

Report on the Implementation of the Liberia Education Advancement Program (LEAP)

2017-2022

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This research report is produced by the Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE), headed by the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL).

COTAE is a network of four Liberian organizations advocating transparency, accountability, integrity, and evidence-based decision-making in the Liberian education sector.

CENTAL is a civil society organization and national chapter of Transparency International (TI), the global coalition against corruption with chapters and networks in more than 120 countries worldwide.

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Acronyms

AP	Abidjan Principles on the right to education (Guiding Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education)	GoL	Government of Liberia
BIA	Bridge International Academies	GPE	Global Partnership for Education
CDC	Coalition for Democratic Change	LEAP	Liberia Education Advancement Program
CENTAL	Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia	LEG	Local Education Group
CEO	County Education Officers	MOE	Ministry of Education
COTAE	Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education	NERA	New Education Reform Act of 2011
CSB	County School Boards	OSF	Open Society Foundation
DEO	District Education Officers	OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
ESDC	Education Sector Development Committee	PSL	Partnership School for Liberia Program
GI-ESCR	Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights	PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
		SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Executive Summary

The Liberia Education Advancement Program (LEAP), initially known as Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) was initiated by the Government of Liberia in 2016 and saw the government transition public schools into private management in an effort to improve access and quality in education.

During the early years of LEAP, independent [monitoring](#) and [evaluation](#) reports – [some commissioned](#) by the Government of Liberia and the Ministry of Education – established that the prime provider, Bridge International Academies (BIA), also known as Bridge Liberia, paid teachers inadequately and required them and other school staff to work longer hours without extra benefits; kept students in school longer than usual without providing meals; and had a very poor relationship with stakeholders in the community (parents, teachers, local education officials, civil society, etc.). Furthermore, they found out that the company's costs were far higher than those of its competitors, and that "higher costs do not necessarily correlate with higher learning gains".¹ The LEAP lacked transparency, resulted in transferring unqualified teachers to other public schools (with full backing of the Ministry of Education) and introduced class caps that denied many students, access to their original schools.

Several years later, many of the initial concerns and controversies about LEAP in general, and about Bridge International Academies in particular, remain. Concerns regarding sustainability still linger, as providers are struggling to mobilize the requisite resources to fund their operation. Of the eight LEAP providers who began operating schools in 2016, four have dropped out of the program mainly due to lack of funding. Brac Liberia, Omega, and More Than Me (which later became Hill Top), have all exited the program, some abruptly doing so without adequate notice to the schools and communities in which they once operated. Stella Maris never actually took over management of the schools assigned to them throughout the program.²

Controversies around BIA's treatment of teachers and other education staff persist. During the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the company reduced the salaries of several staff by over 90%, against the government's regulations and guidelines. Upon the intervention of the Ministry of Labour and other authorities, including the Liberian Legislature/Parliament, this decision was later reversed.

¹ Mauricio Romero, Justin Sandefur and Wayne Aaron Sandholtz, *Can Outsourcing Improve Liberia's Schools? Preliminary Results from Year One of a Three-Year Randomized Evaluation of Partnership Schools for Liberia*, (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2017), p. 3, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/partnership-schools-for-liberia.pdf>

² Mauricio Romero and Justin Sandefur, *Beyond Short-term Learning Gains: The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia after Three Years* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2019), p. 6, <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/beyond-short-term-learning-gains-impact-outsourcing-schools-liberia-after-three-years>

Lack of accountability, transparency, and meaningful engagement with stakeholders are also among the major issues characterizing the program. Financial information on BIA's operation and activities in Liberia remains inaccessible. To date, there is no publicly available, independent audit and detailed financial reporting that clearly demonstrates how much Bridge International Academies has mobilized and expended on LEAP and the schools assigned to it in Liberia. Moreover, successive decision-making around the expansion and scaling-up of LEAP has not been

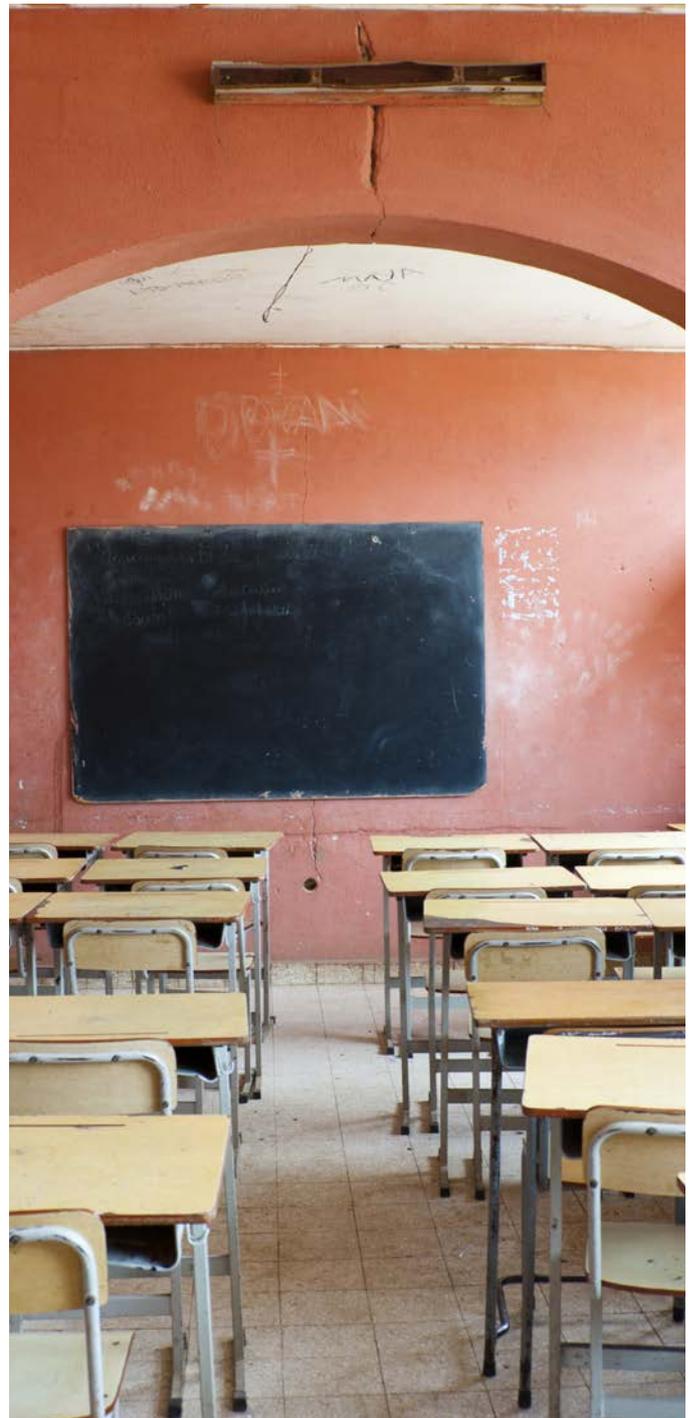
evidence-based, transparent, and inclusive, as civil society and other stakeholders have not been meaningfully engaged and consulted. Furthermore, there is an apparent conflict of interest in the overall management and oversight of the program, which may be associated with its arbitrary expansion and other related decisions. A former top official of the Ministry of Education who helped to introduce the program and presided over the initial expansion decisions became Country Director of Bridge Liberia in 2021.



Key recommendations

There is a need for greater transparency, accountability, inclusion, and evidence-based decision-making by the Ministry of Education around the LEAP. Any plans on its further expansion should be halted, due to the poor conditions in many of the schools being operated by the private providers, the questionable labor practices followed by the providers and other concerns characterizing the operation of the main provider, Bridge International Academies (BIA). To overcome some of these concerns, it is pivotal that the Ministry of Education as well as BIA provide adequate, credible, and timely information to the public on the financial and other resources mobilized for and expended on the program. This is important to enable civil society, media, teachers, parents, communities, and other stakeholders to have the necessary information to properly engage in the decision-making process around LEAP.

As part of its oversight responsibility, the legislature should require the Ministry of Education and BIA to produce and publish independent and comprehensive financial reports on LEAP finances, especially on BIA's financial records as the program's lead partner. Furthermore, civil society, the media, and other stakeholders should increase their monitoring and follow-up efforts and constructively engage with all relevant activities and processes related to education in Liberia, especially specialized education programs impacting the entire public education system and therefore the realization of the right to free, quality public education, such as LEAP.



Background and context

Since the 2016/2017 school year, the Partnership School for Liberia (PSL) Program, rebranded in 2018 as Liberia Education Advancement Program (LEAP), has been a key program in the Liberian education sector. The program began with 93 school schools and eight (8) private providers, namely: Brac Liberia, Bridge International Academies, More Than Me, Omega, Rising Academies, Stella Maris, Street Child and Youth Movement for Collective Action³. The providers were required to pilot diverse methodologies to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes in their assigned schools, which would then serve as basis for continuation and expansion of the program.⁴ “Liberia’s traditional public school systems couldn’t solve this [learning] crisis on their own. Additional resources and approaches were required to

support and complement their existing efforts. (...) LEAP is designed to improve school management and accountability, enhance teachers’ and school administrators’ abilities to deliver quality learning outcomes, and optimize delivery models that the Ministry of Education can apply throughout all of Liberia’s public schools.”⁵

However, the Ministry of Education’s decision was not without disapproval, as it came amid intense criticism from a diversity of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, civil society organizations and others.⁶ Their concerns related to the poor human rights record of the prime provider of the program, Bridge International Academies (hereinafter referred to as BIA or Bridge Liberia); the lack of transparency regarding the decision-making around the introduction of the program; the overall sustainability of the program; as well as its implications on the right to education in the country.

Barely one year into the program, most of these concerns were independently confirmed. Research conducted by the Coalition for Transparency in Education (COTAE), that monitored the first year of BIA’s activities in Liberia, established that the company paid teachers poorly; allowed teachers and other staff to work longer hours without extra compensation and benefits; kept students in school longer than usual without providing meals; had a poor relationship with stakeholders in the community (parents, teachers, local education officials, civil society, etc.); and lacked a clearly defined sustainability plan.⁷



Bridge school in Bong County, Central Liberia. Photo by COTAE.

³ Mauricio Romero, Justin Sandefur and Wayne Aaron Sandholtz, *Can a Public-Private Partnership Improve Liberia’s Schools? Preliminary Results from Year One of a Three-Year Randomized Evaluation*, (Center for Global Development and Innovation for Poverty Action, 2017), <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/can-public-private-partnership-improve-liberias-schools.pdf>

⁴ Abraham Dagher, *Leap Report and Update*, (Monrovia: Ministry of Education), accessed on November 9, 2022, <https://sway.office.com/By551c2160gsA7H2?ref=Link>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Front Page Africa, “Flawed Education: Liberia’s Stakeholders Oppose Partnership,” March 28, 2016, <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/2016news/flawed-education-liberia-s-stakeholders-oppose-partnership/>

⁷ COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*, (Monrovia: Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education COTAE, 2017), <https://cental.org.lr/index.php/documents/reports/education-reports/research-public-private-partnership-in-education/viewdocument>

Furthermore, it was revealed that the company's costs were far higher than those of its competitors; that it lacked financial transparency and accountability; it transferred unqualified teachers to other schools; and introduced a cap for classes denying many students access, including students who were already enrolled in those schools when they were given out to BIA to manage. The marginal gains reported, such as teachers' increased classroom attendance rates and improved monitoring of schools, were overshadowed by the company's problematic practices violating national laws and undermining the right to education for many Liberian children.

The impact of the LEAP program was also evaluated by the Centre for Global Development (CGDEV) following the program's first⁸ and third⁹ years. It summarized the impacts of the program (a) over a longer time horizon, (b) on a range of outcomes beyond test scores, and (c) distinguishing the average impact of the outsourcing policy, which was modest overall, from the larger effects of some specific private operators.

After one academic year, the study found modest improvements in learning outcomes and several important caveats: students in outsourced schools scored higher in English and mathematics, but costs far surpassed original projections, and some providers engaged in unforeseen and harmful behavior, including mass removal of students and efforts to conceal serious sexual abuse allegations¹⁰, complicating any assessment of long-term welfare gains.¹¹

Measuring the impacts of the program after the third academic year revealed similarly modest results. It highlighted that beyond the first year, treatment effects on learning gains plateaued, corresponding to a slight increase in reading fluency for students enrolled in first and fifth grade in 2015/2016, respectively. It also found that outsourcing increased dropout rates among the students originally in partnership schools and negative effects on pupil-level enrollment emerged in the first year due to mass expulsions by one private operator, Bridge International Academies. In schools where enrollment was already high and class sizes were large at baseline, the program led to a significant decline in enrollment. Students enrolled in partnership schools at baseline in 2015/2016 were 3.3 percentage points less likely to be enrolled in any school after three years (from a base of 85%). This negative effect was attributed not to the students



⁸ Romero, Sandefur and Sandholtz, *Can Outsourcing Improve Liberia's Schools? Preliminary Results from Year One of a Three-Year Randomized Evaluation of Partnership Schools for Liberia*.

⁹ Romero and Sandefur, *Beyond Short-term Learning Gains: The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia after Three Years*.

¹⁰ Sexual abuse allegations have also been reported in Bridge Kenya. See Neha Wadekar and Ryan Grim, "A is for Abuse: Two Harvard Grads Saw Big Profits in African Education. Children Paid the Price", *The Intercept*, March 23, 2023, <https://theintercept.com/2023/03/23/bridge-schools-africa-kenya-education/>

¹¹ Romero and Sandefur, *Beyond Short-term Learning Gains: The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia after Three Years*, p. 1.

who were removed from their schools in the first year due to large class sizes. Instead, the effect seems to have been driven by older students who were less likely to enroll in secondary school after they finish primary school in treatment schools, and by girls who were more likely to report drop-out due to pregnancy.¹²

The study highlighted that the average effects of the LEAP program concealed very different results across private operators, both in learning gains and other dimensions.¹³ For instance, outsourcing the management of 23 schools to Bridge Liberia led to learning gains of 0.35 σ after three years, equivalent to reading roughly 2.2 additional words per minute. Beyond learning gains, the study further pointed out that Bridge increased dropout by more than half and reduced transition to secondary school (overall, Bridge had a -6.53 percentage point effect on the probability of being enrolled in any school after three years).¹⁴ It had also highlighted that Bridge had no statistically significant impact on corporal punishment and failed to reduce sexual abuse. The study recommended that “any assessment of outsourcing public schools to Bridge must weigh its modest learning gains against its high operating costs and negative effects on access to education.”¹⁵

LEAP continues unabated, although only four of the original eight providers from 2016 have remained to implement the program, as the others have exited the program due to funding constraints. Since its inception, the program has also significantly expanded in scope and size. From 93 schools in 2016, LEAP providers now operate

525 schools. This is largely due to the Ministry of Education’s seemingly arbitrary decisions, much to the exclusion of key stakeholders in the sector, including civil society organizations. BIA continues to be the most prominent and biggest provider, despite the company’s controversial behavior and the multiple allegations regarding its problematic practices, including but not limited to stifling of critical internal voices; poor treatment of teachers and other staff; and non-competitive recruitment practices and processes.

Media reports and other publications have, from time to time, highlighted the above concerns related to the program. However, no comprehensive civil society-led independent study, similar to those conducted by COTAE and



Bridge-run Barclayville Public School, Gran Bassa County, Liberia. Photo by COTAE.

¹² Ibid., p. 3.

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4. See also Mauricio Romero and Justin Sandefur, *The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia to Bridge International Academies after Three Years*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2020), p. 1, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/impact-outsourcing-schools-liberia-after-three-years-bridge.pdf>

¹⁵ Romero and Sandefur, *The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia to Bridge International Academies after Three Years*, p. 2-3.

ActionAid in 2017,¹⁶ has analyzed and reported on the key aspects of the program since then, in particular on the operation of BIA as the leading provider of the program, managing over 70% of LEAP Schools.¹⁷ Information about the program has mainly been provided by sporadic reporting, largely by the Liberian media and civil society organizations. The Ministry of Education and BIA have also reported on LEAP, but only from a public relations standpoint without giving a full account of the key developments related to labor, transparency, accountability, and other concerns.

and multi-dimensional account of the major concerns around LEAP. Specific focus is on the activities of BIA as the main provider of the program, and their implications for the right to education and overall strengthening of the Liberian public education system. The findings and accompanying recommendations of this report are expected to assist civil society, the media, development partners, the public, and the Government of Liberia to make inclusive, transparent, timely, and evidence-based decisions around LEAP and even beyond.

To help address this information deficit and reporting gaps and enable the informed decision-making of all stakeholders, the present research report seeks to provide an independent, detailed



Books at Bridge-operated Welmoi Public School, Bomi County, Liberia. Photo by COTAE.

¹⁶ COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*.

¹⁷ Bridge Liberia, "LEAP forms part of Government's Education Sector Analysis and Education Sector Plan," accessed on October 10, 2022, <https://bridgeliberia.org/leap-forms-part-of-government-s-education-sector-analysis-and-education-sector-plan/>

Introduction

The present research investigates and reports on the implementation of the Liberia Education Advancement Program (LEAP), formerly known as the Partnership School for Liberia (PSL). It is the first civil society-led study conducted on LEAP and Bridge International Academies' (BIA) operations, covering the period between 2018 through early 2022. The key areas and issues covered include, but are not limited to, the program's overall impact and implications for the right to education and its prospects for building a vibrant public education system in Liberia; and transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of LEAP-related decisions made and implemented by the Ministry of Education and the Government of Liberia. This report also covers BIA's working relationship with stakeholders (civil society, parents, communities, etc.), compliance with labor standards and relevant Liberian laws; as well as the overall sustainability of the program. After detailing its key findings, the report makes key recommendations which are intended to inform and enhance the decision-making processes around LEAP and other existing and/or future programs in education and improve the overall governance of the Liberian education system.

Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature. It is informed by primary and secondary information assembled and analyzed from different sources such as in-person interviews, published reports and news stories, LEAP strategy and plans, and national and international legal frameworks governing education. The desk review of the relevant information on LEAP mainly took place between September 2021 and February 2022. In March and April 2022, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with education stakeholders, including parents, school authorities, former and current teachers and staff of BIA, civil society organizations, and local education officials in Montserrado, Bong, Bomi, and Grand Bassa Counties. In total, eighty-one (81) people were consulted in this category, including 24 females and 57 males. Those interviewed included former employees of BIA, LEAP providers, local and national education officials, teachers, and parents. Information gathered from these interviews and group discussions reinforced the findings of the desk research, which together constitute the findings of this report.

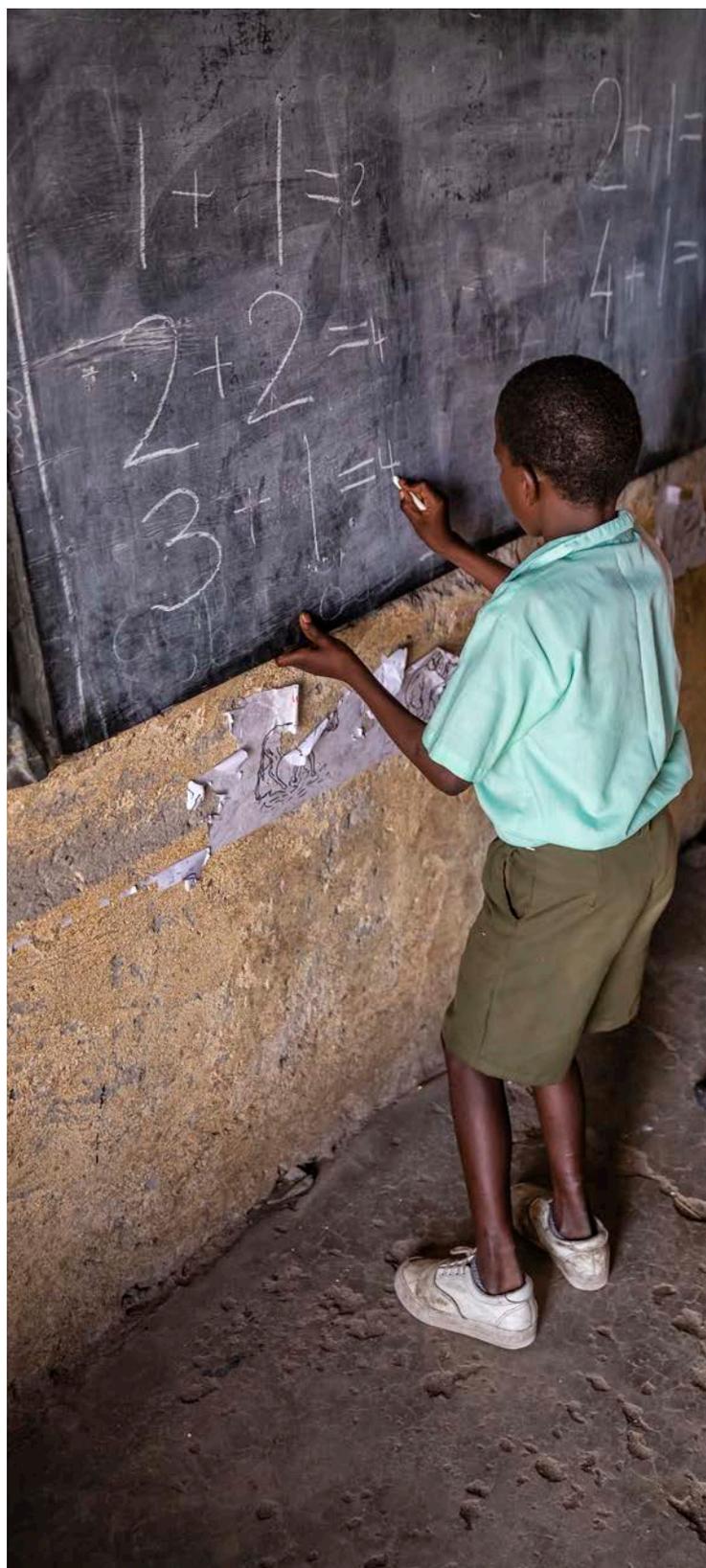


Limitations and Challenges

Since the research has followed an entirely qualitative approach, its analysis lacks a quantitative angle. Notwithstanding this limitation, the research covers the critical aspects of the program, which are sufficient for assessing the program's implementation and its implications for the right education and building of a vibrant, inclusive, and citizen-driven public education system in Liberia.

Although the research is focused on LEAP, it does not provide a detailed review of the performance of all providers. Rather, it emphasizes Bridge Liberia, the lead partner managing over 70% of the schools under the program.

The main challenge faced during the research was that despite the concerted efforts that were made to obtain key documents and information on LEAP from BIA and the Senior Management of the Ministry of Education, several requests for information or documents were denied or ignored. Despite the agreement between COTAE and the Ministry of Education for an interview, when COTAE's team showed up and asked their first questions, they were told that the questionnaire needed to be submitted in hard and soft copies for a formal and coordinated response instead. COTAE shared the interview questionnaire as requested by the Senior Management of the Ministry of Education the same day. The questionnaire, as well as the calls and emails made in follow-up were never responded to. Additionally, the attempts to speak to BIA and to those LEAP partners who are still active within the program were unsuccessful.



Key Findings

I. Lack of evidence-based expansion and scale-up

When the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) was first introduced in 2016 (later renamed as LEAP), the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education, announced that it was a pilot. Authorities at the Ministry of Education said the one-year pilot would determine whether it will be worthy of continuation. The Minister of Education at the time stated: “Partnership Schools will be models of excellence, acting as innovation hubs from which to strengthen the whole system. Technologies, pedagogies and other models tested in Partnership Schools can be scaled to other public schools”.¹⁸ In part, this was due to the intense criticism from key stakeholders and the Ministry’s apparent attempt to keep the growing opposition to the program at bay.

However, long before the first year of the pilot ended and even before it was externally evaluated, the Ministry of Education had already announced plans not only to continue with the program but also to increase the number of schools managed under the program. From 93 schools, BIA and others were awarded additional schools, increasing the total number of schools managed by the program’s providers to 323, of which Bridge Liberia managed 171 (53%).¹⁹

Successive decisions around the program have followed a similar pattern. For instance, the ruling party and new Government that was inaugurated in January 2018 continued from where its predecessor had left off, despite originally opposing the program in 2016 and 2017. This was a dramatic turnaround, especially considering that officials of the party had commended COTAE, the National Teachers Association of Liberia and



¹⁸ George Kronnisanyon Werner, “Partnership Schools for Liberia: Building a Better Future for our Children. By George Kronnisanyon Werner, Minister of Education, Liberia,” Ark’s Education Partnerships Group – Medium, March 25, 2016, <https://medium.com/@ArkEPG/partnership-schools-for-liberia-building-a-better-future-for-our-children-george-kronnisanyon-328f86e6ad8f#.r0e4s5g68>

¹⁹ Bridge Liberia, “Bridge Liberia Celebrates Year Five in the Government’s LEAP Program”, Accessed on July 26, 2023, <https://bridgeliberia.org/bridge-liberia-celebrates-year-five-in-the-government-s-leap-program/>



other stakeholders for standing up against the outsourcing of public schools to private companies with no clear sustainability and transitional plans. Additionally, civil society organizations led by COTAE presented a position statement to the new government outlining issues earlier raised and new developments following the first-year evaluation of the program that showed BIA did not perform any better than other providers (including Youth Movement for Collective Action, a poorly funded Liberian group), despite spending an outstanding 1,050 USD (later revised to 663 USD) per child per annum, as opposed to the Government's existing 50 USD per student budget, and more than twice the per-pupil spending by other providers.²⁰

At the start of the 2021/2022 academic year, the Ministry of Education further expanded LEAP by allocating additional schools to the four remaining partners, taking the total number of schools to 525. This includes: 179 additional public schools

to Bridge Liberia, more than 100% increase in the number of schools managed by the entity, taking its total to 350 (67%); 8 new schools to Street Child, taking its total number of schools to 40 (7%); 15 schools to UMovement (also known as Youth Movement for Collective Action), taking its total number of supported schools to 40 (7%); and no additional school allocation for Rising Academies, which manages 95 (18%) of LEAP schools.²¹

Information gathered from community residents, parents, teachers, school administrators and other stakeholders in Bong, Bomi, Grand Bassa, and Montserrado Counties reveals concerns over transparency, inclusion, and other issues facing the program, including continuous awarding of new schools to BIA and other LEAP partners, despite their failure to adequately fund and support the schools they already manage.²² As part of this research, some partnership schools visited were in a deplorable state and lacked a

²⁰ Romero, Sandefur and Sandholtz, *Can Outsourcing Improve Liberia's Schools? Preliminary Results from Year One of a Three-Year Randomized Evaluation of Partnership Schools for Liberia*.

²¹ M. News Liberia, "Government Gives Bridge Liberia 179 More Public Schools," November 14, 2021, <https://mnewsafrika.com/government-gives-bridge-liberia-179-more-public-schools/>

²² Education International, "Liberia: Renewed fight against increasing privatization," November 18, 2019, <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/23122:liberia-renewed-fight-against-increasing-privatisation>



Bridge-run school visited during field data collection. Photo by COTAE.

conducive learning environment, including lack of adequate chairs, unkempt classrooms, leaking and falling roofs, and unpainted buildings. According to the accounts of school authorities and local residents interviewed in March 2022, the Welmoi Public School in the Western Liberian County of Bomi has not experienced major renovation since its management was taken over by BIA in 2016. For Quietown Public School, in the same Bomi County, more than four months after it was assigned to BIA in the 2021/2022 school year, the company did not provide relevant supplies (textbooks, tablets, sheets of paper, etc.) nor did it compensate the volunteer teachers recruited to run it.²³ Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Education in April 2022 revealed that due to funding and other constraints, BIA could not take over all the 179 new schools that were assigned to them during the 2021/2022 school year.

■ Recommendations

Decisions on public policies and programs should be based on evidence and track record of improved performance by the operations of the actors entrusted with critical roles, especially in a public sector as key as education. Evidence-based decision-making does not only increase the likelihood of success, but it also increases stakeholders' and partners' confidence in the legitimacy of decisions reached and implemented, which in this instant case, should always be in the best interests of the students, teachers, and the entire public school system. LEAP, as well as current and future programs in education should be designed to advance the realization of the right to free, quality public education for all, as required by international human rights standards, as reflected in the Abidjan Principles on the right to education. To this end, public education must be adequately funded and private actors' involvement in education must be regulated. Moreover, decisions and programs impacting the right to education should aim to strengthen rather than compromise public education systems. Since the decisions on the LEAP program's expansion and continuation were not based on evidence or on the track record of improved performance of primary schools managed by BIA and other LEAP partners, there should be no further expansion of LEAP, beyond the current level, as the Government of Liberia works to transition all LEAP schools to full government control and management.

²³ Accounts of teachers, community residents and other stakeholders interviewed by COTAE during field data collection in Bomi County in March 2022.

II. Limited transparency, participation, and accountability regarding decision-making, availability of information and finances related to LEAP

Transparency, participation and accountability are principles that underpin democratic governance and the rule of law, and are therefore enshrined in both national and international laws, including in Liberia's 1986 Constitution, the New Education Reform Act of 2011, as well as in the 2019 Abidjan Principles on the right to education, among other international instruments. They are a key requirement for the design or implementation of any policy or program that is intended to benefit the public. That is why the 2017-2021 Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (G2-Best ESP) has a dedicated program on Education Management and Accountability, which seeks to promote accountability, transparency, and efficiency at all levels of the sector and in all activities and program, including LEAP. The Ministry of Education believes that accountability and transparency are essential to effectiveness and efficiency of the sector including success of LEAP and other initiatives.²⁴ This requires that the government holds providers and key actors accountable and releases education-related documents and data in a timely fashion. However, many concerns emerge in relation to the transparency, participation, and accountability record of LEAP, which are detailed below.

a) Limited participation, lack of transparency around decision-making, and unavailability of core information and documents related to LEAP

Evidence shows that since the inception of LEAP, decision-making around it has not been fully transparent, participatory nor inclusive, much to the disappointment of the National Teachers Association of Liberia, civil society organizations, local education officials, school authorities, and even community residents who are the end-beneficiaries and overseers of BIA's activities.²⁵ Hence, among other things, they have called for the termination of the company's contract and activities in Liberia.²⁶

The Ministry of Education usually facilitates rounds of discussions and consultations with civil society and other stakeholders for projects and interventions funded by traditional donors and agencies such as the "Getting to Best Project" sponsored by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).²⁷ However, this was not pursued in the context of LEAP. COTAE reported in its 2017 research on LEAP that, from the beginning of the program, the Ministry of Education and BIA

²⁴ Ministry of Education Republic of Liberia, *Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021*, December 15, 2016, https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/getting_to_best_education_sector_plan_2017-2021_liberia.pdf

²⁵ Smart News Liberia, "Investigation uncovers public schools in three counties want Bridge International Academies out!", April 3, 2022, <https://smartnewsliberia.com/investigation-uncovers-public-schools-in-three-counties-want-bridge-international-out/>

²⁶ Emmanuel Mensah, "CSO Groups Call for Termination of BIA Contract," Hot Pepper Liberia, June 10, 2020, <https://hotpepperliberia.com/cso-groups-call-for-termination-of-bia-contract/>

²⁷ David Woods Baysah, "Liberia launches 'getting to best in education' program," Global Partnership for Education, September 10, 2018, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/liberia-launches-getting-best-education-program#:~:text=Liberia%20launches%20%20getting%20to%20best%20in%20education%20program,by%20David%20Woods%20Baysah%2C%20Liberian%20Ministry%20of%20Education>

had inadequate engagements with stakeholders in the communities, as they did not consult with them, neither did they incorporate their major suggestions and recommendations made to improve different aspects of the program design and implementation.²⁸ This unfavorable trend seems to persist, with civil society organizations and other education stakeholders being informed solely about the outcomes of major decisions and only from the media, such as the Ministry of Education's latest announcement to award 179 new schools to BIA.²⁹ However, there have been some slight improvements in engaging with stakeholders, especially regarding interactions with County Education Officers, District Education Officers, County School Boards, and Parent-Teacher Associations. Indeed, local education officials interviewed between March and April 2022 indicated that they have had some interactions with BIA and are aware of its activities in their counties and districts, which they deemed to be an improvement compared to the past, when they were never consulted. As a local education official in Bomi County asserted during his engagement with COTAE in March 2022: "Bridge sometimes attends our sector coordination meetings and provides updates on their work." COTAE's field data collection also indicated that at the community and school levels, engagements have slightly increased over the years.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the marginal improvements described above, BIA's engagements with stakeholders have not led to the release of key documents and full disclosure of essential information. In 2016, stakeholders raised concerns about unavailability of key documents regarding BIA's partnership with the Liberian



Government.³⁰ Similar opaqueness exists today with strategic documents about the program not being published, either on the Ministry of Education's or BIA's websites. These include documents such as the latest Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and contracts that are guiding the partnership; financial and independent audit reports of BIA showcasing the total funds mobilized and expended on the program; and detailed reports and updates on its corporate social responsibilities.

This has been confirmed by the school authorities, parents, and community residents interviewed in Bomi, Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Bong Counties in March-April 2022, who averred that stakeholders still have very limited access to critical program documents and information, especially BIA's contract with the Ministry of Education and their core responsibilities at school and community levels. The only information available to them concerns textbooks, electronic devices, and other instructional materials supplied by BIA.

Interviewed stakeholders also declared that, in their view, the unavailability of key documents and strategies defeats the purpose of the marginal improvements in their engagement and makes them unable to demand compliance and the

²⁸ COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*, p. 13.

²⁹ M. News Liberia, "Government Gives Bridge Liberia 179 More Public Schools, December 14, 2021, <https://mnewsafrika.com/government-gives-bridge-liberia-179-more-public-schools/>

³⁰ Front Page Africa, "Flawed Education: Liberia's Stakeholders Oppose Partnership."

required support to their schools. A local worker in a Bridge-run school in Grand Bassa County speaking to COTAE during field data collection in April 2022, said: “As we speak, even though we are under Bridge, we do not have clear information on all their responsibilities to the school. When we make a request, they often say it is not part of their responsibilities. We cannot question their responses because we don’t have their contracts and other documents to know, for ourselves, their obligations to our school.”

Overall, this major information gap makes it difficult for civil society organizations, school authorities, communities, and other stakeholders to fully understand, follow up on, and push for accountability regarding BIA’s operation and services. Because of these concerns, civil society organizations have been calling for increased transparency and termination of BIA’s contract with the Government of Liberia.³¹

■ Recommendations

Decision-making around the LEAP program should be transparent and open for stakeholders’ scrutiny and inputs. There is an urgent need to improve relations with local stakeholders and actors, to ensure the incorporation of their views and inputs into decision-making around the LEAP Program. LEAP should not be an exception to other programs in the education sector, which are largely open for discussion and stakeholders’ inputs before major decisions are reached and implemented.

In line with Liberia’s Freedom of Information Act of 2010 and the New Education Reform Act of 2011, among others, the Ministry of Education and Bridge International Academies should make all the relevant information and documents readily available and accessible to the public, in a timely fashion, through hard and soft copies. BIA’s contract with the Liberian Government and other key LEAP documents, such as strategies and financial reports, should be published and directly shared with civil society, the media, parents, school authorities and other stakeholders for them to make more informed decisions and constructively engage with LEAP-related activities and processes.

Moreover, available decision-making forums such as the Local Education Group (LEG)³² and Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC)³³ meetings should be fully utilized to provide timely, comprehensive, and credible information to stakeholders about the program and solicit their inputs. Platforms for engagement with stakeholders, particularly at the local level, should also be practical, meaningful, and avail all necessary information to enable informed and substantive participation and engagement with the process.

³¹ Emmanuel Mensah, “CSO Groups Call for Termination of BIA Contract.”

³² “The Local Education Group meeting is a higher-level monthly meeting that takes place at the offices of the Ministry of Education. The Meeting is chaired by a coordinating agency, often a nongovernment partner/stakeholder. Its main objective is to facilitate in-depth discussion and make decision (s) on key policy issues, including endorsement of the Education Sector Plan (ESP), Education Sector Analysis (ESA), and other key national documents and policies.” (Educate HER: Promoting Gender Equity and Equality in Education Mapping of National Education Policy and Decision-Making Forums & Platforms, 2021, p. 18)

³³ “ESDC Meeting takes place at the Ministry of Education once monthly and involves a larger body of Education partners and stakeholders... Its overarching objective is to promote and facilitate information sharing, coordination and joint planning of major activities and decisions in the sector.” (Educate HER: Promoting Gender Equity and Equality in Education Mapping of National Education Policy and Decision-Making Forums & Platforms, 2021, p. 18)

b) Limited financial transparency

While underfunding has been a key challenge undermining the fulfillment of the right to education in Liberia, the Ministry of Education's inability to satisfactorily reform the public education system in a timely manner, poor management and limited financial accountability and transparency of budgetary support to the sector have also been major issues.³⁴ Payroll padding, corrupt teacher recruitment processes, bribery, and diversion of educational supplies and logistics have often been cited as key risks and issues affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector.³⁵

In CENTAL's 2021 State of Corruption Report, education ranked third to the police and health sectors in terms of being seen by the public as the most prone to corruption and financial abuse.³⁶ Reports from the media³⁷ and other sources have alluded to misapplication of financial resources at different levels of the education sector, including resources meant for the construction and renovation of schools.

Unfortunately, the same concerns are characterizing LEAP. The financial accountability of providers of the program, especially that of BIA, has been extremely limited. Indeed, media reports, especially accounts from some insiders, have pointed to the company receiving millions of dollars, but spending very little on Liberia and the schools it manages.³⁸ Several attempts by COTAE to seek financial and other key information from BIA



were ignored, as the company failed to respond to written communications sent (letters and emails) and follow-ups made. During interviews and focus group discussions with local education officials, school authorities, teachers, and parents in Bomi, Grand Bassa, and Bong Counties in March-April 2022, they reported having no knowledge of the company's financial dealings, especially what it ought to spend on their counties and schools, as information on the company's finances, per-pupil spending, and other core activities has not been made available to them.

³⁴ Ministry of Education Republic of Liberia, *Liberia Education Sector Analysis* (World Bank Copywrite: 2016), page 118, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/481011575583469840/pdf/Liberia-Education-Sector-Analysis.pdf>; Global Partnership for Education, "Liberia," accessed on October 11, 2022, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/liberia>

³⁵ COTAE, *Improving Education through Democracy: More 4 Education. The Case for Innovative Domestic Education Budgeting: Assuring Access and Quality Outcomes*, (Monrovia: Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education COTAE, 2020), p. 9, <https://www.cental.org.lr/index.php/documents/policy-documents/research-alternative-resource-domestic-mobilization-for-education/viewdocument>

³⁶ CENTAL, Transparency International, *State of Corruption Report 2021*, (Monrovia: Center for Transparency and Accountability (CENTAL) and Transparency International, 2021), p. 24, <https://cental.org.lr/index.php/documents/reports/state-of-corruption-report>

³⁷ Front Page Africa, "Liberia: USAID/LPAC Boss Stresses Significance of Curbing Corruption In Liberian Schools," August 15, 2019, <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/crime/liberia-usaid-lpac-boss-stresses-significance-of-curbing-corruption-in-liberian-schools/>

³⁸ The Analyst News, "Bridge Liberia Under US\$5M Investigation -While Founder Shannon May Rides Private Chopper, Liberian Children Suffer," September 22, 2020, <https://analystliberiaonline.com/bridge-liberia-under-us5m-investigation-while-founder-shannon-may-rides-private-chopper-liberian-children-suffer/>

■ Recommendations

In line with Liberia’s New Education Reform Act of 2011 and other related national policies and laws, as well as international human rights law and standards, including the Abidjan Principles, decision-making in the education sector should be holistic, inclusive and transparent at all levels, including but not limited to financial and other resources mobilized for education. As a major program of the public sector, decision-making around LEAP should be transparent, and the providers under the program should be fully accountable to the public about their financial dealings. Hence, BIA should thoroughly account for the resources it has mobilized and expended on its activities in Liberia. In this regard, a comprehensive and independent audit of the company’s operation in Liberia should be carried out to provide a detailed account of its financial records since 2016, when it became one of the providers under the program. The findings of such an audit should be made public and accessible.

III. Lack of respect for the rule of law

Reports published in 2017³⁹ accused Bridge International Academies of bad labor practices for poorly paying teachers; allowing teachers and other staff to work longer hours without corresponding benefits; having poor relationship with stakeholders, and transferring teachers to different and faraway locations without adequate resettlement packages.⁴⁰ Several years later, many of the issues persist. Largely, BIA has not improved on its corporate practices and engagement with its staff. At the height of the COVID-19 outbreak, the company reduced the majority of its staff’s salary by more than 80%.⁴¹ In a public statement issued on June 10, 2020, the company categorically denied the allegations as being untrue and a smear campaign by its detractors.⁴² However, in

a letter from BIA’s management to several staff deemed “non-essential” in March 2020 and titled: “Temporary Variation of Terms and Conditions of Employment Relating to place of work, hours of work and remuneration”, the company informed the concerned employees about a directive to go on a two-month compulsory leave without pay⁴³. An excerpt of the communication reads:

“[...] unless the pandemic is contained and schools are reopened sooner, non-essential staff are to proceed on compulsory leave without pay for a period of two months beginning 1st April 2020 to 30th April 2020⁴⁴ subject to any extension the company may seek if schools remain closed during this period [...] you will attract a gratuitous payment equivalent to 10% of your salary under contract and retain your medical health insurance benefit”. (See Annex 1).

³⁹ COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*. See also Tyler Hook, *Partnership Schools for Liberia: a critical review*, (Brussels: Education International, 2017)

⁴⁰ Independent Probe Newspaper, “Labor Unrest imm[i]nent at Bridge Int’l Academies Liberia; As Labor Ministry expresses concern over gross labor violations,” May 26, 2020, <https://independentprobe.com/2020/05/26/9798/>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² ELBC Radio Liberia, “Bridge-Liberia Sets Records Straight,” June 10, 2020, <https://elbcradio.com/2020/06/10/bridge-liberia-sets-records-straight/>

⁴³ Julius Konton, “Contrary To Government’s COVID-19 Mandate On Layoff: Bridge International Puts Employees On Compulsory Unpaid Leave,” KMTV News Liberia, March 31, 2020, <http://web.archive.org/>. See also The Analyst News, “Bridge International Flout Gov.’t Directive? – Workers sent On Unpaid Compulsory Leave; As Country Director ‘Absconds’ Liberia”, March 31, 2020, <https://analystliberiaonline.com/bridge-international-flout-gov-ts-directive-workers-sent-on-unpaid-compulsory-leave-as-country-director-absconds-liberia/>

⁴⁴ It is our understanding that BIA’s management possibly meant 30th May 2020

Another letter dated June 25, 2020, references issues at BIA that need to be addressed and reforms instilled, requesting the then Country Director, Mr. Griffin Asigo's dismissal.⁴⁵ In the said letter (See Annex 2), some aggrieved BIA teachers and employees requested the Ministry of Education to prevail on BIA to reduce their workload or give better incentives. According to them, working beyond 3pm and earning less is "horrible" for a multi-million-dollar company. Also, aggrieved employees expressed grave concerns over BIA's policy on compulsory completion of lessons by teachers before receipt of their monthly salary, given that assigned tablets sometimes do not work, yet staff are unduly punished for not completing lessons during that period. These claims were confirmed by stakeholders during interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Grand Bassa, Bong, Bomi, counties between March and April 2022, as part of this research.

Additionally, in June 2018, a long-serving BIA teacher in the central Liberian County of Bong tendered his resignation letter due to what he termed as the company's failure to live up to expectations and deliver on its promises. In the resignation letter, Mr. Edwin G. Sulonteh, a teacher of the David Fijue School in Suakoko cited poor working conditions, including lack of capacity-building opportunities and limited salary and benefits, especially so that they were spending longer hours in school compared to their counterparts in other public schools⁴⁶ (See Annex 4). According to a confidential source, the resignation letter was not officially acknowledged by BIA, neither did they investigate the concerns raised. Information which reached COTAE

indicated that the aggrieved teacher and others are still teaching for longer hours without due benefits.

In a more serious incident, in March 2020, an entire school, the Kendeja Public School in Montserrado County, shut down its premises to Bridge Liberia and withdrew from the LEAP Program.⁴⁷ It was one of the first schools awarded to the company in 2016, but BIA reportedly did little to improve the conditions of its staff, infrastructure, and other aspects. In an interview with a key stakeholder of the Kendeja Public School in August 2022, COTAE was informed that it has since rejoined the LEAP program, although the issues earlier raised remain largely unresolved.

Apart from the complaints raised against BIA regarding long working hours and poor pay, in 2020, BIA was accused of illegally dismissing a senior staff for the alleged release of sensitive and confidential information to current and former BIA employees. Following a thorough investigation into this incident, the Ministry of Labour, through the office of the Deputy Minister for Planning and Manpower Development ruled in favor of the dismissed employee. In its June 2021 Ruling (See Annex 7), the Deputy Minister for Labor Standards and Manpower Development, held Bridge Liberia liable, indicating that the charges levied against the dismissed employee could not be justified. In count one of the Ruling, the Ministry asserts that, "having carefully reviewed and considered all the facts and evidence associated with the issue of dispute (breach of confidentiality), it is our considered opinion that the employee was unfairly treated, and Bridge International Liberia is

⁴⁵ Independent Probe Newspaper, "Over quest for political Influence: Bridge Int'l Bankroll George Werner's Grand Kru Co. Senatorial Bid (Part IV)," June 28, 2020, <http://www.independentprobe.com/over-quest-for-political-influence-bridge-intl-bankroll-george-werners-grand-kru-co-senatorial-bid-part-ii/>

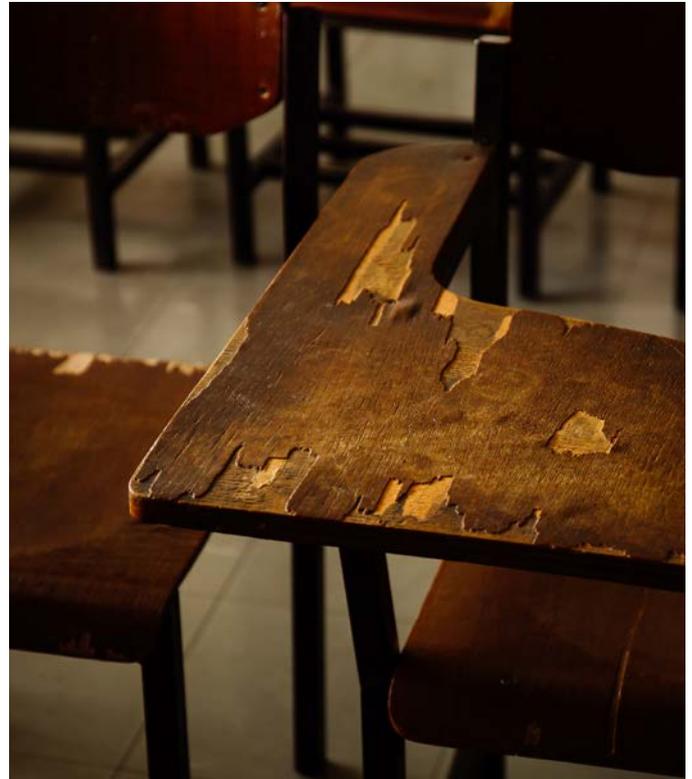
⁴⁶ Consortium of Education Defenders of Liberia, "Resignation Letter of a Bridge Teacher in Rural Liberia," Facebook, June 15, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/Consortium-of-Education-Defenders-of-Liberia-101238261882059/photos/161244999214718>

⁴⁷ Whistle Blower Liberia, "Kendeja Public School Shuts down its premises to Bridge International," March 1, 2021, web.archive.org

held for **wrongful dismissal** and the management is hereby mandated to reinstate Mr. Bealded with all his entitlements and benefits". The ruling further stated that "should management elect not to reinstate Mr. Bealded, we instruct that he be paid the aggregate of his monthly salary for twenty-four (24) months in keeping with chapter 14.10 (2) of the Decent Work Act of 2015". It was established during the proceedings before this Ministry that management only paid Mr. Bealded 50% of his salary for his service during the COVID-19 lockdown period, and that he is still owed a balance of 50%, the Ruling finally asserts. The combined total of all payments is 40,000 USD, which includes salaries deducted and 24-month salary payment due to wrongful dismissal. It was not until late April 2022, following repeated engagements with BIA, that the company made partial payment of \$10,000 USD to Mr. Bealded. This was disclosed to COTAE in an interview with Mr. Bealded in April 2022.

In addition to violating labor laws, BIA also seems to have disregarded public authorities' invitations to provide information on its operation. As reported by various sources, on several occasions, the management of Bridge Liberia ignored invitations from the Liberian National Police and the Legislature, as well as citations from the Ministry of Labour to speak to issues regarding the company's operation in Liberia including alleged bad labor practices⁴⁸ and provision of information on its financial dealings⁴⁹.

During a public hearing conducted by the House of Representatives in 2020, the Chairperson of the Committee on Education, Hon. Johnson Gwaikolo



of Nimba County decried the poor treatment of Liberian workers by Bridge Liberia and the non-cooperative posture of its former country director, whom he described as being "arrogant". Hon. Johnson Gwaikolo stated:

"The issue of Bridge has been lingering from two perspectives. They are one of the partners that is intervening in the education sector [...] our concern directly as a Committee is related to the delivery of the services for which they were hired [...] the other component obviously is the labor issues [...] unfortunately, the previous country director was very, for lack of better words arrogant, was unwilling to work with us for which we even brought a communication to this body [Plenary which is the highest decision-making of the Legislature] asking for the body's intervention because the country director at the time was not responding to the invitations to look into the concerns."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Independent Probe Newspaper, "Bridge Int'l Academies snubs Police, Labor and other govt functionaries; Are they above the law?" July 3, 2020, <http://www.independentprobe.com/bridge-intl-academies-snubs-police-labor-and-other-govt-functionaries/>. See also The Analyst News, "Bridge Liberia Hugging Contempt Charge -As Country Director refuses to Appear before Housing Committee" February 20, 2020, <https://analystliberiaonline.com/bridge-liberia-hugging-contempt-charge-as-country-director-refuses-to-appear-before-housing-committee/>

⁴⁹ The New Dawn, "Bridge International risks legislative contempt", November 7, 2022, <https://thenewdawnliberia.com/bridge-international-risks-legislative-contempt/>

⁵⁰ KMTV Liberia, "Appearance of Ministers of Education and Labor and Top management of Bridge Academy to address alleged wrongful and illegal dismissal of about seventeen (17) Staff.....House Of Representatives," Facebook, September 17, 2020, 9:00-11:03, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=335812184503095>

■ Recommendations

As part of their oversight responsibility, State authorities should enforce the rule of law and ensure that BIA complies with national and international laws, regulations and policies. Additionally, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, the Legislature and other State institutions should duly exert their mandate in ensuring that BIA and other companies and institutions operating in Liberia fully respect the rights of workers and operate within the confines of relevant laws related to recruiting, paying, transferring, and dismissing workers. Existing labor-related complaints against the company should be fully investigated and the findings and recommendations be fully implemented. This includes the timely and full implementation of the ruling regarding the wrongful dismissal of a former senior employee.⁵¹

IV. Conflict of interest

In addition to the concerns voiced regarding BIA's history in other countries,⁵² skeptics pointed to the possibility of a potential conflict of interest regarding BIA's primary position as the lead provider and some State proponents' strong support for the program. Conflict of interest is forbidden by section 9.6 of the 2014 Liberian Code of Conduct for Public Officials, prevents public officials from using their official positions to pursue private interests.⁵³ Although the allegations regarding some public officials' conflict of interest could not be independently verified at the introduction of the PSL program, several years later it has emerged that some former ministry officials continue to be actively involved in BIA's operations in Liberia.

For instance, the lead proponent of the program and then Minister of Education, Mr. George Werner, is still actively involved with BIA's operation in Liberia, after having left the Ministry in 2018. Mr. George Werner confirmed this through a live interview granted to Monrovia-based OK FM 99.5 on 11 June 2020.⁵⁴ Among other things, he strongly defended the company's operations in Liberia and its decision to dismiss some of its employees who he termed as being "deeply political."⁵⁵ When confronted about his role in supporting the removal of Liberians from top levels and hiring foreigners at Bridge Liberia, he stated: "No, that is a lie. I have tried to stay clear of their hiring practices, all of them [...] In fact, I don't really get involved unless I am asked

⁵¹ Fortune TV Liberia, "For Allege Wrongful Dismissal: Labour Ministry Orders Bridge International to Pay Former Employee 40 K", June 14, 2021, <https://fortunetvliberia.com/for-allege-wrongful-dismissal-labour-ministry-orders-bridge-international-to-pay-former-employee-40-k/>

⁵² For information about issues raised in Kenya regarding BIA, consult ANCEFA et al., "Kenyan court upholds the closure of Bridge International Academies over failure to respect standards," February 17, 2017, <https://www.gi-escr.org/latest-news/kenyan-court-upholds-the-closure-of-bridge-international-academies-over-failure-to-respect-standards>. For information about issues raised in Uganda about the company, consult Diane Ravitch, "Uganda: Profiting on the Backs of the Poor," Diane Ravitch's Blog, October 5, 2016, <https://dianeravitch.net/2016/10/05/uganda-profiting-on-the-backs-of-the-poor/> See also ActionAid et al., "Uganda to close the largest chain of commercial private schools over non-respect of basic education standards." August 12, 2016, <https://www.gi-escr.org/latest-news/groundbreaking-news-uganda-to-close-the-largest-chain-of-commercial-private-schools-over-non-respect-of-basic-education-standards>

⁵³ In section 1.3 of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials, Conflict of Interest is defined as "when a public official, contrary to official obligations and duties to act for the benefit of the public, exploits a relationship for personal gain."

⁵⁴ OK 99.5 FM Liberia, "Live Interview with Former Minister of Education, George Werner", OK FM Liberia, June 11, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/okfm.liberia/videos/774656166438554>

⁵⁵ OK 99.5 FM Liberia, "Live Interview with Former Minister of Education, George Werner".

about a particular issue. For example, Bridge has maybe 55 staffs, only three are foreigners.”⁵⁶ Also, on 28 June 2020, it was alleged that Mr. Werner’s Senatorial bid in the South Eastern County of Gran Kru was being bankrolled by BIA.⁵⁷

Furthermore, a former key official of the Ministry of Education has also assumed a leadership position within the company. After being a strong internal supporter and advocate of the program, the once Deputy Minister of Planning and Research and later Head of the Education Delivery Unit moved to BIA in 2021 to lead the company’s operation in Liberia. Mr. Gbovadeh Gbiliala now serves as the Country Director of Bridge Liberia, leading its operation and directly benefiting from earlier expansion and scale-up decisions made in favor of the company.⁵⁸ At the same time, he represents Liberia at UNESCO⁵⁹ as the Vice Chairperson of the Education Commission. Although he was first elected to the position in November 2019, his re-election in 2021 came after being appointed as

Country Director of Bridge Liberia. Currently, he maintains his position as Vice Chair of UNESCO’s Education Commission, representing Liberia and the Ministry of Education, while serving as Country Director for a private and for-profit company that is competing with others under the LEAP program. Furthermore, while still heading the Education Delivery Unit of the Ministry of Education, Mr. Gbiliala co-authored the 2019 internal evaluation report of BIA’s activities requires to be a neutral player providing oversight and guidance to all providers and stakeholders in the sector, and specifically providers under the LEAP Program.⁶⁰

The above concerns regarding public officials’ conflict of interest matter greatly, as they have implications for the effective and independent monitoring and oversight of the program, including BIA’s operations, by the Ministry of Education.

■ Recommendations

The decisions of public officials should be based on solid evidence and in the foremost interest of rights-holders. Policies and programs introduced by public institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, should be entirely public-interest driven and not seem to personally benefit (in short, medium- or long-term) officials heralding such initiatives. A situation whereby an official of the MOE co-authors BIA’s performance report undermines their independent monitoring and oversight roles. A thorough investigation should be carried out, including an audit of the finances of BIA, to establish the connections of current and former officials of the Ministry of Education and others with BIA and to determine whether they have directly benefited or are directly benefiting from the program in their official capacities.

⁵⁶ OK 99.5 FM Liberia, “Live Interview with Former Minister of Education, George Werner”, minute 29:10 of the interview.

⁵⁷ Independent Probe Newspaper, “Over quest for political influence: Bridge Int’l Bankroll George Werner’s Grand Kru Co. Senatorial Bid (Part IV).” June 28, 2020, <https://independentprobe.com/2020/06/28/over-quest-for-political-influence-bridge-intl-bankroll-george-werners-grand-kru-co-senatorial-bid-part-ii/>

⁵⁸ Bridge Liberia, “Liberia Re-Elected as UNESCO’s Vice Chair at the Bureau of Education Commission,” November 15, 2021, <https://bridgeliberia.org/liberia-re-elected-as-unesco-s-vice-chair-at-the-bureau-of-education-commission/>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gbovadeh Gbiliala et al., *Bridge Liberia, Learning in Liberia: Literacy and Numeracy Gains in Year 3* (Monrovia: Ministry of Education, 2019), https://issuu.com/newglobe/docs/3_learning_in_liberia_-_year_3_report

V. Unequal playing field for LEAP providers - Preferential treatment of BIA

From the onset, the playing field has not been level for all providers and partners within LEAP. As detailed in COTAE's 2017 report, disparities in political and financial support to the LEAP providers have favored BIA.⁶¹ BIA has enjoyed preferential treatment from the Government of Liberia, especially from the Ministry of Education, supported by the fact that they were the first company to begin their operation, long before their counterparts started. Also, BIA's schools are largely accessible, compared to others. BIA has been awarded more schools, which means they receive more per-pupil funding from the Liberian Government; as well as mobilize more funds from external partners and donors.⁶² Many years into the program, little has changed. Four out of the eight providers have dropped out of the program chiefly due to funding constraints.⁶³ During interviews conducted in June 2022 by COTAE's National Coordinator, Anderson D. Miamen, with some LEAP operators and stakeholders, the participants

raised equity issues regarding the distribution of joint resources mobilized to fund the whole program. They stated their concern with the fact that BIA receives the same per-pupil contribution of 50 USD from the pool-fund managed by an independent firm (Ark International then) on behalf of the MOE, even though BIA mobilizes additional resources from other sources. This concern is particularly true for the Liberian organization (Youth Movement) that relies almost entirely and solely on support from the pool fund to manage assigned schools under the program.

BIA alone operates the majority, 350 (67%) of the 525 LEAP schools, with the other three providers sharing the remaining 33%. This is despite solid evidence of BIA's performance in the program and the numerous concerns voiced regarding its operation.

■ Recommendations

In line with the Liberian Code of Conduct for Public Officials and other human rights and accountability frameworks, equal and fair play principles should be respected in engaging with partners and stakeholders, especially those recruited and awarded schools to manage under the LEAP program. The Ministry of Education and the Government of Liberia should create an enabling environment and level-playing field that allows all providers and participants of LEAP and any other public sector program to enjoy equal and fair treatment. Continuous preferential treatment of Bridge Liberia against other partners, undermines competition and fair play in the implementation of LEAP.

⁶¹ COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*, p. 16

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The providers that have dropped out of the program are Omega, Brac Liberia, Stella Maris and More Than Me.

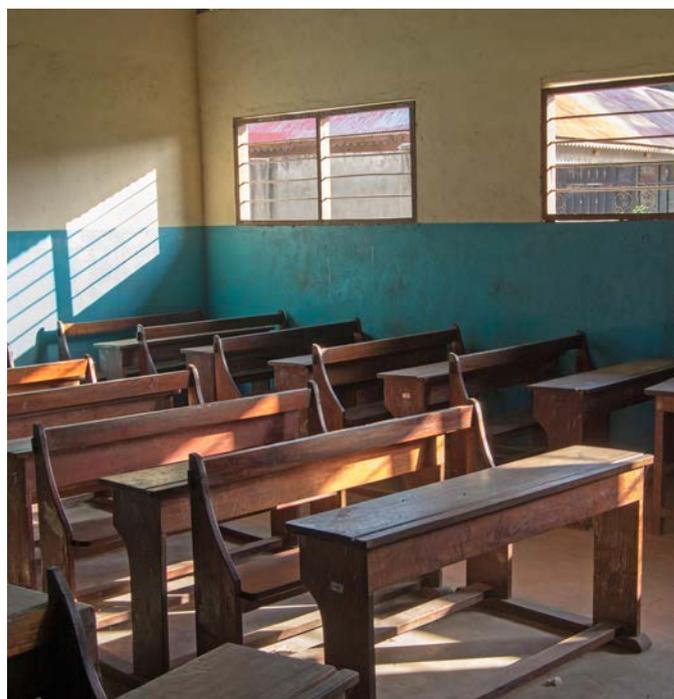
VI. Fundraising and sustainability issues

For nearly six years, the Ministry of Education and BIA have been interested in sustaining and even expanding LEAP, largely ignoring sustainability concerns that have been lingering since the program was initiated. In 2018, COTAE and partners urged the newly elected Coalition for Democratic Change-led government, through the Ministry of Education, to cautiously handle matters related to the LEAP program (See position statement, Annex 6). COTAE and other CSOs suggested a gradual, five-year process through which all schools assigned to BIA and other providers would be turned back to public management. The planned idea proposed an incremental, non-abrupt handover process to avoid any adverse consequences for the education sector. Unfortunately, the recommendations provided were not considered, as the new team continued their predecessors' actions, including the annexation of new schools to the already growing list of schools under the program. In June 2020, the call by CSOs to transition back to public management of the schools was reiterated yet ignored⁶⁴. The size and scope of the program has been expanded, despite the glaring challenges that schools under LEAP are facing, particularly those managed by BIA.⁶⁵ Romero and Sandefur (2020) indicated that the expenditure per pupil for Bridge was 640 USD, and after three years, the average (self-reported) expenditure had changed to 161 USD per pupil, while the government's spending target was 50 USD per pupil.⁶⁶

Several years into the program, financial sustainability concerns raised earlier have begun to emerge. In its quarter one report for the 2018

school year, BIA announced a budget of 6.7 million USD, of which 5 million USD had been raised by the reporting period in March 2019 (See Annex 8). The company was worried about mobilizing the remaining 1.7 million USD, as there were huge doubts about raising it from donors and partners, especially through the pool fund managed by Social Finance and Ark International on behalf of the LEAP partners and the Government of Liberia. The unpublished report stated:

"While Bridge PSL has received per child payments from Social Finance for semester 1, we have yet to hear any communication that there is enough funding for all of Semester 2 payments, or for construction reimbursements. Further, we have not yet heard whether Social Finance is working on an impact bond for 2018-2019 and beyond, with whom, or how it will be structured – a key aspect to ensure the viability of future funding for the program." (See Annex 8)



⁶⁴ COTAE and National Teachers' Association of Liberia's joint press statement, June 8, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6e0958f6576ebde0e78c18/t/5ee11d2644ab3034e5b3d211/1591811366302/Joint+Press+Statement+on+BIA++NTAL+%26+COTAE-June+2020.pdf>

⁶⁵ Smart News Liberia, "Investigation uncovers public schools in three counties want Bridge International out!"

⁶⁶ Romero and Sandefur, *The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia to Bridge International Academies after Three Years*, p. 2-3.



In addition, four of the eight providers who started the program are no longer a part of it. Brac Liberia, Omega, More Than Me Academies, and Stella Maris Polytechnic have since dropped out due to funding issues and their inability to fundraise to sustain their operation. In COTAE's interviews with some providers, they decried their inability to fundraise on their own and uncertainty around fundraising for the pool fund that annually provides 50 USD per pupil to each provider. Their abrupt exit from the program affected the schools under their control. An executive of one of the providers (Brac Liberia) explained in an interview with COTAE: "Our exit from the schools affected them because it was not properly planned. We would have loved to do so orderly and properly, but it was beyond our control. It was difficult to fundraise; so, we could not do anything about it."

The nature of LEAP makes it difficult to attract funding from traditional sources, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the European Union, and the World Bank.⁶⁷ This further exacerbates the sustainability concerns of the program, which relies on philanthropic funders, some of whom withdrew support from the program as early as 2018.

An internal confidential source notes that Social Finance, the group that manages the LEAP Pool Fund, informed partners in September 2018 about fundraising difficulties for the remaining half of year two. One of the core pipeline funders had fallen away due to shift of

⁶⁷ In March 2022, the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) [divested support to New Globe](#), otherwise known as Bridge International Academies. The IFC had invested a total of \$13.5 million in BIA since 2014, with the intention of supporting the company's expansion to other countries. The divestment, which is unusual for the IFC, was confirmed through a note published on March 9. The decision came after several scandals surrounding BIA and a series of serious complaints to the IFC's independent accountability mechanism, the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) regarding the IFC's investment in the company. Allegations in the complaints range from violations of labor rights, child sexual abuse involving BIA staff and students, and inadequate health and safety measures that led to the tragic death of one child and the injury of another.

strategic priority; there was a significant risk that substantial further funding would not be raised for the last calendar year; and even though some resources were secured for the first tranche of the third school year, challenges still existed, as potential donors wanted funds from other sources to match up their contributions.

This highlights the fundraising woes for the program, while the MOE continues to entrust additional schools to providers and ignore the precarious financial sustainability of the program.

Additionally, according to the same internal confidential source, Social Finance indicated that although there was a commitment of 750k

USD from a potential donor to support an early Q4 [quarter 4] 2018 payment, the release of the funds was contingent on a number of factors, including sourcing 500k USD to take commitment fund to around 1/3 of the total year three budget.

This exposes existing and looming financial difficulties facing the program and providers, which will have serious implications for its sustainability and viability. Overall, these financial issues can have severe consequences for the sector and the right to education of vulnerable Liberian children.

■ Recommendations

Given the growing fundraising issues and the fact that there are now only four active LEAP partners (Bridge Liberia, Youth Movement, Rising Academies, and Street Child), who themselves are experiencing financial difficulties, it is important that the Ministry of Education and the Government of Liberia proceed with extreme caution in decision-making around LEAP, especially any plan(s) to add new schools to the program. The Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education, should work with stakeholders to develop a clear and gradual exit strategy for BIA and others managing public schools under the LEAP program. This begins with halting any new plans to expand and give additional schools to LEAP providers and partners. Importantly, it entails working with providers and others to identify and mainstream any best practices across the public school system, carefully considering financial, logistical, and other implications for the sector. Doing so will support efforts aimed at pushing for a vibrant, inclusive, and accountable public school system, adequately funded by the State and owned and fully operated by the national government, with meaningful involvement of parents, students, teachers, civil society, and other stakeholders.

VII. Unfulfilled verbal promises to schools and communities

There was much excitement among many parents, community dwellers, teachers and even administrators of schools earmarked to be given to BIA in 2016. Students surged to BIA-run schools⁶⁸, but the class-size cap BIA implemented limited the number of students (55 in theory)⁶⁹ enrolled or retained into their program. This initial preference for BIA may have been encouraged by multiple enticing verbal promises made by Bridge Liberia to schools, parents, and communities.

BIA promised huge salaries to recruited teachers. This has not been realized, as volunteer teachers are paid monthly “stipends” (between 70-80 USD) that is below that which government pays to “C” Certificate Teachers, the least of three grades (A, B, and C) of teachers in the public school system in Liberia.

“Our school is one of the new schools given to Bridge by the Ministry of Education during the 2021/2022 school year. I am told I will be paid 70 USD as stipend/compensation as a volunteer teacher. But since November 2021, we are in March 2022 and I have not been paid by Bridge, although I have been teaching. Also, we have not received supplies as promised. This is making things difficult for us, as we have families to feed and other obligations to settle.”

These were the words of John Sambulah (not his real name), a volunteer teacher at one of BIA’s newly assigned schools in Bomi County in Western Liberia, who was interviewed by COTAE in March 2022. Similar concerns were raised by volunteer teachers in other schools, especially in Grand Bassa and Bong Counties.

Students, parents, and community members indicated that BIA made several promises to them, which largely attracted them to the company and PSL, then LEAP. In some communities and schools visited by COTAE in 2017⁷⁰, many parents indicated that they stood in long queues to secure spaces for their children in BIA-assigned schools. While this was partly due to the class-size cap introduced that limited the number of students, parents arrived at various campuses as early as 7am to get space(s) for their children due to multiple promises made about supply of free uniforms to students, three meals per day for the students, free textbooks, tablet/computer for each student, and teaching through tablets and computers instead of the traditional system. In 2022, five years later, many of these verbal promises are unfulfilled. Although inadequate, one set of uniform was given to students in BIA schools visited in 2017 in Nimba, Grand Bassa, and Margibi, Bong, and River Cess Counties. During interviews conducted with teachers and parents in March-April 2022, COTAE was informed that supply of uniforms by BIA has since stopped due to a mandate from the Ministry of Education requiring all public schools to have the same uniform, and no different uniforms for Bridge-run schools. Parents have reverted to buying uniforms for their children in BIA-run schools, putting strains on their meager incomes. As highlighted by an aggrieved unemployed parent in Bong County in central Liberia in an interview

⁶⁸ Rodney Sieh, “Students Surge at Bridge Managed Public Schools in Liberia,” FrontPage Africa, September 6, 2016, <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/2016news/students-surge-at-bridge-managed-public-schools-in-liberia-communities-hail-education-partners/>

⁶⁹ According to Romero et al. (2017) p.15, “Bridge International Academies was authorized to cap class sizes at 55 (but in practice capped them at 45 in most cases as this was allowed by the MOU), while other contractors were authorized to cap class sizes at 65.”

⁷⁰ As part of COTAE, OSIWA and ActionAid, *Public Private Partnership in Education: Monitoring Report*.

conducted by COTAE in March 2022: “We thought the money Bridge once used to buy their own uniforms for our children will now go towards buying the regular uniforms for our children. But this is not the case. Instead, parents are themselves doing so, most times under difficult circumstances.”

Also, the non-fee paying/free school, promised by BIA through their community engagement, is not forthcoming. Despite BIA mobilizing extra resources, students in BIA-run schools are paying Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and activity fees (See Annex 5) just like their counterparts in traditional public schools⁷¹. In BIA-run schools visited in Bomi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Montserrado Counties between March and April 2022, students

pay fees imposed by the national government (the Ministry of Education) and PTA fees agreed by the parents and school authorities to support basic school running costs. Even in communities and towns with BIA-operated schools, lots of children are reportedly out of school due to financial burdens. During COTAE’s field data collection in March-April 2022, many interviewed parents revealed they were unable to pay official and unofficial fees charged by public schools for all their children. This is despite the government having a free and compulsory primary education program in the country. These conditions are affecting enrollment and leaving many children out of school as some parents cannot afford the cost of uniforms and various fees charged.

■ Recommendations

BIA should be truthful to communities about their dealings and activities. Promises made to communities and students should be fully upheld. This begins with making their contract public and available to stakeholders to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.⁷² Their monitoring should be holistic, focusing on the needs of their teachers and students that the schools are meant to serve. Teachers’ welfare issues reported during these monitoring visits should be promptly addressed, while reports related to school infrastructure and renovation issues should also be considered.

⁷¹ Liberia has a Free and Compulsory Primary Education Program in place, introduced in 1997 and relaunched in 2007. Nevertheless, the policy is not fully implemented, as students pay PTA and Activity Fees to compensate volunteer teachers, procure instructional materials, and address other pressing school-level challenges, amid limited financial support from national government.

⁷² For more recommendations on how to improve transparency in private provision of education, consult Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Transparency of private commercial education providers: A case study of Bridge International Academies*, (Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2022), <https://www.gi-esqr.org/en/resources/publications/transparency-of-private-commercial-education-providers>

General recommendations

1. The Liberian Government should honor its human rights obligations by adequately funding public education and improving the management and governance of the education sector in Liberia. In line with the Dakar Framework of Action of 2000 and the Incheon Declaration of 2015, the Government of Liberia should increase the share of the national budget allocated to education to at least 20% to ensure that services provided in the sector are adequate, inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries.
2. In line with the Abidjan Principles on the right to education, the New Education Act of 2011, and other legal frameworks, the Liberian Government should effectively regulate the activities of private actors in the education space, including BIA and other LEAP partners as well as private and faith-based institutions owning and operating schools in the country.
3. The Ministry of Education should ensure that timely, adequate, and credible information and documents about LEAP are made available to stakeholders and partners. Schools (administration, parents, teachers, students) currently under the management of LEAP partners should have unhindered access to their contracts with the Government of Liberia and the Ministry of Education to enable them to make informed decisions and hold the actors accountable.
4. There is a need for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the providers and the schools managed by BIA and other providers that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and obligations of the providers towards the communities and schools they manage. The MOU will help to clearly document and communicate services to be provided by BIA and others, the limits of their involvement with the schools, as well as the amount of financial and non-financial resources to be invested in their schools.
5. Civil society organizations and the independent media should remain constructively engaged with education-related activities and processes in Liberia. With increased involvement of private actors in education in the country as well as the latest trend of outsourcing public schools to BIA and other providers, CSOs and independent media should routinely investigate and objectively report to the public about developments in the education space in Liberia. Also, they should build the capacity of communities, parents, teachers, and school authorities to fully understand their rights and responsibilities in providing guidance and oversight to the sector.
6. Civil society organizations, communities, school authorities, teachers and other local stakeholders should seek information, capacity-building opportunities, and other resources to speak out and demand accountability for quality, improved services from BIA and others. They should push for access to documents regarding what partners are to do and not do within their schools and communities, as this is the first step to arming them with the required information to make informed decisions.
7. Finally, development partners and promoters of the right to education should financially, logistically, and technically support civil society to keep pushing for and defending the right to public education by the Government of Liberia. With the many concerns raised regarding the activities of LEAP partners, especially BIA, the independent role of civil society in investigating and timely reporting on relevant issues and developments in the sector cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, civil society, the media, and other players should remain engaged with the program and various issues around it to enable them to make informed decisions and demand accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making from the Government and the providers.

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Annex 1:

Letter from BIA on temporary variation of terms and conditions of employment

March 26, 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: Temporary variation of terms and conditions of employment relating to place of work, hours of work, and remuneration

The recent directive by the government to close schools to contain the spread of the covid-19 virus means that we do not have operational schools to support and must scale down support office operations while the situation remains unsolved.

The implication of this unfortunate, yet unforeseen event is that the company cannot meet its obligation to provide work for a majority of its staff whose services will not be required while the situation persists. Despite not having received enough donor funds to meet the full school year budget, the Company intends to retain a small workforce deemed essential for critical business continuity deliverables under a flexible time and place of work policy where the employee may be required to telework.

Unless the pandemic is contained and schools are reopened sooner, non-essential employees are to proceed on Compulsory leave without pay for a period of two months beginning 1st April 2020 to 30 April 2020 subject to any extension the Company may seek if schools remain closed beyond this period, or until such time as schools will be directed to reopen whichever is earlier. For those with accrued paid annual leave, this will be factored into the Compulsory leave period and paid upon their request. You will attract a gratuitous payment equivalent to 10% of their salaries under contract and retain your medical health insurance benefit.

Your role in the company as [REDACTED] is considered non-essential because the schools have been closed. While operational stoppage remains in place, you will not be expected to work. These measures amount to a temporary variation of

March 26, 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: Temporary variation of terms and conditions of employment relating to place of work, hours of work, and remuneration

The recent directive by the government to close schools to contain the spread of the covid-19 virus means that we do not have operational schools to support and must scale down support office operations while the situation remains unresolved.

The implication of this unfortunate, yet unforeseen event is that the company cannot meet its obligation to provide work for a majority of its staff whose services will not be required while the situation persists. Despite having not received enough donor funds to meet the full school year budget, the Company intends to retain a small workforce deemed essential for critical business continuity deliverables under a flexible time and place of work policy where the employee may be required to telework.

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Your role in the company as [REDACTED] is considered non-essential because the schools have been closed. While operational stoppage remains in place, you will not be expected to work. These measures amount to a temporary variation of your terms and conditions of employment with respect to scope of work, place of work and remuneration, and are considered reasonable in the circumstances and for the duration the company fails to resume normal operations as a consequence of the pandemic and the closure directive. The measures are scheduled to be effective from April 1, 2020 until April 30, 2020 subject to any extension the Company may communicate if schools remain closed beyond this period, or until such time as schools will be directed to reopen whichever is earlier.

The situation is unfortunate for all concerned but we ask you to appreciate the necessity of this measure and exercise patience.

your terms and conditions of employment with respect to scope of work, place of work and remuneration, and are considered reasonable in the circumstances and for the duration the company fails to resume normal operations as a consequence of the pandemic and the closure directive. The measures are scheduled to be effective from April 1st, 2020 until April 30, 2020 subject to any extension of the Company may communicate if schools remain closed beyond this period, or until such time as schools will be directed to reopen whichever is earlier.

The situation is unfortunate but we ask you to appreciate the necessity of this measure and exercise patience.

Annex 2: Letter from “Concern” BIA Teachers to the Minister of Education (Hon. D. Ansu Sonii)

Letter obtained in the word format during our research

**Concern Bridge Teachers Association
Republic of Liberia
Cell numbers: 0775701883/0775920887/0881166691
June 25, 2020**

**Hon. D. Ansu Sonii
Minister of Education
Republic of Liberia**

**Re: Issues at Bridge International that need to be addressed
and reforms instilled; requesting Griffin Asigo departure
for return of sanity in the program or teachers revoke**

We as concern teachers and administrators from all Bridge run schools nationwide are pleased to acknowledge with thanks and profound appreciation for the immense contributions or efforts made by the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Education and other prominent donors and partners toward the rebuilding and uplifting of the educational system of the country.

As we work comparatively in the rebuilding and strengthening of our educational system in post - war Liberia, we as teachers and administrators are duly aware that it requires several measures to address. These issues border on huge pitfalls at Bridge International Academies under the Directorship of Griffin Asigo which we can no longer cope with or have our schools associated with.

In keeping with the above, we have unanimously agreed to call the attention of the Ministry of Education, National Teachers Association of Liberia, Committee on Education at the both Houses of the Legislature and other stakeholders including dignitaries, civil society, Ministry of Labour, amongst others that it is about time that the below shortfalls of Bridge International Academics Liberia be critically looked into so as to strengthen our educational system which is yet to be 'Best' since their arrival.

Kindly see below key counts we hope is addressed:

- Reduce workloads or give better incentives; working beyond 3 PM and earning less is horrible for a multi-million company
- Griffin Asigo has dismissed more people than anytime in Bridge history and reduced the morale of the entity locally and internationally and it's time he leaves so that we have smooth operations in our classroom and program, the news media lately is terrible for the brand only because of the one in charge
- Compulsory lesson completion before we earn our just pay should be done away with as in many occasions Bridge devices fail yet we are not paid as though it's our fault
- Griffin's professed 'Director of Schools' Corina Totimeh with a nursing degree and no teaching experience is an affront to us qualified teachers and must be told to leave the program; we spent years undergoing teacher training and credential to be supervised by a nurse with no such experience in teaching, education or the classroom
- Stipend should be provided for both payroll administrators & teachers, as it sits stipend is provided for only teachers when many do both administration and teaching
- Increase work force or staff is necessary at this time to get our kids learning more and becoming proficient
- Execute refresher training each school semester; started before but since went into oblivion under Corina
- Method of evaluation should be changed at Bridge completely
- Resettlement/ Relocation must be allocated; Bridge cannot continue to say relocation of teachers is at our own cost, this is totally unacceptable
- Adjustment/Reduction in the learning hours
- Volunteer teachers should be placed on payroll before school resumes and Bridge with the millions made of the circle should make additional payment to teachers in these schools they operate

We look forward to your timely response and can sit to further elaborate if requested. Again thanks as always for your continuous support towards Liberia's educational reawakening!

Respectfully yours

Signed: Peter Cephus Dillon
Secretary General

Approved: Gayflor Mulbah
Chairman

Annex 3: Complaint from Bridge Liberia Office to Bridge Global

Letter obtained in the word format during our research

Dr. Shannon May
CEO Bridge International Academies

February 15, 2020

Complaint from Liberia Country Office

Dear Shannon,

Again, thanks for establishing Bridge and improving the education systems of countries. I complaint last year March 2019 that Griffin Asigo the current Country Director of Liberia threatened to get rid of me which he proved by accepting my resignation which was never in line with the company's policy. I arranged a meeting with Jennifer Giroux and requested that I should be transferred to another department instead of remaining in the Schools Department where Corina Totimeh was promoted to Schools Director after Griffin falsely placed me on PIP just to have Corina promoted to the position. Corina has been unable to provide guidelines/directions to me for timely delivery but she spend hours blasting and insulting on the phone and even has taken her attitude to principals and teachers. Griffin is always in the defense of Corina to the extent that he comes in the Learning and Development Supervisors chatroom and defend her to the last. Anyone in the company that has problem with Corina Griffin will also have problem with you. Griffin is the one performing good amount of Corina's daily tasks. They traveled in field together for days. Corina has hired many persons she knows in the role of Learning and Development Supervisors and whatever she says is the final. My last performance under Griffin was at 22%/30 but since Corina enter Bridge, Daniel has been appearing negative to Griffin because he says I am tough and informed.



Corina asked me to not confirm Molley Paasewe in the role of Learning and Development Supervisor and I refused because he is doing his job. My refusal to this and many others which could kill the company or lower performance, Corina invited me to Monrovia for the final PIP Evaluation which I honored and today only to give me a letter of termination of performance that I am the least performance Regional Manager and contract ends February 15, 2020. I asked about my servant to leave peacefully and a letter to allow me work with another LEAP Partner and refused. Alimata Johnson and Corina Totimeh with Corina laughing at me held me hostage to hand over the company assets immediately and accept sign the termination letter else I could not leave. I have health problem which Jennifer Giroux is aware of and was compelled to call a friend who phone a representative from the House before I was allowed to go home. Bridge Liberia is for Griffin Asigo and Corina Totimeh. They both have been and against me since February 2019. I was alone managing all Area Supervisors and schools in the entire country for over two years, doing portion of the Learning and Development Manager job and has never underperformed but only when Griffin wanted to promote Corina to the position.

I was hired from Monrovia and sent to Harper being the oldest Liberia Country staff and only to end me while all my things in Maryland and for no good reason but to satisfy their own interest. I suffered too much for the establishment of the company in Liberia but Corina and Griffin are damaging the company.

I don't want to cause any problem but leave peacefully. I request speedily intervention. I await hearing from you before I proceed if I will. I do love Bridge and appreciate the work but with Griffin and Corina being the owners in Liberia, I have been managing to work under intense daily pressure.

Regards,

Daniel Fully
Regional Manager, Southeast
Dfully2024@gmail.com

Annex 4: Edwin G. Sulonteh's resignation letter to Bridge

**Mr. Edwin G. Sulonteh
6th grade sponsor, Bridge International
Academy partnership Schools for
Liberia; David Fejue Public School,
Suakoko School District,
Bong County, Liberia**

June 15th, 2018

**Human Resource Manager (HRM)
Bridge International Academy
Partnership schools For Liberia polar
Project, 16th street Sinkor, Monrovia, Liberia.**

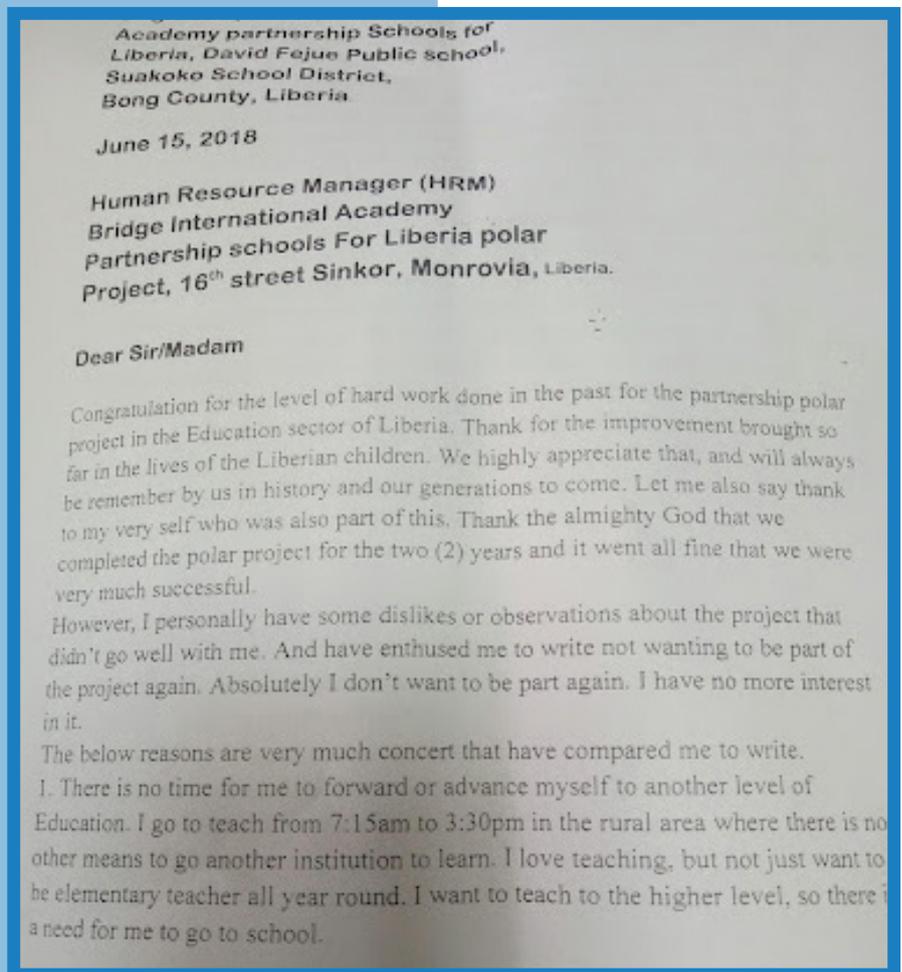
Dear Sir/Madam

Congratulation for the level of hard work done in the past for the partnership polar project in the Education sector of Liberia. Thank for the improvement brought so far in the lives of the Liberian children. We highly appreciate that and will always be remember by us in our history and our generations to come. Let me also say thank to my very self who was also part of this. Thank the almighty God that we were very much successful.

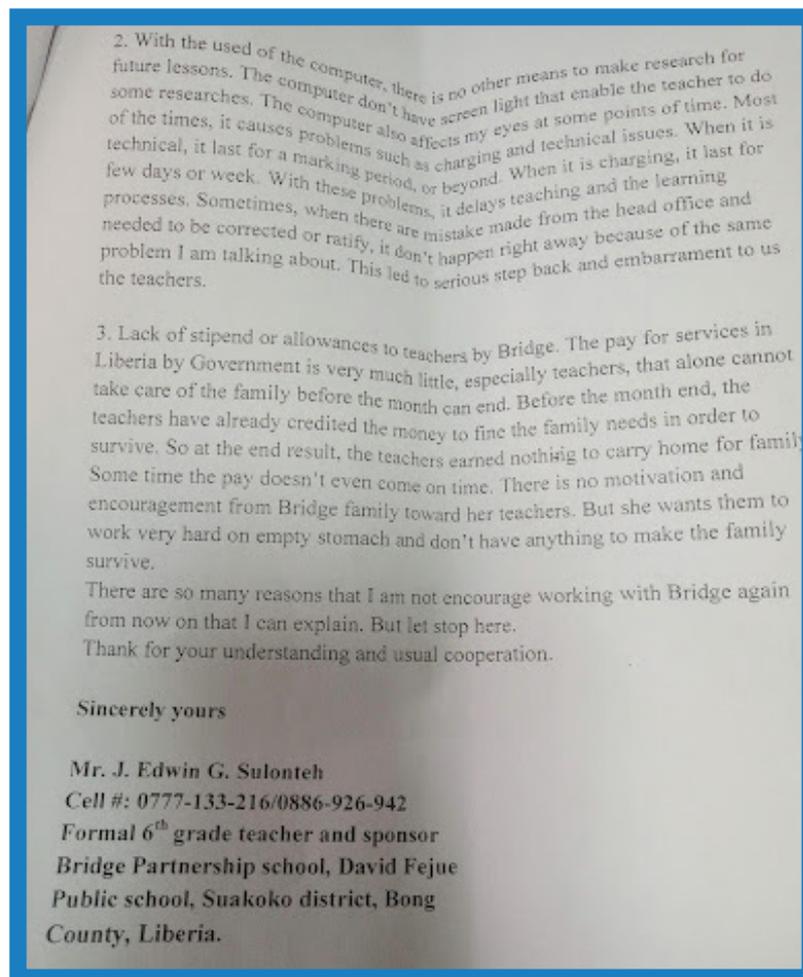
However, I personally have some dislikes or observations about the project that didn't go well with me. And have enthused me to write not wanting to be part of the project again. Absolutely I don't want to be part again. I have no more interest in it.

The below reasons are very much concert that have compared me to write.

1. The is no time for me to forward or advance myself to another level of Education. I go to teach from 7:15am to 3:30pm in the rural area where there is no other means to go another institution to learn. I love teaching, but not just want to be elementary teacher all year round. I want to teach to the higher level, so there is a need for me to go to school.



2. With the used of the computer, there is no other means to make research for future lessons. The computer don't have screen light that enable the teacher to do some researches. The computer also affects my eyes at some points of time. Most of the times, it causes problems such as charging and technical issues. When it is technical, it last for a marking period, or beyond. When it is charging, it last for few days or week. With these problems, it delays teaching and the learning processes. Sometimes, when there are mistake made from the head office and needed to be corrected or ratify, it don't happen right away because of the same problem i am talking about. This led to serious step back and embarrassment to us the teachers.
3. Lack of stipend or allowances to teachers by Bridge. The pay for services in Liberia by Government is very much little, especially teachers, that alone cannot take care of the family before the month can end. Before the month end, the teachers have already credited the money to fine the family needs in order to survive. So at the end result, the teachers earned nothing to carry home for family. Sometimes the pay doesn't even come



on time. There is no motivation and encouragement from Bridge family toward her teachers. But she wants them to work very hard on empty stomach and don't have anything to make the family survive.

There are so many reasons that I am not encourage working with Bridge again from now on that I can explain. But let stop here.

Thank you for your understanding and usual cooperation.

Sincerely yours

Mr. J. Edwin G. Sulonteh
Cell #: 0777-133-216/0886-926-942
Formal 6th grade teacher and sponsor
Bridge Partnership school, David Fejue
Public school, Suakoko district, Bong
County, Liberia.

Annex 5: List of fees at a BIA School

SARAH SIMPSON GEORGE / BRIDGE LIBERIA EDUCATION
ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM (BRIDGE LEAD)
Tubman & Johnson Streets, Buchanan City
Grand Bassa County

INFORMATION SHEET - (\$50.00LD)

The above mentioned institution wishes to inform her valued parents and the general public that academic 2020/2021 registration process runs from November 9, 2020 to December 5, 2020.

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION DATES

1st Entrance	November 7, 2020
Final entrance	November 14, 2020

ENTRANCE FEES

Kindergarten entrance fees	\$200.00LD
1st Grade - 5th Grade Entrance fees	\$250.00LD

OLD STUDENTS REGISTRATION

Nov. 9 - 21, 2020 daily (Monday to Saturdays) from 8:00am to 3:00pm

NEW STUDENTS REGISTRATION

Nov. 23 - 30, 2020 daily (Mondays to Saturdays) from 8:00am to 3:00pm

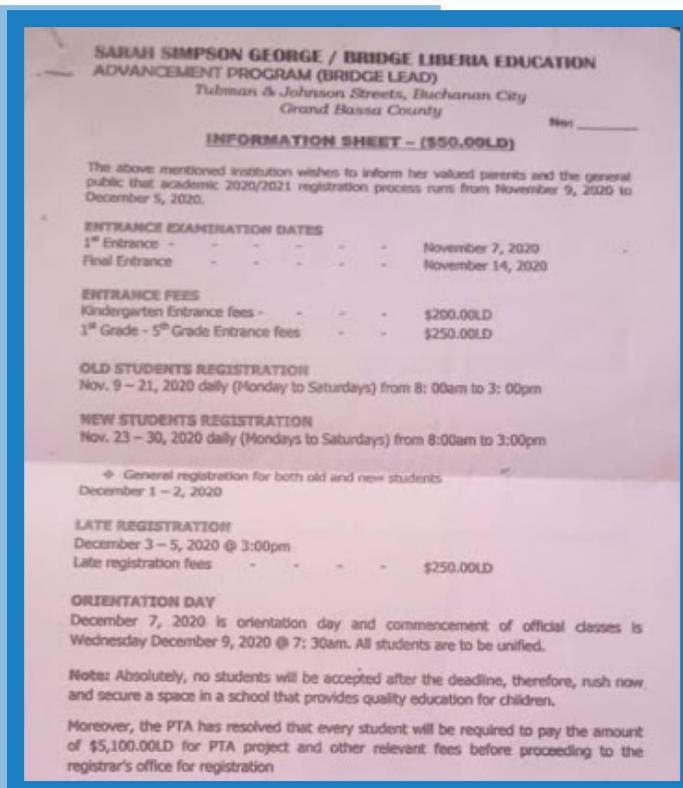
General registration for both old and new students
December 1 - 2, 2020

LATE REGISTRATION

December 3 - 5, 2020 @ 3:00pm	
Late registration fees	\$250.00LD

ORIENTATION DAY

December 7, 2020 is orientation day and commencement of official classes is Wednesday December 9, 2020 @ 7:30am. All students are to be unified.



Note: Absolutely, no students will be accepted after the deadline, therefore, rush now and secure a place in a school that provides quality education for children.

Moreover, the PTA has resolved that every student will be required to pay the amount of \$5,100.00LD for PTA project and other relevant fees before proceeding to the registrar's office for registration. **THE SAID AMOUNT IS CATEGORIZED BELOW**

NO.	ITEM DESCRIPTION	UNIT COST PER CHILD
1	Tuition	Free
2	PTA Project Fees	\$550.00LD
3	Unemployed Teacher's Compensation	\$825.00LD
4	Security Compensation	\$360.00LD
5	Feeding Fees	\$550.00LD
6	Care Giver Compensation	\$285.00LD
7	School maintenance fees	\$1,220.00LD
8	PTA Meeting Due	\$220.00LD
9	Sports Activities Fees	\$250.00LD
10	CEO's Project Fees	\$200.00LD
11	Cooks' Compensation	\$330.00LD
12	ID Card & Batch	\$310.00LD
TOTAL COST PER CHILD		\$5,100.00LD

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10.	CEO'S Project Fees	\$200.00LD
11.	Cooks' Compensation	\$330.00LD
12.	ID Card & Batch	\$310.00LD
TOTAL COST PER CHILD		\$5,100.00LD

The above total cost per child will be paid before your child/children is considered as a student of the institution.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS
All students from Beginner to Kindergarten are required to bring the following items:

- > Half Dozen of Copy Book
- > One Dozen of Pencils
- > One Bottle of Alcohol
- > One Bath Soap
- > One Roll of Tissue

All students from Grade One to Grade Five are also required to bring the following requirements/items:

- > One Bottle of Dexter
- > One Roll of Tissue
- > One Piece of Bath Soap

Please contact the administration for details on the above information for clarity 0776-821-318/0880-614-234/0776-035-278/0776-443-671.

Signed: _____ Attested: _____
Amos Cole Registrar Mr. Prince Nyie PTA CHAIR

Approved: _____
Necross M. Nigatu

The above total cost per child will be paid before you child/children is considered as a student of the institution.

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- One Roll of Tissue
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Please contact the administration for details on the above information for clarity 0776-821-318/0880-614-234/0776-035-278/0776-443-671.

Signed: Arnos Cole
Registrar

Mr. Prince Nyie
PTA CHAIR

Annex 6: COTAE's Position Statement and Recommendations to the new Liberian Government in 2018

COALITION FOR TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION
22nd Street & Tubman Blvd, Sinkor
www.cotae.cental.org, +231-886818855



COTAE's Formal Position on the Future of Partnership School for Liberia Program

May 15, 2018

Background and Context

Since January 2016, the Coalition for Transparency and Accountability (COTAE) has been opposed to the Partnership School for Liberia/ Public Private Partnership (PPP) Program. COTAE agrees that there are challenges in the sector, including acute underfinancing and poor supervision, which negatively impact on learning outcomes, as students are not obtaining the required quality education in nearly all public schools. However, we believe that the long-term and sustainable solution cannot be to outsource public schools to mainly foreign and for-profit companies whose so intention is to profit from the system.

In his August 2015 report to the United National Secretary General highlighting the implications PPP for the right to education and for the principles of social justice and equity, The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Kishore Singh, cautioned governments to proceed with "extreme caution" in establishing PPP in education. In count 33 of the report, he furthered: "outsourcing education activities to profit-making corporations opens the space for them not only to make a profit, but also to steer education agendas in ways that may not be in the best interest of students, parents and teachers and thus societies as a whole." His call is based on several factors, key among which are limited state capacity to properly regulate the private sector, whose financial viability usually undercuts government's capacity and ability to effectively regulate

them. Besides, his call came in the wake of excesses associated with existing public private programs, including those of Bridge International Academeis, that have been highly contentious and a source of distractions due human rights violation, high cost, and sustainability issues.

COTAE does not detest partnership between government and private sector actors, which has always existed in Liberia in terms of faith based organizations, individuals and NGOs establishing and operating their own schools to compliment government's efforts. Private sector actor have partnered with government to build capacity and support key areas such as teachers' training and construction and renovation of schools and other facilities. What we are opposed to, based on human rights violation, equity and sustainability issues is a commercially-driven approach, whereby, government outsources public schools to private actors, especially foreign companies driven by financial gains and profits, which runs contrary key guiding principles of education such as equity, equality, and inclusiveness.

In fact, it has been established that quality education is not merely achieved by resorting to outsourcing public schools to private providers. However, quality is achieved by employing qualified teachers, providing quality-teaching materials, strengthening supervision and monitoring and allocating sufficient budgetary support to improve quality, which are conditions and opportunities PSL schools are benefiting from.

Key Issues:

- 1. Disparity in Funding Triggered Marginal Gains**---we still believe that PSL is not the long-term and holistic solution to the problems in the Liberian Education System. Whatever marginal gains achieved during the first year of program, which does not commensurate with funding received by key providers like Bridge International Academies, was due to increased investment. BIA spent over 1000 USD per child when the Liberian Government was spending around 50 USD on students in other public schools. The Evaluation Report, Commissioned by the Government of Liberia, also shows that PSL providers benefited from extra teachers and other conditions, due to huge cash inflows, compared to traditionally run public schools.
- 2. The Evaluation report contradicts the current expansion plan**--MOE proceeded to award more schools to providers

without waiting awaiting the randomized control trial result/ independent evidence. So, the number of schools cannot be increased, moving forward based on results from the first evaluation, which is not positive about the level of investment and results achieved. The independent evaluators had advised government against expanding the program without evidence, which they ignored and awarded more schools to providers under the current school year.

- 3. Financial sustainability and Lack of Clear Exit Strategy**-----the current providers seem to be looking for long-term sources of funding for their investments/establishments, which will disadvantage the Liberian Education System. The plan does not suggest anything around turning over ownership to Liberians in the foreseeable future. Funding used for the program is non-sustainable, thereby making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, the scale up the program across all public schools.
- 4. Rights Violation**-----equity and equality issues from the program is even more concerning, especially those involving Bridge International Academies. Focus on managing few students and limiting access to education for the vast majority contradicts government role and obligation to educate all Liberians, as enshrined in Chapter 6 of the 1986 Liberian constitution.

Few Implications for Continuing with PSL, especially without clear and short term exit strategy:

1. Government is not ready, anytime soon, to live up to its responsibility/obligation to fund and run public schools, especially in terms of providing core education and instructional services
2. Foreigners are the only solutions to Liberia's problems, which is a dangerous and an untrue proposition/statement. We have to take full charge and ownership of our systems and processes.
3. We should be prepared to live up to/accept, even against our wishes and aspirations, the dictates and maneuverings of investors and private providers who will be dumping money into our system in an unsustainable manner
4. Brace ourselves for other sectors like Health and Agriculture, to

be equally outsourced, as the same tactics being employed and rationale for outsourcing public schools will be used in other critical sectors

Suggested way forward:

Our position is that government abolishes the PSL to look into effective, sustainable and inclusive/holistic ways of improving the system. One classic example is building the Ministry's capacity to effectively monitor and supervise schools. Full implementation of the Education Reform Law of 2011, the provides for creating county school systems and giving more leverage to locals to manage their own education systems and process will work. MOE can then provide overall supervision and guidance to ensure proper functioning of these County Education Systems.

Incase the Liberian Government wants to continue with the program for now, against views being expressed by COTAE and other stakeholders, we recommend that:

1. They immediately exclude – and certainly not scale up – providers who either:
 - Have violated ethical guidelines, either by pushing out students or teachers or received undue advantage in the first and second years,
 - Are not sustainable, using funding dumping to compete with others in an unfair and unsustainable way
 - Are commercial in nature, and/or have a track record of unethical or illegal behavior in other countries.
 - Have operated in secrecy and promoted a culture of opaqueness
2. Focus of support is for non-profit, local Liberian operators.
3. The Government chooses the allocation of schools based on its own criteria that reflect government citizens' interest-driven priorities, and not based on operators' criteria. If operators refuse, they can leave.
4. The Government puts together a comprehensive plan to, for instance in 2-3 years, take over the school management again, or integrate the operators into the public system. Operators that do not agree can leave as well.

5. The Government and all operators agree to full transparency, including by allowing unplanned visits of citizens and civil society organizations and other external assessments. Contracts are made legally, publicly, and in accordance with the Liberian relevant regulations.
6. No single operator has more than e.g. 25 schools, to avoid any provider having too much influence.
7. The Government does not expand the program beyond its current scale, and truly commit to take lessons learned from the evaluation into account, including potentially scaling back or stopping the program in the near future.
8. Government capacities to monitor and regulate are truly strengthened, rather than bringing in external consultants to monitor the system. All providers should be required to contribute, in kind and financially, towards building the technical capacity of the ministry to effectively monitor the system
9. All operators agree to handover to the Government their successful practices, tools, and data, so that the Government can use what it finds helpful in public schools. Operators that do not agree can leave. This should be added to the agreement with operators.
10. Funding to public education is not affected by the program, and increased to match PSL funding as rapidly as possible.
11. Providers should not be scattered all across the country—they should be confined to one county and operate in both rural and urban locations. In fact, majority of their schools should be located in inaccessible and hard to reach areas
12. Providers should be answerable to the CEOs and DEOs and other key stakeholders working around education in counties in which they operate. They must provide monthly updates to DEOs and CEOs on the status of their operation to help them make informed decisions

We recommend that these principles be put in a document, perhaps the “plans for the future”, that is made public – which would protect the Government from pressure by the providers and enable stakeholders closely follow and independently report on the program.

Annex 7: Ministry of Labour's ruling against BIA

RL/MOL/HMK/DMP/080/21'

June 4, 2021

Gbovahdeh Gbilia
Country Director
Bridge International
11th street, Sinkor
Monrovia, Liberia

The Management,

We extend our compliment and wish to present to your management our findings and subsequent recommendation in the compliant file by, Mr. Alexander T. Bealded; Complaint the Management of Bridge International Academics for **Wrongful Dismissal and Unfair labour Practices.**

Without any malice, or prejudice against any party in said complaint, we urge your management to take into consideration this determination in the spirit of peace and harmony for both parties.

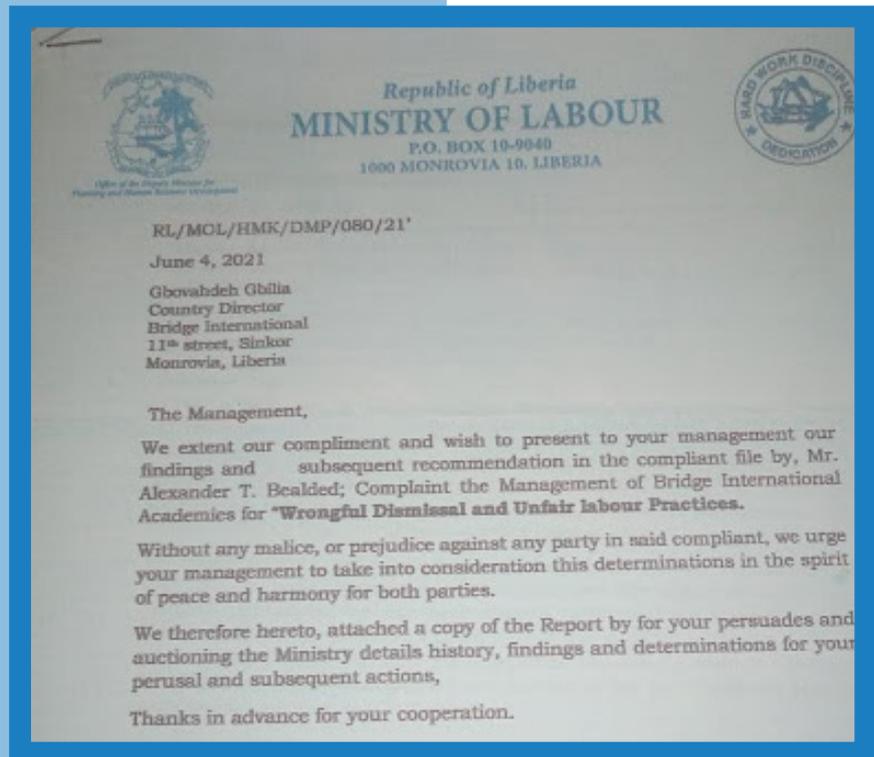
We therefore hereto, attached a copy of the Report by for your persuades and auctioning the Ministry details history, findings and determinations for your perusal and subsequent actions,

Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Finding on the Bridge International Academics

Background of the complaint

On May 20, 2021, Mr. Alexander T. Bealded was suspended without pay for the breach of confidentiality. The suspension was necessitated by Mr. Bealded sending an email on February 27,

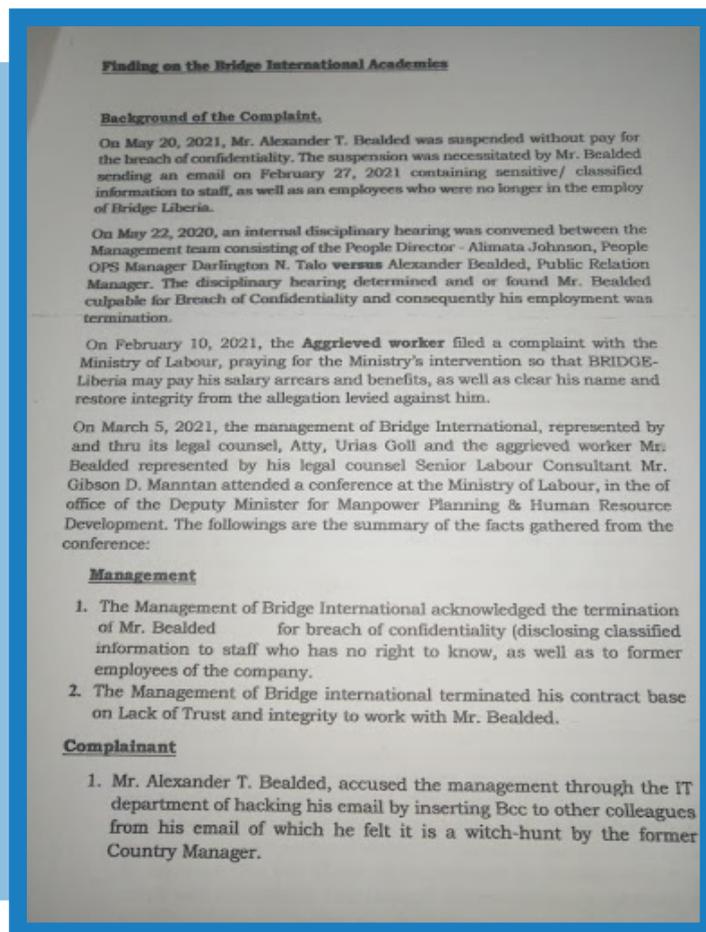


2021 containing sensitive/ classified information to staff, as well as an employees who were no longer in the employ of Bridge Liberia.

On May 22, 2020, an international disciplinary hearing was convened between the Management team consisting of the People Director - Alimata Johnson, People OPS Manager Darlington N. Talo **versus** Alexander Bealded, Public Relations Manager. The disciplinary hearing determined and or found Mr. Bealded culpable for Breach of Confidentiality and consequently his employment was termination.

On February 10, 2021, the **Aggrieved worker** filed a complaint with the Ministry of Labour, praying for the Ministry's intervention so that BRIDGE-Liberia may pay his salary arrears and benefits, as well as clear his name and restore integrity from the allegation levied against him.

On March 5, 2021, The management of Bridge International, represented by and thru its legal counsel, Atty, Urias Goll and the aggrieved worker Mr. Bealded represented by his legal counsel Senior Labour Consultant Mr. Gibson D. Manntan attended a conference at the Ministry of Labour, in the of office of the Deputy Minister for Manpower Planning & Human Resource Development.



The following are the summary of the facts gathered from the conference:

Management:

1. The Management of Bridge International acknowledged the termination of Mr. Bealded for breach of confidentiality (disclosing classified information to staff who has no right to know, as well as to former employees of the company).
2. The Management of Bridge International terminated his contract base on Lack of Trust and integrity to work with Mr. Bealded.

Complainant:

1. Mr. Alexander T. Bealded, accused the management through the IT department of hacking his email by inserting Bcc to other colleagues from his email of which he felt it is a witch-hunt by the former Country Manager.

Analysis

After a careful perusal of the documentary evidence (see the "Transcript of internal disciplinary hearing), the facts and circumstances of the proceedings, the Ministry of Labour, through the Deputy Minister for Manpower Planning & Human Resource Development decided the following:

1. In the absence of conclusive evidence that Mr. Beaded's email account was hacked as per his claim, I am perturbed by the assertion by the HR, Alimata Johnson that "Bridge emails are ownership of the company and can be assessed at any time by the company, without having to share the name of the particular person who assessed I...". It is my understanding that the author of the report meant to say access instead of assess. Such a statement by the HR suggests a clear admission to tampering with Mr. Beaded's account.

Analysis

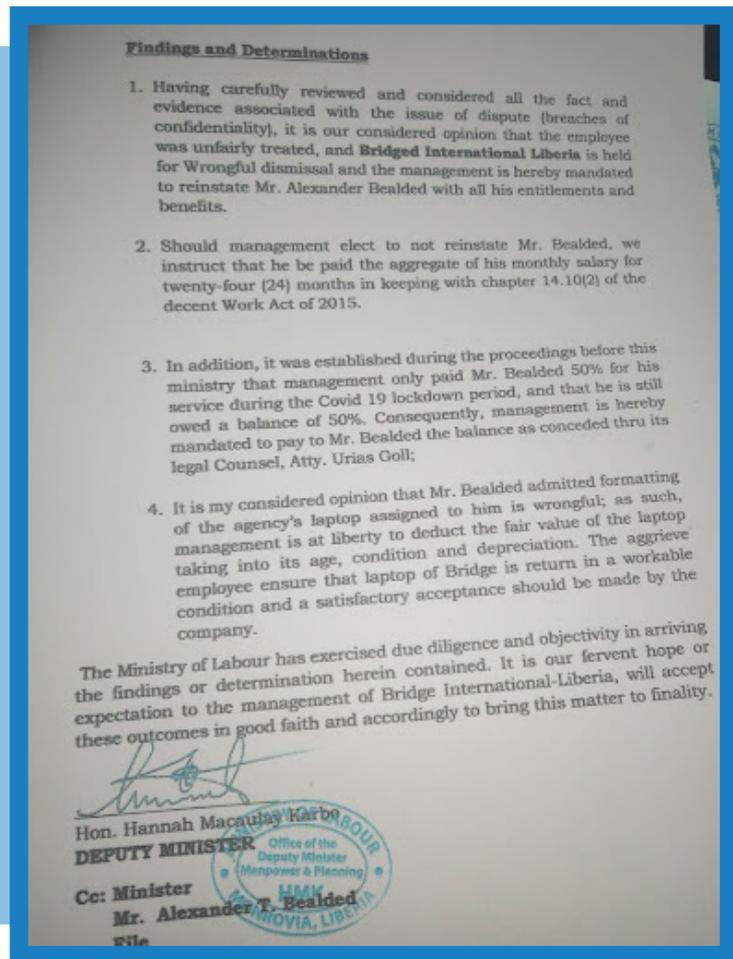
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- b) We have observer during the investigation process that the Management of Bridge International did not investigate or ascertain the views of the other persons who Mr. Beaded is alleged to have wrongfully copied into the email deemed by management to be sensitive. The transcript of the telephone discussion presented by management as a report of an internal disciplinary hearing does not include any analysis of the fact and evidence leading to the decision to terminate Mr. Beaded's contract of employment. Above all, the transcript or report includes no findings or recommendations pointing to Mr. Beaded's culpability.
- c) We feel Everyone Concerned should have been investigated to comprehensively and conclusive determine the facts and circumstances of the allegation of breaching confidentiality. Instead, only Mr. Beaded was interviewed to the exclusion of the others (Molley, Darlington and Daniel, as well as Shannon, Joana and Griffith). It is my considered opinion therefore that the so-called internal disciplinary hearing was fundamentally flawed and void of objectivity.
- d) Throughout the proceedings, management failed to show or indicate what part of the email in question that they considered as classified information to demonstrate the effect and extent to which such information must be protected because of its sensitivity to the agency or individual(s) which is not already in the public domain. As such, we are not convinced about the classified nature of the email in question. The font of the email produced by management is so small and unreadable. Our request to management to produce an audible version felt yielded no dividend.

2. We have observer during the investigation process that the Management of Bridge International did not investigate or ascertain the views of the other persons who Mr. Bealded is alleged to have wrongfully copied into the email dreamed by management to be sensitive. The transcript of the telephone discussion presented by management as a report of an internal disciplinary hearing does not include any analysis as a report of the fact and evidence leading to the decision to terminate Mr. Bealded's contract of employment. Above all, the transcript or report includes no findings or recommendations pointing to Mr. Bealded's culpability.
3. We feel Everyone Concerned should have been investigated to comprehensively and conclusive determine the facts and circumstances of the allegation of breaching confidentiality. Instead, only Mr. Bealded was interviewed to the exclusion of the others (Molley, Darlington and Daniel, as well as Shannon, Joana and Griffith). It is my considered opinion therefore that the so-called internal disciplinary hearing was fundamentally flawed and void of objectivity.
4. Throughout the proceedings, management failed to show or indicate what part of the email in question that they considered as classified information to demonstrate the effect and extent to which such information must be protected because of its sensitivity to the agency or individual(s) which is not already in the public domain. As such, we are not convinced about the classified nature of the email in question. The font of the email produced by management is so small and unreadable. Our request to management to produce an audible versión felt yielded no dividend.

Findings and determinations:

1. Having carefully reviewed and considered all the fact and evidence associated with the issue of dispute (breaches of confidentiality), it is our considered opinion that the employee was unfairly treated, and Bridged International Liberia is held for Wrongful dismissal and the management is hereby mandated to reinstate Mr. Alexander Bealded with all his entitlements and benefits.
2. Should management elect to not reinstate Mr. Bealded, we instruct that he be paid the aggregate of his monthly salary for twenty-four (24) months in keeping with chapter 14.10(2) of the decent Work Act of 2015.



3. In addition, it was established during the proceedings before this ministry that management only paid Mr. Bealded 50% for his service during the Covid 19 lockdown period, and that he is still owed a balance of 50%. Consequently, management is hereby mandated to pay to Mr. Bealded the balance as conceded thru its legal Counsel, Atty. Urias Goll;
4. It is my considered opinion that Mr. Bealded admitted formatting of the agency's laptop assigned to him is wrongful; as such, management is at the liberty to deduct the fair value of the laptop taking into its age, condition and depreciation. The aggrieve employee ensure that laptop of Bridge is return in a workable condition and a satisfactory acceptance should be made by the company.

The Ministry of Labour has exercised due diligence and objectivity in arriving the findings or determination herein contained. It is our fervent hope or expectation to the management of Bridge International-Liberia, will accept these outcomes in good faith and accordingly to bring this matter to finality.

Annex 8: Excerpts from Bridge PSL Quarter 1 2018 impact report

Financials

- Our budget forecast for 2018-2019 is \$6.7m. To date, \$5m has been raised, including the commitment from the Ministry of Education and Social Finance to fund the \$50-\$60 per child capitation.
- This leaves \$1.7m unfunded at this time. We have several approaches to make up the difference:
 - We have active applications pending for \$150,000 in grants, with more planned in Q1 2018.
 - We are also continuing partnership with a non-profit organization, the Liberian Education Achievement Resource Network, to further support our work.



Outlook for Q1 2018

For the coming quarter, we will continue our four key goals from the previous quarter:

1. Maintain operational strength of all schools.
2. Make up funding deficits through grant support.
3. Continue to engage with new Ministry.
4. Prepare for expansion in the coming year.

There are several challenges on the immediate horizon that may interfere with these goals. We are working hard to solve these challenges, and welcome conversations with supporters as to how to mitigate them:

- In spite of Bridge's work gathering teacher biometric data in support of the Ministry, *a majority of teachers in Bridge PSL year 2 schools remain unpaid and unpayrolled*. We welcome government statements of intent to add nearly 400 teachers (covering PSL and other public schools) to payroll, and hope to see this action executed in the coming months. Without government action, we worry that we will not deliver on the improved education outcomes from last year.
- While Bridge PSL has received per child payments from Social Finance for semester 1, *we have yet to hear any communication that there is enough funding for all of Semester 2 payments*, or for construction reimbursements.
- Further, we have *not yet heard whether Social Finance is working on an impact bond* for 2018-2019 and beyond, with whom, or how it will be structured – a key aspect to ensure the viability of future funding for the program.



This report was originally drafted by:

- Anderson D. Miamen, Executive Director of CENTAL & National Coordinator of COTAE.

Edited by:

- Aya Douabou, Programme Officer - Africa.
- Ashina Mtsumi, former Programme Officer - Public Services & Africa Representative.
- Juana Barragán Díaz, Programme Officer on the Right to Education.
- Zuzanna Nyitray, Programme Officer on the Right to Education.
- José Antonio Guevara, Deputy Director, GI-ESCR.

Design by Mikmac Estudio:

- Miguel Torres Carlomagno
- Nahuel Condino
- Martín Squiciarini

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