

# Research and knowledge systems in Liberia

An analysis prepared for INASP by Lansana Gberie and Jason Mosley

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## Preface

INASP is continually exploring options for further work and new projects. As part of these exploratory measures, several in-depth country profiles have been commissioned to bring insight into research and knowledge systems in various countries. In this document, we look at Liberia; the country's background, the research landscape, higher education system and extent of use of research in policymaking. We also include a section on political analysis by Jason Mosley. In the interests of openness and sharing, INASP makes these reports available online for use by peer organizations and other interested parties. Views are the authors' own.



## Authors

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**Jason Mosley** has been a Research Associate of the African Studies Centre since 2012. He is also the Managing Editor of the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* and an Associate Fellow of the Africa Programme at Chatham House. His main geographical interests are in the greater Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and Nigeria. Current research is focused on the impact of multilateral regional organisations on stability in the Horn of Africa, and on linkages between state-building, foreign investment and security in peripheral regions in East Africa and the Horn. Jason also serves on the board of Stakeholder Democracy Network, a non-profit working in the Niger Delta to bolster the capacity of communities affected by resource extraction to push for their interests in negotiation with governments and companies.



## Political analysis – Jason Mosley

Following the end of the country's civil war (1989-2003), Liberia's politics have been characterized by a highly fractured political elite, compounded by the slow pace of economic recovery. Following a two-year transition, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won a six-year term in late 2005, and took office in January 2006. She was re-elected in 2011 despite widespread disillusion with the performance of her administration – both within Liberia, and among Liberia's international supporters. Dissatisfaction with her performance is understood to have undermined her son, Robert Sirleaf, in his Senate election campaign in December 2014; Johnson Sirleaf had been grooming him as a successor, as she will step down after the next election in late 2017. Nevertheless, she remains an influential force in domestic politics, with tight control over the under-resourced government. The Unity Party, dominated by the president, is the largest in both the Senate and House of Representatives, although it controls only about one-third of seats in either chamber. Parties are fragile electoral vehicles, rather than significant locations for policy debate and formation.

Johnson Sirleaf – a Nobel Peace Prize laureate – has had a long career in Liberian politics, dating back to the pre-coup and pre-civil war 1970s, and including presidential bids in the 1985 and 1997. Between political openings in Liberia, she worked in the international financial sector and in the UN system, leaving her well connected to global policy debates on development. Economic policy was heavily influenced from outside Liberia during her first term under the 2006-2010 Liberia Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP), a novel ceding of economic sovereignty in policy making terms, part of an approach to post-conflict governance and policy management. GEMAP had mixed results, and the country's yawning infrastructure, educational and governance gaps (including rampant corruption) led to a cooling of relations with donors, especially following Johnson Sirleaf's re-election in 2011.

Liberia's economy remains weak, and fragile. The country's governance and policy capacity was heavily tested during 2014 and 2015 by the Ebola virus outbreak which affected the sub-region. More than 10,000 were likely infected during the outbreak, with some 4,400 deaths. Moreover, the crisis resulted in the closure of schools and the suspension of health service delivery in many areas. GDP growth estimated at 5.9% for 2014 had to be revised downward to less than 1%, with similarly weak growth expected in 2015. More broadly, growth is heavily dependent on the primary commodity sector (rubber and iron), which has been dented globally recently by slowing demand from China, and in general by the turbulent aftermath of the global economic crisis since 2008. The Ebola crisis has further set back foreign investment, with foreign firms suspending operations or withdrawing.

Ahead of the October 2017 presidential elections, Johnson Sirleaf retains significant influence over the Unity Party's succession plan. Although her son and preferred successor Robert is apparently out of the running, she is pushing for her vice-president Joseph Boakai, to stand for the Unity Party, despite a pledge ahead of the last election that they would both step down together at the end of their current terms. Without a clear figure around which to coalesce, party discipline – already minimal – will likely fracture. Members of the government with presidential ambitions, such as finance minister Amara Konneh and foreign minister Augustine Ngafuan, are rumoured to be considering defecting to rival parties. The main opposition party, the Congress for Democratic Change, will probably be represented in the race by Senator George Weah, who was Johnson Sirleaf's main opponent in the last two elections, and defeated her son Robert in the Senate election. In addition to the established opposition figures, a new party was formed in August 2015 by Benoni Urey, a businessman and former politician, with significant personal wealth. His All Liberian Party may well be the Unity Party's main competition in 2017.

In security terms, 2016 is meant to be an important milestone, in that the UN peace-keeping mission, UNMIL, is scheduled to be drawn down. However, Johnson Sirleaf reportedly used her influence to ensure that she was happy with the incoming Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and head of mission for UNMIL – Farid Zarif – following a tense relationship with outgoing SRSG Karin Landgren. Landgren has been critical of Johnson Sirleaf's administration in terms of governance. Slow progress on police reform and in enhancing the capacity of the security services –



along with limited resources devoted to security -- mean that Liberia is ill positioned to take full responsibility for peace and security in the country by next year. There is significant speculation that UNMIL's mandate will instead be extended. The focus on economic and social recovery following the Ebola crisis may well provide sufficient political cover to justify the extension, although pressure will remain for Liberia to address shortcomings in terms of law and order.

## Research, knowledge and education based systems – Lansana Gberie

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### 1. Introduction

This paper describes state policy towards higher education and research, as well as the actual state of the education sector and research in Liberia, a country recovering from many years of devastating civil war. Liberia's wars in 1990s and the early 2000s destroyed its already limited education infrastructure, killed tens of thousands of its citizens, and forced many of its teachers, academics and the educated into exile. After the war, and following the election of the progressive government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – Africa's first elected female president – an ambitious programme of reviving the education sector was launched. This included free education at the primary level and a policy to expand higher education to make up for over a dozen years of anarchic warfare and state collapse. This paper shows that this ambition has not been matched by available resources devoted to the sector, and the result has been uneven – in some cases, probably counterproductive.

This fact was made glaringly clear in 2013 when all 25,000 students applying to the University of Liberia, the country's premier research institution, failed the entrance examinations. It emerged that a policy to relax academic standards had been instituted since 2006. This was to allow for the mass production of university graduates to make up for the non-production of graduates during the war years. Once the university authorities decided to adhere strictly to acceptable academic standards, none of the applicants could pass. The episode exposed the parlous state of primary and secondary education in Liberia, a perennial problem which has still not been addressed, and which makes a mockery of the lofty goals for the education sector set out in policy documents described in this report.

These policy documents provide guidance for Liberia's education policy. In practice, the lack of funds, teachers, and schools means that Liberia has probably the weakest education system in West Africa. The government allocated 13% of its national budget<sup>1</sup> to education for fiscal year 2015-16. This is a decrease from previous years: it was 14% in 2012-13, and is lower than that of comparable neighbouring countries including Sierra Leone (18% in 2009-10) and Cote D'Ivoire (24.6% in 2008-09). Funding for its premier research institution, the University of Liberia, has been consistently inadequate, and the university is in a poor state. Government spending on the institution has decreased as student numbers have increased; from USD 11.75 million for 20,000 students in 2011 to USD10.3 million in 2014 for a student population of 36,000. Classrooms are overcrowded and there is a shortage of qualified academic staff. The university has 1,500 students in its postgraduate programmes but there are few properly qualified lecturers. Moreover, lecturers sometimes work for several months without being paid.

A 2014 report for USAID by the Washington consultancy firm Chemonics International, entitled "Liberia Governance Stakeholders Survey", asserted that the vast majority of Liberian university graduates in the postwar period cannot express themselves in written English, the language of government and instruction. Partly as a result of this, aside from the important work being done by the Governance and Land Commissions, Liberia has virtually no record of quality research or knowledge production. It has no national library to collect, consolidate and preserve local publications and research findings.

USAID is by far the biggest external donor to Liberia's education and other sectors. It invests USD160 million per year in the education, health, democracy and governance sectors in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The entire budget amounted to \$604 million.



## 2. Research and knowledge systems in Liberia

### 2.1 Vision

Liberia's higher-education policy is not well-articulated, and is stretched across several documents and presidential speeches. The priority after 2005 was to revamp primary and secondary schools, but there was also a strong sentiment on the part of the government to produce university graduates. This was never well-articulated but it clearly influenced the ill-advised decision to admit thousands of poorly prepared students to the University of Liberia. The key elements of higher education that are better planned and articulated are those relating to the medical school (to produce doctors and nurses) and the recently launched National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) 2015-2020,<sup>2</sup> which aims to correct the situation where only 19% of school leavers are accounted for in the Liberian job market, and to create "a paradigm shift towards the acquisition of skills that add value to the human person."

The recent Liberia Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Plan (April 2015) has the following to say about the education sector:

"The Ministry of Education, with the endorsement of the legislature published a Five-Year (2012–2017) Medium-term Plan for Education Reform and Development in Liberia which focuses on restoring basic education (grades 1-9) through expanding access and improving the quality of education by rebuilding facilities, providing learning materials, training teachers, and introducing accelerated learning for older learners.

"The 2009 Education Sector Plan calls for free and compulsory nine-year basic education, comprising six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education. In addition, the Education Reform Act of 2014 and the draft Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy of 2011 provide a framework that includes pre- primary/early childhood education as well as post-basic education and skills development.

"Currently, a high percentage of children and adolescents are not in school, having either dropped out or never started. Liberian schools have a high percentage of over-aged learners (60 per cent) and low efficiency in terms of repetition and poor learning achievement. Another problem is the large number of uneducated youth in the rural areas. This is disturbing. A high percentage of the population is illiterate and unskilled, and the programs for adult basic education and training must be extended across the country.

"The constraints of the education sector are:

- inadequate resources and lack of capacity (both teachers and managers) to provide basic education services to all communities, especially in the rural areas;
- fewer schools to meet the increased enrollment, a lack of school readiness for many children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- a challenging backlog of out-of-school children and adolescents who need alternative education services;
- a fragmented and dysfunctional TVET subsector that does not address the skills required by young people in Liberia; weak provision of adult literacy or adult basic education and training programs; and
- a higher education subsector that needs reform in order to provide appropriate leadership, and quality education that will enable graduates become employable thereby improving the economic recovery of Liberia."<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Education is the key government agency implementing education policy and setting policies for schools, colleges and universities.

The Government of Liberia published a National Vision 2030 in December 2012. The National Vision had an ambitious aim, encompassing education, culture, economic development, and the forging of a better society. It aimed at "a significant departure from the current resource-based development model to a model that is knowledge-based, open to strategic intervention, and supportive of social

<sup>2</sup> [moe.gov.lr/site/doc/TVet\\_Policy\\_Liberia.pdf](http://moe.gov.lr/site/doc/TVet_Policy_Liberia.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Liberia Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Plan pp45-46. Bulleted added. The full document is enclosed with this report



capital development.” The Vision posited using education and culture policies as “tools for strengthening unity and nurturing citizens.”

The idea of undertaking a National Vision process began in 2004, shortly after Liberia’s civil wars ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2003. It was initiated by then Governance Reform Commission (GRC), which had been set up as a result of the CPA. The GRC was initially chaired by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and later Dr. Amos Sawyer, Liberia’s leading academic.

The Vision pledged to make “quality education available to all citizens” and to develop policy measures and initiatives, including research and publication, “to enhance cultural identity and national reconciliation.” The Vision urged institutions of higher learning in Liberia to deepen research into the critical thematic areas focusing on the Liberian state, its capacity and its origins and how citizen relationship with the state can be improved.

Liberia’s constitution (1986 amended) emphasizes ‘education-for-all’ as a national goal. Article 6 of the constitution commits the state to “provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens” with an emphasis on “the elimination of illiteracy”.

Shortly after Sirleaf became president the government launched its National Policy on Girls’ Education (drafted 2005, implemented 2006), which sought to promote the education of girls through several measures, including by providing free and compulsory primary school and reducing secondary school fees by 50%; recruiting and training more female teachers; establishing girls clubs at schools; providing counselling in schools for girls; ending the impunity of teachers who commit sexual abuse and assault of students; and increasing the availability of small-scale scholarships for girls. The policy aimed to ensure that girls have equal access to school at all levels and in all educational programs and services by 2015.

In 2010, the Liberian government launched the Education Sector Plan (ESP), outlining future strategies and policies for reconstruction and development of education in Liberia. The following year, the Government of Liberia passed the Education Reform Act 2011. This act established free compulsory primary education and free compulsory basic education, and committed the government to decentralizing the education sector, in order to improve the provision of education across the country. This was a response to the perceived over-centralization of all social services in Monrovia, the capital.

## *2.2 Research centres and focus areas*

### **Institutions of higher learning**

According to the Ministry of Education, there are 16 institutions of higher learning in Liberia. These institutions include vocational schools, community colleges and universities. Universities granting degrees include Adventist University, African Methodist Episcopal University, United Methodist University, Baptist Theological Seminary, Stella Maris Polytechnic, Cuttington University, Tubman University and University of Liberia. Among these universities, **University of Liberia** and **Cuttington University**, which is a private university, are the ones known to have conducted research.

- **University of Liberia:** The University of Liberia (UL) is extremely weak. It includes a number of so-called ‘research institutions’ but the best that can be said of them is that they are aspirational - they currently produce no research, and they are poorly equipped to do so. The university has not produced any significant research or publication for years. Within the University of Liberia, there is the Medical School which runs the Liberia Institute of Bio-Medical Research (see below). In 2012, the UL set up the Liberia Institute for Policy Research. In 2013, the Institute received a research award from the United States Institute of Peace to establish a reconciliation barometer project. The purpose of the research is intended to “compile and analyze primary data at the micro level.” It is also intended to “supply a vital evidence-based perspective on progress toward the overall goal of achieving social and political reconciliation in post-war Liberia, as well as about needs and developments related to recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of





Liberia.” These goals have not yet been accomplished. In 2013, the Governance Commission entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UL to jointly undertake a National History project. The Liberian National History Project is a key output of the Vision 2030 and one of the twelve thematic areas in the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peace Building and Reconciliation. The history project aims at writing a comprehensive general history of Liberia in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and UNESCO. The project is being coordinated at the history department of the UL. Prior to the establishment of the Liberia Institute for Policy Research, the UL allocated funds for research to academic departments.

- **Cuttington University.** Cuttington’s Department of Conflict and Peace Studies has collaborated with universities in the United States to conduct research in areas such as peace-building and conflict resolution, though the university itself has not published any of these studies.

### Government commissions

Key institutions that produce policy research are the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism (MICAT), Law Reform Commission (LRC), Liberia Institute for Public Administration (LIPA) Governance Commission, the Land Commission, and Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services (LIGIS).

The Sustainable Development Institute has produced a few good reports relating to land issues, and the Liberia Media Center also did some work around media coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Otherwise, the CSOs are - like public sector bodies - very weak where research is concerned. The research landscape in Liberia as a whole is near zero.

### Governance Commission (GC)

The Governance Commission, previously Governance Reform Commission, has been the most effective and prolific in producing solid research and documentation. With this, the commission is expected to focus on these areas:<sup>4</sup>

- **Political and Legal Reform** focusing on crafting a policy of decentralization to consolidate and deepen democratic governance. This aims to promote people-centred development by implementing programmes of decentralization over a ten-year period.
- **Public Sector Reforms** policy research, which focuses on enhancing responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency in public sector service delivery, by completing mandates and functions reviews, restructuring of public institutions, establishing a Civil Service Commission, and developing a policy and implementation strategy on the privatization of state-owned enterprises.
- **Civic Engagement, National Identity and Visioning**, which is designed to strengthen government-civil society relations by developing a Government-CSO policy and a CSO directory; supporting the establishment and capacity development of a CSO National Council and an independent CSO secretariat; contributing to the development of a civic education policy and implementation strategy. In 2012, the GC and Civil Society Advisory Council launched the first ever CSOs directory. Today this directory provides real time information on the location and work areas of civil society organizations across the country, the total number of CSOs, their structure, sources of funding, areas of specialization, and gender representation.
- **National Integrity Systems Policy** research is focused on contributing to the institutionalization of transparency, integrity and accountability in governance at national, regional and local levels through the assessment of the anti-corruption strategy. This includes work in the enactment of various anti-corruption instruments; to strengthen the National Integrity Forums and Policy Dialogues through the establishment of an independent Secretariat for the forums.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation**; Research and publications is a key activity at the GC, reflecting the strength of its chair, Dr. Sawyer. It conducts policy reviews and the development of policy options for the government, the development of a government-wide M&E framework, the institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation in governance, and the production of annual

<sup>4</sup> An Act establishing the Governance Commission, Liberia, 2008





governance reports and other policy studies. In 2013 the M&E Unit of the GC completed an assessment survey on health and education.

#### *Law Reform Commission (LRC)*

Another important commission that engages in policy is the Law Reform Commission. The core focus of the LRC is to review the existing laws of Liberia to ensure their modernization and reform. The commission also works to harmonize and codify the somewhat disparate laws of Liberia to ensure that they are fair, simple, accessible and responsive to the needs of citizens..

#### *Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA)*

The primary objective of LIPA is to conduct training programs for public servants in all its forms (pre-entry service training, on the job training), including research and the provision of basic academic lessons in specified provision field.

#### *Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo Information Services (LIGIS)*

Another significant research institution is the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services (LIGIS). It was established in 2004 with a mandate to collect and disseminate official statistics and spatial data to inform development planning and policy formulation in the country. LIGIS is Liberia's national survey research entity that conducts all housing and population census in the country. LIGIS conducted Liberia's first post-war census.

#### *Liberia Land Commission*

The Land Commission has conducted original and important research relating the fraught issue of land in Liberia. In May 2013, it presented a draft national land rights policy to President Sirleaf. The policy sought to grant legally guaranteed ownership — as opposed to mere custodianship — of land to indigenous communities. This is a very important governance and security issue in Liberia, one that goes to the heart of national identity questions. Through its research, the Land Commission estimated that over half of Liberian land has been parcelled out in various concessions and private deeds.

#### *Institute for Bio-Medical Research (LIBR)*

The Institute for Bio-Medical Research (LIBR) was established in the 1970s as a premier research facility to develop scientific breakthroughs for a variety of viral infections, including hepatitis. The institute is currently engaged in serious research into the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), an epidemiological battle that started in 2014. LIBR is one of only a few laboratories in Liberia where Ebola specimens are sent to be tested. A team of medical and disaster experts from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), the US National Institutes of Health, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) currently support the institute. As a result, LIBR's lab processing capacity almost doubled from 40 specimens a day to more than 70 since 2014. The goal is to eventually be able to test 100 specimens a day, with assistance from the USAID-led Ebola Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and the USAID Mission in Liberia.

#### **Civil-society organizations and research**

Outside of government, CSOs are engaged with a range of research projects. Some of these projects build on the work of the National Vision while others are separate and responding to particular donor needs. Some of the key CSOs engaging in research and knowledge advancement are:

- ***Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)***, which focuses on land rights and community protection; SDI is presently leading research and publication on community protection and land rights issues in Liberia.
- ***Liberia Media Center***, which focuses on public perception surveys, media development and freedom of information studies.
- ***Institute for Research and Democratic Development***, which focuses on legislative governance.
- ***Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia***, which focuses on transparency and integrity issues in Liberia.
- ***Center for Media Studies and Peace building***, which focuses on decentralization, freedom of information and attitudes on elections monitoring.



- **Carter Center International**, which focuses on access to justice in Liberia.
- **Search for Common Ground**, which focuses on conflict resolution and reconciliation issues at the sub-national levels.
- **Action Aid Liberia**, which focuses on poverty and development.

### 2.3 Research and Role of Donor Institutions in Liberia

The following donors fund research:

- **USAID** provides significant funding for education, agriculture and food security, democracy, human rights and governance, and public health.
- **Swedish International Development Corporation (SIDA)** funds CSO capacity strengthening projects, decentralization, security sector governance and private sector development.
- The **European Union** provides funding for human rights, transparency and accountability issues.
- The **Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)** provides funding for research on governance, justice and human rights.
- **Trust Africa Foundation** funds research activities on natural resource management and concession.
- The **Japanese Development Corporation** funds government and infrastructure projects.
- The **German International Corporation (GIZ)** funds projects focused on infrastructure development, security, reconstruction and peace, governance and democracy, environment and climate, and economic development and employment.

### 2.4 Research dynamics and politics

As a matter of policy, the Government of Liberia is committed to supporting research, education and social inquiry, and funds these activities in universities, and through its ministries and commissions. Both the funding and human capacity to engage in productive research are, however, woefully inadequate.

The National Vision 2030 generated important quantitative data as well as useful qualitative materials on areas such as demography, governance, land and natural resource management, education and Liberian society. These data are, however, still in draft form, and have not been published. The Government of Liberia is largely open and committed to the free exchange of ideas, and researchers are free to collect data and publish their findings.

## 3. Access to research information

In 2010, the Liberia Freedom of Information Act was passed into Liberia. Legally journalists and researchers are unencumbered, indeed are encouraged, to collect information. However, a recent study conducted by the Liberia Media Center on use of the FOI law suggests that the opportunity provided under the FOI law is not being used. Beyond the FOI opportunity, assessment of universities across the country show that books are outdated and access to quality and real time data are in short supply.<sup>5</sup>

No university in Liberia has online access to journals or the facilities of other libraries. International NGOs are so far the only organizations in Liberia with good access to published online research. Liberian researchers access online research mostly through links provided by visiting lecturers with access to university systems. Public libraries are non-existent outside the universities. In addition to the lack of access to online resources, many libraries lack a constant source of power supply or internet access. Over 85% of the country lacks mains electricity.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on discussions with Dr. Walter Wiles, Vice President for Institutional Development, University of Liberia, 16 June 2015, University of Liberia Campus; Atty Norris Tweah, Vice President for University Relations, University of Liberia, 16 June 2015, University of Liberia Campus; Sr. Mary Laurene Browne, President, Stella Maris Polytechnic, 16 June 2015, Stella Maris Polytechnic Campus



## 4. ICT infrastructure

Liberia's information communication technology (ICT) sector is still evolving. In 2011, Liberia received its first supply of fibre optic cables. However, only a few areas of Monrovia are connected to the fibre optics to date. High speed internet is still considered a luxury. Cell phone companies sell both credit and data for internet usage; however they are expensive and often beyond the means of students. Internet connections on universities campuses serve only administration and faculty.

## 5. Research, communication and publication

Most of the research published in Liberia is focused on development programmes; relating, for example, those to the security sector, governance, decentralization and natural resources management. As indicated above, much of these build on the Vision 2030.

There is also independent research into perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Over the last few years, ex-generals from Liberia civil wars have been arrested and some have been tried and convicted of war crimes.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations are the major drivers of post-war research in Liberia. One of the major frustrations of researchers is that communities and respondents are becoming unwilling to take part in similar research projects conducted over and over again. Research of this nature is donor-driven and thus it is more about measuring output than using previous studies as a baseline.

Postgraduate research interests cut across a variety of thematic areas. Some of them include: drugs and crimes, terrorism, Liberia's relations with China and security sector reform.

## 6. Gendered dimensions of research

Within the Government, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is the main institution working on gender issues, including carrying out policy research focusing on gender. Some of the themes of research include sexual and gender-based violence, women's rights and harmful traditional practices against women such as female genital mutilation. The Ministry's research has shown that girls going through this practice normally forfeit regular schooling as they are groomed for early motherhood. Women's groups have petitioned the Ministry to intervene, so that traditional authorities can recognize the damage caused by the practice to both health and education and end it.

Over the last decade several women's groups have emerged in Liberia. Some are engaged with research while others are involved in advocacy on female empowerment, women's rights and the campaign against gender-based violence. These groups include:

- **Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)**'s advocacy and research work is largely focused on issues of transitional justice and increasing women participation in electoral politics.
- **Liberia Women Media Action (LIWOMAC)**'s work is focused on giving women a platform in the media by giving women more visibility.
- The **Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa (GPFA)** is an NGO based in Monrovia, Liberia. It was founded in 2012 by 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee, and works to provide educational and leadership development opportunities for Liberians.

## 7. Concluding thoughts

The quality of teaching and graduates fell to extremely low levels following the civil war. In an effort to increase student populations and produce large numbers of graduating high school and university graduates, there was a relaxation in academic standards.



The government has recognized however, in the Liberia Stabilisation and Recovery Plan, the need to raise the quality of higher education to produce employable graduates who can help improve Liberia's economic recovery.

There is little to no research culture in the country. The two universities known to conduct research are weak in the area and rarely, if ever, publish.

There is inadequate funding or human capacity to support research in Liberia. With only 85% of the country on mains electricity, the lack of power, and the resulting lack of internet connectivity is a major barrier to researchers being able to access online resources.

The major drivers of the research agenda are civil society and NGOs, with international NGOs often the only organizations with access to online published research. Donor priorities drive themes which are often contained in repeated projects leading to participant fatigue and incorrect data being collected at the primary level.

