%	-10%	13%
Private	1,892	2,852	66%	735	1,122	39%	21%	38%
Mission	898	1,554	58%	351	549	35%	15%	13%
Community	689	1,431	48%	243	414	29%	-17%	-12%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>5,343</b>	<b>11,565</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>2,085</b>	<b>3,922</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>16%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010.

Only 13% of teachers are female at the primary level. More are in private than public, and there's also been a decrease in teachers, particularly at public and community schools. There are a higher percentage of trained teachers in all school types, except community schools. Community schools have the fewest teachers and the fewest proportionately trained. Mission and private schools were growing the fastest in these census years and this may still be true, and they are recruiting more trained teachers. Some have called for greater support to the private schools so that they can continue their improvements and contribution to the larger education system.

Table 3. Change in Female Teachers in Primary Schools by School Type.

Type of School	All Primary Teachers		% Female	Trained		% Trained	% Change in No. of Teachers 07/08 - 08/09	% Change in No. of Trained Teachers 07/08 - 08/09
	Females	Total	% Fem	Females	Total	% Total Trained	Change	Change
Proprietor								
Public	1,082	10,975	10%	635	4,977	45%	-5%	14%
Private	898	5,103	18%	499	2,718	53%	11%	36%
Mission	513	3,644	14%	293	1,870	51%	16%	26%
Community	314	2,398	13%	150	1,001	42%	-18%	-9%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>2,807</b>	<b>22,120</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>1,577</b>	<b>10,566</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>18%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010.

At both the junior secondary and secondary levels, female teachers are almost non-existent. Because of the level of subject matter competence required and the general higher levels of qualifications necessary to teach at secondary school, the majority of females who are employed are trained for their positions. However, the numbers are so low that the presence of females in secondary education is of little educational or social consequence. Furthermore, there are not dramatic changes underway to improve the situation at the secondary level.

Table 4. Change in Female Teachers in Junior High Schools by School Type.

Type of School	All Junior High Teachers		% Female	Trained		% Trained	% Change in No. of Teachers 07/08 - 08/09	% Change in No. of Trained Teachers 07/08 - 08/09
	Females	Total	% Fem	Females	Total	% Total Trained	Change	Change
Proprietor	130	3,137	4%	85	2,074	66%	6%	14%
Public	153	2,491	6%	90	1,491	60%	3%	18%
Private	114	2,351	5%	74	1,509	64%	13%	25%
Mission	24	595	4%	16	361	61%	-20%	-22%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>8,574</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>5,435</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>14%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010.

Table 5. Change in Female Teachers in Senior High Schools by School Type.

Type of School	All Senior High Teachers		% Female	Trained		% Trained	% Change in No. of Teachers 07/08 - 08/09	% Change in No. of Trained Teachers 07/08 - 08/09
	Females	Total	% Fem	Females	Total	% Total Trained	Change	Change
Proprietor	35	983	4%	18	595	61%	3%	3%
Public	46	1,017	5%	32	629	62%	-14%	12%
Private	50	1,368	4%	33	898	66%	0	28%
Mission	3	119	3%	1	78	66%	-15%	-3%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>3,487</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>15%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010.



## High School Attendance and Completion of Females

There are fewer females than males enrolled at every level of the schooling program from pre-primary through senior secondary school. The percentages of females diminish as the level increases. This ultimately affects the number of females available for a teaching career. If females are dropping out over the course of the program (or not entering at the same rate as males), then the teaching force is likely to remain unbalanced. In addition to social justice arguments, this limits the number and extent of role models for females in the school system, and this effect varies by region.

Table 6. Percentage of Females Enrolled by County and Level.

County	Pre_% Fem	Prim_% Fem	JHS_% Fem	SHS_% Fem	ALP_% Fem	All_% Fem
Bomi	48%	46%	42%	34%	46%	47%
Bong	46%	44%	39%	35%	45%	45%
Grand Bassa	46%	42%	39%	36%	44%	44%
Grand Cape Mount	46%	43%	37%	40%	42%	44%
Grand Gedeh	48%	44%	39%	28%	46%	45%
Grand Kru	46%	41%	32%	18%	39%	42%
Lofa	48%	45%	32%	26%	44%	45%
Margibi	50%	49%	42%	39%	48%	48%
Maryland	48%	45%	39%	34%	42%	44%
Montserrado	51%	50%	48%	46%	49%	50%
Nimba	47%	46%	41%	39%	46%	46%
River Cess	44%	41%	31%	18%	42%	43%
Sinoe	47%	43%	31%	24%	43%	44%
River Gee	47%	43%	28%	21%	22%	44%
Gbarpolu	46%	42%	31%	25%	47%	44%
<b>National</b>	48%	46%	43%	42%	46%	47%

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010

Some Counties are worse than other Counties in female participation and the rural areas lag behind, some considerably. Although the overall average for female enrolment is 42-43% at secondary school, and there are approximately 72 girls for every 100 boys at senior secondary schools, the figures are very low for several rural communities. The Ministry's Census Report indicates a 4% increase in the Girls/100 Boys Ratio at senior high school and girls' enrolment grew 21% compared with 18% for boys. This means that girls participation is growing slightly faster than boys, although these are relatively small numbers overall and general participation rates remain low.

Table 7. Senior High School Enrolment by County and Gender.

County	Girls Enrolment	Total Enrolment	% National Total	% Girls	Girls/100 Boys Ratio	% Change in Enrolment from 07/08	% Change in Girls' Enrolment from 07/08	% Change in G/B Ratio from 07/08
Bomi	213	625	1%	34%	0.52	-9%	-32%	-37%
Bong	1,104	3,138	5%	35%	0.54	-2%	0%	4%
Grand Bassa	581	1,605	2%	36%	0.57	9%	4%	-7%
Grand Cape Mount	109	275	0%	40%	0.66	127%	374%	185%
Grand Gedeh	381	1,348	2%	28%	0.39	40%	57%	16%
Grand Kru	46	249	0%	18%	0.23	74%	156%	62%
Lofa	678	2,624	4%	26%	0.35	24%	34%	12%
Margibi	1,219	3,159	5%	39%	0.63	-17%	-19%	-5%
Maryland	868	2,559	4%	34%	0.51	40%	56%	17%
Montserrado	19,560	42,708	65%	46%	0.84	22%	26%	6%
Nimba	2,332	5,953	9%	39%	0.64	8%	8%	1%
River Cess	17	94	0%	18%	0.22	100%	70%	-18%
Sinoe	150	620	1%	24%	0.32	65%	81%	14%
River Gee	60	281	0%	21%	0.27	20%	54%	36%
Gbarpolu	32	129	0%	25%	0.33	23%	14%	-8%
<b>National</b>	<b>27,350</b>	<b>65,367</b>		<b>42%</b>	0.72	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>4%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report*, 2010

The Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) are low (30%) and the GER is lower for girls than for boys. Montserrado has a GER of 55% but no other County comes close to that, and many are very low ( $\leq 5\%$ : Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, River Cess, Sinoe, River Gee, and Gbarpolu). The Gender Parity Indices (GPIs) by County are computed using Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) for the two sexes rather than simply using the girls to 100 boys (G/100 B) ratio. Again, although the overall index is 75 girls to every 100 boys, many Counties are low (particularly Grand Cru and River Cess).

Table 8. Senior High School Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) and Gender Parity Indices (GPIs) by County.

County	GPI 08/09	GER 08/09		
		Boys	Girls	Both
Bomi	0.59	20%	12%	16%
Bong	0.59	24%	14%	19%
Grand Bassa	0.59	20%	12%	16%
Grand Cape Mount	0.74	4%	3%	4%
Grand Gedeh	0.47	18%	8%	14%

County	GPI 08/09	GER 08/09		
		Boys	Girls	Both
Grand Kru	0.28	10%	3%	7%
Lofa	0.38	22%	8%	15%
Margibi	0.64	32%	21%	27%
Maryland	0.60	30%	18%	24%
Montserrado	0.75	64%	48%	55%
Nimba	0.74	23%	17%	20%
River Cess	0.27	4%	1%	2%
Sinoe	0.41	13%	5%	10%
River Gee	0.35	9%	3%	6%
Gbarpolu	0.38	3%	1%	2%
<b>National</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>30%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report, 2010*

Gender parity is achieved when the GPI value is 1 i.e. there is equal proportional enrolment of boys and girls. With a GPI value of 0.75, Montserrado County was closer to achieving gender parity than other counties in 2008/09. The troubling part is that Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios are low across the country, reflecting the low level of participation for children in Liberia. Although these figures may be only relatively accurate (e.g., 252% for Grand Cape Mount and the Ministry is checking them), they do indicate that children in Liberia are still not starting school at the official age or at least were not a few years back. The wide difference between GER and NER is due to the large numbers of over-aged students in Senior High School. The equal NERs for boys and girls indicates that school starts at the official age are beginning to equalize. This effect will not be evident for many years, but the rates are still so low that few children in Liberia are receiving education at their official age for entry.

Table 9. Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) and Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) for Senior High Schools by County and Sex.

County	GER Boys	NER Boys	GER Girls	NER Girls	GER Both	NER Both	GER Change 07/08 - 08/09	NER Change 07/08 - 08/09
Bomi	20%	2%	12%	1%	16%	1%	23%	35%
Bong	24%	1%	14%	1%	19%	1%	26%	-62%
Grand Bassa	20%	2%	12%	1%	16%	1%	57%	49%
Grand Cape Mount	4%	1%	3%	1%	4%	1%	252%	
Grand Gedeh	18%	1%	8%	1%	14%	1%	13%	
Grand Kru	10%	0%	3%	0%	7%	0%	68%	
Lofa	22%	2%	8%	1%	15%	1%	27%	-29%
Margibi	32%	2%	21%	1%	27%	2%	-8%	-73%

County	GER Boys	NER Boys	GER Girls	NER Girls	GER Both	NER Both	GER Change 07/08 - 08/09	NER Change 07/08 - 08/09
Maryland	30%	1%	18%	1%	24%	1%	21%	-73%
Montserrado	64%	16%	48%	13%	55%	14%	17%	10%
Nimba	23%	2%	17%	2%	20%	2%	12%	57%
River Cess	4%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	140%	
Sinoe	13%	1%	5%	1%	10%	1%	96%	
River Gee	9%	0%	3%	0%	6%	0%	28%	
Gbarpolu	3%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	23%	
<b>National</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>-3%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report, 2010*

Although the Gross Completion Rate (GCR) for Senior High School is 30% overall, the GCR for females is lower than that for males and markedly so in some Counties. The NCR rates reflect the low NERs for those at the official age range for the level, and few students are graduating at the anticipated age level. To some extent, then, the problem of a low qualified pool of applicants for the RTTIs will continue and female participation suffers from these structural problems as much as possibly other contributing factors. Policy wise this might mean that recruitment is not likely to improve quickly and the policy focus would emphasize general school enrolment at the official age level. The issue of retention remains subject to other considerations, but there is little quantitative information available about the magnitude of the problem or those issues for females in particular.

Table 10. Gross and Net Completion Rates for Senior High School by County and Sex.

County	GCR_Male	GCR_Female	GCR_All	NCR_Male	NCR_Female	NCR_All
Bomi	11%	7%	9%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Bong	21%	10%	16%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Grand Bassa	18%	10%	14%	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%
Grand Cape Mount	3%	2%	2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Grand Gedeh	17%	6%	12%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Grand Kru	9%	1%	5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lofa	23%	7%	15%	0.9%	0.0%	0.5%
Margibi	33%	19%	26%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Maryland	25%	17%	21%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Montserrado	62%	48%	55%	5.3%	4.9%	5.1%
Nimba	23%	14%	19%	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%
River Cess	2%	0%	1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Sinoe	10%	3%	7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

County	GCR_Male	GCR_Female	GCR_All	NCR_Male	NCR_Female	NCR_All
River Gee	7%	1%	4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Gbarpolu	2%	0%	1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>National</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report, 2010*

Not only are there many structural difficulties faced by the various Counties as they take on increased responsibilities for access and quality of education, the Counties must address the general low-level qualifications of teachers across their regions. Many teachers are unqualified or under-qualified to deal with the curriculum and the classroom. Unless they are better trained, this significant factor in quality education will neutralize other efforts for quality education for the future.

Table 11. Teacher Numbers and Qualification.

County	All	Trained	% Trained	% Change in No. of Teachers 07/08 – 08/09	% Change in No. of Trained Teachers 07/08 – 08/09
Bomi	37	33	89%	42%	74%
Bong	163	84	52%	-23%	-15%
Grand Bassa	98	85	87%	-2%	89%
Grand Cape Mount	24	10	42%	-25%	-33%
Grand Gedeh	114	54	47%	75%	125%
Grand Kru	29	15	52%	21%	-6%
Lofa	102	74	73%	-20%	-13%
Margibi	182	91	50%	-16%	-16%
Maryland	107	58	54%	7%	16%
Montserrado	2,207	1,413	64%	-2%	24%
Nimba	347	252	73%	-12%	-5%
River Cess	3	1	33%	-67%	-80%
Sinoe	43	10	23%	13%	-50%
River Gee	14	6	43%	-50%	-45%
Gbarpolu	17	14	82%	21%	17%
<b>National</b>	<b>3,487</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>15%</b>

Source: MoE, *A Case for System Transformation: The 2008/2009 National School Census Report, 2010*

## Attendance in the RTTIs and University Teacher Education Programs

As a result of the long destructive and chaotic recent civil history of Liberia, the infrastructure and programs for teacher education were destroyed. Many teachers and teacher educators lost their lives or were forced into exile or hiding in safer relocation areas. In the absence of these teachers, community volunteers kept schools going. Their heroic efforts provided some instruction, but the quality was low and the resources nearly non-existent. These volunteers were often illiterate themselves or had limited education and untrained. Early efforts were made by NGOs and external donors to support the local efforts and begin the reconstruction of schools and the teaching environment.

As the system was re-established, more children attended school (still at low numbers as indicated earlier), but there were few qualified teachers, and almost no female teachers. As indicated as late as 2009, the number of untrained teachers was high and constituted about 52% of primary teachers and 37% of secondary school teachers. The volunteers remain in the system in many rural schools, and there is a school that had to close because of limited qualified teachers at the secondary level.

LTPP was initiated in 2006 to develop a modern teacher education program and re-institute the minimum qualification of the C Level Certificate. There are about 34,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools, and the GER and NER are low, indicating that many more teachers are needed. LTPP helped to restore the RTTI and University of Liberia education programs, but the output of these institutions has been very low (about 700 or slightly more), and the numbers of females in these early groups was dramatically low (about 10%). There have been some improvements. Recent applications have increased beyond institutional capacity (about 980 applicants) but the refurbishment and opening of Webbo increases the potential capacity to handle a larger pool from another part of the country. Of the applicants in early 2010 to Kakata and Zorzor, only about 14% were females, indicating that females are still under represented, and after review of credentials and selection decisions, about 68% of the applicants were admitted, but only 10% were female. Only 96 females are presently in the RTTIs, and only 121 have graduated over the years. This is very low, particularly given the number of teachers needed in the primary schools.

The plight of females in teaching education is not new. The number of places at KRTTI and ZRTTI was increased over the period of 1976-1980 from 410 to 630, but the primary education program in 1982 had about 78% males at KRTTI and about 89% males at ZRTTI and those completing the lower secondary programs were 89% males at KRTTI and 97% males at ZRTTI. It was recognized that the teaching force was largely male. There were over 7,000 teachers in the teaching force back then before the era of President Doe (The National Education Survey 1978), and now it is nearly 7 times larger. The number of teachers who were not trained in education was about 4,300, with only just over 2,000 trained. Both then and now, the percentage of untrained teachers is high but it's difficult to compare. Before the war years, many of the "untrained" teachers had high school degrees, or some college experience, and over 750 had advanced degrees (including 10 doctorates). Now the untrained teachers have very little educational experience of any kind so the problem is more debilitating, even if it appears that both presented considerable challenges. More serious now is the fact that the RTTIs have about the same number of places that they had over 40 years ago.<sup>1</sup>

Any growth in the system is not likely to cover replacement of volunteers and attrition due to resignations, deaths, or dismissals, and it is very unlikely to include many females. The number of female teachers in the system at the primary school level is not likely to grow significantly over the next few years, and the system needs to retain as many of those in the system as possible. There is an urgent

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<sup>1</sup> Just to note, the cost of producing a graduate in 1982-83 at KRTTI was \$3,500 and at ZRTTI, \$8,800 (when including the scholarship costs). This was unusually high at the time.

need for some effective strategies to improve the representation of females in education, and this study is intended to provide some information to guide the strategy development.

## Variables of Interest to the Teaching Career

To some extent Liberia has few employment opportunities in rural areas besides teaching. The problem is that few females are among those attracted to teaching, and much of this has to do with limited possibilities for earlier education experience. There is little doubt that the beginning of this problem lies in the primary and secondary schools. But this is a future cause for continuation of the problem. There are needed solutions now and needed policies to address the longer-range constraints. The purpose of this study is to examine the conditions and reasons for limited female participation in teaching. Given the variability of cultures living within Liberia (and often identified within counties), the reasons and solutions may vary across the country.

The domains below outline potential sources of policies and strategies for increased female participation in teaching. They are only suggestive because of the unique conditions in Liberia and some searching focus groups in various cultural areas and schooling levels (at secondary level) may highlight those of greatest promise

## Preconditions and Issues for Female Students in Secondary Education

The importance of schooling for future teachers is clear and an obvious precondition to teach others, and the lack of school completion for many females in Liberia is a problem for future balance in the teaching force. A first part of the study investigates the situation for females in secondary education. Why are they not completing? What problems do they have? Are there demographic conditions that mediate their completion rates? The experiences in secondary education both limit future possibilities and color the experience of the classroom. Teachers frequently reference their past when talking about how they teach and how they manage classrooms.

In order to attract females into the teaching area, they must be exposed to teaching early on. Contrary to common belief, experience as a student is not adequate exposure to the realities and positive aspects of teaching. In Liberia, it's often said that if individuals are exposed to what teaching is like they will not be impressed and see only the detriments of the system. However, real teaching is satisfying and with the decentralization of school governance and the greater focus on opportunities to learn at the local level, the attitudes and practices in schools may begin to change. Students at secondary need to have positive experiences to see what teaching can be, even if it isn't at the moment a reality of Liberian education. They need to change the future. Frequent suggestions include the creation of programs for credit in high school, hearing about the difference a teacher can make in a life, and having visits to the teacher education institutions to see what teachers study and do as they prepare. Liberia has already instituted tuition forgiveness as an incentive, but adequate advising and counseling may not be getting this information to students in time or in ways to influence their motivation to complete school or their enthusiasm for a career in teaching. Teaching is a challenge, but the volunteer teachers in schools during the crisis promoted the idea that anyone can teach (because they are there). The problem is that few can teach and their presence is a continuing detriment to the system (although there are not yet adequate replacements). The development of local school systems may identify the good teachers in the system and give them prominence in the promotion of future teachers. Anyone can stand in a classroom, but few can teach.

The students in secondary school form their opinions and attitudes about teaching in their direct experiences with schooling. Their motivation to complete school and the conditions that promote

negative or positive attitudes are clear pre-conditions to career in teacher education. First, they must finish, and second, they must want to be teachers. The survey can collect data while at the same time providing information about teaching and the need to complete secondary school in order to make this career move a possibility for these young students. Liberia is facing severe shortages of jobs, particularly in the rural areas, so students need to know that teaching is a viable possibility for the future and a good sustaining career that enables them to stay close to family and community (in fact, this may be an early policy adjustment to attract individuals into the dysfunctional system at present, and later be changed in accordance with a revived profession and secure and safe environments in all schools). Females will pursue and remain in education only if their safety and security are assured, and their role in education is supported by their communities and culture.

There is a limited amount known about teaching pre-conditions in the developing world and almost nothing known about Liberia, either in the past or in the context of post-conflict. There are areas of concern that prompt attention, based on the universality of the context of teacher education.

### **Academic Performance**

There is little question that inadequate academic performance both de-motivates the student and hurts the chances of either success or completion of the high school program. Without some motivation to seek out new opportunities and a poor foundation of academic preparation, female students are either opted out of opportunities or lack the wherewithal to take on the future requirements to become a teacher. Many females don't complete their high school programs and their performance is below the already low levels of performance seen in Liberian schools. This places them at risk of attrition or at risk in terms of capacity to complete a quality program. The teacher education institutions face an additional challenge to remediate the poor preparation and these institutions are already stretched in meeting the regular programmatic needs. These conditions compromise both female opportunities and teacher preparation quality.

### **Other Demands**

There has always been pressure on rural families to care for additional children and deal with the household chores and needs. Females are particularly vulnerable to exploitation that robs them of a childhood and later opportunities. After the long crisis, the stresses on families and rural communities are far greater than ever before. The females hold the family together and support the subsistent lifestyles that perpetuate the community. It is unlikely that most females even think about a future in any occupation and with schooling in such disarray, in teaching particularly. Changes in family demands are difficult to affect from external influences. Somehow parents and communities need to be aware of the long-term benefits of promoting their children, particularly the girls, to valuable roles in teaching.

### **Organizational and Working Conditions**

Rural schools do not generally function at a high level in Liberia. The organizational arrangements are hierarchical and aversive, and the working conditions are poor and deteriorating. School physical facilities have suffered greatly over the years from neglect and destruction. Interventions and improvements have not reached many of the communities and schooling is not as attractive either for students or prospective candidates for employment. During the war, the teaching positions were taken up by volunteers, who now want compensation for their support and maintenance of some semblance of an education system. There are few incentives to promote the youth to take over or to encourage interest in the future. The hope is that decentralization and greater community involvement will



energize community action and planning. Only if the context improves will it be a draw to the youth, who face other obstacles and concerns for survival and well-being in rural communities.

### **Lack of Cultural and Social Support Groups**

Any tradition for teaching has disappeared in the devastation that has lasted almost 30 years or more, going back to the Doe coup and through the Civil War and then the slow restoration process. Most natural or historical traditions that created cultural or social support for teachers have long disappeared or been damaged. Families might still have relatives and friends in teaching but they are or were in survival mode and not functioning as sustaining members of a growing society. There is little to encourage and support the aspirations of a future teacher. Females in the community do not likely have teaching icons to encourage and support them to pursue this important vocation. There is probably very little awareness of the possibilities.

### **Financial Incentives**

A young female is unlikely to be looking at any future of financial security. It is a daily concern. Many of the teachers, in these last many years, have been volunteers and the little finance in education has not likely prompted great interest. Because of the international, regional, and national economic condition, teaching is likely to be one of the few employment opportunities in rural Liberia. It does provide some financial security to the individual and family, and feeds many concerns in the community, but it may not have yet been fully realized or promoted as a future possibility for young females. This is not just about the little pay that teachers might get but it's also about the awareness of any financial benefits to teaching.

### **Attributes of Other Female Teachers**

Female teachers in the system serve as role models for youth, particularly young girls. In the many years of rural life for most females, there were few if any female teachers. The Liberian education system is dominated by males. This robs those young girls who might aspire to teach of role models, in an atmosphere where there are few other positions or employment opportunities for female role models as well. That is, education is probably not seen as a ladder to some success or as a possible vocation.

### **Imposed Standards -- Arbitrariness**

In the highly centralized education system of Liberia, most decisions and standards are externally imposed with few inputs or involvement from local communities or teachers. Liberia is a very diverse nation, made up of many different cultural groups with different histories and beliefs and values. The hierarchical organizational arrangement reinforces the notion of helplessness of the local community in the education of their children. Females remain locked in traditional roles and possibly inhibited from changing their positions in the hierarchy. Some make it but the numbers at present are few. In many countries females have risen in education as a means for cultural recognition. The arbitrariness of the current Liberian education system may pre-empt any such movements and recognitions. Communities recognized the importance of education by maintaining schooling even under duress and difficulties, but the view of schooling was diminished and now imposed standards only serve to disfranchise the community further. The new decentralization plan reaches into the region, but it will need to involve more local actions and local players in order to revitalize full community participation and improve overall quality.

## Female Role

With the many diversions and devastations faced in local survival, the potential contributions of females to education are most likely swamped by other concerns. There is a general lack of realization of the importance both for the community and individual of female ascendance in teaching roles. Unless female participation is valued again, education will suffer and fail to deliver all that it can to society and rural communities particularly.

## Multivariate Context

Promoting teaching for society and enabling individuals to make informed career choices are complex considerations. Within any group the variables indicate many causal keys for different sub-groups. How to sort through this for the encouragement of female participation in education is not a single theme. There are many different policies, actions, and conditions that make up the complex of enticement to a teaching career. Teaching is critical to quality education, but the way to attract the best teachers is not simple or easy to formulate.

A typical approach is the use of the occupational and vocational choice theories to help frame policy and adaptive responses to improvements. In this theory, several variables dominate the way individual choices are made. These include:

- Socio-economic Status. The question is the value or compensation of the career possibilities in order to attract the individual to consider the career. It is the combination of successful experiences and valued reinforcement that entice the involvement of the individual.
- Acculturation
- Environmental Fit (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional). Females tend to score in artistic, social, and conventional environments, possibly reflecting a cultural bias that may not exist in Liberia.
- Identity and Self-Concept. This changes throughout life as a result of experience. It is refined over time and it adapts to career choice.
- Phenotype
- Education Attainment of Parents. Successful parents aspire for their children to equal or surpass them in accomplishments. This plays a role in the range of choices that are considered and the motivation to prepare for these possibilities.
- Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, and Personal Goals. Career choice is influenced by the developing beliefs influenced by personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states and reactions.
- Personal Experiences with Failures, Discrimination, or Success in Education

These variables add to the mix of causal influences and likely are valid even in the Liberian situation to some extent. Ironically, little research has focused on impoverished groups or females, but they could help in the overall consideration of how to approach the problem of female interest and recruitment across the stages of schooling.

## Content and Requirements of Pre-service Education and Training

In the quest for quality there is always a call for higher standards and greater credibility for the teacher education institutions. However, there is evidence indicating that non-traditional or alternative teacher education programs do appear to produce graduates who are remain in the teaching force longer. The ATEP (Alternative Teacher Education Programs) programs have been successful in many situations.

There is also evidence that streamlined routes to credentialing provide more incentives than monetary rewards to entering teaching. Additionally, the RTTIs rely upon pre-testing for entry. The evidence is that this adversely affects the entry of many candidates. Candidates with higher measured academic aptitudes are less likely to join teaching (mostly true for elementary teachers), and the testing negatively influences the choices of others. Of course, these findings are from countries with higher quality pools of applicants with other skills and other conditions of constraint. The Liberian situation may require some unique responses to pre-service education and training.

There is strong evidence that short-cuts in quality are not effective, no matter how teacher education is approached. The current program in the RTTIs is considered too short by many, and it is clear that a teacher needs to have a strong content knowledge base, a theoretical and practical understanding of pedagogy, and then needs high levels of mentoring and support to bring these talents to high quality performance. Experience in the USA from "Teach for America" has indicated that poor preparation leads to lost teachers -- over 50% don't last past 3 years. Under-preparing teachers results in high turnover, undermines the potential school culture of excellence, and does not lead to high student achievement. The idea of a "profession" is that there are unique and challenging skills needed to perform, and teaching needs to press the idea of a profession and begin to publicize the special talents of its teachers. Those who join the ranks of teachers should be proud of their profession.

The problem is that lowering standards for entry to the profession and overcoming shortages results in ill-equipped teachers and a lower respect for public education and educators. Lower quality candidates perpetuate the drill and practice exercises that dull down education for students and lack creativity and engagement to motivate and encourage higher student achievement. The lower the teacher quality, in other words, the poorer the processes of instruction and the lower the outcomes in education, which then means that fewer talented people are attracted to the pool for the teaching profession.

The approach to teacher education varies widely across the world, and it likely differs even with standardization efforts across Liberia. A recent survey by the National Center for Education Information in the United States found that no matter what kind of preparation teachers went through they considered their teacher preparation and certification programs the most important part of their teaching preparation. Teaching effectiveness also does not seem to correlate with the type of preparation provided the teachers. Nine out of 10 teachers believe their teacher preparation programs are good measures of the qualification to teach, and this is independent of years of experience, how many education courses taken, how much clinical experience they had, or the type of program they went through. The NCEI concluded that there is no best way to prepare future teachers. This does not mean that vigilance and care aren't needed in the accountability of teacher education programs, but it does mean that as long as high-quality preparation is provided, the details of that preparation probably are not differentially important. Debates continue in Liberia about content versus pedagogy, and it's clear that both are needed. At the moment, it does not seem that Liberian teachers are competent in content, so the emphasis on content may be an appropriate response at this time, with balance regained at a later date. Assessment of this area determines what teacher educators and future teachers think of their program, its importance and credibility to them, and their aspirations for a better program and for their future.

- **Content Adequacy:** What do they think they need for teaching that they are not getting or getting at a significant level of amount or duration?
- **Effects of Experience:** What are their experiences in the teacher education programs?
- **Enhancing Professionalism:** Are they increasing their professionalism, their ability to teach, their appeal to the teaching profession?
- **Biased Experiences:** Are female candidates' experiences different from their male counterparts?

- **Encouragement and Interest:** Are females encouraged by their experiences?
- **Social Justice:** Are females aware of the social justice implications of their participation?
- **Educational Philosophy:** Are females aware of the philosophical foundations for their involvement in education?
- **Prestige:** Does the program enhance the feelings of prestige in the profession of teaching? Is the program of sufficient quality to engender feelings of self-efficacy and pride?

Also, teachers are asked and should be continually asked about their preparation in retrospect to ascertain what was important about their preparation and what was missing from the program. The feedback from teaching professionals provides perspective on why females are present or absent from teaching and how to improve programs to be more successful, especially for female candidates.

### In-service Training

The successful transition from RTTI graduate to novice teacher to skilled practitioner requires a comprehensive induction program and continuing professional development. The induction program orients the new teacher to the school and community, and it helps link the teacher's role in school improvement. Teachers depend upon sustained support from the school administration and colleagues, as well as other professionals and the community. The induction program sets up these linkages and possibilities and begins the in-service training of the teacher.

Continuous professional development is considered a key ingredient to effective teaching. It provides continuing ideas and support for the teaching career and energizes and reinvigorates teaching approaches and content. There is little doubt about its importance.

### Mentoring

Mentoring is an extension of the induction process. Schools that provide mentoring and induction programs, especially when they entail collegial atmospheres and support, have lower turnover rates among beginning teachers. In mentoring a probationary teacher is paired with a highly skilled teacher or team of teachers trained in working with peers. The new teachers get support, develop their skills, and utilize information from others' experiences. This is not an isolated process but is on-going and built into the regular programming of teachers in the schools, in order to be effective. Unfortunately, there is little funding or time in Liberian schools for mentoring, its planning, materials or training, or feedback processes.

In order to assess the importance or possibility for mentoring in Liberian schools, teachers and principals, plus regional administrators, will be asked about the extent, quality, and likelihood of mentoring in their schools. This will be particularly examined in view of the support this process provides to beginning female teachers.

### Conditions of Service

#### Work Load

Inexperienced teachers just starting their teaching careers need time and help in adjusting to the rigors of conditions and routines of the job and the school. They need to develop a comfort with the context and build their skills and confidence in the teaching job. Some teachers will revert to inadequate or inappropriate teaching techniques, possibly as experienced in their own student days, unless they are given enough support and time to develop in the new tasks slowly and with time to do things right. They need to develop their own routines and approaches, but these have to be based on high quality ideas

and standards. New teachers cannot be overloaded or given difficult assignments that might not develop good work habits and skills. This is particularly true at the secondary level where preparation is more difficult and subjects are changing and knowledge is more dynamic.

New teachers must learn to work with students and develop their skills and cannot be expected to take on other challenges. Assessment in this area will examine practices with new teachers and workloads, both in terms of types and extent.

### **Maternity and Health Care**

Although the formalities of benefits to teachers are centrally known, the attitudes and hardships of teachers, particularly female teachers, are to be assessed to see if these are obstacles to recruitment and retention of female teachers.

Family-friendly policies are an important part of the teaching field possibilities. Teachers are part of the community and they need to have support as care-givers to the community and their families. The investigation will look at the female role in the community and how this connects to teaching and retention of female teachers.

### **Housing**

In many rural settings, there is no housing. Some schools have shut down because of inadequate housing to attract qualified teachers. This is particularly acute for female teachers, who need safe and secure dwellings near their schools. The importance of this condition of service will be examined. It's known that it is a difficult situation for many communities, but is it a major deterrent for the attraction of female teachers.

### **Salary**

Salaries are low across Liberia and teaching is correspondingly low. The idea that teachers are attracted to the profession for nurturing reasons or desire to make a difference in the world does not seem sufficient to keep them in teaching. Once adequate salaries are available, however, the pay does not seem to be a major incentive either. Liberia doesn't have a pipeline of students who understand the role or importance of teaching to see it as a gratifying experience and they do not have salary levels that are seen as competitive or adequate at this time. The key to the assessment is the attitudes and views about the salary situation in terms of other incentives. Many teachers want additional professional development opportunities as incentives or special assignments or decreased workloads. Incentives become important in building the career ladders of the profession.

### **Personal Security**

Sadly, personal safety is a major issue in the more remote areas of Liberia, but also in all areas where a recent history of violence still prevails. Violence or taking advantage of women is a particular concern in the teaching profession. There is student violence and disruption and destruction of property and person, and there is coercion and abuse of colleagues in the male-dominated teaching profession. The level of concern is not known. The rumors and reports are troubling and undoubtedly reach the ears of many and dissuade many from venturing into teaching and away from home areas.

There is a need to question those females who are in teaching to get any idea of the range and extent of maltreatment or exploitation of women in schools. This may also extend back into experiences in

secondary school, so both of these groups need to be surveyed to ascertain the needs and requirements to ensure personal safety of students and teachers in the schooling environment. Safety is a priority requirement of effectiveness of schooling.

## Promotions

There are no comprehensive data on the number of female teachers who are promoted. There are few female administrators, so over these last many years since the crisis, not many have risen to become school administrators at any level. Teaching is the most important position, but there should also be equity or approximately so at all levels of education. With relatively few female teachers in the teaching cadre, the opportunity to appoint a female administrator is less. This may be a negative influence on the expectations and prospects for potential female teachers.

## Retention

There are no comprehensive data on the ability of the system to retain its female teachers. Both data collection and strategies to retain females are necessary to influence this important area. The cost of teacher education is now borne completely by the state so the retention of graduates after they move out of the colleges and into the system is very important. In many systems, graduates frequently do not become teachers or they remain in teaching for relatively short periods of time. This is an area that requires greater attention.

## Professional Communities

Mentoring and support in the early days of teaching are important to creating a professional that is both better able to handle the teaching work and is more likely to feel confident and comfortable in the career. This is an important contributor in many systems to retention of personnel, particularly in the rural areas. In fact, professional development is sometimes an incentive as important as salary to young teachers.

## Continuing and Increasing Prestige

Attracting the best young scholars and bright community members to the teaching profession are important to the continuing improvement of teacher quality. Prestige in the community and in the country is an important feature of an attractive career. To get the best of youth to aspire to teaching as a career, the prestige of the profession has to improve over the damage done to schooling and teaching during the long period of unrest and civil chaos. The attitudes about teaching are rumored to be very negative throughout the country, and the qualifications of those who had to fill in during difficult times remain characteristics of the current system. Low quality not only hurts the accomplishments of the system but it also hurts the future of the system to improve itself. Prestige is an important attractor to female teacher recruitment, and is especially important when social and cultural attitudes about females in any employment are not positive. There is still a long way to go to have a system of qualified teachers. A prominent sub-group that is not well represented in teaching is females, and prestige and the many attributes associated with a high-level job may help young aspiring females to reach for teaching as a viable profession.

## Design of the Study

The design of the study is a phased set of surveys that move deeper and deeper into the reasons for female participation or lack of participation in teaching. Starting at secondary school, females and teachers, principals, and regional supervisors are interviewed about the problems of female retention, completion, and interest in teaching. At the same time information is conveyed to students that there is a concerted push to encourage more females in teaching and the values, possibilities, and avenues to that profession.

There is no attempt to hide the reasons or intents of the questionnaires. This is an open attempt to understand the status and possibilities of the system to cope with the future recruitment and retention of female teachers in the education system. Liberia faces an immediate future of few jobs, particularly in the rural areas, and teaching could become a competitive job area for high school graduates. The proposals to increase the credential requirements and improve the quality of the RTTIs further requires supporting concerns with recruitment and academic preparation of potential candidates for the teaching profession. Females are noticeably absent, an unusual employment result compared to most countries and a potential problem for the full recovery of Liberian society from the years of devastation.

The interview and questionnaire format is basically open ended. In the early phase a focus on a particular region guides the study and then is extended to other regions. The feeder areas for the RTTIs are key foci for sampling. This is not a statistical study but rather a sampling of ideas and needs. Convergent interviews are the prototype. For policy purposes, it is important to identify the key influences to recruitment and retention of female teachers. Their extent is obvious and not part of this study -- statistical studies are far more difficult to do well and much more expensive. In this case, they are also less appropriate. This is an exploration of ideas and reasons.

## Sampling Information and Ideas Rather than People

Commonly, the purpose of a study is the generalization of attributes across a sample of entities to a target population of the entities, and these are usually people. This is the basis of statistical studies that aim to estimate a population parameter from an appropriate and adequate sample of the entities. In this case, there is no reason to expect that the population of students, teachers, or administrators has the special knowledge required to inform the Ministry on the scope and reasons for low female participation, and there is no need for us to know the strength of feelings about any particular reason for the low numbers of females in the education system. Instead, the purpose of this study is to generate a comprehensive picture of the potential causal precursors to the lack of teachers in the system. The population is the population of ideas about potential causal influences that are leading to low completion of high school and low participation in teaching. The study seeks the range of ideas about the problems in female student retention at the upper grades, the difficulties in recruiting females to the RTTIs, and the difficulties and successes of females who are currently teaching. The study maps the comprehensive coverage of the problem domain at these various levels where decisions and barriers are likely to exist.

Within the limits of "purposive sampling" of the most articulate and knowledgeable people in education, the study yields a deeper understanding of the situation and better definitions and conceptions about the multiple problems faced in female teacher education, as well as some suggestions for policy and strategy work. The purpose of the study is to understand the situation facing young females as they contemplate their futures and do not seek to be part of the teaching profession, why it is so difficult to recruit females into the teacher training institutes, and what difficulties do they eventually face in teaching that may frustrate retention in the system and further feedback discouraging information to

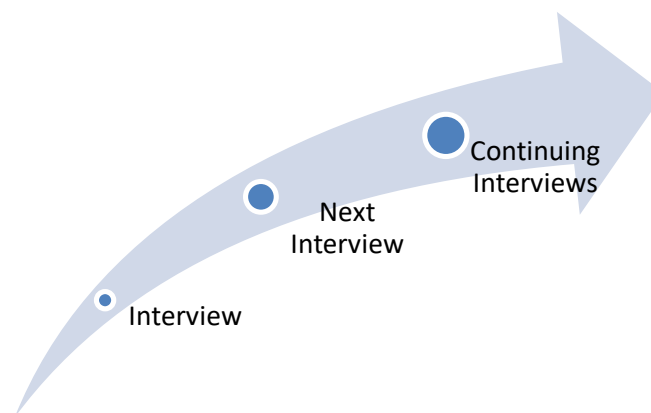
future participants. This is not a study of attitudes or knowledge about female teachers. It's a study about the main causes of female participation in teacher education and teaching as a career.

The open-ended questions prompt the person being interviewed to reveal all that they know about the domain, and the questioning focuses on the best-informed people, not a random sample (again this is not generalization to people, this is generalization about the domain of ideas). This leads to the range of ideas that are thought to underlie the plight of female students to become teachers. The study samples anyone we who can provide good information. This includes the best of female students (they'll know about their classmates as well and they will be able to articulate the ideas of importance), the best of DEOs and principals and teachers because they have been dealing with the issues for many years and have a perspective that could prove important. The intent is to understand the domain, not how many people know it or what attitudes they have or how ill-informed they are about the situation. This is a qualitative study that probes the domain, goes deep inside it using the intelligence of those experiencing it and emphasizes their participation in the generation of new ideas to address the issues.

The interview approach adopted here is called convergent interviewing. This method is economical and efficient. By sampling the knowledgeable about an area they understand, the range of ideas and experiences that comprise the situation emerge across the interviews. The interviewees reveal their experiences, thoughts, and applications. Within these discussions, they are likely to propose relevant policy agendas to deal with what they have seen as well. When interventions are attempted, then the quantification of effect for policy analysis is the focus but not at this formulation stage.

Usually the convergence of ideas occurs after interviewing around 10 people, if they are selected to be as diverse as possible within the domain experience. If the ideas and experiences are diverse, then the sampling of interviewees continues. The real sampling is the sampling of ideas and the intent is to gather a comprehensive list of possibilities. Convergent interviewing is successful if in each target group the very best and most informed people that also reflect the range of perspectives about the problem area are interviewed. Responses begin to "converge" on a depiction of the reality faced by female students and teachers. Every useful idea and impression about the situation that exists is taken as part of the sample of ideas and this range of perspective begins to reveal the depth of the problem and its needs.

Figure 2. The Increase in Understanding with the Progression of Interviews.



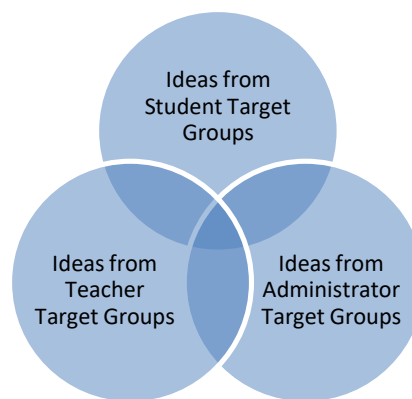
In this process, the selection is not just 10 people but 10 well-informed, high verbal people who potentially represent diverse viewpoints. The diversity yields the range of ideas as quickly as possible. There is no attempt to seek agreement. One person may hold the key to a problem or have the most penetrating idea about it to better understand it. Another person may have a different perspective and contribute another aspect of the problem and how to address it. And another person may have



experiences that illuminate the problem for better understanding. Causal processes are not always seen by participants or by others, so the study seeks a range of observers who have dealt with the situation and have informed ideas about what is happening and why.

Liberia is a complex country made up of many different regions, which are somewhat delineated by one or more cultural groups that differ significantly from others in the immediate and distant regions. Liberia is inherently diverse. The study looks for the convergence of responses that reflect the potential ideas in a particular region and then moves to the next one, looking for commonalities and differences. Broad policies would be easier to frame and apply, but the situation for females may be different in differing parts of Liberia. Not only may there be a multivariate picture of the problem area, but there may be multiple profiles that present different pictures. The advantage of an open-ended convergent interview approach is that it deals directly with the diversity and its validity in fact depends upon it.

Figure 3. The Increase in Understanding Due to the Varying Perspectives of Different Groups.

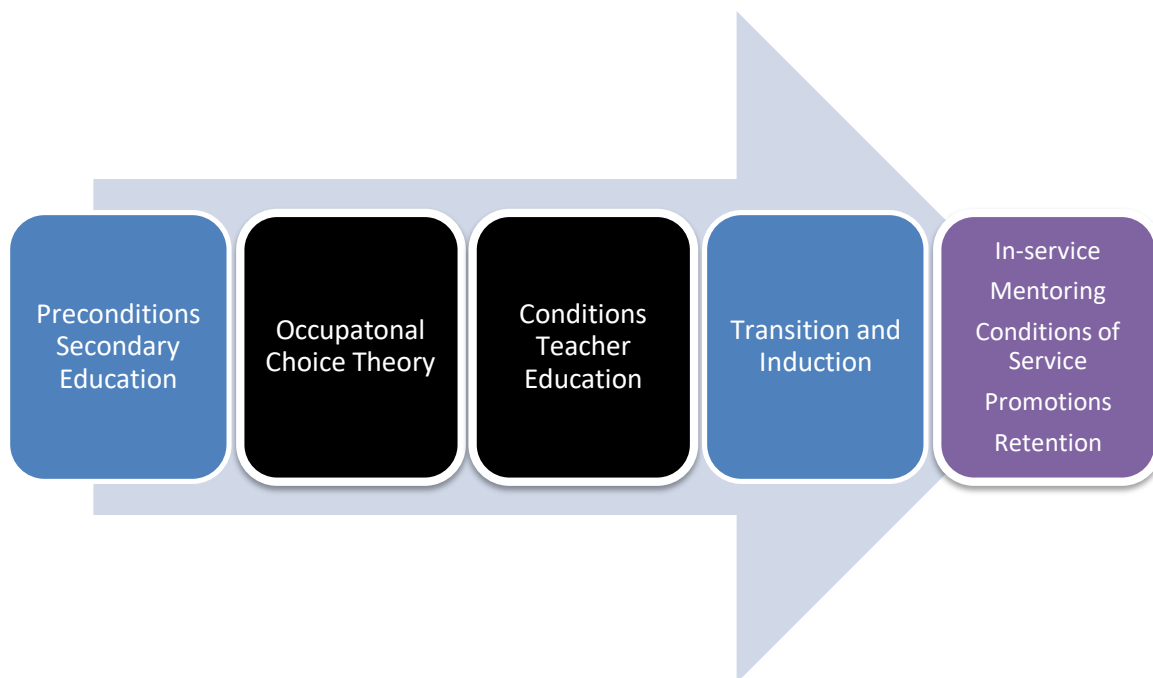


The sampling is purposive. There is no attempt to pick a random sample of people to interview. In fact, the process depends upon selecting interviewees based upon the potential diversity of their perspectives, either because of their positions, perspectives of the issues, or their experiences. The person sampling is not arbitrary but informed. The set of interviews must "represent" the variety of viewpoints that exist around female participation in education.

### Design and Target Groups

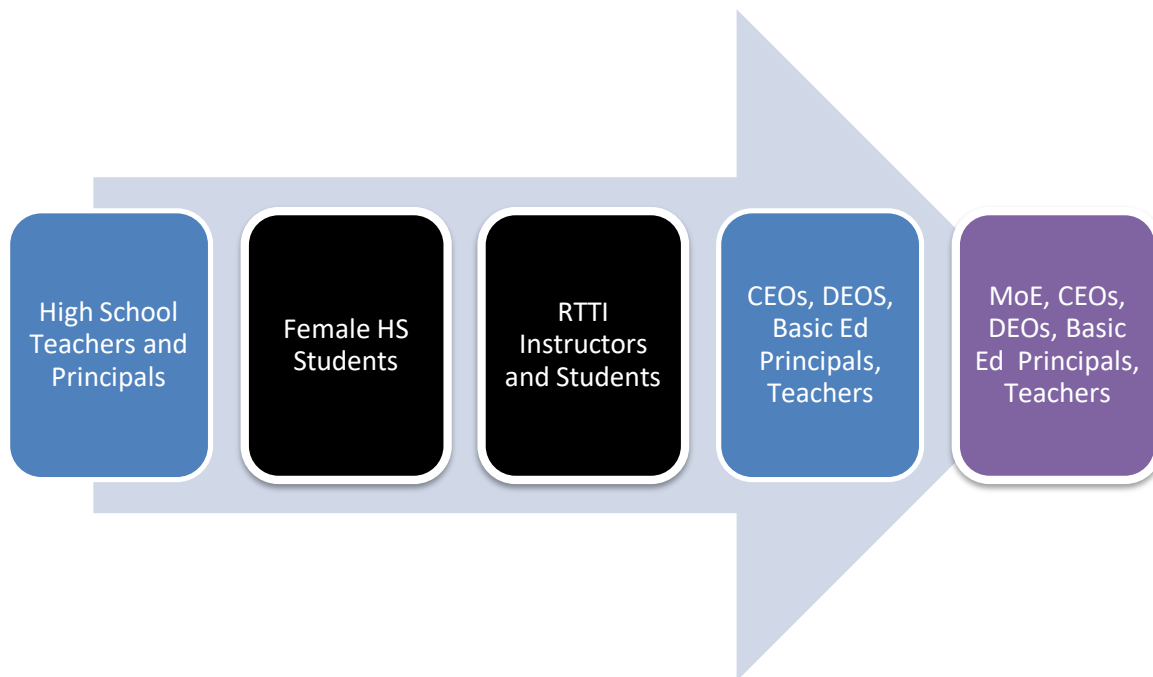
The design of the study focuses on probing questions and identification of the informed target groups to interview. The questions are probing and lengthy. This is not a quick survey of impressions but a deep and probing analysis with the interviewee of their perspectives on an issue.

Figure 4. Progression of Variables Implicated in Female Participation in Education



The study has many facets and follows the progression of a female student through educational experiences and then into areas directly related to teacher education. Because this is cross-sectional, the surveys are within an academic year and of course, only comprise those students in the system and those females who have continued.

Figure 5. Target Groups for Data Collection



Next focus groups will be held with teachers, principals, community, and regional and county leaders about females in teaching, both as it is and as it might be. With some key ideas and variables collected from these dialogues, a larger survey will be undertaken with these groups. Additionally, school visits

will be coupled with the surveys to ascertain actual conditions and contextual interviews with female teachers and their colleagues about the situation for female employment.

Lastly, successful female teachers will be assembled for discussions about the implications of the findings. What policies and strategies should be utilized to attract more females, improve the image of education as a profession for females, and what is needed to keep females in teaching. These ideas will be assessed in meetings with Ministry and regional leaders to see what is possible and realistic, and to develop more formal proposals for policy development.

The eventual output is a report on female teacher education and teacher career participation. This report will encourage further discussions, improvements in RTTIs (and possibly extended into the university programs), and policies.

### Key Questions by Target Group

The study entails many questions about the precursors, conditions, and influences that are important in the better understanding of female teaching in Liberia. Most studies on gender situations are outside Liberia so this study needs to investigate the many possibilities for causal influences of career choice and specifically teaching as a career.

#### High School Teachers and Principals

Teachers and Principals deal with the problems of a school and are aware of the difficulties experienced by students, especially in terms of academic performance but also social concerns.

- What is life in high school like for girls?
- Do they have special problems in academic areas?
- To what extent do social situations negatively affect female attendance in high school?
- To what extent do social situations negatively affect female retention in high school?
- To what extent do social situations negatively affect female completion of high school?
- What do you do to enhance their learning environments and improve academic performance to retain girls in school?
- Do you do anything to enhance the appeal and credibility of the teaching profession as a career path for female students?
- Do you feel that female students complete high school with adequate knowledge and skills to undertake future teacher preparation programs?
- How would you describe the climate at your school? Facilities? Academic orientation? Social conditions? Community relations? Male-Female relations? Teacher-Principal relations?
- How many female teachers are there at your school? Do they clearly serve as role models for female students?
- Does the community value education? Do they value it for females?
- Are there many teachers in the community, outside the school, who are considered prominent citizens and serve as role models for your female students?
- Does your school talk about the community economic conditions? Do females generally hope to participate in employment in the community? What would they do? Is teaching as a career valued at all by female students? Do the female students know the opportunities available?
- Within the economic conditions of the community, are teachers reasonably better off than most people? How is the salary for teachers perceived in terms of sufficiency? Are teachers at your high school satisfied to be a teacher or administrator?

- Do teachers see a career ladder for their professional development? Do they aspire to be better teachers?
- Policy is essentially established in the Ministry of Education. Are the policies generally well regarded? Does the school have input and paths to express concerns or make suggestions? Does the school and/or the community feel they are involved in education or is it mostly an imposed process?
- Will decentralization affect your school?
- Is education valued in your school? Do the teachers and principal strive for excellence, even if conditions are not ideal?
- Does the school value its female teachers? if you have any... Do you see any importance to having female teachers?
- Do many of your female students go on in their academic pursuits? Do many enter teaching? So you do anything to promote education as a career for your female students and teachers?

### Female High School Students

Occupational choice theories frame the common dimensions of career choice by individuals. Both in terms of high school completion and aspirations for a career, these dimensions are usually important to the individual in making a choice about what to do next. In Liberia there are few options in rural areas for anyone, but since females may want to stay close to family or be pressured to do so, education represents one of the few possibilities in these rural environments.

- Do you hope to have a job when you complete high school? What would it possibly be?
- Are you considering continuing your education? If so, what career do you wish to pursue?
- Does the teaching profession interest you as a profession?
- Are teachers paid sufficiently for you to support yourself in your community?
- Is the salary and conditions in teaching attractive to you?
- How do you feel about teachers? Are they important to society? Are they valued in your community? Do you value them?
- Do you have any female teachers? Are they role models?
- Would you feel comfortable in teaching as a profession?
- What is life like for you in high school?
- Do you intend to complete your high school studies?
- Do you study much? Do you feel you have the knowledge and skills necessary to continue your education? or to get a job?
- What's your attitude about your teachers? Could you be a teacher someday?
- Do teachers represent valued and influential people in your life?
- What have you been taught by parents, friends, relatives about teachers? Are they considered valued members of the community? Would your family be proud of you to become a teacher?
- Are you considering teaching as a career?
- Can you see yourself as a teacher? Can you picture yourself helping children learn?
- Are there teachers in your life and school with whom you can identify? They are role models for you? Do you consider female teachers as successful? Do you prefer female or male teachers?
- How would you describe a good teacher? Have you experienced good teaching?
- Have your parents completed high school? What's their educational level?
- Do your parents encourage you to pursue your academic program in high school? and beyond?
- Do your parents value education? Do they respect your teachers?

- Do you feel you can complete high school?
- Do you feel you can go on and continue in education? Can you be successful?
- Are you confident in your studies? Are there subjects in which you excel?
- Are you sufficiently prepared in a subject that you could teach someone else? someone younger perhaps?
- Are female students well treated in your school? Are female teachers well treated in your school?
- Do most of your female friends succeed or fail? and why?
- Are females discriminated against in some areas? in what ways?
- Have your experiences in high school been largely positive? Any examples of negative ones?
- Is there some reason that you might not complete high school?
- Is there some reason you wouldn't consider teaching as a career for yourself?
- Are your female friends considering teaching as a future job?
- What do you need to succeed in high school? Is there any support or changes you need to make sure you complete your high school diploma? Is completion important to you?
- What areas have you had the most success in school? outside of school?
- How would you characterize your education, useful or not? valuable or not? important or not? relevant or not?
- Which adjective best describes you? realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional?
- What demands do you face from parents? friends? teachers? other adults?
- How would you describe your interests?

### RTTI Instructors and Students

- What is essential preparation for teaching in Liberia? Does the RTTI provide that in adequate form and level?
- What is important for teaching that is not provided in the current RTTI?
- Is the program long enough?
- Is the level of the program at a sufficient difficulty and complexity?
- What experiences have you had in the teacher education program? successes and failures or problems?
- Do the experiences at this RTTI enhance the feelings that teaching is important and valuable? Does it increase professionalism?
- Does the program at this RTTI improve the ability to teach?
- Does the program increase the feelings of importance of teaching?
- Are female candidate teachers' experiences different from their male counterparts?
- How many females are there at this college?
- Are females encouraged by their experiences in this college?
- Are females aware of the social justice implications of their participation? Do they understand the need for a balance between gender views of the world?
- Do females perform at the same level as their male counterparts?
- Are females aware of the philosophical foundations for their involvement in education?
- Does the program at this RTTI enhance the feelings of prestige in the profession of teaching?
- Is the program of sufficient quality to engender feelings of self-efficacy and pride?
- How would you describe the quality of graduate from this institution? Are female graduates at the same or higher level than their male colleagues?

- Does the RTTI encourage or actively seek community involvement? Are the students involved in community activities? Are the female students involved?
- Are there many females in teacher education? How many at each level? Is this an increasing, balanced, or decreasing trend? Do they graduate?
- What are your graduates prepared to do as teachers? Can they teach immediately? Do they have adequate pre-service experiences to have a smooth transition into a real teaching job?
- What would you say are the primary barriers to females in the teaching world?
- What would you say are the primary barriers to the entrance of females in this institution?
- What would you say are the primary barriers faced by female students at this institution?
- Why do you think there are so few female teachers in Liberian education?
- How important is practice teaching? Is there much of that at this RTTI? Is it adequate? Why is it or isn't it important?
- What is the right mix of academics and pedagogy for a successful teacher education program?
- Do you support a role for RTTIs in continuing professional development in schools? Why or why not? and How would you do it?

### CEOs, DEOs, Basic Education Principals, and Teachers

The induction process for college and university graduates into basic education teaching can be influential in future decisions about staying in the field and being motivated or supported to do well. Induction is considered extremely important to retaining and developing excellent teachers.

- Do you have formal induction programs? Why or why not? What do they entail?
- Do you use mentoring to support new teachers? or in general professional development?
- What is the extent, quality, and likelihood of mentoring in your schools?
- What other techniques do you use to help new teachers cope with their teaching contexts and work?
- Do you have many female teachers? as many as males? Why or why not?
- How do you ensure that new teachers feel comfortable in their new assignments and that they practice good teaching methods?
- Are new teachers given extra assignments? more than other teachers? Are they given difficult classes or students?
- Are they overloaded so that the experienced teachers can be rewarded and given a break to entice them to stay?
- Are female teachers given the same kinds and levels of assignments as males? What are they?
- What is the workload?
- Are there maternity or health care facilities for females in the community?
- Is there housing for teachers? Is it adequate for female teachers?
- What is the life of a female teacher like in your school(s)?
- Do you attract new female teachers?
- Do you have lots of "volunteer" teachers? Are female teachers actively recruited to replace these volunteers?
- Are salaries in the community comparable or lower or higher than teacher salaries? Are there other jobs in the community?
- Are there many females working in the school(s)?
- Do you a professional development program? how often?
- Do you use any incentives to encourage good teaching?

- Is teaching valued in your area? are female teachers valued?
- Are students disruptive and behavior problems? Are female teachers able to cope with these situations?
- Are female teachers safe in your school(s)?
- Are there adequate facilities in the school for female teachers?
- Are females encouraged to become teachers in your communities?
- What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages facing a new female teacher in this area?

### Ministry, CEOs, DEOs, Basic Education Principals, and Teachers

The recruitment, retention, and promotion of teachers may be related to policies and initiatives promoted by the Ministry or the regional and school managers. The intent is to investigate their impressions of the positive and negative forces that influence female continued participation in the teaching profession.

- Are there any barriers to the promotion of females in the system? What are they or how are they avoided?
- Are female teachers usually as talented as their male counterparts? Why or why not?
- Do you have many female teachers in the system and are they eligible for promotions?
- Why do you think there are few female teachers when compared to male teachers in the system?
- Do your schools promote professional communities? What do you mean by that and how do you promote them? Do they help in the retention of good teachers? Do they help in the retention of female teachers?
- As we enter this new era of reform, do you see any signs that teachers enjoy more prestige than earlier? Do volunteer teachers remain in your system? Are they perceived as qualified and positive contributors to the quality of education? Are your female teachers mostly volunteers or teacher education graduates?
- Are female teachers among the best teachers in your system? Why or why not?
- What suggestions do you have for the retention of good female teachers?

### Successful Female Teachers

In the process of interviewing and talking to local schools, some recognized successful high quality female teachers are identified to provide their perceived reasons for their success and their ideas about helping others succeed.

- What do you attribute your success to? Did you have a good teacher education preparation? good mentoring? good professional development? good leadership? personal attributes?
- What policies and/or strategies would you recommend to attract more females to teaching?
- What support mechanisms would you recommend to retain good female teachers?
- How do you think the image of education could be improved as a profession for females?
- What is needed to keep females in teaching?
- Do you serve as a role model for your female students?
- Are you fulfilled in your career in teaching? What more could be done to support you? Will you stay in teaching for a long time? Why or why not?

## Questioning Approaches

Two general questions set the tone for the discussion. The above questions fill in if they are needed. The intent is to provide a framework for creativity of ideas about how to address the issues facing Liberian education that are reflected in the dramatically low number of females in the teaching corps. The first question provides a framework for transformation. After showing the individual the data from the earlier charts, the absence of females should be indisputable. The question is: What would you change in the education system to produce an **idealized system** that would have males and females represented in more equitable numbers in the teaching corps?

The second question looks at **attribution**. What caused the situation and what can be done to address the issues? The question is: Think of a successful female teacher (or student or administrator); how did they get to where they are? What were the critical incidents that led to their success? How did they navigate the system that so many others have been unable to do? (If the person is a female and cannot think of another example, then ask them about themselves – this is less useful at times because the individual may present a modified view of their situation for a variety of reasons).

The interview team consisted of at least two persons (male and female) from the recognized cultural groups in the area, and they alternate note taking and interviewing responsibilities. Each interview lasted about an hour or so because the intent is to make the interviewee comfortable and give them every opportunity to delve deeply into the issues and barriers that confront them or their colleagues. Some interviews were carried out in focus groups, bringing people together for a common discussion about the issues. The approach adapted to the situation.

## Field Work

The findings were consistent with those expected from the general literature and the many experiences in Liberian schools and with Liberian teachers. One expectation was the existence of regional and cultural differences. There were some but all in all, the results were similar across the various counties, even when the reasons might be different. The secret societies of the inland counties, the legacies of traditions in the southeast, and the influence of religion in the west led to the same outcomes of the limit on female opportunities, and also place females in difficult contexts even in schools, both as students and as teachers. Women were considered inferior and this backcloth of constraints tainted all possibilities for them in various careers, but particularly in teaching. Teaching requires respect from peers and pupils, and this was not easily gained by female teachers. Those who survived the difficulties of schooling during their education years had perhaps developed coping strategies to enable them to endure the continued limits of teaching. It was said that the election of a woman president helped in recent times, and also recent modernization and urban influences have also eroded these enduring stresses. Underlying the limited numbers of those pursuing or eventually joining the teaching profession, the evidence remains that the general attitudes and prejudices about women still prevail to some extent. It appears that some effort is required to change the context more dramatically, even as it is eroded. The constraints conspire to limit the full development of the teaching corps. The fewer number of women in the teaching profession is more than a civil rights issue. There is no way that Liberia can meet its schooling requirements without female teachers. Their talents and numbers, particularly in the rural areas, where they suffer the most from negative influences, are required to achieve a high-quality schooling system.

In addition to the attitudinal constraints and biases, there were real system issues. This underlines the importance of the system. No matter what the talent or biases, if the system does not address key



issues of effectiveness and efficiency, there is little pressure to change the outcomes of the societal and cultural difficulties. The system must provide a safe environment and sufficient incentives to overcome the other issues facing a teenager in high school deciding on what to pursue next and a young adult making decisions about a future and a career. In the Liberian case, the system seems to add additional barriers to women, particularly in the rural environs. Isolated schools are embedded in communities that do not support females in teaching or even schooling in general, poor living conditions make it difficult for women to be placed in rural schools, inadequate leadership fails to counter problems and issues that women face, and few women gain any opportunities that might change the local situation or influence others to try.

At every turn and in all institutions relevant to schooling and teacher education, women face many barriers to their consideration, recruitment, or retention in the education system. The prevailing attitudes, even when eroded in more modern environments, seem to endure and operate to undercut real possibilities for women. Even those who endure are faced with limited career opportunities, and those few were interviewed to find out what their experiences were.

Capacity is not just about talent. It is about the possibility of an organization to actually do something. The barriers to women challenge the Liberian education system and damage its possibilities to do what it needs to do. The results of this representative survey were not surprising in terms of the identification of influences, but they do emphasize the consistency of the issues that face women, whatever the local reasons are. Barriers to women in education are national and require national policies and strategies to change the future possibilities. Without women, the education system cannot fulfill its mandate or mission.

## Target Groups

There was every attempt to interview the same categories of individuals in each of the counties. The teams were divided into three: southeast, Montserrado, and inland counties. There was also an attempt to interview as many women in the teaching field as was possible within the time and distance constraints. The intent was to collect as many diverse perspectives and opinions as possible and then see what convergences arose from these groups of educators and community members. The first field teams visited the southeast and Montserrado, and the reports followed the interview listings with no collection or collation of the findings. The inland counties field teams visited the remaining target counties but the findings were now provided in terms of underlying influences as indicated by the various interviewees. In a sense, the study progressed in understanding from the earlier coastal county work to the inland counties, and the convergence of influential factors became more apparent. As pointed out in the methodology, the intent was to gain greater detail and convergence as the study progressed. The report of the findings reflects that study development.

The team interviewed the following stakeholders for Grand Gedeh and River Gee:

- Districts Education Officers
- Principals/administrators
- Female Teachers
- Female Students
- Male Students
- WRTTI Female Trainees
- WRTTI Academic Dean and Trainer
- Parents within the communities visited

Table 12. Interviewees for the Southeastern Counties.

Category	Number of Respondents	Sex	Institution	Location
District Education Officers (DEO)	2	Males	Ministry of Education	Grand Gedeh and River Gee
Schools Administrators	5	Males	Zwedru Multilateral, Tubman Wilson Memorial, Tweh Jaiklay Elementary and Junior High School, Webbo Elementary and Junior High School	Grand Gedeh and River Gee
Female Teachers	5 ("C- Certificate")		Zwedru Multilateral, Tubman Wilson Memorial and Tweh Jaiklay Elementary & Junior High School	Grand Gedeh and River Gee
Students	14	10 Females and 4 Males	Zwedru Multilateral, Tubman Wilson Memorial, Tweh Jaiklay Elementary and Junior High School	Grand Gedeh and River Gee
RTTI Administrators	1 (Dean)	Male	WRTTI	River Gee
Trainers	2 (All BSc.)	Males	WRTTI	River Gee
Female Trainees	5		WRTTI	River Gee
Parent/Communities Members	12		Zwedru, Fish Town, and Webbo	Grand Gedeh and River Gee

The team interviewed the following stakeholders for Montserrado:

- County and District Education Officers

- Principals/administrators
- Female Teachers
- Female Students
- Parents within the communities visited

Table 13. Interviewees for Montserrado County.

Category	Number of Respondents	Sex	Institution	Location
County (CEO) and District Education Officers (DEO)	1 CEO and 1 DEO	2 Females	Ministry of Education	Monrovia
Schools Administrators	2	1 Female and 1 Male	William V. S. Tubman (MCSS), and Elizabeth Tubman Memorial Institute	Monrovia
Female Teachers	4	All Females	William V. S. Tubman (MCSS), and Elizabeth Tubman Memorial Institute	Monrovia
Female Students	12	All Females	William V. S. Tubman (MCSS), and Elizabeth Tubman Memorial Institute	Monrovia
Parents	2	All Females		Monrovia

The team interviewed the following stakeholders for Margibi, Bong, Nimba, Bomi, and Lofa:

- County Education Officers
- Districts Education Officers
- Dean, Cuttington University
- Principals/Administrators
- Female Teachers
- Female students
- KRTTI Female Trainers
- ZRTTI and KRTTI Female Trainees
- ZRTTI and KRTTI Academic Dean, Registrars, and Director
- Parents within the communities visited

Table 14. Interviewees for the Inland Counties.

Category	Number of Respondents	Sex	Institution	Location
County Education Officer( CEO)	3	All males	Ministry of Education	Bong, Nimba and Bomi Counties
District Education Officer(DEO)	4	1 Female and 3 Males	Ministry of Education	Margibi, Nimba, Lofa and Bong
Dean-College of Education	1	Male	Cuttington University	Bong County
Schools Administrators	13	3 Females( two vice principals and 1 principal) 10 Males	Lango Lippi, Harbel Multilateral, Gboveh, Sanniquele Central High, J Wesley Pearson Elem. Jr. & Sr. High, Zorzor Central High, Robertsport High School, Mardina Jr. High, C.H. Dewey, Samuel D. Hills Memorial ( The team visited Curren Lutheran High School in Zorzor and Yeala Public School)	Margibi, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties
Female Teachers	12 ("B- Certificate")	All Females	Lango Lippi, J. Wesley Pearson, Mardina Public School and Yeala Public School	Margibi, Nimba, Lofa and Grand Cape Mount
Female Students	23		Lango Lippi, Harbel Multilateral , Gboveh and C.H. Dewey	Margibi, Bong and Bomi
RTTIs' Administrators	4(Dean of KRTTI, 2 Registrars, and Director of ZRTTI)	All Males	KRTTI ZRTTI	Margibi Zorzor
Female Trainers	5 (All BSc.)		KRTTI	Margibi
Female Trainees	25		KRTTI ZRTTI	Margibi Lofa

Category	Number of Respondents	Sex	Institution	Location
Parent/Communities Members	20		Phebe, Sugar Hill, Lake Teleh, Zorzor, Yeala, Mardina, Tubmanburg, Ganta.	Margibi, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi

## Interview Results<sup>2</sup>

The findings are reported in the sequence in which they were gained. The first interviews were both pilot experiences for the interviewing team and real data collection exercises. The experience demonstrated that people will talk about this area at this point in Liberian history, and most feel that it is a sad context for the teaching profession. The language of the reports is only slightly altered from the reported responses. Although there are repeats across the interviews, this highlights the consistency of the findings.

### Grand Gedeh and River Gee Counties

#### Principals/Administrators

The team interviewed five school principals from Grand Gedeh and River Gee. The principals provided several reasons that are contributing to the fewer females in the classroom, their retention, and development.

- Generally, all the principals highlighted the issue of low salary and the lack of incentives as a contributing factor to the lack of interest by females to enter the teaching profession. According to them, women cannot withstand difficulties or hard times and would rather prefer to engage in other commercial activities and take on other careers than going in the classroom. According to them the life of a teacher is always poor and that the teacher accomplishes some “richness” only when they make leaders, ministers, etc. The rewards of teaching are not in salary but gained through others’ achievements.
- Females are also afraid of challenges (or so these principals contend). They have developed the preconceived notion that they should always take care of kids and as such their teaching career (if they decided to teach) should be limited to pre-primary and the primary level. They find it very challenging to take on junior or senior secondary level.
- The lack of career counseling at secondary level is also a problem. According to them at senior secondary level students should be encouraged to go in the teaching profession. In some cases they have tried as principals to encourage girls to take up the teaching career but their living standard as teachers or principals does not serve as incentive for the students to take up the career.
- **Centralized higher education system:** Girls completing high school cannot pursue higher education because most of the higher institutions of learning are centralized (in Monrovia). In

<sup>2</sup> As part of the LTTP training program, the first draft of this section was written by Morrison Chelleh and his local team, supplemented by Aberra Makonnen Hailesalassie with particular additions for Montserrado, and organized and edited by Wes Snyder. The field work was managed by Aberra Hailesalassie and Morrison Chelleh. Johnson Odharo provided additional information and recommendations.

some cases, if not Monrovia, they are located in areas far from other counties. Liberia has seven degree granting institutions with five located in Monrovia, one each in the central region and the Far East (Bong and Maryland). Girls completing senior secondary like boys in those counties without a university do have limited options but the girls will find it very difficult to change environment because of the lack of security and the fear of not getting support from their parents. The girls, unlike the boys, find it more challenging to be far away from their parents who barely support them even while they are around. They are very vulnerable once away from home and support does not always continue from parents.

- **The salary structure:** According to them the salary structure at the MoE is one factor that is also discouraging females wanting to go in the teaching profession and it is also causing exodus from the profession. All teachers are given the same salary regardless of their qualification or experience. Women find other opportunities that are more attractive.
- All of the principals expressed interest in having more female teachers. According to them, female teachers are more committed to their jobs than their male colleagues; therefore, having more qualified female teachers will raise the educational standard of Liberia.
- On the issues or problems confronting girls' enrollment, retention, or completion and the decision to join the teaching corps, the principal highlighted the following points:
  - Generally, the issue of teenage pregnancy was highlighted by all the principals. "Girls are becoming mothers overnight." According to them, most parents in the southeastern region hardly send their girls to school. In most cases if a girl is sent to school it would be because of pressure from advocates and other community members and they would probably be at an older age than the boys. This leads to girls being very mature before they complete primary education. Because of the maturity they seem to attract men who impregnate them or abuse them or at least abuse their position to influence them.
  - Girls are more involved with social activities than the boys. They see it as a way of sustaining themselves since their parents cannot afford to keep them in school while the boys will prefer to engage in other unskilled jobs to keep themselves in school. It is quite understandable why these girls do not prefer the unskilled job. The social activities take up most of their time to study and concentrate on their schooling.
  - Girls mostly lagging behind in certain subjects like math and math related subjects and the sciences because they feel that those are subjects for boys and are very challenging. Because of this preconceived notion and their failure to overcome it or help to do so, they feel discouraged to continue. They settle for primary education in so that they can read and write their names and figures.

### Female Teachers

The team interviewed five female teachers, three from Zwedru and two from Fish Town. Of the number interviewed, only one teacher had a C-certificate from the WRTTI Crash Program that was conducted by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). Trainees were trained for six weeks and given the C-certificate. The team would have taken advantage of interviewing more female teachers had they been available but it goes back to the reason of the study. The study gathered from female teachers the following reasons why there are fewer female teachers in the classroom:

- **Lack of Motivation:** According to these female teachers, females are not encouraged by the Ministry of Education to be in education. In most cases the school administrators and colleagues also make life difficult. The male dominance of Liberian society considerably influences the motivation of female teachers or female administrators. According to one of the teachers, she

has been teaching for the past seven years and has never worked along with a female administrator. Meanwhile all the administrators in the public schools visited by the team were males. Females are not motivated to be in schooling because they feel left out of decision making. Female teachers are not given equal opportunities to their male colleagues to serve in positions that will motivate young girls to take up the teaching profession. In addition to that, the views of female teachers are not respected in decision making processes. Female teachers are always perceived by the administrator as weak-minded individuals and therefore should take care of primary level pupils. The Ministry of education is also not gender-sensitive in appointing education officers at the county level.

- **Cultural Factor:** There is also a cultural practice that looks down on women's ability to perform regardless of the level of education acquired. This perception also has an effect on female teachers in the classroom as well as girls. Boys at junior and senior secondary level will bring this bias to the classroom. They overlook female teachers and their female colleagues in class. There is a common saying in the southeastern region of Liberia: "A woman is always a woman no matter what she does; she can't lead and a man is born to lead." According to the female teachers, the election of a female President is helping to change the mindset but it is still a serious challenge.
- As always, the issue of low salary and the lack of incentives is a serious problem. According to teachers, females are usually attracted to profession with attractive salary because of their desires to always look "smart, decent, and or flashy." The teaching profession is considered by the communities as the least paid profession, which is evident by the living standard of the teachers. They do not get paid in time and are underpaid for the services they provide. In some instances, women are asked by their husbands to leave the classroom because it is not worth it.
- **The lack of interest due to the absence of career development programs:** All of the reasons above are major contributors to the lack of interest to go and to stay in the teaching profession but according to female teachers it is more frustrating because of the lack of career development programs by the Ministry of Education. They said having had numerous challenges, going against all odds in their striving to join the ranks of educators. They have realized that upon entering the classroom there are few opportunities for them for career development.
- On the issues confronting girls' enrollment, retention or completion and the decision to join the teaching corps, the principal highlighted the following points: There is a cultural belief that a girl child is the property of another family since she will eventually get married and take up the name of the groom's family. The parents prefer to educate the boy using the money or cattle paid by the groom as bride price and not to waste their resources on supporting a girl whom they consider as part of another family. One of the interviewees said that some of her friends in her village became victims of this practice. According to her, her father decided to send her to his brother in Zwedru City in order to protect her and provide education for her.
- **Early Marriage:** For a very long period the practice of early marriage has been rooted in the southeastern culture. Some parents give their girls to men at a very early age because they believe he will support the family through the daughter. He also may be willing to provide a big rice farm for the parents<sup>3</sup>. Of course, those girls will be turned into mothers by those men and leaving them with no option but to be a housewife.
- **Teenage Pregnancy:** The presumed rate of maturity of a girl is greater than for a boy though they may be of the same age group. Girls in the southeast begin primary education later than

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<sup>3</sup> In some districts in the southeast strength of a man or a father is measured by the size of his rice farm and the quantity of his harvest.

the boys because of the “age-old beliefs” as mentioned previously. If the opportunity is afforded for the girl to go to school, she is already at a mature age and will be under pressure by males (including male teachers and classmates) who will make advances for sexual relationships that will eventually result in pregnancy. Thereby the females drop out of school.

- Some male teachers’ poor classroom management and unprofessional behavior also discourage the female pupils. Some male teachers create an unfriendly learning environment for girls. Girls are sometimes jeered or shamed when asked to respond to question. According to them, the male teachers do these things as an intimidating tactics that pressures the girls to succumb to their sexual advances.

## Montserrat County

### Ministry of Education

An interview with the Assistant Minister for teacher education, who is female, touched upon the problems of female education in general and female teachers in particular.

- **Reasons for fewer female students and female teachers:** The Assistant Minister started her response with a quote of a parent: *“I would have sent my children to school if I had the opportunity to go to school myself.”* Starting with the lack of awareness she continued to list the cultural, economic, and educational reasons for fewer females in the education system. According to her, cultural reasons prevail, like early marriage, teen-age pregnancy, children usually being self-supporting, females being the bread earners for the family contribute to a larger percent of the reasons for the low presence of females in the teaching force and the system as a whole. She said that since the government introduced free and compulsory education at the primary level, schools are now packed and sometimes females are higher in number. In grade 7 the number starts to decline, some because of the fee, but mostly the absence of junior and secondary schools in rural areas. Parents are reluctant to send their female children far away from home due to lack of resources and also security.
- While the above reasons contribute to the low share of enrollment of female students at junior and secondary schools, the Assistant Minister singles out the low pay and lack of benefits for teachers for the low percentage of female teachers at all levels. She added that there is only one female head of a CEO and only 6 female DEOs in the country.
- **Policies affecting female education and female teachers and effects of decentralization:** The policy is girls’ friendly, according to the Assistant Minister. The opening of a girls’ unit in the MOE is an example. There are now grants and scholarships exclusively for girls, according to the Assistant Minister. On decentralization, she believes that decentralization will enable functions and authority to shift from the center to the local level. At the local level, they will have their set priorities. They will have their own budget. They don’t have to come to the Ministry for materials and salary. Before the war, RTTIs were decentralized. They had their own budget, their own food, fuel and resources. It got centralized, according to her, because there was no democratic government. She said that there is a democratic government now, powers will be decentralized. More local involvement will give focus to girls’ education. People will be empowered and will make sure that things are done. She added that if decentralization is successful, equity will be ensured between rural and urban, counties and districts. Capacity will be built at all levels. More junior and secondary schools will be built in an equitable manner, not only in Montserrat.



- **Capacity building programs and incentives for female teachers:** Apart from the RTTI regular program, there is no national program except for partners like Save the Children and Concern, who have remedial programs that will ensure that females succeed in the WAEC and enter to the RTTIs, where LTTP is supporting. There are no incentives for teachers except the new pilot program of providing housing to teacher of science and math, which is expected to cover all teachers in rural and hardship areas gradually.
- **Value and worth of teachers and teaching profession:** She believes that teachers are perceived as valuable in the society. At the President level, teachers are the first to be given appointments for higher government positions. In the classroom, female teachers have an important role to play as teachers and mothers. They are better role models, better in parental care, and focus on advocacy for student rights. They are also a moderating factor for erratic and impatient male teachers.

### Head of Girls' Education Unit, MoE

- **Reasons for fewer female students and female teachers:** The head of the girls' education unit in the Ministry shares the reasons given by all respondents: poor incentives, low salary, and difficult working environments. She added that when girls reach grade 6 they become mothers. Teen-age pregnancy is dominant. She indicated that most people left teaching due to the war. Teaching was hectic for females so they left for social work. One reason, according to her, that has contributed to low female number in the RTTIs is they have not been encouraged enough during recruitment and she offered the support of her unit in building awareness through various means of publicity work.
- **Policies affecting female education and female teachers and effects of decentralization:** She said that the national policy on girls' education, which came out recently, has many provisions to help females' access and success in school. The girls' education unit, based on the policy, started a pilot program called *Special Girls Education Initiative*, which included evening classes and Adult Learner integrated programs. She added that female issues are not well streamlined within the system.
- On decentralization, her understanding is that decentralization can only be effective if it is monitored. The lack of females in the system remains a national issue.
- **Value and worth of teachers and teaching profession:** She doesn't think teachers are valued by the society while teaching as profession is. The reason again is related to their low salary, which forces them to live a relatively impoverished life style. Teachers now augment their income by begging for handouts from the community in the form of rice, etc. This has led to lack of role models for female students, and has denigrated the general status of teaching.

### County and District Education Offices

- **Reasons for fewer female students and female teachers:** The team got a chance to discuss the issues of female teachers with the two female CEO and DEO heads together. They tend to share the cultural and economic factors mentioned by the Assistant Minister above. They added that after secondary school, females tend to be with their children. In adolescence, they pay attention to material things other than their education. A good number of our female students, they said, are self-supporting. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and absence of support and encouragement all contribute to the small presence of females in the teaching profession. The school environment is not generally conducive and female-friendly for them to stay in school and continue.

- **Policies affecting female education and female teachers and effects of decentralization:** They thought the policies are enough. Implementation is the problem. On decentralization, they indicated that if what they are hearing is real, it will bring more females into the system, equity in salary, improved living conditions and housing. There will be more information and transparency. More people at lower level will participate in decision making. Employment will increase. People will be empowered.
- **Capacity building programs and incentives for female teachers:** There are no programs run by government except what partner NGOs do. There are no incentives for teachers except their salary, which is usually delayed as indicated by everybody in the two schools visited although the CEO doesn't think salary is delayed.
- **Value and worth of teachers and teaching profession:** Some are valued and some are not because of their behavior. Teaching as a profession is valued. However, parents don't want their children to be teachers because of the low pay. A teacher will always remain poor.
- **Females compared to male teachers and problems faced by female students and teachers:** According to the head of the County Education Office, females are more committed than males, a position which is also shared by respondents in the schools. Females are more serious in their work. On the challenges side, female teachers are not encouraged. They have little say on most decisions in school. Males dominate. There is generally low respect for females. Female students see few role models. Teachers prefer to ask male students more to present in class.

## Principals

Two principals, one female and one male were interviewed. It is noteworthy to begin with a quote from the female principal: *“Teaching is not who wants to work but who is working.”*

- **Reasons for fewer female students and female teachers:** Both principals agree on the cultural and economic factors for low participation of females in teaching. Teen-age pregnancy is considered as the main contributor to dropping out. The female Principal indicated that she had five girls dropping out already this year. Female children usually serve as the main care givers and bread earners for the entire family, affecting their chance to stay and success in school. All these factors ultimately contribute to fewer female teachers in schools.
- Both principals indicated that no proper care and love is given to females. Parents don't have the knowledge and skills to guide their children. Most parents are illiterate. Nobody tells them that they are valuable; nobody encourages them to stay in school even if they are pregnant or have children. Most girls are self-supporting and they count the money and get stuck with it.
- They did disagree on how they perceive female teachers. The female principal believes that female teachers are equally capable of teaching and handling students. The male principal indicated that female teachers usually prefer to teach at the primary level where the students are more manageable. His reason for this conclusion is the fact that 10 – 15 female teachers left teaching from school. He added that student delinquency is a serious problem and he attributes it to the effect of the civil war. He thinks that the proportion of female teachers was much better before the war. His assertion of delinquency was later corroborated by the female

A 12-year old looks sick, taken to a clinic for a check-up and found pregnant. A grandfather in bed and a mother out to make a living have not been helpful for the child. The grandfather laments: “I tell her to stay at home at night but she runs around and now she is pregnant”. Female children especially lack proper care and are exposed to the dangers around them because they have to earn a living to support the family.

teachers and students interviewed. In fact, they acknowledge that enough awareness building and conflict resolution programs were not implemented after the civil war.

- According to the female principal, male teachers are more qualified and stronger than female teachers. However, since work ethics have not been enforced for years, the females tend to be more committed to their job. The male principal, on the other hand, gave the pre-war picture by asserting that females in the sciences were equally strong to males. He added that even students used to fear and respect the female teachers because they were not compromising. After the war, they left teaching at the secondary level because they couldn't handle the unruly students.
- Girls usually prefer to study home economics, catering, and business. They go for areas where they get quick money. Government in general doesn't pay much. Teaching doesn't pay much. A secondary school teacher gets 5,700LD or US\$80. That is why teachers get corrupt and exchange exam papers for money.
- The challenges in the classroom are equally formidable. There are too many children in the classroom, which creates a problem to manage. Handling students at secondary level has now become a national crisis. Counseling and other means are necessary. The necessary counseling within the society that is critical in a post-conflict situation has not been done and the effect is visible among the young because most have lost a parent or two.
- **What needs to be done?** Both principals discussed in-school and out-of-school factors extensively. They indicated that schools need to be funded adequately so that the environment is more attractive to girls. Foundation should be good. Girls travel far to attend school. Food attracts attendance. Many come without breakfast. Schools, especially for girls, need better medical services.
- Parents need to be educated and be aware of benefits of girls' education. Child and education laws that ensure children's attendance in school need to be enforced. "Primary education is compulsory but are we enforcing it?" The female principal asked this question. Children come to school but teachers are not there. There is no water, no chalk, no books, and no desk. The curriculum needs to be reviewed. It should be geared to building leaders, help develop self-esteem, respect, love of country and history.
- Females need to be empowered. They need to know that females can also do other tasks. They need better salary, training, and teacher exchange programs. Female teachers have to be encouraged and provided with incentives because they have a double responsibility of taking care of the family and pursuing a profession. Teaching is now called a 'non-thank you job'. This perception has to change to make progress, according to these respondents.
- **Policies affecting female education and female teachers and effects of decentralization:** Although they acknowledged the existence of the policies affecting females, they were not able to clearly describe them. Nevertheless, the main constraint was considered to be the implementation of the policies. One of the principals pointed out that although procedures for the selection of teachers for further training was clear, the authorities ended up selecting individuals based on criteria other than merit and performance. There is no fair play, according to him.
- The female principal is aware of the decentralization drive of the Ministry and she believes decentralization would bring more accountability and transparency. She said CEOs and DEOs never visit them and decentralization probably will force them to. She also thinks that decentralization would help in getting more female teachers because decentralization will help females to be heard and that they will not be cheated. She pointed out her case as example of the current state of affairs to strengthen her argument for decentralization. She said that

education is supposed to be free and fair but her school has not received a grant for six semesters and that it has no means of income to run the school. She said decentralization would help to be heard since there will be more involvement from below.

- The principal of William V. S. Tubman secondary school indicated that he is already exposed to a certain degree of decentralization since his school is under MCSS, where parents are represented. According to him, decentralization increases peoples' involvement and transparency. All will be part of the solution. You could have scholarship programs, facilities will be available, and above all the challenges and opportunities will be shared by all.
- **Capacity building programs and incentives for female teachers:** There were two workshops given to teachers at William V. S. Tubman secondary school during the year, leadership training by Youth Leadership Program of New York and Accelerated Learning Program by CESLY. There was no support by the Ministry or the county office. For public schools, there are no programs. They usually get training at the beginning of the school year by development partners. Oxfam gave them training on teaching methodology, lesson planning but no focus on females.
- On other incentives, both principals indicated that there are no benefits other than salary, which is very low and is paid after long delays. They added that the extremely low salary is the reason why teachers are not committed to teaching and that they spend their work hours looking for other sources of income.

### Female Students and Focus Groups

- **Career Choice:** There were five female students in the focus group discussion of seven students at Elizabeth Tubman Memorial Institute. Most have parents that either attended or graduated from secondary schools. None of them wanted definitely to be a teacher. Three wanted to be either a doctor or a nurse, one a journalist, and another, a lawyer. The reasons they gave revolve around the need to support the weak in the society. The doctors wanted to save lives, the journalist to get news to the poor in the rural areas, and the lawyer to help the less fortunate. Only one out the seven has interest in the teaching profession, but indirectly. One of the girls' fathers is a teacher and she values teaching but still she does not want to be a teacher. They didn't want to be teachers because their experience has been that teachers have not been respected in class, that students are abusive, use profane language, and pressure their teachers to pass them. Generally, they are afraid of handling the type of students that are in the secondary schools.
- There were seven girls in the discussion at William V. S. Tubman. Three wanted to be nurses, another three accountants, and a seventh one, computer analyst. For most of them, their fathers influenced them. The aspiring accountants mentioned that they wanted to get quick money. One of the girls, who is originally from Nigeria, said if I were in Nigeria I would have chosen teaching as a profession because they pay well there and on time. So, the issue of low pay and long delay in payment is an underlying reason here as well why they don't want to be teachers. Some of the discussants also mentioned that students are aggressive to teachers.



Students at the W.V.S Tubman High School during the focus group discussion

- There are in-school and out-of-school factors influencing female students form their perceptions about the teaching profession. As indicated before, they value the teaching profession but would only be comfortable to be a teacher if there were no delay in payment and if the payment were better. The reason given is not based on the intrinsic value of the profession.
- **Understanding and valuing teaching profession and the Teacher:** The female students were very prescriptive in describing who the good teacher is. They said a good teacher is one who knows his/her subject matter; has good method of teaching, doesn't accept bribes, comes to class regularly and encourages students to succeed. It is interesting to note here that some of these qualities of a good teacher are taken for granted in some other societies, like taking a bribe is unthinkable in some societies and coming to class regularly is taken for granted. Another group of female students consider patience, managing class well, ability to talk to students, use of interactive methods, being supportive of students, good lesson planning, lesson presentation, and dressing properly as the duties and responsibilities of a good teacher. Here, they mixed up the duties and responsibilities of the profession with the teacher's personality and communication skill. All discussants, although none wanted to be a teacher, value the profession. They acknowledge that it is the teaching profession that produced the doctors, the nurses, the accountants, and the lawyers they all aspire to be. Concerning the perception of their parents and the general community, the teaching profession is highly valued. Unfortunately, none of their parents want them to be teachers.
- **The teacher as a Role Model:** Most indicated that about one in ten are found to be good or considered to be role models. One student described her math teachers as her role model. She said he presented his lessons very well, checks everybody's homework, makes sure everybody understands, and regularly gives class work. Another student said she had a role model, her physics teacher. She said she liked the way she taught, moved around the class and talked with and encouraged them all. One mentioned her phonetics teacher, who moves around energizing them, encouraging them, used teaching aids, and motivated them with rewards.
- **Challenges of females:** Females have many challenges, according to the female students. Peer pressure comes out first. They look at their peers who succeeded in getting money and leading a lavish life and they drop out of schools in search of easy and fast money. Teen-age pregnancy then follows but they are inter-connected. All these, according to them, are caused because of lack of parental support and guidance, with quite a few having no parents. They also added that male teachers and boys look down upon them, which they found very discouraging. They also said that teachers and their male peers seek sexual favors, which greatly affects their schooling. Most are self-supporting, including selling oneself. When girls reach grade six, they feel they are big and mature and expose themselves to early pregnancy and other ills. Parents also neglect female children and shoulder them with heavy responsibility beyond their age. Females want more material things, and when that is not fulfilled, the dropout and go astray. There is also great parental influence and pressure on females to be a source of income.
- **What needs to be done:** The female students provided a few creative ideas. The most common recommendations are: increase teachers' salary, provide living quarters, pay on time, create awareness on teen-age pregnancy, encourage girls to continue schools through various female-support programs. The most creative suggestion was for the community to take the initiative and campaign to bring street-girls to school. They further added that school fees at secondary level should be abolished, especially for girls because it is probably the single one step which could bring more girls to school.

- The other substantial recommendation is the support that needs to be given to female teachers starting from the training to the place of work. They suggested counseling to teachers, especially to female teachers, is critical.

### Female Teachers

- **Reasons why there are fewer female students and female teachers:** Low pay is considered as the main reason but, they added, it is also common for males. Other reasons include: the inability to travel far out of their birth place since they are the care takers for their children; fear of handling bigger students and preferring to work at primary level, and lack of opportunities to improve themselves and as a result tending to concentrate on C -Certificate only. They also said that they don't have the capacity to compete with their male counterparts. Females tend to follow their peers. Early marriage, teen-age pregnancy, and the urge for fast money are also reasons. One of the female teachers out of the three in the group discussion mentioned she is the only one who went to school out of 12 siblings. Her aunt, who lives in Monrovia, brought her up and that gave her a chance for schooling.
- The school environment is not conducive, especially to girls. Poor school management has also discouraged female teachers to leave the profession. Female teachers have not been good role models.
- Peoples' perception that females are weak and incapable of teaching is a serious challenge. As a result, female teachers lose confidence in themselves. The male counterparts look down upon females. Parents think the place of a woman is at home raising children. As they reach puberty, usually around 15, they are given in marriage or get pregnant. The society believes that females will not respect their husbands or take orders if they are highly educated.
- **Motivation to be a teacher:** The three female teachers, who were the group discussants, gave different reasons. One said that she wanted to become a nurse, a favorite occupation, but didn't have the tuition to pay. The second one indicated that she was motivated by a teacher, who was her role model. The last teacher said that teaching was the only job available for her at the time as a refugee.
- **Challenges:** The teachers agreed that the toughest challenge for them has been the changes in principals, the fourth in three years. The next is overcrowded classrooms that created difficulty in managing the students. The last one is that the school does not have even the basic resources needed for teaching and learning, including textbooks.
- There is no career ladder and any incentive or professional growth possibility and it has a negative impact on their motivation, commitment and effectiveness as teachers. They think the administration discriminate against the female teachers.
- **Values:** The teachers said that both students and their male counterparts respect them. They added that student value you if you have interest in them. Parents appreciate and value their work. Community does value their work.

### Parents

Two parents, both mothers, shared their ideas with the study team. Their children's ages range from 13 to the twenties. Both indicated that teachers are important, one describing teachers as foundation for children's education and the other indicating that teachers go the extra mile to provide service, but are not paid enough for a decent life, adding that the only way they can get their worth is if they open their own school. When females reach puberty, they think differently. They expose themselves to early marriage and pregnancy. As a young mother, you have to pass through a lot of sacrifices. Your children

see you with different men and follow your foot-steps. It is difficult for single parents to stay and continue at school.

Both parents said that they don't want their children to be teachers because of the hard work and the low salary. Female teachers specially are in a difficult situation as they have to also work at home. On the other hand, they prefer their children to be doctors, nurses, governors, and presidents. They said such professions have respect of the community, they pay better, and they always look good while teachers don't.

A teacher feeding from her students' lunch boxes: A parent eye-witness told a story where a female teacher took a portion from each of her students' lunch box. The teacher told her students that she has not eaten for a long time and she was starving.

The parents believe that the provision of incentives like transport allowance, medical coverage, and living quarters besides increase of salary will go a long way to attract more to the teaching profession. An interesting suggestion was to provide uniforms to teachers so that they would look decent.

### Margibi, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties

The study shows that the fewer presence of females in the basic education system can be attributed to several factors including culture, social, economic, academic, amongst others.

#### Cultural Factors

Liberia has many cultural values and practices and to a great extent these values affect the education system. These practices continue to be more disadvantageous for females' education than for males. Many of the traditional influences of the inland areas are the most debilitating to female professional development. Some of the practices are:

- Sande Society<sup>4</sup>:** The Sande Society is a cultural practice that provides informal education for females. Young girls are taken to "hole-up" and taught the traditional values of a good house wife within the Liberian context: (1) they are not to speak in the presence of man because they are servants, (2) they should give men absolute respect and accept their decisions, and (3) they are absolutely responsible for domestic duties, etc. Most young girls graduating from such cultural institutes do not consider formal education as an option because they are prepared in the context to take up the responsibilities of a house wife. They are told that the success of a woman is through the success of her husband and that the ultimate responsibility of any woman is to be a house wife. This practice in the past would immerse a young girl in up to 3 years of studying these cultural values. At present, it takes three to four months because of the level of advocacy and indoctrination, but they are still taught the same lessons. In other rural areas young girls are taken out of schools to the "hole-ups" during the academic calendar year. Upon return they are distracted or disinterested in continuing

*"I told them to stop destroying the children's future but they see me like a bad man. I told them that all the money you are spending on the feast can be given to parents who do not have money to send their children to school." Words of an elderly man.*

<sup>4</sup> It is a cultural practice for women in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. A Dutch Geographer, Olfert Dapper published a description of the "Sandy" society as it existed in the Cape Mount region of Liberia, based on a first-hand account that dates approximately from 1628.

education. The determined few that return to school and complete secondary education might find it difficult to take up the teaching profession for fear of being in violation of the tradition that forbids women from speaking in the presence of men. Females tend to prefer to teach at the primary level to interact with the younger children rather than face secondary level boys and girls who have had similar orientation.

During the study, the team visited one community that was celebrating the feast of their traditional heritage. The feast had lasted six days prior to the team's visit. During the celebration, young girls were taken into a room only identified as "Zoe Bush" and expected to stay for the entire period of the feast (1 week). They were kept in the room for initiation to serve as female traditional leaders. As such they were not to leave the community as they can be called upon at any time to perform traditional ceremonies. This practice stops females that are selected from pursuing secondary education after completion of primary education (there is only one school in the community and it is a primary school). According to one of the elderly men in the community, who opposes this practice, the feast is held annually. They spent thousands of dollars in trying to honor the ceremony. The team talked to the teachers and administrators of the only community school about the community support to the school. They said the community has been of no help to the school.

- **Early Marriage<sup>5</sup>:** Females that are desirous of becoming teachers have to complete secondary education as a criterion for enrollment into the RTTIs or Teacher Colleges. The issue of early marriage is one major cultural factor that prevents girls from completing secondary education. They are given to men who have paid their bride price before they are matured. These men at times underwrite the cost of the girls to stay in the Sande Society or Bush School, which is very expensive, but this practice also keeps them out of formal schooling. The parents have to keep their promise by giving their daughters to men who have supported them for fear of being sanctioned by the community. It is believed that this practice is fading away due to social exposure and experiences gained from rural to urban migration, but it is still rooted in many parts of Liberia.
- **Traditional/Cultural Belief:** Females are also not sent to school, for example in the southeast, because they are considered as property of another family, the husband's family. As such their parents are not willing to send them to school because it is considered as a waste of resources. They do not want to support the prosperity of another family; therefore, the girls should work to support their brothers in school before they go off to another family. According to some of the interviewees, this practice is also fading away due to the campaign by human rights groups on "girl child education," but others are saying it is still being practiced in some rural areas. With this practice being dated back into the Liberian history, it is evident that this has contributed largely to the lower representation of females not only in the educational sector but in every sector of the Liberian society.

### Economic/Financial Factors

Liberia, like many other war-affected countries, is grappling with the difficulty of restoring the economy to pre-war status and customizing it to the current global economic reality. The demand for attention is

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<sup>5</sup> Note. Early marriage is one of the major contributors to females not completing secondary education prior to the civil war. These cultural constraints are part of Liberian history, and they still pose pressure on female education.



high in every sector, especially the education sector, to maintain academic standards and create a fertile intellectual environment. Female teachers like their male colleagues are the custodians of the Liberia basic education system but there are very few women in the profession for the following economic reason:

- **Low Salary:** The issue of low salary is believed to be one of the major contributing economic factors that is discouraging females who are completing secondary education from going into the teaching profession. It is also contributing to the high attrition rate. Teachers in the public-school system are paid according to category. The various categories are based on the qualification and in some cases experience. For instance, a C-certificate teacher, who is only qualified to teach primary education, receives \$5,800 Liberian Dollars, which is equivalent to the minimum wage of a civil servant (US\$80.00) who is unskilled. A B-Certificate teacher would make 6000LD to 7000LD, which is still a very low salary. Many eligible females have refused to consider the profession as an option in their quest for financial gain. Meanwhile, prior to the civil war the salary of a teacher was relatively sufficient to sustain a family but current salary levels, particularly considering the global economic conditions, cannot sustain a family.
- **Lack of Financial Incentive:** The lack of financial incentive to complement the already low salary is also discouraging females from taking up the profession. They would prefer to be in the health sector, which is more attractive than the educational sector and higher prestige, or get involved in other commercial activities that generate more income.
- **Living Standard:** The cost of living is high, even in the rural areas, and a teacher who makes 5800LD will find it difficult to meet her basic needs. If the cost of a bag of rice is at least US\$30 and the teacher will have to keep her own children in school, transport to work and at the same time put food on the table for her family, it is clear that the salary is small. In the rural areas teachers undergo strenuous conditions in order to get their salary. Some have to travel over 100 Kilometers to get to the nearest bank or pay center, spending about 3000LD for round trip. The teacher is left with 2800LD to cater for other needs. In the case of a pregnant female teacher who is expected to cover a similar distance, she would prefer to stay home for fear of her condition. She will not get her salary until the pregnancy is over. The pay team does not pay the check to any other person. The unfortunate thing is she may not see that check by the time she is available to collect it.
- **Unemployment:** Some parents do not support their girl children because of the lack of family finance and the lack of employment opportunities or reliable source of income for their own support. Besides, in Liberia, like other African countries, the support for the extended family is culturally embedded. Prior to the war, relatives of young girls and boys residing in urban areas who were employed, provided support for them in the rural areas and in most cases encouraged them to relocate to the city where they could acquire quality education. But the high rate of unemployment at this time clearly affects the financial support available and unfortunately, young girls and boys are self-supported.

The female students are aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by their teachers for salaries that are considered insufficient and not paid on time. They feel pursuing such career would definitely subject them to a low living standard. The question is “why are there more men amid all these conditions?” Most female teachers are concentrated in the primary level and are given self-contained assignments. They do not have the time to commute between schools to teach. The male teachers are often given

rotational assignments, and therefore have the opportunity to teach at more than one school. They can accrue larger salaries accordingly.

Ironically, all the administrator interviewees said male teachers are more corrupt than females. They would always extort money from students in exchange for passing scores unlike females. They also said female teachers are very committed than their male colleagues. “They respect the teaching ethic and are always punctual” (the words of the principal of Robertsport High School).

### Social Factors

The social factors that account for the lower presence of female teachers in the basic educational system is directly linked to the failure of females to complete secondary education. Meanwhile, in most cases, there are direct links between the economic and social factors.

- **Teenage Pregnancy<sup>6</sup>:** Teenage pregnancy is a very serious contributing factor to girls not completing secondary education. All the interviewees, including female students, mentioned teenage pregnancy has a serious problem. Girls between the ages of 15-19 (active school-going ages) dropped out of school due to pregnancy, which is caused either because of ignorance, poverty, peer pressure, etc. Most of them are abandoned by those who impregnate them. They are left with the burden of supporting themselves and the young ones, thus not affording them the time to continue their education. The issue of teenage pregnancy is an issue of national concern. Liberia is rated third amongst the top ten countries in South Saharan Africa.
- **Fear of Break-up in Relationships:** The trainees at the RTTIs and their administrators pointed out the fear of difficulties in relationships to the lack of interest by females to enroll at the RTTIs. The female trainees feel being away from their spouses for up to 9 months would put them at risk of losing their relationships. On the other hand males also discourage their spouses out of fear of losing them to another man. In the case of males who are not educated, the fear would be that the spouse will no longer be the one he used to live with because she will have acquired education at a higher level and will put up a challenge for him in decision making.
- **Domestic Pressure:** Teaching is a profession that requires a good work habit, skills and time. A good teacher will need extra time for preparation, research and catching-up with current developments/issues. Females come under serious pressure from their spouses to take care of domestic responsibilities which in most instances conflict with their professional duties. According to some of the interviewees, a female teacher in the rural area is likely to fall out with her spouse because men in the rural areas are more demanding. The Liberian society gives greater burden of domestic work to females, again, with the mindset that their male companions are the lead bread winners and that any support from a female is secondary.
- **Community perceptions and value for teachers:** The communities visited expressed value for the profession and consider teachers as academicians, knowledgeable and as those that help to teach and empower their children. They consider them as “king makers but are never kings.” Unfortunately, these community members who are parents do not want their children to be teachers. In an option of five, the least choice is a teacher. According to them, the profession is for people who want to be poor. ‘If you want to be poor for life, you can take up the teaching

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<sup>6</sup> Liberia has an alarming high rate of teenage pregnancy. It’s estimated that on average 3 in 10 Liberian girls are pregnant before the age of 18. The rate of pregnancy among adolescent girls aged 15-19 in rural areas is almost double that in urban areas – 42% and 24% respectively. ( Save the Children Teenage Pregnancy Survey Report 2010)

profession.” They also blame teachers as corrupt individuals because they exploit students (mainly the male teachers). One community member said he feels insecure every time a male teacher comes around his daughter. The perception of community members or parents creates a negative image of the profession to females who always want to be associated with success and dignity.

### Working Conditions

Generally, the working conditions of teachers in Liberia are poor but more deplorable in the rural areas. Teachers in the rural areas are facing difficult working conditions that provide a huge sense of insecurity and lack of interest.

- **Lack of Housing Facilities:**<sup>7</sup> The study shows that the lack of housing facilities is one contributing factor that contributes to disinterest for the profession by females. They normally feel insecure and vulnerable to take up assignments in rural areas for fear of being harassed.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the District Education Officer of Yarwin-Mensonneh made a specific reference to one of her female teachers who was sexually harassed on one occasion because she had to commute between her town of residence and another town where she was assigned. She covered 10 km every morning to teach and return to her town of residence after work. Prior to the incident, the DEO said she had asked the community to provide an accommodation for the female teacher but they refused. She pleaded with them on grounds that she wanted their children to have access to a female teacher but to no avail. In some cases, female teachers prefer to take along their families to area of assignment for fear of breaking up due to distance; therefore, the lack of housing makes it difficult for them to resettle.
- **Medical Package:** The Ministry of Education has a medical insurance package for teachers but it is centralized. The medical facilities identified by the insurance company to provide services are only located in Montserrado. Teachers in the rural areas are not aware of this policy and of course have no access to authorized medical offices. All of the teachers interviewed said they did not have any knowledge of a medical package. Only the CEO and DEO of Nimba and Zorzor District knew about the possibility. The teachers use their already insufficient salary to provide health care for their families.
- **Payment Process:** Teachers in the rural areas are subjected to strenuous conditions securing their payment. Teachers will have to travel long distances (sometimes up to 100 km) to get to the payment center and spend at least a week before they are paid. In most cases they will have to spend most of the salary on accommodation and transportation. The long stay away from school also affects the students and could account in large measure to the massive failure during the academic year and the public exams. Teachers might not complete the curriculum because the long stay away cuts the instructional week and the opportunity to learn.

<sup>7</sup> Just to note that Mardina in Grand Cape Mount County is the only community visited by the team with housing facilities for teachers teaching at the Mardina Elementary and Junior High School. The facilities were built by the community.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Ministry of Education 2008/2009 census more than 50% of the female teachers are concentrated in Montserrado.

- **Unfriendly Working Environment:** The study gathered that females in some institutions suffer gender bias from their male colleagues. They create an unfriendly environment for the females. They feel that their female colleagues are less academically able even if they have the same qualification, only because they are females. At institutions where they are serving as administrators they do not get the full cooperation from the male teachers. This is believed to be tied-in with their cultural beliefs to some extent.

Female teachers also complained of not being given the opportunity to serve at higher levels by school administrators. They are always overlooked by administrators and are placed in the primary education level automatically, even though their male colleagues with the same qualification are given the opportunity to teach at secondary level.

- **Prolonged Recruitment Process of Teachers:** “The recruitment of teachers by the Ministry of Education is a nightmare,” in the words of a principal at one of the schools visited. Most of the teachers interviewed expressed frustration over the delay in the recruitment of teachers who have graduated from the RTTIs and then the inclusion of those recruited teachers on the Ministry payroll. Most of them complained of having worked for six to seven months without pay because they had not been placed on the payroll. This was confirmed by the CEOs and DEOs interviewed. A female teacher is highly likely to quit the classroom under these poor conditions of service in pursuit of another engagement or other economic activities to take care of her needs.
- **Lack of Career Development Programs and Career Motivation:** Career development is very important in the life of every professional. It motivates the individual and creates a sense of responsibility and enhances productivity. The quality of the process significantly determines the nature and quality of individuals’ lives. Career development, though may be considered personal, but it is for the good of the public, who benefits from the services provided by individuals. The lack of career development programs for teachers discourages teachers who want to improve their capacity to contribute professionally, socially and economically to their institutions and communities. Meanwhile, not only is this having effect on teachers’ retention but it scares young people that are expected to join the profession. The teachers and administrators interviewed said there is no career development program for teachers by the Ministry of Education besides what is normally offered by LTTP and other NGOs. According to them these NGOs programs do not cover all the teachers in the basic education system and it is limited. It does not include all the aspect of career development.
- **Lack of Transportation Allowance:** According to the teachers and students the lack of vehicle for transportation or transportation allowance also de-motivates teachers. Teachers are using their already insufficient salary to transport themselves to school unlike other civil servants who are given transportation allowances or bus services.

## Academics

- Generally, it was highlighted by more than 80% of the interviewees that females do have special academic limitations that scare most of them away from the profession. They have very low capacity in Mathematics and the Sciences but are comfortable with Language Arts and Social Studies. They see the profession as one that requires adequate knowledge in every aspect of

academia. Most of those who brave the storm would prefer to teach at primary level for fear of being laughed at by students who are in junior secondary and senior secondary.

The lack of confidence to take up the challenge at the secondary level also answers the question why there are more female teachers in the pre-primary and primary level.

- **Lack of Academic Standard:** The lack of academic standards in the Liberian Education System couple with corrupt teaching practices is producing “half-baked high school graduates”. According to the Dean at the KRTTI this can account for the massive failure of females in the RTTIs’ entrance exam. “They do not have the foundation from high school.” Teachers compromised their profession for money and extra social activities with female students. They give them high scores that they do not deserve. Most females are graduating from secondary education with inadequate knowledge to become teachers. This is a clear manifestation of the lack of standard.

## Religion

Religion in its totality may not be a major factor as compared to the others, but it has had its own negative impact on female education in Liberia. For example, some interviewees made specific reference to scriptures in their religious books that forbid fornication and that it brings shame and disgrace to the family of a girl that will be involved with such lewdness. Parents will rather give their daughters’ hand in marriage once “appear mature” at ages 15-18 than to be ashamed or disgraced. This may appear to be fading away but is deeply rooted in some communities that are predominantly Muslim. Interviewees did not expand more on this for fear of being bias.

Religion is not easily discussed openly in terms of negative influences. The Muslim areas of Liberia do present deep challenges to the encouragement of female participation in education. Interestingly, the general attitudes about female inferiority seem to weigh more heavily and religion only supports the existing ideas. Enlistment of religious leaders in improving attitudes may help, but the real change incentive seems to rest in economic conditions. Participation would then wear down the social and cultural barriers, as they have according to some.

## RTTI’s ( Specific issues)

The RTTIs mentioned the need to include media education, agriculture and home economics in the curriculum at the RTTIs. They believed these will enhance the capacity of the trainees since they will be assigned in rural communities where they will probably be engaged in agricultural activities and the making of teaching aids using skills acquired from the training at the RTTIs.

Meanwhile, the administrators said the practice teaching is very important because it is a form of orientation. It is intended to give trainees a hand-on experience of what is expected in the classroom after graduation. It is also used to evaluate the trainees on what was taught during training sessions. Students are on a daily basis monitored by their trainers. The practice teaching is good but the administrators feel that the time allocated is more than adequate (16 weeks). They would prefer the number of weeks be reduced and reallocated to the subject content.

According to them the trainees are making significant impact in the communities they are performing their practice teaching. They always got positive feedbacks from the communities. Meanwhile, the introduction of participatory teaching technique is greatly contributing to the high attendance rate in

schools within the communities where the trainees are assigned. These communities are beginning to appreciate the RTTIs, thus giving the profession some prestige.

Meanwhile, the trainees highlighted, along with other issues mentioned above, the processes and unnecessary bottlenecks normally created by those registering the applicants for the RTTIs' entrance exams in their various districts. According to them, these bottle necks are scaring females away. They make unnecessary demands just to have your name on the application list.

### Decentralization

Most of the interviewees besides the students and trainees at the RTTIs admitted that they are aware of the Ministry of Education Decentralization Plan but are apprehensive. They believe for the decentralization to work, there should be vigorous monitoring system in place. They have seen other good plans and policies but the implementation has been the problem. They all agreed that it will help the education system because counties will be deciding for themselves what is needed and what can be done to improve their respective systems. Teachers will be recruited locally and their welfare will be managed at the local levels. The process will also save teachers and county administrators from the bureaucracy at the Central Ministry.

*"This country is noted for making good plans but the implementations never work."*  
These are the words of one of the DEOs.

### General Recommendations

Based on this information, recommendations and areas of further study are identified to further illuminate the conditions surrounding both the current absence of large numbers of female teachers (proportionately) and the policies and strategies that might change the situation in the future to provide a balanced work force in Liberian education. This initial report will provide some ideas for policies and strategies. Further consultations and deliberations will develop them, implement them, and review their efficacy.

Many contend that there are enough policies and implementation is the issue. There appears to be justification in the notion of improving implementation of what does exist first. Throughout the discussions, the delays in pay, the inadequacies of safe conditions, facilities, and resources dominate the list of influences that are barriers to female participation in education careers. Also, fair management practices in the schools and fair promotion and opportunities for professional development all seem reasonable expectations. Additional policies have little chance of offering much hope unless these basic system changes are fully in place. The problem with most of the Liberian system is that the basic features of a quality education program just are not happening. Teachers are off chasing salary checks, supervision and leadership in the schools is lacking, little resources or training actually reaches teachers, and the basic post-war conditions of over-aged students and poor disciplinary support limit the time and quality of any opportunities to learn. There are few normal practices in place to provide a learning ecology. Extra incentives are proposed in the new Education Act. But unless the normal conditions are guaranteed, the extra incentives will not be delivered or fall prey to the same delays and difficulties of the regular expectations. Schooling is not happening as it should. Attracting females requires a working system. With the chaos of the post-war period and the general economic conditions, change is easily achieved if it proves effective on the ground and in the communities. Female teachers would be

accepted, as they have been in the past, and their existence would help begin the process of other changes to improve their position and conditions.

The interviewees made several recommendations that would help to address the issues and barriers that are contributing to the lower representation of females in the basic education system of Liberia. These underline the inadequacy of the system. Overall, these recommendations are expected to answer the question of what needs to be done to have equitable representation of females as their male colleagues in the teaching corps. There was no attempt to over-interpret their comments and recommendations so they are presented within the context of the current reforms, but not linked to theoretical propositions. The recommendations are intended to be practical policy or strategic considerations. It remains the case, however, that unless the ordinary conditions for schooling are regularly in place and can be guaranteed, then both women and men, who choose teaching, will suffer unjustly and in turn, not be part of an effective schooling program.

- **Create an attractive salary structure and incentive for teachers:** The issue of low salary and the lack of incentives are the “jingle” that is being sung by every teacher. Every teacher or administrator would first mention these two as primary. They believed if there is a well-structured system and an attractive salary scheme for teachers and or incentives are provided, more females will take up the teaching profession, as they are currently trooping to the nursing profession.
- **Improve working conditions of teachers:** The availability of health benefits, housing facilities, fringe benefits, a more decentralization and organized way of paying teachers, etc. will motivate more female teachers and will also encourage others to join the profession.
- **Decentralization of public higher institutions of learning:** It is a fact that most of the higher institutions of learning are concentrated in Monrovia or a few other communities. There are seven (7) degree granting universities in Liberia (5 in Montserrado and 2 outside of Montserrado). Two of the seven universities are public universities (University of Liberia and Tubman University) and are located at the extreme ends of the country, Monrovia and Harper respectively. The only university that is located in the central region, Cuttington, is private and practically non-affordable for the locals within that region. Therefore, a decentralized higher education system that would include community colleges (providing degree in education) would help to attract more females to the teaching profession. Because of the lack of higher education institutions in the counties, boys and girls who have completed secondary education do not have any form of peer pressure that would serve as a catalyst for advance. Their colleagues who may have completed are not advancing anyways.
- **Awareness and sensitization campaigns on girls’ education vis-à-vis teacher education:** The interviewees highlighted the issue of a vigorous awareness and sensitization campaigns to educate parents and girls on the importance of girls’ education. The MoE should develop a well-designed strategy that would concentrate at the community level basically to change the negative mindset towards female education that has loomed the Liberian Society.
- **Provide incentives/scholarship programs for females at secondary level:** The provision of scholarships and incentives for females in secondary education wanting to become teachers will also attract more females. Note, this will also be alleviating some of the financial burdens most girls are faced with in their pursuit of a secondary education. One of the female students said “The Government should sign a contract with the parents or guardians of those girls who will receive the scholarship. The contract should compel them to serve upon graduation.”

- **Career guidance and counseling programs at schools:** The need for career guidance and counseling in secondary education was consistently mentioned by the interviewees. It is expected that if career guidance and counseling was provided in secondary education emphasizing the importance of having a female teacher in Liberia's basic education system, females would feel valued and be more interested to become a teacher. They will see it as a national call to serve and will take pride in serving.
- **Improve the registration process, dissemination of information regarding the entrance exams and the activities at the RTTIs:** Adequate dissemination of information regarding the entrance exams and activities at the RTTIs will encourage more females to enroll. According to some of the female trainees, most of the DEOs conceal information and create unnecessary bottlenecks for the registration of entrance exam. They even accused some DEOs of making lot of unnecessary demands. The trainees are requesting a more transparent process for registration.
- The **dissemination of information to the public about activities at the RTTIs** and how teachers are trained and the resources that are available at the RTTIs will also encourage females to enroll. According to the females interviewed, most of their friends are discouraged to register for the entrance because of the misinformation they get from the communities. They recommend regular media programs that would provide adequate information on the RTTIs.
- **Improve the image of female teachers:** A media program should include the public filming of prominent women who have contributed meaningfully to the Liberian society and or the world, females who have served and or continue to serve in the basic education system of Liberia.
- The Ministry of education should have a **gender-balanced administrative structure** in public schools and encourage gender sensitivity in private and mission schools. It will help greatly in encouraging young girls to serve in the educational sector.
- **Sex education** should be taught in schools to help educate females on how to avoid unwanted pregnancy. This is important because it is the major cause of girls dropping out of school;
- A more **vigorous monitoring** of the free and compulsory primary education policy to ensure that parents in the villages send their children to school at the age set by the Ministry of education.
- The Ministry should introduce **"ZERO Tolerance" on sexual harassment or abuse** of female student.
- **Incentives** should be provided for teacher as in other professions but with more attractive incentives for female teachers teaching at junior secondary and senior secondary levels.
- The **construction of teachers' quarters at public schools** in the rural area will attract more female teachers and other females to go in the teaching profession as there will be security.

These recommendations amount to fringe improvements at the present time. The main problem is the current inadequacy of the system as it is supposed to be. The hope of decentralization is that school focus on teaching and learning will improve. If that focus is given emphasis in the re-organization, then a major accomplishment will support other initiatives that will improve the conditions and likelihood of female participation. Females were not part of the system before the war, but many years ago they were. Financial and personal security, along with professional opportunities, will go a long way to improve the situation. Only at that time will additional programs to improve female participation begin to have real impact. There is policy that promotes female participation and there are donor programs, although only a few. Until the system is really operating, nothing is likely to improve for any teachers



and the basic reasons for attraction to the profession will continue to dissuade good candidates, both male and female, from pursuing the teaching career.

The contention here, and that of many of the respondents, if not all, is that the system at the moment does not function well. Until it does it will not attract quality males and females. There are many other conditions that need improvement for female participation and they are listed here, but unless the general effectiveness and efficiency of schooling are improved, other initiatives are unlikely to have any appreciable impact. The hope for decentralization is that it will improve supervision and oversight, and encourage overall monitoring. All of this will lead to more effective schooling. The problem is that most social and cultural barriers to women are local. Once decentralization has made schooling more effective, and improved the opportunities and functioning of schools, there is no doubt that some initiatives for some communities (particularly very rural ones) are needed to enhance the prevailing conditions for female participation in education.

Two key recommendations are offered:

1. Improve schooling so that it is fully functional and safe and effective. Females cannot easily be expected to want to join an obviously deficient program and they would not be comfortable or safe unless the environment is secure and functional. Everyone at a school deserves the right to focus on learning or teaching without concern for their safety or wellbeing. No educational program can work in a stress-filled environment, and this is a pre-requisite for effective schooling and developing community and professional respect.
2. Create a national teacher training program that incorporates the formalities of a teaching training institution (like the RTTIs and at the advanced level, the universities) with continuing professional development. Bring teacher education into the community, enhance its credibility, and promote wider participation in the rural areas. RTTIs and the universities were never able to meet the demands for teachers in the system, even before the war, and their capacities remain the same or close to it. They cannot be expected to change the quality of the system in the near future. There is also evidence internationally that teacher training can be effective through many different mechanisms and agendas. Liberia has to develop a better way of educating and developing teachers that takes into account all the difficulties of centralizing teacher education in “bricks and mortar” when the needs exceed the possibilities for that traditional approach. Other approaches, such as mentoring and in-service supervision, are also vulnerable to the inadequacies of the current system. Some ideas were introduced long ago in terms of clustering of schools, development of teacher and principal leaders, and trying to promote a continuing professional development program. Also, many countries have used cell phones and improved communication technology to promote contact and delivery of programming for distance education (e.g., radio is successful in Australia and was successful in the early days for programming in Liberia linking with VOA facilities). These ideas need to be pursued.

It is clear that female participation requires a more effective and secure schooling program. There are significant other barriers, promoted by traditional societal and cultural biases, but they dissipate in the face of economic realities and modernization influences. They do not disappear, however. Therefore, two prongs of the incentive program are required: A guarantee of better schooling and conditions of work, and promotion of more valued roles for women in Liberian society. The first is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and its regional organization. The new decentralization re-organization provides an opportunity to focus the improvement of schooling on teaching and learning, and in that process, promote female participation and the credibility of the profession. The second is a responsibility of all the Ministries, and may become an important emphasis in the devolution of central responsibilities to the County governments. The societal and cultural barriers for women are not

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completely local, although specific ones apply in general regional areas (like the secret societies). The counties can help local communities and as part of that process, bring in new ideas about equality and opportunity for all. Liberia needs everyone. Given the many changes and some confusion that still exists in the development environment of Liberia, this is an opportunity to address female participation in education as part of a larger agenda for national development. It may operate as war has done in some societies, where females entered new occupations out of need and performed as well as anyone. On the ground experiences with success is probably the only lasting and convincing evidence that will substantially transform deep-rooted attitudes and biases.

The major change is a new frame for development that is well-known but rarely supported. Change at a large scale is only possible if the organizational and institutional conditions are changed to sustain the initiatives. The improvement of opportunities and participation of females in Liberian education depend upon the development of a more effective system and the development of institutions that can and will sustain their participation and their personal and professional growth. Possibility and capacity require the requisite conditions to fully utilize and enhance individual talents and improve their credibility.