

ICT in Education in Liberia

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Source: *World Fact Book*¹

Please note:

This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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It is expected that individual *Country Reports* from the *Survey of ICT and Education in Africa* will be updated in an iterative process over time based on additional research and feedback received through the *infoDev* web site. For more information, and to suggest modifications to individual *Country Reports*, please see www.infodev.org/ict4edu-Africa.

Overview

Liberia is in the process of developing a comprehensive ICT policy called E-Liberia: Vision 2010, yet efforts at increasing access and use of ICTs have already begun under the telecommunication policy. In the education sector, Liberia has no specific policy on ICTs, but there is wide acknowledgement that ICTs need to be incorporated in schools and universities.

Country Profile

Freed US slaves established Liberia in the 19th century as Africa's first independent country effective July 26, 1847. After nine years of misrule and decline, several rebel factions (including one led by Charles Taylor) mounted an uprising against President Doe, beginning an eight-year civil war that devastated the population. A peace agreement, brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ended the fighting in 1997 with a round of presidential elections

During the presidential elections on October 11, 2005, and November 8, 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became Liberia's – and Africa's – first elected female head of state.

Liberia's legislature is a bicameral National Assembly consisting of a Senate (26 seats) and a House of Representatives (64 seats). Members of both institutions are elected for nine- and six-year terms respectively by popular vote.

Historically, Liberia's economy has been predominantly commodities based. Prior to the war, the rubber industry generated over USD\$100 million export earnings annually. The discovery of significant iron ore deposits attracted substantial foreign investment in the 1960s and 1970s, with the export-oriented concession sector as a whole generating about one-third of government revenue

Limited available information suggests that in recent years there has been a modest rebound in economic activity, largely driven by donor assistance (predominantly humanitarian aid).

Table 1 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.^{2,3}

Table 1: Selected Country Data

Indicator	
Population	3.3 million
Languages	English
Economic activity 2005 (% of GDP)	Agriculture: 63.6% Industry: 15.2%

	Services: 21.1%
Per capita gross national income (US dollars)	\$130 (2000); \$120 (2004); \$1,300 (2005)

The Education System⁴

Elementary education in Liberia lasts for six years. Secondary education consists of two three-year cycles: three years of junior secondary (Grades 7 to 9) and three years of senior secondary education (Grades 10 to 12). At the end of Grade 10, students sit for an examination administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). Successful students are eligible to enter senior high school. Upper secondary education culminates in the WAEC Certificate Examination, which is the basis for access to higher education institutions. An entrance examination is also required for access to higher education.

Higher education is provided by universities, colleges of education, business schools, and polytechnics, as well as institutions that offer professional courses such as bookkeeping and accounting, architecture, law, medicine, and mass communication. Universities train high-level manpower in various fields.

The University of Liberia is responsible for research, but this role has been hampered by the serious damage inflicted on the university by the civil war: over 90% of its facilities were looted or destroyed, many faculty members fled to other countries, and student enrolment dropped. The Cuttington University College has now reopened.

Each tertiary education institution is under the Ministry of Education, the National Commission on Higher Education, and the Board of Trustees, but each sets its own standards.

Table 2 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.²

Table 2: Selected Education Data

Primary enrolment (% gross)*	99.2 (2000)
Secondary enrolment (% gross)*	33.2 (2000)
Tertiary enrolment (%gross)*	15.5 (2000)
Ratio of girls to boys in primary and Secondary (%)**	72.7 (2000)

*Percent of gross is the number enrolled as a percentage of the number in the eligible age group.

**Ratio of girls to boys is the percentage of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

ICT Policy

National

Liberia is in the process of preparing its national ICTs policy, E-Liberia: Vision 2010. However a finalised telecommunications policy under the Telecommunications Act 2006⁵ provides insights into the ICT vision for the country. This policy establishes the framework for the evolution of the Liberian telecommunications sector and the transformation of Liberia towards an information-based economy and society.

The objectives of the telecommunications policy are the following:

- To promote the development of the Liberian telecommunications infrastructure and markets
- To promote market liberalisation, private-sector expansion, and fair and effective competition throughout the telecommunications sector
- To create and establish an independent regulatory agency responsible for telecommunications and spectrum regulation
- To promote universal access to telecommunications services throughout Liberia
- To support education, economic, and social development within Liberia
- To ensure flexibility and adaptability and ease of access to radio spectrum resources in response to technological advances, and economic, social, and markets factors.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) is responsible for determining broad sector policy and development strategy to conform with the goals and laws of the Government of Liberia.

Education sector

Liberia has yet to develop any comprehensive ICT strategy for the education sector, although the proposed Telecommunications Act specifically makes provisions for ICTs in education. The policy states, “The educational system, from primary through university curriculum, shall incorporate awareness and applications of ICTs, to prepare students to participate fully in the information age.”⁵

It goes on to say, “The Government will promote universal access or community access especially in primary and secondary schools and universities, community health facilities and hospitals, telecenters and any other public or private community centers.”⁵

Infrastructure

National

The Liberia telecommunications sector, like most other infrastructure, has been severely hit by the civil war. Copper wires have been looted and there is very little telecommunications service outside the capital Monrovia. However progress is being made and the existing telecom operators are busy expanding their infrastructure to other parts of the country.

Also several private sector initiatives have lead to an expanding use of computers and Internet cafés in the major cities, especially Monrovia.

Table 3 provides a snapshot of the state of national ICT infrastructure.⁶

Table 3: ICT in Liberia

Indicators	
Fixed-line operators	1
Cellular mobile operators	4
Total cellular mobile subscribers	200,000
Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants	1 (2004)

Education

Efforts at rebuilding the education infrastructure in Liberia have included increasing access to ICTs in schools and universities. A pilot computer project under which computer laboratories were established in seven public high schools in seven of the political subdivisions has been launched. The goal of this programme is to make computer education an integral part of public school education curriculum in all counties.

At the tertiary level (Cuttington University and University of Liberia), there is also a dire need for information technology including the Internet, CD-Roms, and Web-ready computers.

Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

Table 4 summarises the current and recent ICT initiatives and projects in Liberia.

Table 4: ICT Initiatives and Projects

<p>Project: From Guns to Computers: ICT multimedia and skill training centre for child ex-combatants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Education for Peace in Africa and SchoolNet Africa • <i>Contact:</i> www.schoolnetafrika.net/278.0.html
<p>Project: ICT Training for Young Refugees in Liberia: enables development of an efficient and sustainable education in ICT, including the Internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organisation(s)/funding sources:</i> UNHCR; funded by International Telecommunication Organisation • <i>Contact:</i> www.itu.int/ITU-D/CDS/newslog/rss_bdt_newslog.asp
<p>Project: GATech Project: improving ICT training and infrastructure in the University of Liberia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Georgia Technology and University of Liberia; funded by Georgia technology (USA) • <i>Contact:</i> www-static.cc.gatech.edu/~mikeb/Liberia/liberia.indx.htm
<p>Project: Hoffman Technology Centers; 14 public access computers for use at no charge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Monrovia Public Library • <i>Contact:</i> http://nhanced.net/sites/site15/index.cfm?page=page&id=989&pageid=142

<p>Project: Digital Bridge Project: A multi-media laboratory installed at the University of Liberia that includes 200 computers linked to a university intranet, research data bases and a VSAT internet connection that allows students to register for courses, pay fees and access libraries globally. (http://allafrica.com/stories/200705020639.html)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organisations:</i> SocketWorks, a software and outsourcing company that provides packaged ICT solutions to clients; University of Liberia; WorldSpace. • <i>Contact:</i> Damilola Bamiro (dbamiro@socketworksglobal.com); K.Riva Levinson (Riva@krinternational.com)
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Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Table 5 provides the various factors that help and hinder ICTs and education growth in Liberia.

Table 5: Analysis of Factors Influencing ICT Adoption

Factors	Enabling Features	Constraints
<i>Policy framework and implementation plans</i>	A commitment to policy development	Lack of a clear, present strategy for ICTs in education
<i>Advocacy leadership</i>	Strong leadership on ICTs and education from the Minister for Vocational Education	
<i>Gender equity</i>	Presidential support for girls' education	
<i>Infrastructure and access</i>	A serious commitment for infrastructure development in the education sector by government, donors and private sector	unreliable electricity
<i>Human resource capacity</i>		A huge skills gap in meeting the ICT needs of the education sector
<i>Fiscal resources</i>	A large expected inflow of donor and multilateral support for Liberia's reconstruction	
<i>Learning content</i>		No learning content on ICTs currently exist in schools
<i>Attitudes</i>	A firm belief that the education sector is the key to the reconstruction of Liberia	
<i>Sustainability</i>		A high reliance on donor and philanthropic funding

Notes

1. The World Factbook 2007. <https://cia.gov/cia//publications/factbook/geos/li.html>
2. Country Brief: Rwanda. 2006. World Bank.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/LIBERIAEXTN/0,,menuPK:356204~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:356194,00.html>
3. "Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis." Human Development Report 2006. UNDP. http://hdr-beta.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_LBR.html
4. Liberia Education System. IAU World Higher Education Database. 2003-2004.
www.unesco.org/iau/onlinedatabases/systems_data/lr.rtf
5. Republic of Liberia national Telecom Policy and Strategy.
<http://www.jhellerstein.com/liberiatelecompolicy.pdf>
6. ICT at a Glance. World Bank. 2005. http://devdata.worldbank.org/ict/lbr_ict.pdf

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