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Foreword

By Hon. Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, Minister of Finance and Development Planning

It is with great pride and a deep sense of collective achievement that I introduce the Study on the Future Drivers of Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Liberia (DoD Study). This study represents a pivotal moment in Liberia's development planning, offering an evidence-based and co-created roadmap toward a future that is resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

The DoD Study is the result of a rigorous and participatory process, one that has brought together government stakeholders, development partners, civil society, and the private sector to jointly explore Liberia's development challenges and opportunities. The study underscores our shared commitment to rethinking development approaches—leveraging innovation, inclusion, and strategic investments to unlock Liberia's full potential.

At the heart of this study is a fundamental question: How can Liberia harness its abundant human and natural resources to drive transformative and equitable growth? This question compels us to look beyond conventional policy responses, to challenge existing paradigms, and to embrace bold and catalytic solutions. The pathways identified in this study—spanning governance, economic transformation, and human capital development—are intended to provide actionable, high-impact strategies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Liberia's national development ambitions.

This report is not just a reflection of where we stand today but a guidepost for the future. It aims to serve as a practical tool for policymakers, development partners, and all stakeholders invested in Liberia's sustainable and inclusive development journey. We believe this report is and will continue to contribute to shaping national planning efforts and guiding our collective path toward a transformative journey. I therefore call everyone- researchers, development partners, civil society, academia, and sector MACs to utilize this report for the transformation of Liberia. For the first time, I am delighted that we have a co-created work that is informing the development of the national plan, and I trust will guide the preparation of partner strategy for Liberia's growth and development. I thank my team at MFDP, my direct reports, and my predecessors (Hon. Anthony Myers, Hon. Boima Kamara Hon. Samuel Tweah,) who initiated this worthy journey. Special thanks go to Hon. Depue Zuo, Hon. Augustus Flomo, Mr. Fohn Gborweah, and Mr. Vamuyan Sesay and Assistant Minister …. For their invaluable technical support in seeing this report through into completion

I extend special appreciation to UNDP for its technical and financial support, and to all partners who contributed to this endeavor. This study is a testament to our shared vision for a Liberia that is prosperous, just, and inclusive. Let us seize this moment to advance a development agenda that is inclusive and leaves no one behind. On behalf of the Government of Liberia, I wish to assure everyone that under the visionary leadership of H.E Joseph Nyumah Boakai, President of Liberia, this report that defines transformative pathways for inclusive development will continue to guide us in thinking Liberia, Loving Liberia, and Building a more prosperous and vibrant Liberia.

Preface

By Ms. Christine Umutoni, UN Resident Coordinator

The Study on the Future Drivers of Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Liberia (DoD Study) is a result of an extensive, collaborative effort to identify and articulate the key pathways for Liberia's socio-economic transformation. This study, co-created through national dialogue and technical expertise, provides an evidence-based foundation to inform the country's medium and long-term development strategies, including the forthcoming National Development Plan and the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID).

The DoD Study seeks to answer critical questions about Liberia's development trajectory: What are the primary drivers of inclusive and sustainable growth? How can Liberia navigate existing and emerging challenges to build a more resilient and equitable society? What policy interventions can accelerate progress toward the SDGs?

These questions have been examined through a structured approach, engaging diverse stakeholders across government, civil society, the private sector, and international development partners. The study identifies key enablers of change, from strengthening governance and institutional capacity to investing in human capital and diversifying the economy. It also highlights crucial areas where targeted interventions can yield the greatest impact, particularly in fostering job creation, improving service delivery, and enhancing social cohesion.

The validation process has been essential in refining this report to ensure it is not only analytically robust but also aligned with national priorities and global best practices. I would like to express my gratitude to the technical teams, government agencies, development partners, and all stakeholders who have contributed their insights, expertise, and commitment to this process. I extend my deepest appreciation to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) for its leadership

As we move forward, our collective challenge is to translate these insights into concrete actions. The UN remains committed to working alongside the Government of Liberia and all partners to support the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this study. Together, we can drive transformative change that benefits all Liberians, ensuring that no one is left behind. The United Nations, through the UN Country Team in Liberia, stands ready to support the government and people of Liberia in translating these findings into tangible actions that improve livelihoods, strengthen governance, and enhance economic resilience.

I encourage all stakeholders to engage with this report actively and to use it as a guide in shaping policies and programs that contribute to a more just, equitable, and sustainable Liberia. The journey ahead requires vision, commitment, and sustained collaboration, and I am confident that through our joint efforts, we can achieve the development aspirations of the Liberian people.

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Transversal Topics

Acronymes

AADPD	Addis Ababa Declaration On Population And Development
AfDB	African Development Bank
AG	Auditor General
ARREST	Agriculture, Roads, Rule Of Law, Education, Sanitation And Tourism
CBL	Central Bank Of Liberia
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CC	Climate Change
CENTAL	Center For Transparency And Accountability In Liberia
DPA	Data Pop Alliance
DoD	Drivers Of Development
ECF	Extended Credit Facility
ECOWAS	Economic Community Of West African States
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GAC	General Auditing Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HCI	Human Capital Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information And Communications Technology
IAA	Internal Audit Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITC	International Trade Center
INCHR	Independent National Commission On Human Rights
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LBO	Legislative Budget Office

LGA	Local Government Act
LRA	Liberia Revenue Authority
LPHC	Liberia Population And Housing Census
MACs	Ministries, Agencies, And Commissions
MFDP	Ministry Of Finance And Development Planning
MGCSP	Ministry Of Gender, Children And Social Protection
NAP	National Action Plan
NDI	National Democratic Institute For International Affairs
NDP	National Development Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEC	National Elections Commission
PAPD	Pro-Poor Agenda For Prosperity Development
PPCC	Public Procurement And Concession Commission
RSL	Revenue Sharing Law
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SCORE	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation program
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TSA	Treasury Single Account
ToRs	Terms Of Reference
TRC	Truth And Reconciliation Commission
UNDESA	United Nations Department Of Economic And Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency For International Development
USIP	United States Institute Of Peace
VNR	Voluntary National Review
VoA	Voice Of America
WB	World Bank
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive Summary

The Goal: Inclusive and Sustainable Human Development

Since the end of the civil war, Liberia has made significant strides in economic and human development, effectively moving beyond the post-conflict humanitarian phase. The next challenge lies in consolidating these gains and embarking on a path of sustainable, resilient growth. Liberia now stands at the humanitarian-development nexus, transitioning from stabilisation to building a sustainable, inclusive economy capable of supporting and sustaining essential investments in development.

Key constraints preventing progress in Liberia include demographic pressures from rapid population growth, limited institutional capacity, poor service delivery in health and education, insufficient infrastructure, and entrenched socio-cultural norms. Weak institutions and inefficient spending hamper effective service provision, while poor coordination among government agencies often leads to unresponsive or suboptimal outcomes. Structural challenges, including inadequate road networks, weak energy infrastructure, and limited social infrastructure, further hinder development.

Liberia's human development journey highlights the need for sustained, strategic investments in both social infrastructure and human capital. This dual approach is essential for building a solid foundation for long-term national growth. Strategic investment in social infrastructure improves access to essential services and supports economic activities, while enhancing education and healthcare quality is key to unlocking the potential of Liberia's predominantly young population. Together, these efforts are crucial for steering the nation toward a more prosperous and sustainable future.

Youth, despite being a demographic pressure point, represent a tremendous opportunity for Liberia's growth. With targeted investments, this young population can expand the labour market and create new industries. Skills development, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and fostering entrepreneurship are essential for harnessing this potential. Strengthening community-based organisations and services is also crucial, requiring investment in training personnel across sectors, such as health workers, agricultural extension support, and educators. Collaboration with international partners, comprehensive digitalization—especially in agriculture—and leveraging the Liberian diaspora and remittances are critical for sustainable development. By advancing these areas, Liberia can improve health service delivery, modernise agriculture, and foster innovation and value-chain development, ultimately attracting more youth to the sector and enhancing human development outcomes.

Liberia has made notable progress toward **gender equality** through legal frameworks and policies aimed at equal protection and non-discrimination. Initiatives such as the National Gender Policy and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection have helped raise Liberia’s women’s equality scores above the West African average since 2017. Liberian women have played a strong role in shaping the nation’s political landscape, especially in post-conflict peacebuilding. However, despite this influence, harmful patriarchal norms persist, creating significant barriers for women, girls, and other gender identities. These groups continue to face

challenges in accessing inclusive education, quality healthcare, and employment, alongside pervasive discrimination, oppression, and gender-based violence (GBV).

Liberia's forests and tropical climate are central to its culture and economy, yet deforestation and climate change pose severe risks to the country's development. Liberia's rich natural resources, including its extensive forests and fertile land, present significant opportunities for climate resilience. The country's tropical climate supports a diverse range of flora and fauna, which are integral to the livelihoods of many Liberians. However, the nation's abundant natural resources are threatened by rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and coastal erosion. Liberia's heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture and forestry exacerbates its vulnerability to natural disasters and economic instability.

The environmental challenges are compounded by socio-economic factors, including high levels of poverty, limited institutional capacity, and inadequate infrastructure. The reliance on biomass for energy, unsustainable agricultural practices, and unregulated logging further exacerbate environmental degradation. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive climate policies and enforcement mechanisms hampers effective climate action. Collaborative efforts between the government, international partners, and local communities are crucial to fostering resilience and ensuring sustainable development in Liberia. Properly leveraging Liberia's natural resources offers a pathway to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Liberia holds significant potential for development, fueled by its rich resources and opportunities. To realise this potential, the country must address constraints on human development and overall well-being. **Key drivers** that should be reinforced include harnessing the energy and creativity of youth, strengthening community-based organisations and services, fostering effective collaboration with international development partners, promoting gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive rights, advancing digitization (especially in agriculture), and creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurship. Supported by an improved public finance management system, these efforts can drive Liberia's development forward.

The Enabling Arena: Sustainable Governance & Peace

Liberia stands at a critical juncture, balancing the promise of new governmental leadership with enduring challenges of corruption and weak public administration. The nation's future hinges on its ability to harness current opportunities while transforming systemic fragility.

The governance framework in Liberia encompasses administrative governance including both central and local public administration, political governance which covers democracy, human rights, and rule of law, and the broader spectrum of peace, which includes post-conflict reconciliation and inter-group relations. **Governance** is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic, social and environmental resources for development; and **Peacebuilding** is described as actions to solidify peace and avoid a relapse into violent conflict.

In assessing the state of governance and peace in Liberia, the analysis reveals that **while there are notable strengths such as the stability of democratic institutions, the rule of law, political participation, limited violence, relative social cohesion, and gender-responsive governance, significant weaknesses persist.** A poor business climate exacerbates social tensions and hinders economic growth. Corruption permeates both public and private sectors, undermining development efforts. Policies that favour urban areas over their rural counterparts perpetuate inequality and social exclusion.

Opportunities arise with the new administration in 2024, offering a fresh mandate and potential for leveraging development support. Growing public demand for transparency creates momentum for reform. Embracing digital solutions can enhance service delivery and governance transparency, making processes more efficient and accessible. Despite these opportunities, threats persist, including inefficiency, ongoing corruption, and limited capacity in the public sector. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality pose substantial risks, potentially fueling discontent and destabilising the fragile gains made in governance and peace.

To navigate these challenges and capitalise on opportunities, **Liberia must enhance institutional capacity by strengthening governance institutions**, ensuring their independence, adequate funding, and professionalising the civil service. Combating corruption through stringent measures, enhancing transparency, and building public trust is crucial. Fostering inclusive development by adopting policies that address spatial inequalities, promoting local empowerment, and ensuring equitable resource distribution is necessary.

The Key Players: Inclusive Economic Transformation

Following severe GDP contraction during the civil war, Liberia experienced a robust post-war recovery, driven by political stability, external support, and sound macroeconomic policies. However, subsequent disruptions such as the Ebola outbreak and falling commodity prices have posed new challenges. Despite these hurdles, Liberia's economy exhibited resilience, achieving 5% real GDP growth in 2021, fueled by expansions in the rubber, gold mining, and cement sectors. Projections indicate steady growth, reaching 5.7% in 2024, underpinned by favourable conditions and expansionary fiscal policies.

Liberia's trade and current account deficits highlight its dependence on international markets, making the economy more vulnerable. In recent years, while imports have consistently outpaced exports, the deficit has been offset by grants, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and concessional loans. Recently, there has been a shift from grants to loans from international organisations. As a result, government revenue as a percentage of GDP has declined due to fewer grants, although it has grown in absolute terms due to economic expansion. Tax revenue remains a key income source, yet it is sensitive to global price fluctuations. The budget deficit persists and is increasingly financed by public debt, despite efforts to reduce it.

The primary sector remains central to Liberia’s economy and employment, with agriculture and forestry employing a large portion of the population and contributing significantly to GDP. In recent years, growth in the mining sector, particularly gold production, has added to economic gains. However, Liberia’s **potential remains largely untapped** due to compounding challenges, including infrastructure deficits, limited human capital, and a difficult business environment. Low export diversification and limited value addition underscore the need for investment in value chain development, especially in the primary sector. Additionally, high-interest rates set by the Central Bank to control inflation limit household purchasing power and constrain business investment.

Nevertheless, Liberia's economic opportunities are propelled by its abundant natural resources, recent macroeconomic reforms, international support, its young population, and its potential for attracting tourism. Overall, addressing the aforementioned challenges through strategic investments and sustained reforms is crucial for fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Liberia.

Liberia's path toward inclusive growth and sustainable development presents both challenges and opportunities. By addressing systemic weaknesses, adopting new governance models, and leveraging technological advancements, Liberia can build a more stable, equitable, and prosperous future.

To this end, addressing key constraints and seizing opportunities are critical to building economic resilience, enhancing human development outcomes, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Aligning climate policy with broader policy objectives has emerged as a priority, highlighting the importance of maximizing the co-benefits of integrated policy instruments. The recommendations outlined in the Development Pathways are grounded in rigorous thematic analysis and are intended to provide actionable guidance for policymakers, development partners, and stakeholders committed to advancing Liberia's development agenda.

While these pathways are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, the analysis underscores the importance of prioritizing urgent synergies and addressing critical needs. This approach facilitates the identification of high-impact entry points, enabling transformative and sustainable change and advancing the shared vision of a prosperous and inclusive Liberia.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Part I.
Introduction

1. Objectives

The **"Study on the future drivers of sustainable and inclusive development in Liberia" (DoD)** seeks to delineate the main factors that could shape Liberia's trajectory towards inclusive and sustainable development. The study reviews the major sectors of the economy and society, focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) intervention areas. These areas include human development, economic and social well-being, political and economic integration, governance, and resilience to stressors, shocks, and crises. The overarching goal of the study is to identify current development constraints, opportunities, and entry points for tangible actions to foster transformative change. The focus is on identifying catalytic drivers and pathways for socio-economic transformations that can lead to significant progress in achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

The DoD study presents a comprehensive and practical document, informing possible policy actions in the main sectors of society and economy to advance inclusive and sustainable development. The specific study objectives include:

1. Identify the current and potential **drivers** that propel development in Liberia across the various thematic pillars.

2. Outline the significant **challenges** that are currently hindering progress within each thematic pillar.

3. Examine potential **synergies**, **conflicts and trade-offs** that may arise in harnessing the drivers of growth and development within each thematic pillar.

4. Explore **critical "entry points" or transformative strategies** that can be employed to promote inclusive and sustainable development in Liberia (See Development Pathways).

The DoD study serves to inform the forthcoming phase of development planning for national government and development partners. It aims to provide valuable insights to relevant stakeholders, aiding them in identifying strategic development priorities, potential conflicts and pathways aligned with the country's needs, challenges, and opportunities **over the next 5-8 years (2024-2030)**.

The study was initiated at the request of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) of Liberia alongside financial and development partners. The philosophy and approach adopted by the DPA expert team composed of national and international experts is rooted in centering the local context, co-creating the study design and methodology and co-developing the policy recommendations with the project stakeholders, thus ensuring the reliability and credibility of the study findings and pathways forward.

This initiative is a response to the collective commitment of the Government and partners to leverage and build upon the relevant lessons learnt from the development and implementation of

the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018 to 2023 (PAPD) and to lay the foundation and provide relevant inputs to the new development plan ARREST ("It is time to use **A**griculture, **R**oads, **R**ule of Law, **E**ducation, **S**anitation and **T**ourism to ARREST Poverty and Ignorance in Liberia").

2. High-level Country Overview

Liberia has made significant strides in economic growth and human development over the past decades, yet faces considerable challenges in achieving a sustainable and resilient development trajectory. Despite improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI)[1], which rose from 0.435 to 0.480 between 2000 and 2019, Liberia still ranks low, at 175th out of 189 countries globally.[2] External factors such as climate change, environmental degradation, conflicts, global health threats, and supply chain disruptions complicate the country's development efforts. These factors directly impact Liberia's social, economic, and human development gains, further eroding traditional coping mechanisms and aggravating vulnerabilities.

With a population of 5.3 million, Liberia has a notably youthful demographic: 79% of the population is under the age of 35, and almost two-thirds are below 25 years old.[3] This demographic dynamic significantly influences development trajectories, emphasising the need to ensure that these young individuals receive appropriate education, skills, and resources to unlock their full potential.

Thus, improving social infrastructure, accessibility, and the quality of public social services is crucial for inclusive and sustainable development. Currently, **access to education remains a challenge,** with individuals aged 25 years and older, on average, receiving only 4.8 years of schooling throughout their lifetime. Moreover, in terms of **health** outcomes, though achievements have been made on a number of health indicators such as infant (57/1000 in 2021) and maternal mortality (742/100,000), these numbers still remain high. Challenges also still persist in terms of access to essential health services.[4]

Significant economic and social disparities between the regions accentuate the inequality gap. There is an urgent need to increase investment to consolidate the achievements, improve access to quality essential health services, protect the population from health emergencies and build resilient health, education, and social protection systems.

Effective and inclusive governance and social cohesion are also cornerstones of growth and development in Liberia. Since 2003 Liberia has successfully conducted four democratic elections in 2005, 2011, 2017, and 2023. The 2023 elections stand out as the first where the incumbent willingly conceded before the official results were formally announced by the National Election Commission.[5] While the political environment remains peaceful, concerns persist regarding corruption and limited institutional capacity. The nation consistently receives unfavourable rankings in both global and domestic accountability evaluations, including assessments by Transparency International. Similarly, the country's perception of corruption has

[1] HDI measures progress across three main dimensions of human development: healthy life, access to education and decent standard of living (UNDP).
[2] UNDP, 2022a
[3] LISGIS, 2022a
[4] WHO, 2022
[5] Doe & Toweh, 2023

been on a declining trend, with its score in the global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) dropping from 32/100 in 2018 to 26/100 in 2022.[6] This hampers the attraction of private investments and diminishes the effectiveness of public investment. Effective governance is necessary for planning and executing infrastructure projects, such as roads and energy, which are vital for economic growth and improving living standards in Liberia, as well as for maintaining social cohesion.

While still recovering from the effects of the decades-long civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 2003 and crippled the country's social fabric and economic structures, **Liberia has more recently faced several other major crises, including the Ebola epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic**. Climate change and environmental degradation present another set of challenges, including deforestation caused by logging activities and agricultural expansion, which poses threats to biodiversity and contributes to soil erosion; as well as the effects of climate change, including unpredictable weather patterns, rising temperatures, and the potential for more frequent and intense natural hazards.

Despite these challenges, Liberia's economic growth has rebounded after a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic**. However, this recovery has been heavily dependent on extractive industries and commodity exports, making the economy vulnerable to global trade fluctuations.** In 2022, the country's economy expanded by 4.8%, primarily driven by the mining and agricultural sectors, despite global disruptions following the war in Ukraine, with an annual average inflation contained at 7.6%.[7]

At this pivotal moment, Liberia has tremendous potential to reshape its narrative and take decisive action toward transformative growth. With the Agenda 2030 deadline fast approaching and a peaceful government transition following the November 2023 elections, Liberia has the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to sustainable, inclusive development focused on poverty reduction, with special attention to vulnerable populations such as women and youth.

The path forward should centre on translating the sustainable economic growth into investments in public social services and improved health and focusing on further strengthening public institutions and governance mechanisms. A young population with a tremendous capacity to innovate in resource-constrained contexts, prevalence of smallholder agriculture in rural areas, the abundant potential for renewable energy are among some of the endowment factors that coupled with an inclusive development plan can set the country on a path towards resilient and green growth.

[6] Transparency International, 2022
[7] World Bank, 2023a

Part II.
Study Methodology

1. Conceptual Framework

Sustainable development, as outlined in the SDGs, is all encompassing, including social, economic, governance and environmental dimensions and drivers. The realisation of the transformative vision critically depends on acknowledging the intricate interlinkages and integrated structure inherent in the SDGs. This entails not only discerning potential synergies and trade-offs among the SDGs and their associated targets but also crafting context-specific integrated methodologies to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the goals.[8] Identifying key transitions "*that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDG (...) requires a consideration of multiple policy levers spanning economic, social and environmental dimensions*" (p. 2).[9]

Therefore, the explores three main vertical pillars identified and chosen based on the ToRs and three transversal topics that cut across these vertical dimensions:

The **three main pillars**:

1. Governance and peace;
2. Inclusive economic transformation; and
3. Human development.

The three transversal **dimensions** analysed as part of each pillar are the following:

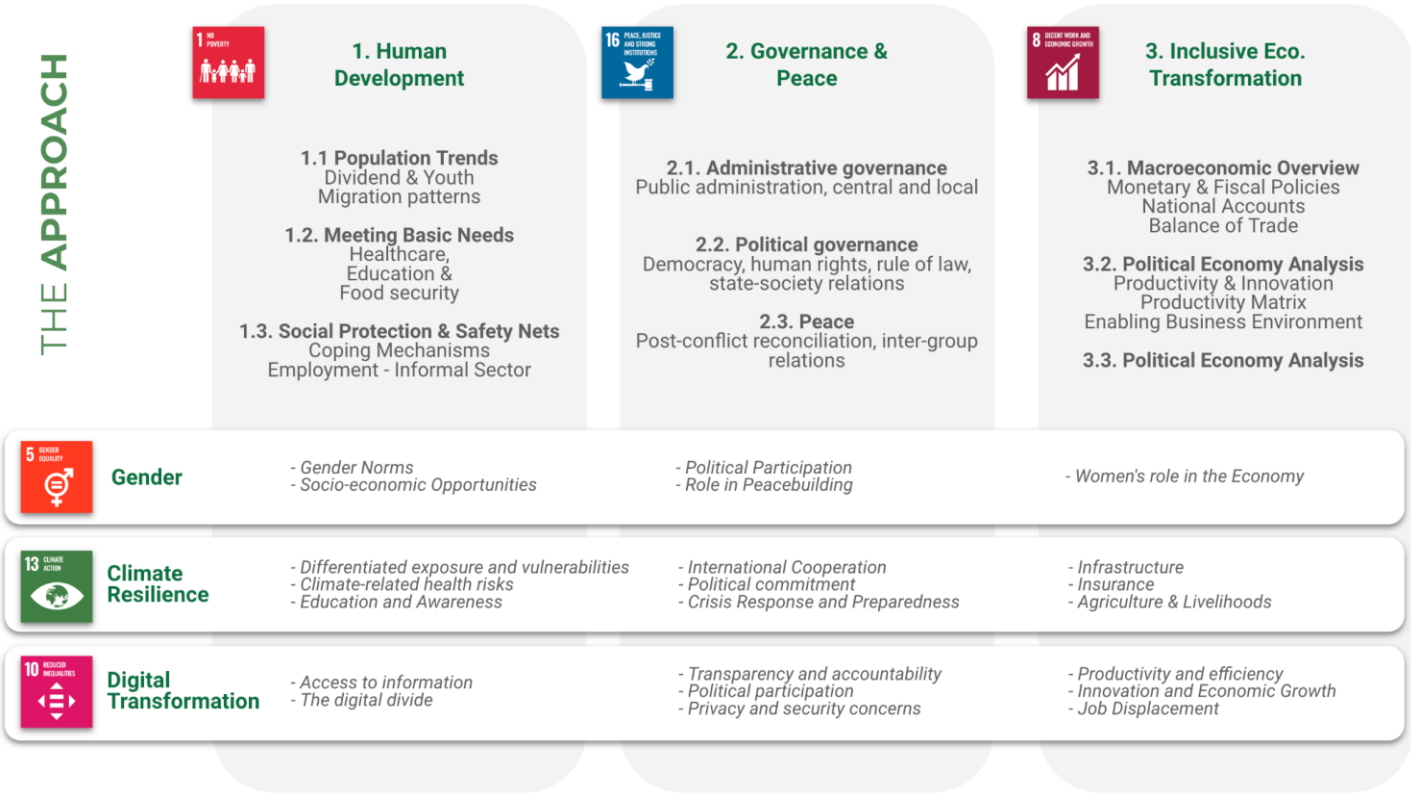
1. Gender equality;
2. Climate (change) resilience; and
3. Digital transformation.

The DoD study adopted a systems-approach to comprehensively examine the Drivers, Constraints, and Potential conflicts associated with each thematic pillar under consideration. The research provides an in-depth analysis of the forces propelling, hindering, and potentially conflicting with the objectives within and between each pillar. By systematically exploring the inputs, processes, interactions and feedback loops, the study offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play within each thematic area. Additionally, a dedicated scenario planning/pathways forward section has been incorporated to synthesise and integrate the findings across thematic pillars.

In order to address and counteract prevailing development practices that tend to favour isolated approaches, resulting in disparate and competing strategies and processes[10], this synthesis aims to illuminate potential pathways that emerge from the interplay of drivers, constraints, and conflicts, providing strategic insights for navigating complex scenarios and fostering informed decision-making in the broader context of the study's focus.

[8] Sachs et al., 2019
[9] UN SDG, 2023
[10] UN SDG, 2023

Figure 1. Overarching Conceptual framework



Source: Author's own.

The systemic vision is consistent with the interconnected and multidimensional nature of sustainable development, which requires a holistic and long-term perspective. This approach is particularly useful for grasping the complexity of development challenges and designing more integrated and effective policies and interventions.[11] It highlights the intertwined importance of political, social, and economic factors, with changes or interventions in one dimension having ripple effects across the entire system. Thus, this holistic understanding of development dynamics emphasises the need to search for synergies and positive feedback loops within and between dimensions to strengthen the resilience and sustainable development in a lasting way. The main research questions that guided the analysis of the study and were explored within each main vertical thematic pillar with transversal themes contributing to their analysis are:

1. What are the main drivers of inclusive growth and human development in Liberia within each thematic pillar?
2. What are the main constraints within each thematic pillar?
3. What are the potential conflicts or trade-offs in realising the growth and development drivers within each thematic pillar?

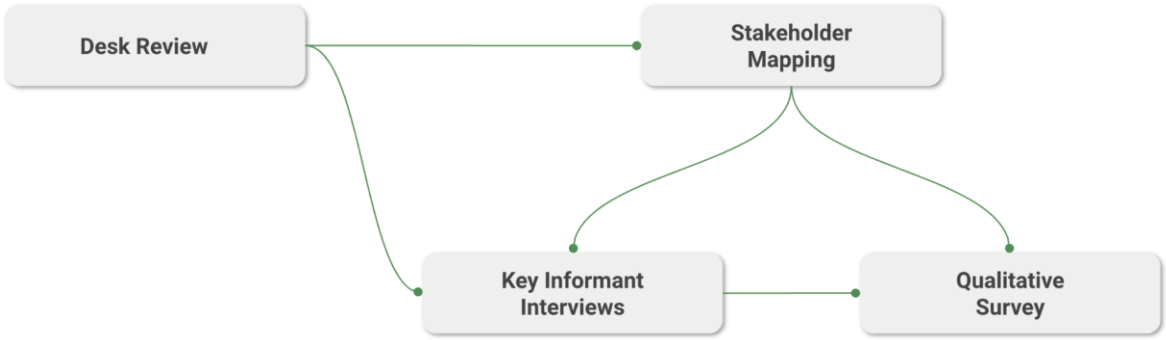
[11] Kemp, Parto, & Gibson, 2005

4. What are the key "entry points" or transformations to foster inclusive and sustainable development in Liberia?

2. Research Methodology

To meet the outlined objectives and scope, various methodologies and approaches were employed. The components of the overall study and research methodology are described below and are connected as follows:

Figure 2. Study data collection approach



2.1. Desk Review

DPA began with a systematic review and analysis of the topics, current situation, and constraints faced by societal actors within each thematic pillar—Governance and Peace, Economic Transformation, and Human Development. Issues at the intersection of each thematic pillar and the cross-cutting pillars were also reviewed and analysed. This systematic review drew on all available disaggregated data, reports, and relevant studies from national and international sources to identify key drivers for growth in sectors that support inclusive, sustainable development and job creation.

Over a hundred documents were reviewed, including sources from the government, development partners, and both grey and academic literature, along with online resources such as published reports and journal articles from reputable publications. Key national literature consulted to provide a comprehensive analysis of the country's socio-economic and political development, as well as SDG progress and gaps, included the following (non-exhaustive list):

- Manifestos of the political parties running for elections in October 2023;
- The political agenda of the Unity Party and its Contributing Parties that won the October/November 2023 elections titled ARREST;
- Former National Development Plan (NDP) titled Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.[12];
- PAPD monitoring, evaluation and performance reports;
- Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the progress made towards achieving the SDGs;

[12] Government of Liberia, 2018

- SDGs Acceleration and Transformation roadmap developed for the 2023 UN SDGs Global Summit held in New York on 18-19 September;
- National report on the results of the 2022 National Population and Housing Census;
- The review of the 10 year implementation of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (AADPD), 2023; and
- Liberia Integrated SDG Insights Analyses.

The literature was systematically reviewed through the creation of a document inventory that categorises documents, summarises main findings, and analyses the current situation and constraints in sectors identified in the TORs. All documents were selected based on their validity, determined by:

a) the relevance of the contents to the objectives of the thematic pillars and the overall study;

b) the date of publication to avoid using obsolete documents, particularly for sector-specific reports, laws and policies, only those that covered the last five years will be included; and

c) credibility of the author(s)/website.

The desk review included a mapping of available **secondary quantitative data** to be used for analysis across all of the study's vertical and cross-cutting pillars.

The findings were documented in a synthesis matrix organised by themes or categories. Each key document was then prioritised using a traffic light system and assigned to individual team members, who were responsible for extracting key information and findings relevant to each thematic pillar.

2.2. Stakeholder Mapping

In parallel, stakeholder mapping and analysis was performed throughout the study. The stakeholder mapping serves to:

a) **Ensure that all relevant actors who can contribute to the main research questions are identified.** This shaped the organisation and implementation of key informant interviews by linking relevant stakeholders to the specific dimensions of analysis where their input adds the most value, providing insightful information to substantiate the main research findings and address the research questions.

b) Ensure that stakeholders with an interest in the subjects under study are engaged in the process, allowing them to share their insights. Involving key stakeholders enhanced the triangulation of information and findings, strengthened their ownership of the results, and contributed to relevant policy recommendations.

The stakeholder mapping involved identifying *who* the stakeholders are, understanding their stake in the topics under study (*why*), and determining their potential level of input and involvement in the study (*how* and *when*). To pinpoint stakeholders relevant to the evaluation and those likely to provide the most valuable input, delimitation criteria were based on agencies, organisations, groups, or individuals—public or private—who have a direct or indirect interest in, and potential knowledge of, the main topics under study.

The final selection of these stakeholders was revised by the CPG and UNDP teams of this study. **In total, approx. 150 individuals or organisations across all sectors were contacted for Key Informant Interviews and/ or the Survey on societal aspirations and priorities.**

2.3. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The DPA team conducted 38 semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs), each lasting 45-60 minutes (See Table 1). These interviews engaged key stakeholders representing the main sectors of the three pillars. Participant selection was a collaborative effort with the UNDP team to ensure interview quality and representativeness.

The primary objective of these KIIs was to achieve two key outcomes:

1. **Insight Gathering from Key Actors:** The interviews aim to capture the perspectives of both national and international key actors regarding the crucial drivers and levers for sustainable and inclusive development.
2. **Validation of Findings and Conclusions:** The KIIs will serve to validate findings and conclusions from the desk literature review, with a specific emphasis on identifying gaps in our understanding of sector-specific challenges.

Table 1. Conducted Key Informant Interview (31-July-2024)

Pilar/ Topic *	Contacted	KII Conducted	Total
Governance & Peace	9	**8**	17
Gender Equality	15	**5**	20
Human Development	5	**11**	16
Inclusive Economic Transformation	31	**14**	46
Total	**60**	**38**	**98**

Note: Climate Resilience and Digital Transformations questions were included within the questionnaires of the different pillars. Gender Equity included 5 specific KIIs to cover specific actors and perspectives not accounted for in the mapping of the other pillars.

All interviews were conducted with the explicit consent of interviewees, and any personal information collected was anonymised to ensure confidentiality. To broaden the scope and include more participants, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held, involving multiple individuals in the same session. This approach enabled simultaneous interactions with participants who shared common perspectives or could offer synergies on specific topics. The intention was to optimise efficiency by interviewing multiple participants collectively when beneficial for a more productive discussion.

Following the desk review phase, the design of the KII instruments was informed by identified information gaps and the need for further substantiation or elaboration. Each set of instruments included approximately 10 guiding questions tailored to the three main overarching topics of the study. To facilitate targeted discussions, the KII guides were sector-specific for each thematic pillar and incorporated the three cross-cutting topics.

To enhance efficiency, transcripts were typed in real-time during each session by a research associate, while the facilitator guided the conversation flow and technical content. This meticulous approach aimed to extract rich, nuanced insights from the stakeholders involved in the study.

2.4. Qualitative Survey on Societal Aspirations and Priorities

The qualitative survey on the Societal Aspirations and Priorities of the Liberian population for the future development of Liberia will inform the country's diagnostics and gap analysis in terms of socio-economic, political and gender equality development progress. Given its qualitative nature, the survey results are not nationally representative. However, they do provide valuable insights into specific issues and aspirations of various population groups.

In terms of sampling, the survey employed a **"snowball" non-probabilistic sampling method,** relying on participants' referrals (forward linkages). This approach is suitable for qualitative and exploratory research, facilitating insights from diverse perspectives and experiences. Targeting stakeholders from all development sectors, the online survey, conducted through the **Qualtrics platform**, enabled focused engagement with key stakeholders across various groups. Explicit requests to enhance the referral chain were embedded in the survey, giving rise to the term "snowball" for this technique.

The survey was disseminated through various social media platforms actively used in Liberia, targeting the entire population as well as specific civil society networks, academic institutions, and youth groups. It began with "seed" participants, who were selected based on desk reviews and key informant interviews (KIIs).

The survey explores the aspirations, priorities, mechanisms, and limitations. The minimum sample size set at 30 to enhance statistical validity was reached with **45 full responses** (and 61 total) (See Table 2). Although not representative of the entire affected population, the responses contribute valuable perspectives. The outcomes of the survey results inform the formulation of the policy recommendations.

Table 2. Survey on Societal Aspirations and Priorities Responses (31-July-2024)

Thematic Area	%	#	Sector	%	#
Governance & Peace	18%	8	Government	9%	4
Inclusive Eco. Transformation	16%	7	Private sector	18%	8
Human Development	29%	13	Civil society/NGO	39%	17
Gender Equality	22%	10	Academia/Research	11%	5
Climate Resilience	16%	7	International Dev.Partner	18%	8
Digital Transformation	0%	0	Other	5%	2
Total	**100%**	**45**	**Total**	**100%**	**44**

2.5. Participatory Workshop on Development Pathways

To ensure the rigor, inclusivity, and stakeholder ownership of the DoD Study, UNDP in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and DPA conducted two key workshops as part of the study's validation and consultation process. These events served to refine the study's findings, align recommendations with national priorities, and integrate stakeholder insights into both study's deliverables.

The first workshop, held on September 1, 2024, provided an opportunity for technical review and validation of the Thematic Analysis Report and Development Pathways. Participants included representatives from government entities, CSOs, NGOs, UN agencies, the Core Project Group (CPG), and other development partners. Feedback gathered during this session was instrumental in refining the study's findings and ensuring alignment with the ARREST agenda, Liberia's new framework for inclusive and sustainable development.

The second workshop, convened on November 13, 2024, focused on finalizing the DoD Study through a Technical Validation Workshop and Development Pathway Dialogue. The hybrid event brought together stakeholders for an in-depth review of the study's three thematic pillars through presentations, breakout group discussions, and a plenary session to consolidate feedback. This workshop also incorporated a one-hour consultation for the upcoming UNDP Global Strategic Plan (2026–2029), enabling participants to provide inputs through interviews and a roundtable discussion.

The report is structured into thematic analysis and is divided into three main chapters. **The first chapter focuses on Human Development,** examining demographic trends, poverty, education, healthcare, food security, and social protection. It identifies key constraints, drivers, and potential trade-offs in these areas. The **second chapter addresses Governance and Peacebuilding**, discussing the importance of governance, key drivers of inclusive development, and the challenges and risks facing this sector through a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The **final chapter covers Inclusive Economic Transformation** and explores the drivers, challenges, and potential conflicts in achieving sustainable economic growth by providing an overview of Liberia's economic context, including GDP, external sector dynamics, public finance, inflation, and women's economic inclusion.

All chapters apply a poverty, gender and human rights perspective that are reflected in the suggested development pathways, in line with the 2030 Agenda goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. A strategic long-term vision that defines desired sustainable development outcomes (at national and subnational levels), helps enhance coherence across policy objectives and across policy areas. Ex-ante and ex-post impact assessment should to the extent possible consider these different policy trade-offs, and measure impact across policy areas.

Part III.
Thematic Notes

Chapter 1.
Human Development

This chapter outlines the current status of key aspects of human development and well-being, focusing on education, healthcare, food security, and social protection [Goal 1.1]. Through an analysis of the existing challenges, it identifies the primary constraints, obstacles, and structural issues impeding progress in these dimensions [Goal 1.2]. Additionally, it highlights the drivers and untapped opportunities that could enhance human development and should be further leveraged, as well as the potential trade-offs when prioritising policies and investments [Goal 1.3].

1. What is the State of Human Development in Liberia?

1.1. General Trends and Overview

Ranked among the poorest countries in the world, Liberia has faced numerous crises in recent decades. The civil war severely damaged social, economic, and physical infrastructure, in addition to eroding trust between society and the State. While still grappling with the war's aftermath, Liberia was struck by the Ebola epidemic, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the repercussions of global conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, in addition to the escalating impacts of climate change. **Despite these adversities, Liberia has made notable progress in human development.** The overall improvement in the HDI reflects advancements in health, education, and income.

Liberia has a predominantly young population, with 79% of its 5.3 million citizens under the age of 35, and almost two-thirds below 25 years old.[13] This demographic faces significant challenges, including high unemployment, a lack of vocational training, and limited economic opportunities, rendering them **particularly vulnerable.**[14]

The county has experienced modest improvements in its Human Development Index (HDI), reflecting slight but steady progress across various fundamental aspects of human development. Between 1999 and 2021, the HDI increased by 21.2%, rising from 0.397 to 0.481. During this period, life expectancy saw a notable increase of 10.8 years. Meanwhile, the average years of schooling and expected years of schooling improved slightly, increasing by 1.7 years and 1.5 years, respectively, while Gross National Income (GNI) per capita grew by 5.1%. Despite these gains, Liberia remains classified within the low human development category, ranking 178th among 191 countries and territories.[15]

The onset of global crises, particularly COVID-19, has highlighted Liberia's vulnerabilities and underscored the need for greater resilience to health emergencies and economic disruptions. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Human Development Index (HDI) remained steady, supported by general increases in life expectancy, education, and income per capita.

At the household level, a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line.[16] As of 2021, more than half (52.3%) of Liberians were living in multidimensional poverty with 24.9% experiencing severe multidimensional poverty.[17] An additional 23.3% estimated to be vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.[18] Moreover, **inequality remains a challenge, with**

[13] LISGIS, 2022a
[14] UNDP, 2023a
[15] UNDP, 2022a
[16] IMF, 2022a
[17] UNDP, 2023a
[18] *Ibid*

wealth concentrated in urban centres and among political and economic elite.[19] Three individuals out of four (~ 75.4%) are classified as multidimensionally poor in rural areas, compared to 35.2% in urban areas.[20] The trend in severe poverty follows the same pattern, with a value three times higher in rural areas (39.9%) than in urban areas (13.7%).[21]

Female-led households, which make up 33.7% of all households[22], are at greater risk of poverty due to women's limited access to financial services, credit, and employment opportunities. Migration trends increase the prevalence of female-headed households, further straining their financial stability. Women are more often employed in informal sectors, while men dominate other industries [KII].[23]

Deprivations in the standard of living, encompassing access to energy for cooking, sanitation facilities, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets, is the main feature of Liberians experiencing multidimensional poverty (51.7%), with health and education deprivations accounting for 19.7% and 28.6%, respectively.[24] **Poor housing conditions, including overcrowding and limited space, significantly impact health, privacy, and overall quality of life** for many Liberian households. Over a third (36.1%) of residences in Liberia consist of single-room dwellings, with more than half (52.6%) occupied by households with three or more members. Additionally, only around half of Liberian households (52.4%) use improved materials for their housing outer walls. In rural areas, the situation is even more concerning, with over three-fourths (77.4%) of housing walls constructed with unimproved materials such as mud or sticks.[25]

Energy consumption is still dominated by charcoal and wood usage contributing to environmental degradation, air pollution, and health risks. Despite some progress in connecting to the government-operated electricity grid, more than 96% of Liberian households rely on charcoal and wood as their main source of energy for cooking. Charcoal is predominantly used in urban areas (83.3% of households), while wood is the primary fuel in rural areas (84.7% of households). In contrast only 1 out 4 of households have access to electricity provided by the government through the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC), mostly concentrated in urban areas (See Climate Box 7).

The role and voice of women in society are strong; however, harmful patriarchal gender norms persist, creating a hostile environment and significant challenges for women, girls, and other gender identities. These groups face heightened difficulties accessing inclusive education, quality healthcare, and employment opportunities, in addition to grappling with widespread discrimination, oppression, and gender-based violence (GBV). The 14-year civil war and subsequent economic downturns disproportionately affected women and girls, with approximately 82% of women experiencing violence during the conflict, including 77% facing sexual abuse.[26]

Moreover, a recent study conducted as part of the Liberian Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) program suggests that Liberia has yet to fully embrace gender equality. The findings

[19] IMF, 2022b
[20] OPHI, 2023
[21] *Ibid*
[22] LISGIS, 2021
[23] KII Insights
[24] UNDP, 2023a
[25] LISGIS, 2022a
[26] Government of Liberia, 2019

indicate that 62% of men and 33% of women surveyed expressed **opposition** to gender equality.[27] Gender equality was measured across four domains: rejection of violence against women, support for women's inclusion in decision-making, backing for the economic advancement of women, and ensuring livelihood security. Additionally, 32% of females reported *partial* support for gender equality. Overall, this suggests that approximately two-thirds of Liberia's male and female population do not fully support gender equality in the country, a deeply concerning obstacle to achieving sustainable development.

At the community level, the state of infrastructure development in Liberia has seen gradual progress amidst significant challenges. Following the end of its civil wars, Liberia faced the daunting task of rebuilding its devastated infrastructure. The early years of the post-conflict period were primarily focused on restoring basic infrastructure with the support of international donors and organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. Significant investments were directed towards rehabilitating roads, restoring electricity and water supply, and reconstructing healthcare and educational facilities. While these efforts have extended toward expanding access to electricity across the country, other bottlenecks remain. Projects aimed at expanding the national grid and incorporating renewable energy sources have been initiated, though progress has been slow.

Liberia's forests and tropical climate are central to its culture and economy, yet deforestation and climate change pose severe risks. The nation's abundant natural resources are under threat from rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and coastal erosion.[28] Vulnerable to natural disasters and with a heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture and forestry, Liberia grapples with poverty and inadequate infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the country's natural wealth offers a pathway to sustainable and inclusive growth if leveraged properly (See Climate Box 1).

Overall, the past few decades have seen Liberia experience various trends in human development, including both progress and setbacks. The demographic dividend[29] remains one of the major drivers for sustainable and inclusive development, emphasising the need for Liberia to provide young people with appropriate education, skills, nurturing and resources to unlock their full potential. However, in order to be able to fulfil this potential, adequate commitment to education and safeguarding in the form of policies, programmes and investments are require

[27] Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD), 2021

[28] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021

[29] "The demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)" [UNFPA, n.d.]

Climate Box 1. Environment and Climate Context in Liberia

Liberia has a tropical climate and ranks among the wettest countries globally, receiving an average annual rainfall of nearly 2,500 mm.[30] It is characterised by a 'wet' (May to October), and a 'dry' season (November to April)[31] in most parts of the country, following the West African Monsoon. **The country boasts the highest forest coverage in West Africa,**[32] housing extensive parts of the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem**, a critical biodiversity hotspot that holds deep cultural significance**.[33] Liberia's notable biodiversity, with high levels of unique species, makes it one of the 14 global centres of plant endemism.[34] It plays a crucial role in conservation for the West African Upper Guinean Rainforest, home to 25% of Africa's mammal species, including 30 primate species and several endangered animals.[35]

Dense tropical forests constitute a major part of the territory, according to UNEP,[36] in 2015, forests[37] **expanding through over 68% of Liberia's land surface** (6.5 million hectares). Liberia's forest policy aims to balance different land uses.[38] Of the total forest area, 28% is designated for timber production, 5% for palm oil concessions, 1% to other plantations including rubber.[39] Conversely, around 18% of the total forest area correspond to protected[40] areas, with a large segment (45%) remaining non-designated and utilised by local communities.[41] Yet, there are significant oversights and failures in the enforcement of regulations regarding the allocation of uses in forest concessions mainly due to a deficiency in political commitment.[42]

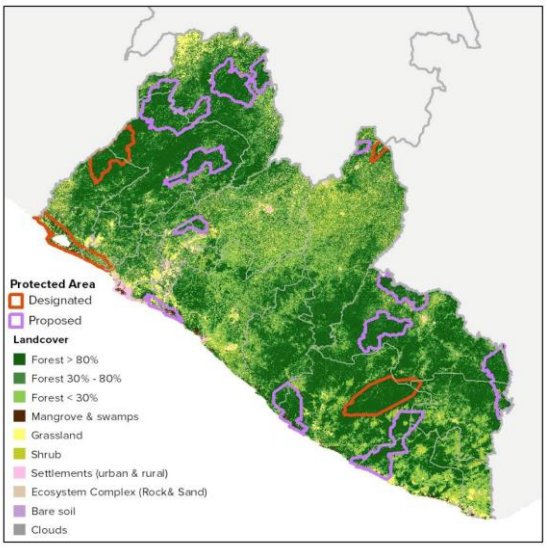


Figure 6. Landcover, designated protected areas, and proposed protected areas.

Source: Neugarten et al. (2017)

[30] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[31] Government of Liberia, 2020
[32] World Bank, 2020a
[33] Forest Trends, 2024
[34] EPA, 2019
[35] USAID, 2018; EPA, 2017; UNEP (n.d.).
[36] UNEP, n.d.
[37] Defined as greater than 30% tree canopy cover.
[38] Forest Trends, 2024
[39] Forest Trends, 2024; World Bank, 2020b; UNEP, n.d.
[40] Or proposed to be protected
[41] World Bank, 2020a; USAID, 2020
[42] Forest Trends, 2024

The majority of Liberians depend on forests in various ways for their survival and economic well-being.[43] The forestry sector in particular provides numerous jobs and contributes significantly to the GDP. Concretely, "According to the 2020 Forest Resources Assessment produced by FAO, as of 2015, around 39,880 full time equivalent workers (of which about 35% women) were formally employed by the sector."[44] It is estimated that the informal sector employs approx. over 20,000 'full time equivalent' in chainsaw milling and 28,000 in the charcoal industry. Moreover, the collection and use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are essential for communities living in forest areas. Thus, products and services from forests contribute to the livelihoods, income, employment, and adaptive capacity of Liberians, particularly many economically disadvantaged rural households.[45]

However, over the last thirty years, **Liberia has experienced unprecedented environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, largely due to inadequately managed human activities.**[46] Specifically, the area covered by primary tropical forests dropped from 43.5% in 1975 to 36.82% in 2013, with the rate of deforestation more than doubling between 1975-2000 and 2000-2013.[47] This decline in forest cover not only impacts biodiversity but also hinders economic development and governance. The overexploitation of natural resources, including unsustainable agricultural practices, mining, and pollution, continues to pose significant challenges to the country's sustainable development.[48] As a result, despite its rich natural resources and strategic location, Liberia remains one of the poorest nations in the world.[49]

Liberia is highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, with its coastal zones, public health, agriculture, water, and fisheries sectors being particularly vulnerable.[50] According to the INFORM Risk Index, Liberia is highly exposed[51] to multiple hazards mainly river floods (7.4) and epidemics (7.3).[52] Despite its minimal contribution to global climate change (less than 0.05%), **Liberia faces a significant risk of adverse impacts from climate-related events.**[53] In particular, the country is expected to experience more frequent and unpredictable intense rainfall events, exacerbating existing flood related disaster risks.[54]

Climate change indicators show concerning trends, exacerbating Liberia's significant threat from natural hazards. **The average annual temperature in Liberia has risen by 0.8°C**, with an average increase of 0.18°C per decade (between 1960 and 2006). Moreover, there's been a **decrease in mean annual rainfall since 1960** -despite long-term implications remaining uncertain- and **sea level rise is projected to increase** by 0.13-0.56 metres this century.[55] **These trends are expected to increase the risk of disasters.** Firstly, the rise in sea level is likely to exacerbate coastal vulnerability, particularly

[43] Forest Trends, 2024
[44] UNEP, n.d. [Forest section]
[45] World Bank, 2020a
[46] EPA, 2017; UNEP, n.d.
[47] USAID, 2018
[48] USAID, 2014
[49] UNEP, n.d.
[50] EPA, 2021.; Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[51] The index scores between 0.0 and 10.0, where 0 represents very low risk and 10 very high risk.
[52] EU, 2024
[53] EPA, 2020.; UNEP, n.d.
[54] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[55] EPA, 2020.; Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021

when combined with heavy rainfall, causing coastal flooding and erosion.[56] **The country's coastal area, an essential environmental and economic resource that houses about 70% of its population**[57] has already experienced considerable challenges, including the loss of 0.8 km² of land to coastal erosion in recent decades, affecting both infrastructure and local communities.[58] Secondly, given Liberia's geography, with its numerous rivers, catchments, aquifers, and a low-lying coastal zone, changes in precipitation patterns are likely to lead to **severe flooding scenarios.**[59] Liberia's UNFCCC Initial National Communication document emphasises the many detrimental effects of climate change on various demographic groups, showcasing how women are often affected more harshly.

High population densities in areas such as the capital city of Monrovia, the broader urban region of Greater Monrovia, and coastal urban locations coincide with critical flood-prone zones and regions of heightened vulnerability. Urban and rural infrastructures are increasingly threatened by natural hazards and erosion, and the country's **vulnerability is further intensified by widespread poverty and a substantial reliance on sectors sensitive to climate change, including agriculture, fisheries, mining, and forestry.** Moreover, the prevalence of **informal settlements,** traditionally linked with disaster risk, along with ongoing urbanisation, heightens the country's susceptibility to pandemics and disasters, particularly floods. In these urban areas, a considerable portion of the infrastructure is situated within flood-prone zones.[60]

As will be discussed throughout the report, factors contributing to Liberia's increased vulnerability to climate change impacts encompass: maladaptive agricultural practices, unsustainable logging, unregulated coastal sand mining, an excessive dependence on biomass resulting in significant deforestation, inadequate infrastructure, low socio-economic development levels, limited institutional capacity, and insufficient meteorological and hydrological data collection capabilities.[61] **However, Liberia's rich and abundant natural resources also hold great potential to drive sustainable inclusive development.**

1.2. Meeting Basic Needs

Challenges in meeting the population's basic needs—such as access to education, healthcare, and quality nutritious food—persist against a backdrop of overall improvement. Below, we review the current status of each of these dimensions to identify areas of progress and where obstacles remain.

Education Dynamics

Over a third (35.8%) of the population aged 5 years and older has not received any formal education. Only 17.3% have attained one of the main education levels, namely early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, or tertiary education. Among those who have received formal education, 67.9% have completed secondary school, whereas only 18% have completed tertiary education. The proportion of individuals completing tertiary education is twice

[56] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021; UNEP, n.d.
[57] EPA, 2021.
[58] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[59] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[60] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[61] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021

as high in urban areas compared to rural areas, with similar proportions observed among males and females.[62] This low educational attainment is reflected in the global educational indices. The Liberian illiteracy rate (measured as the population 15+ years lacking reading and writing ability) is 41.4%, significantly above the global average of 13%.[63]

Illiteracy is more prevalent in rural areas, and is positively correlated with age. Over half (56.2%) of the rural population is illiterate compared to 29.1% in rural areas. Rural regions also lag behind in enrollment rates (27.5%) compared to urban areas (42.4%). Additionally, rural areas experience a higher dropout rate (15% versus 12.5% in urban areas), leading to a completion rate of 8.8%, nearly three times lower (2.8) than that of urban areas (24.6%).[64]

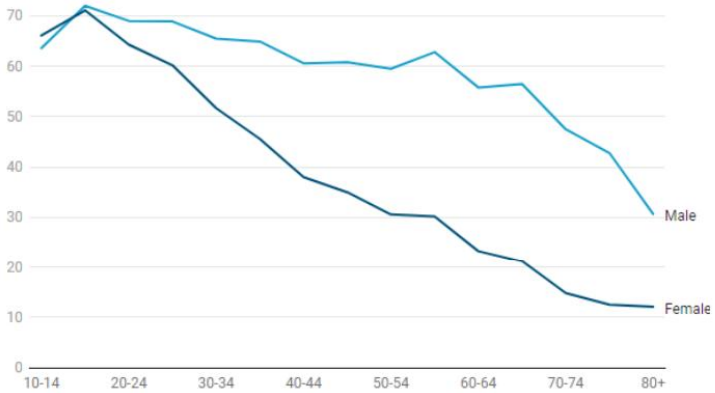
On an upward trend since 2013, the educational enrollment has reached 60% in 2023. However, the enrollment rate drops between the ages of 15 and 18.[65] Between the ages of 3 to 18 (the government-mandated school attendance age range) the proportion of children enrolled in schools rises until the age of 15, indicating that as age increases more children frequent school. However, after 15 the enrollment rate drops. This pattern illustrates a high drop-out likelihood after 15, alongside a late enrollment trend. This could be partially attributable to long walking distances between the households and school facilities, especially in rural areas where 30.5% of the households live 40 minutes or more away from the nearest primary school.[66] UNICEF, 2018 underscored this late enrollment trend, noting that approximately 40% of students in Liberia were three years older than the appropriate age for their grade.[67]

The literacy level of the head of the household significantly influences the school attendance of children aged 3 to 15 in Liberia. Over 90% of households with literate heads of household currently have their children attending school, compared to only 40.1% of households with non-literate household heads. Conversely, 56.2% of households with non-literate heads have children who have never attended school, while this figure is only 2.1% for households with literate heads. Finally, households with literate heads are more likely to have their children complete school compared to households with illiterate heads.[68]

Despite initially higher participation in the education system, girls and women face disadvantages in terms of completion and graduation. Completion rates for primary education stand at 32.2% for girls compared to 28.6% for boys, while for lower secondary education, the rates are 19.6% for girls versus 18.7% for boys. However, males in Liberia are more likely to graduate from school, with an upper secondary completion rate of 12.4% for males compared to 9.3% for females. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the differing literacy rates between males and females, highlighting the generational literacy gap.

[62] LISGIS, 2022a
[63] UNESCO, 2023
[64] LISGIS, 2022a
[65] UNICEF, 2023a
[66] LISGIS, 2022a
[67] UNICEF, 2018
[68] LISGIS, 2022a

Figure 1.1. Literacy prevalence, population aged 10 and older, by age group and sex



Source: LISGIS, 2022a

This gender disparity in school completion rate is partly attributable to traditional and discriminatory gender norms, high adolescent pregnancy rates, and early, child and forced marriage,[69] which often forces girls to drop out of school.[70] While the adolescent birth rate decreased to 128 per 1,000 women in 2019 from 150.3 per 1,000 in 2015,[71] it still ranks among the highest globally.[72] Additionally, UNESCO suggests a strong possibility of increased rates of both early marriage and teenage pregnancy following the COVID-19 pandemic, mirroring trends observed after the Ebola epidemic in 2014.[73] The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for youth literacy rate (0.83) also reflects this disparity with 83 females for every 100 males aged 15 to 24 who have the capacity to read, write, and understand a basic statement regarding their daily lives.[74] The illiteracy rate for females is 45.4%, and 34.9% for males.

Currently, children born between 2021 and 2022 are projected to complete fewer years of formal education by the age of 18 compared to previous generations, according to the Human Capital report. This concerning trend, highlighted in the World Bank's 2022 report, indicates a substantial regression in the educational sector, exacerbated by high gender inequality and limited access to quality education. The most significant challenges constraining the development of Liberia's education system are identified as follows:[75]

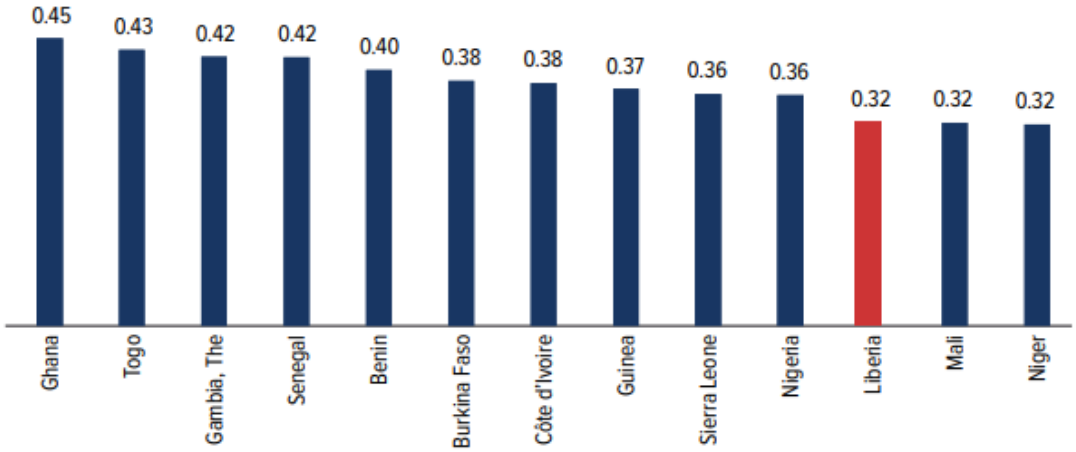
a) low learning outcomes;
b) over-age enrollment at the early childhood education and primary education levels;
c) disparities in access and completion at the basic education level;
d) inadequately trained and inequitable distribution of teachers; and
e) inadequate management and accountability systems at the central and school levels.

Liberia's low performance in the Human Capital Index (HCI) is largely due to poor education outcomes, characterised by high gender inequality and limited access to quality

[69] UNESCO, 2022
[70] KII Insights
[71] UN Women, 2020
[72] UNFPA, 2021
[73] UNESCO, 2022
[74] UNESCO, 2020
[75] UNESCO, 2022

education.[76] The inadequate state of the education sector is estimated to have contributed to a staggering 50% of the country's human capital loss in 2022, a significant increase of 9 percentage points since 2000.[77] Among 174 assessed countries, with a score of 0.32, Liberia ranks near the bottom, surpassing only the Central African Republic (0.29), Chad (0.31), and South Sudan (0.31). This highlights the substantial hurdles Liberia must overcome, particularly given its demographic trends, to improve educational outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential for translating educational improvements into human capital accumulation and, ultimately, productivity gains.[78]

Figure 1.2. Human Capital Index Liberia and Selected ECOWAS Countries



Source: World Bank, HCI (2020)

As a result, the connection between the educational system and the labour market is weak. The Liberian workforce comprises 33.3% of individuals with no formal education, 54.6% having completed up to secondary school, and 12.2% holding tertiary degrees. Those with higher educational qualifications are predominantly engaged in salaried or wage-based employment, while individuals with lower educational backgrounds tend to be self-employed.[79] The last school-to-work transition survey (SWTS) conducted by ILO in Liberia showed that 63.1% of employed youth were undereducated for the job they were hired to do.[80] KIIs also emphasised that girls are disproportionately likely to drop out of school, significantly limiting their economic opportunities and ability to achieve a sustainable livelihood. One KII highlighted that, despite efforts to empower women, societal perceptions continue to favour men in both education and the labour market. Additionally, it was noted that even women with formal education encounter considerable barriers to securing formal employment due to the social expectation for women to prioritise household chores and family care.[81]

[76] World Bank, 2022a
[77] World Bank, 2022a
[78] World Bank, 2022a
[79] LISGIS, 2022b
[80] ILO, 2017
[81] KII Insights

Programs and Policies Targeting the Education Sector

Several national policies and programmes have been implemented to reconstruct Liberia's education system, but national funding remains low. The Education Reform Act of 2011 established free and compulsory basic education, aiming for quality education at all levels and promoting equal access without discrimination. Although several components of the previous Education Sector Plan (Getting to Best 2017–2021) remained incomplete and were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Liberian Government introduced in August 2022 a new Education Sector Plan (2022/23–2026/27) with the aim of bolstering the education sector. The government's primary objectives during this plan period include enhancing equitable access to education, improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and strengthening the efficiency of the education system. To achieve these goals, five priority programs have been outlined:

1. Increase access and equity in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and general education;
2. Enhance quality and learning in ECE and general education;
3. Fortify governance and management in ECE and general education;
4. Reinforce the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system; and
5. Strengthen equitable access, quality, relevance, and governance of the Higher Education system.

While the first three programs are targeted towards addressing the specific goals, the last two are expected to have a cross-cutting impact on all objectives.[82]

The education system in Liberia heavily relies on development partners, with grants covering 100% of spending in the education sector since 2018. In 2023, Liberia allocated 11.98% of its budget to education, falling below the UNESCO-recommended threshold of 15 to 20%.[83] USAID, the World Bank, and the Government of Sweden are the primary development partners funding this sector. In 2023, there were 22 ongoing education projects in Liberia focusing on both improvements, but only 7 were implemented by the Ministry of Education.[84] These projects are expected to increase the quality of the education system, and overall performance. Collectively, as a result of these programs the number of schools increased between 2017 and 2021, and the number of teachers increased from 64,928 to 71,649 (MoE report). However, in absolute terms the proportion of teachers per school has effectively decreased, which is inconsistent with the plan to improve on the low learning poverty. Additionally, there is a significant lack of inclusive education tailored to the needs of people with disabilities.[85] This issue also affects LGBTQIA+ individuals, where a primary concern is the lack of institutional acceptance. "*Many students fear discrimination and harassment from teachers, students, or the school environment. This fear can lead them to avoid education altogether*" [KII].

[82] Ministry of Education, Education Sector Plan, 2022/23–2026/27
[83] MFDP, 2023a
[84] MFDP, 2023b
[85] KII Insights

Box 1. The Digital Divide

The digitalisation of the economy and public and private sector services is one of the key opportunities for Liberia to enhance public service delivery, coordination, and access, as well as to improve educational outcomes, aid in job creation, and facilitate access to global labour markets. Investing in digital technology presents a significant opportunity in Liberia, as many young people utilise mobile phones and social media platforms. This investment can yield benefits in education, social norms, communication, and engagement. Additionally, technology can enhance health services, improve educational accessibility for people with disabilities, and help the government transition away from traditional paper-based models.

There is a significant digital gap within the country:

- **School equipment**
  - Out of the 15 counties, **four lack any public school equipped with a computer lab.** While some counties have one or two such schools, Montserrado, boasts six.
  - Slightly over 20% of these schools are equipped with computer labs, but only 18% of these labs have operational computers.
  - There are nine schools with computer labs that do not contain any computers.
  - With an approximate total of 578 computers in these labs, **the ratio of students to computers is about 58 to 1.**

- **Teacher/ Staff equipment**
  - Half of the school principals have access to a working computer in their offices, but less than 20% of teachers and less than 10% of students have access to computers or tablets at their schools.
  - It's estimated that around 80% of teachers and less than 20% of students own a smartphone or tablet yet the expense of using these devices for educational purposes is high in a predominantly low-income country like Liberia.

The **curriculum** lacks clear ICT requirements, and very few teachers are properly trained in ICT use for teaching and learning. Consequently, ICT is not integrated into teaching methods or student assessments, which remain traditional and offline. Even national exams are not computer-based. When ICT is taught, it is often theoretical and disconnected from the rest of the curriculum. Among Liberia's tertiary institutions, only four offer IT-related bachelor degrees, with no advanced ICT training programs available, and the nation's leading university lacks a computer science program. In 2022, the **Ministry of Education** initiated a comprehensive ICT strategy for senior secondary education, developing an ICT curriculum, digital competencies by grade, teacher qualification standards, and curriculum implementation methods. This strategy aims to equip students with digital skills relevant to the current job market and enhance teachers' ability to integrate ICT into their teaching.

In the **health sector**, the lack of connectivity primarily impacts efficient system management, exemplified by delays in funding releases due to digitisation issues, which lead to a bureaucratic and slow manual invoicing process. Furthermore, low connectivity and limited access to mobile money present challenges for the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the health system. However, innovations such as using motorcycles for the delivery of clinical samples have significantly improved the country's response to disease outbreaks, resulting in a notable increase in the speed of sample transportation to laboratories.[86]

The deployment of technology must consider potential risks, especially those that could worsen existing inequalities. This was evident during the **COVID-19 pandemic** when reliance on electronic devices for teaching, due to school closures, **further widened the digital divide among the less privileged** who lacked such devices and internet access. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the limitations of remote learning due to the scarcity of internet access, making radio the preferred method. Therefore, while technology offers vast opportunities for human capital development, its integration should be approached with caution regarding potential risks.[87]

[86] World Bank, 2022a
[87] World Bank, 2022a

Healthcare System Overview

Liberia has made some progress in improving health indicators, healthcare access and delivery. The average life expectancy was estimated to be 61.1 years in 2022 for both males and females, with the average female life expectancy 2.6 years longer than male. Although it has increased by 1.2 during the last decade (59.9 years in 2012), life expectancy in Liberia has decreased by 0.4 during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019 - 2021).[88] The leading causes of death for both genders across all age groups (mortality rates per 100,000 population) in Liberia are primarily attributed to neonatal conditions (89.21), tuberculosis (56.03), lower respiratory infections (54.54), measles (51.74), and malaria (49.17). Men have a higher mortality rate due to road injuries (52.7), while malaria deaths are more prevalent among women (48.7) (see Table 1.1).[89]

Table 1.1. Top Causes of Death in Liberia for all Age Groups, by Sex (rate per 100,000 population)

	Both Sexes		Female		Male	
	Rank	Rate	Rank	Rate	Rank	Rate
Neonatal Conditions	1	89.21	1	78.2	1	100.1
Tuberculosis	2	56.03	5	45.5	2	66.5
Lower Respiratory Infections	3	54.54	2	52.4	3	56.7
Measles	4	51.74	3	49.8	4	53.6
Malaria	5	49.17	4	48.7	6	49.6
Road Injury	6	38.89	11	26.93	5	52.7
HIV/AIDS	7	38.87	10	31.96	7	45.71
Ischaemic Heart Disease	8	38.17	6	44.11	9	32.29
Diarrhoeal Diseases	9	32.24	9	32.07	8	32.4
Stroke	10	31.96	7	37.72	10	26.27

Source : Global Health Estimates 2020: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2019. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2020

Although Liberian women now live longer and healthier lives than they did two decades ago, with an average increase of 12 years and a longer life expectancy than men, they still face significant health challenges.[90] Maternal mortality has dropped from 1,072 to 913 per 100,000 live births from 2013 to 2020, though it is still high. Under-5 mortality also fell from 110 to 93 per 1,000 live births between 2007 and 2019/2020, but neonatal mortality increased over

[88] United Nations, 2022
[89] WHO, 2020
[90] Cunningham, Ringwala, & Johansson, 2023

the same period, 26 to 37/1000 live births.[91] Additionally, as previously emphasised, entrenched traditional and discriminatory gender norms contribute significantly to early marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the country. These factors continuously expose women and girls to substantial health risks. Specifically, adolescent mothers face heightened health risks, including maternal mortality, compared to other demographic groups, and their infants are at increased risk of low birth weight, premature delivery, and severe neonatal conditions.[92]

Despite a decline in teenage childbearing from 38% in 2009 to 30% in 2019,[93] and a decrease in adolescent fertility from 149 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2007 to 123 births in 2021, **Liberia's adolescent fertility rate remains notably high compared to neighbouring West African countries and the broader Sub-Saharan African region**.[94] Additionally, adolescents in rural areas, those with limited educational opportunities, and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to begin childbearing at an earlier age compared to their urban, better-educated, and wealthier peers.[95]

One of the primary contributors to unintended pregnancies in low and middle-income nations is the lack of contraceptive use. Despite widespread awareness of contraceptive methods in Liberia—reported by 99% of women and men in 2019—the actual utilisation of contraception remains disconcertingly low.[96] Only 24% of women aged 15-49 employ any modern contraceptive method. Additionally, young women and men exhibit risky behaviour; among those who engaged in sexual activity with a non-spousal or non-cohabiting partner (52% of young women and 57% of young men), only 17% of young women, in contrast to 34% of young men, used a condom. These patterns not only pose concerns regarding teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality but also raise issues related to sexual and reproductive health. Notably, the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is particularly high among women in Liberia, with 48% of women, compared to 24% of men surveyed in the 2019–2020 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), reporting either having an STI or experiencing symptoms of one within the previous 12 months. Nonetheless, there have been some noteworthy advancements. For example, data reported by UNAIDS indicate a continuous decrease in new HIV infections among both the female and male populations from 2010 to 2022.[97]

Access to WASH facilities remains a major health challenge, contributing to the vulnerability to infectious diseases transmitted through food or water (including bacterial and protozoal diarrhoea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever) as well as vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and yellow fever.[98] Many Liberians still cannot afford access to safe drinking water due to their social status, disability and low income levels. More than 24% of the households (38.7% in urban areas) are using unimproved sources of drinking water such as open wells and surface water (River lake spring creek). In rural areas, surface water is the second most used source of drinking water (27.4%) behind Pipe or Pump out doors (45.9%). Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Kru, River Cess and Sinoe, which together account for more than 13% of the population, have more than 40% each (respectively 40%, 53.8%, 46.3%, 61.1% and 43.6%) of

[91] LISGIS, 2021
[92] WHO, 2023a
[93] LISGIS, 2021
[94] World Bank Open Data, 2021
[95] LISGIS, 2021
[96] LISGIS, 2021
[97] UNAIDS, 2020; UNAIDS, n.d.
[98] WHO, 2021b

households who are using Open Well and surface water as their main source of drinking water. 43.1% of the households, of which 71.8% in rural areas, rely on unimproved sanitation facilities such as Open pit latrine, Bush and Beach/Riverside.[99]

Table 1.2. Trends in Childhood and Maternal Mortality (Rate per 1,000 live births)

	2008	2013	2019/2020	2022
Neonatal Mortality		26	37	35.6
Infant Mortality	78	54	63	63.7
Child Mortality	41	42	33	32.1
Under-Five Mortality[100]	112	94	93	92.6
Maternal Mortality (per 100,000)	890	1072	913	854

Source: LPHC 2008, LDHS 2013, LDHS 2019/2020, LPHC2022

Liberia's experience with the Ebola pandemic helped the country to prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Liberia stands out in the fight against COVID-19 with an impressive 84% vaccination coverage, ranking first in West Africa and second in the continent.[101] Liberia has also made remarkable progress in controlling malaria. The prevalence among children under 5 years of age has significantly decreased from 45% in 2016 to 17.7% in 2023. Furthermore, the malaria mortality rate among the population has decreased from 16 per 1000 in 2018 to 8 per 1000 in 2022.[102]

Healthcare service delivery, including quality of the services and availability of qualified and trained personnel are among the key challenges. Despite achieving the WHO's health facility density threshold of 2.1 per 10,000 people, Liberia faces challenges in healthcare workforce density, with only 11 workers per 10,000 population compared to the WHO's recommended 44.5. This underscores the need for increased investment in healthcare education, workforce development and management.[103] There has been a general decrease in the overall number of health workers and a shortage of skilled health workers, primarily due to retirement and a lack of replacements.

Additionally, the healthcare workforce is demotivated by low and unequal wages, particularly among mid-level health workers who provide the majority of the health services. In that sense, the Ministry of Health currently possesses less than 25% of the skilled workforce required to effectively deliver Universal Health Coverage.[104] In 2020, the number of nursing staff (including midwives and associate nurses) was 19.5 per 10,000 population, with only 1.8 health facilities

[99] LISGIS, 2022a
[100] Newborn mortality accounts for approx. 40 % of under five mortality especially within the first 24 to 72 hours of delivery.
[101] WHO, 2023b
[102] NMCP and ICF, 2023
[103] WHO, 2023b
[104] Ministry of Health, 2023

available for the same population.[105] Despite these low numbers, Liberia had the highest nurse/midwife to physician ratio in Africa in 2018, at 38.27. However, much remains to be done, with only 0.503 medical doctors and 7.04 community health workers per 10,000 people, just one medical training institution for medical practitioners, dentists, and pharmacists, and a total of 24,620 health workers across the country. Furthermore, there was an annual decrease of eight laboratory technicians from 2005 to 2018.[106]

Liberia is facing an inadequacy of drugs and medical supplies at public health facilities, hindering the provision of essential healthcare services to the population. This shortage is compounded by limited operational support for maintaining ambulances and utility vehicles, exacerbating the challenges of transporting patients and ensuring efficient healthcare delivery, especially in remote areas with poor road networks.[107] Moreover, **High out-of-pocket expenses for health services contribute to financial strain and push many individuals and families into poverty,** perpetuating health inequities[108]. In 2021, Liberians out-of-pocket expenditures constituted 24.7% of the Current Health Expenditure, while the government expenditure represented only 6.5%.

Health system accessibility and equity remain significant challenges in Liberia. Only 39% of the population can access health services when needed (accessibility), while 62% regularly express a demand for these services. Additionally, healthcare services are delivered correctly in only 64% of cases (quality), with 41.9% of essential health services covered. As a result, the system operates at just 55% of its potential performance level.[109] **Many health facilities are currently unable to provide specialised care and resources, significantly undermining their ability to serve people with disabilities effectively.**[110] Numerous facilities are not physically accessible and lack basic sanitary amenities, further hindering their usability by women and those with disabilities. The shortage of psychosocial support services is another critical issue, exacerbating the challenges faced by these groups. Additionally, disability is frequently misunderstood as a mental health issue, leading to trauma and discouraging individuals from seeking help at official healthcare facilities.[111]

The divide in health system coverage and accessibility is more pronounced between urban and rural areas. While in urban areas 77.2% of the households take less than 40 minutes to reach the nearest health facility, in rural areas, less than 40% do. In fact, more than 50% of the households living in rural areas have to walk one hour or more to reach the nearest health centre. This reflects the poor access to health services in rural areas.[112]

[105] WHO, 2022
[106] WHO, 2021a
[107] Ministry of Health, 2023
[108] Nyei & Cleary, 2023
[109] WHO, 2022
[110] KIIs Insight
[111] LISGIS, 2022a
[112] LISGIS, 2022a

Climate Box 2. Water, WASH and Exponential Threats to Health

The combination of rising temperatures and floods (see Climate Box 1) **together with high vulnerability and low coping capacity, is expected to exponentially increase the risk to health.** In particular, "due to Liberia's weak health infrastructure and preparedness capabilities, it places it as one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa least able to cope with climate change".[113] Direct effects such as the higher temperatures exacerbating the risk of vectors, airborne or waterborne diseases or decreasing water levels translating into fewer water resources; or indirect effects such as potential increase in food insecurity create compounding risk in communities already facing significant health challenges.[114]

Currently, **Liberia already experiences some of the highest incidences of environmentally-linked diseases**. In particular, Malaria is one of the leading causes of sickness and death, particularly among children under five years old (see Table 1.1.). Additionally, Liberia's nutrition levels are among the lowest in the world, due to ongoing food insecurity, resulting from insufficient agricultural production, a heavy dependence on imported food, and frail infrastructure—all conditions that climate change is expected to further aggravate (see Food security section).[115] **Water scarcity and degrading water quality are anticipated to become major problems, leading to significant health consequences through various channels.** It is forecasted that runoff in the St. Paul River Basin will decline by 0.7 – 25% by the 2020s as a result of changes in precipitation and temperature.[116] In short, climate vulnerabilities can strain public health systems, reduce food security, and limit access to safe water and sanitation, impacting overall human development.

In contrast, Liberia boasts one of the highest per capita water resources in Africa, with 70% of the population having access to improved drinking water sources (76.4% urban vs 60.4% rural).[117] **Yet, the country struggles with water quality and sanitation issues, particularly in urban areas like Monrovia.** One of the major issues is contamination from mining, farming, and industrial activities that degrade water quality which has led to significant water quality issues, including dangerously high mercury levels near mining operations. Secondly, urban wastewater management is largely inadequate. At national level, 32% of the population still practises open defecation.[118] Consequently, despite remarkable progress **Liberia has one of the lowest WASH service coverages in sub-Saharan Africa.**[119]

The critical WASH and health situation is compounded by governance, capacity, and financial challenges,[120,] inherited from past civil conflict damage to infrastructure[121] and expected to be further exacerbated by climate change.[122] Nevertheless "**the water resource potential of the country is enormous."**[123]

Health System's Measures of Efficiency and Budgeting

National funding of the healthcare sector remains significantly below the Abuja Declaration target of 15% of the annual government budget. In 2023, only 9.5% ($74.27

[113] UNEP, n.d.; EPA, 2021.
[114] UNEP, n.d.
[115] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[116] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021; UNEP, n.d.
[117] LISGIS, 2022a
[118] LISGIS, 2022a

million) of the Liberian National budget was allocated to health. This situation contributes to the dependence of the Liberian health system on the development partners.[124] In Liberia, the health system has witnessed a consistent investment trend since 2018, marked by robust expenditure levels exceeding the projected spending with an average disbursement rate of 118%. A significant portion of these expenditures has been covered by grants from the two main Development Partners (DP), USAID and the World Bank. Both organisations have financed 9 out of the 10 largest projects in the country's health sector, accounting for more than $50 million. All over the country, 84 health projects are ongoing, with 7 of them being implemented by the Ministry of Health itself and the rest by the DP.[125]

Food Security and Nutrition Assessment

Liberia faces significant challenges in ensuring food security and access to nutritious food for its population driven by an interplay of various factors, such as low-yield or limited domestic food production, import reliance, price fluctuations, climate shocks, and a legacy of years of civil war.[126] The ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis as well as climate variability further compound these challenges.[127]

Hunger remains pressing in Liberia despite the country's rich natural and agricultural endowment. In the most recent ranking of the Global Hunger Index of 2023, Liberia ranks as the 117th with a score of 32.2 on a scale from 0 to 100. Liberia made significant progress in its hunger index from 2000, when it had a score of 48.0, moving from an alarming to a serious level of hunger.[128] In terms of food security, as of the latest data, 47% of the households in Liberia are considered food insecure, with 39% moderately food insecure and 8% severely food insecure.[129] The situation was different within counties as food insecurity prevalence varied across counties. For instance, 4 counties have an insufficient food consumption prevalence higher than 45%: Nimba (46.64%), River Gee (46.54%), Maryland (46.02%), and Grand Bassa 46,14%, while Margibi (38.59%) and Bomi (30.93%) had rates below 40%.[130]

The challenges to meet the needs of the population in terms of access to quality food are reflected in the increasing share of the malnourished population since 2008. The number of undernourished individuals rose from 1.5 million in 2012 to 2 million in 2021, showing a consistent upward trend.[131] Subsequently, undernutrition prevalence among children under five is particularly alarming with 29.8% suffering from chronic undernutrition while 3% of them are experiencing acute malnutrition.[132] Women and adolescent girls bear a greater burden in this

[119] USAID, 2017; USAID, 2021; Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[120] USAID, 2017
[121] Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, 2007
[122] World Bank, 2011
[123] UNEP, n.d.
[124] MFDP, 2023a; WHO, 2021a
[125] MFDP, 2023c
[126] WFP, 2023b
[127] AfDB, 2023a
[128] Global Hunger Index, 2023
[129] United Nations, 2022
[130] WFP, 2023a
[131] FAO, 2022c
[132] United Nations, 2022

regard: in 2020 nearly 60% of Liberian girls aged 15 to 49 had anaemia, consequently heightening the risk of malnutrition in children born to adolescent mothers.[133] According to the 2019-20 Liberia Demography and Health Survey, anaemia is a major public health problem in Liberia affecting 71% of children, 55% of adolescents and 52% of pregnant women.

Malnutrition poses a significant health risk for women in Liberia, particularly for pregnant and postpartum women, and adolescent girls. While most women in Liberia are considered to have a normal weight, nearly half (45%) of women aged 15-49 are anaemic.[134] This high incidence can be attributed to poor-quality diets, especially those lacking in iron-rich foods, and frequent exposure to infections. Additionally, anaemia can lead to decreased job productivity, increased maternal mortality, and adverse birth outcomes, exacerbating the challenges faced by women experiencing poverty and food insecurity.[135] These health issues hinder women's ability to lead productive lives, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

In 2022, around 373,000 people were estimated to face acute food insecurity, with considerable effects of the slow economic growth and the elevated food prices on the vulnerable households, exacerbated by weather hazards and forced migration. Acute food insecurity levels were anticipated to increase in 2023 due to limited food availability and access, compounded by high prices and below-average imports, worsened by the impact of the war in Ukraine on international trade and economic growth.[136]

Table 1.3. Data for Infants and Young Children Aged 0-23 Months

	Boys		Girls	
	2013	2019	2013	2019
Minimum Meal Frequency	26.6%	19.3%	33.2%	24.2%
Minimum Acceptable Diet	4.8%	3.1%	5.7%	3.2%
Minimum Dietary Diversity	9.8%	8%	9.7%	9.2%

Source: Global Nutrition Report, 2020

Table 1.4. Data for Infants Aged 0-59 Months

	Boys		Girls	
	2013	2019	2013	2019
Stunting	34.7%	31.8%	29%	27.9%
Wasting	5.9%	3.6%	5.3%	3.2%

[133] UNICEF, 2023a
[134] LISGIS, 2021
[135] WHO, 2023c
[136] FAO, 2022b

Overweight	3.1%	4.5%	3.3%	4.2%

Source: UNICEF, 2023b

Table 1.5. The cost and affordability of a healthy diet in Liberia

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cost of a Healthy Diet (PPP Dollars/Person/Day)	4.032	3.852	3.907	4.447
People Unable to Afford a Healthy a Diet	91.6%	91.4%	91.6%	92.8%

Source: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2023

Limited Domestic Agricultural Production, Combined with Low Yields and Affected by Increasing Climate Variability, Contributes to the Vulnerability to Food Insecurity (See Climate Box 6)**.** Cassava and rice are the primary staple food crops in Liberia. Most agricultural production depends on smallholder farmers with cassava being the most produced food crop. More than 80% of the demand in rice is covered through imports mainly from India (97.3%).[137] Rice ranks 5th among Liberia's most imported products as of 2022. Liberia imports food products mainly from China (1st), Brazil (2nd), USA (3rd), Morocco (4th), and India (5th). Plantain, yam, tropical fruits and vegetables are also part of the Liberian diet, as well as fish and meat depending on availability.[138] [See Chapter 3].

In particular, **climate change alters Liberia's traditionally reliable rainfall patterns, introducing unpredictability with erratic rainfall, characterised by sudden heavy downpours and prolonged droughts.** These irregularities disrupt agricultural activities and diminish crop yields, posing challenges for farmers in planning planting seasons and selecting suitable crops, ultimately resulting in harvest deficits.[139] Additionally, the increased frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall events contribute to flooding, causing significant damage to agricultural land, crop destruction, and disruptions to transportation networks. Consequently, access to markets and food supplies becomes compromised.[140] The unpredictability of rainfall patterns can lead to both droughts and floods within the same year, exacerbating the challenges faced by farmers. These climate impacts undermine the overall resilience of the food systems, as well as the communities already facing food insecurity, rendering them even more vulnerable to other external shocks such as price fluctuations or disease outbreaks.

Women play a crucial role in Liberia's agricultural sector, constituting the majority of the workforce. Approximately 93% of women are involved in food crop production, marketing, and trading, while 80% are engaged in agricultural labour. However, their responsibilities extend beyond farming to include cooking, fetching water, and other domestic chores, which limit the time available for agricultural work. This dual burden decreases their productivity and can have significant implications for food security, not only for themselves but also for their children.[141] Furthermore, 79% of women working in agriculture are self-employed, indicating their reliance on

[137] OEC, 2023
[138] OEC, 2023
[139] FAO, 2019
[140] WFP, 2023b
[141] Letouzé et al., 2021

their own efforts for income generation. Only 17.3% are employed by family members, and a mere 3.7% are employed by non-family members, emphasising the predominance of self-employment among women in the agricultural sector.[142]

In geographic terms, communities living in the borderland areas with Sierra Leone are among the most vulnerable to food shortages. They have reported that food shortages are among the most common shocks experienced, with female households being the most vulnerable.[143] External shocks that affect supply chain disruptions, such as conflicts and pandemics (the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 crisis) affect the price of commodities and food staples in Liberia. Poor households in borderland communities bear the brunt of these impacts given their low purchasing power, and already vulnerable state due to the high share of food and commodity budgets.[144]

The contrast between the country's fertile soil and its high hunger levels points to systemic issues in food production, distribution, and access. The intricate interplay between the variability in and capacity of the domestic agricultural production that is also affected by climate variability and impacts of global supply chain disruptions and global price fluctuations due to regional or global shocks such as conflicts and pandemics demonstrates the interconnected nature of food security with other variables. There is an urgent requirement for comprehensive approaches that not only increase food production but also ensure equitable distribution and access, especially for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Shocks and Coping Mechanisms

'Lack of coping capacity' and 'vulnerability' are two main components contributing the most to Liberia's risk profile. According to the INFORM Risk Index that measures the country's risk to humanitarian crises and disasters that risk overwhelming the national response capacity, Liberia is classified as a Medium risk country with a score of 4.5 out of 10. The 'lack of coping capacity' (7.8) and 'vulnerability' (5.7) are the two components that contribute the most to the overall risk (see Table 1.6). The lack of coping capacity composite index includes institutional and infrastructure indicators that aid in coping with disasters, whereas the vulnerability component measures socio-economic vulnerabilities and focuses on the vulnerable groups; and, finally the hazard and exposure index measures to which extent the country is exposed to both natural and human hazards.

Table 1.6. INFORM Risk Index

	Inform Risk	Risk Class	Hazard & Exposure	Vulnerability	Lack of Coping Capacity
	Out of 10				
Liberia	4.5	Medium	2.1	5.7	7.8
Africa	4.91	Medium	3.9	5.47	6.21
Low Income Countries	6.26	High	5.42	6.86	7.12

[142] Letouzé et al., 2021
[143] Non-representative survey
[144] UNDP, 2023b

Source: INFORM Risk Index 2024.[145]

[145] INFORM is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the European Commission. The European Commission Joint Research Centre is the scientific lead of INFORM.

The majority of Liberians are exposed to a number of stressors and shocks, including income loss, food insecurity and health shocks. Other exogenous shocks with an impact on the Liberian economy and society, such as food supply chain disruptions, or climatic variability, further exacerbate and amplify these vulnerabilities increasing the fragility. Based on the Data in Emergency Monitoring (DIEM) survey conducted by FAO in 2021, higher food prices than usual and loss of employment were considered as the two main socio-economic shocks encountered by Liberians, with 53.5% of the households having experienced a decrease in their main source of income in the 3 months prior the survey.[146]

While Liberia does not face significant drought risks, the country remains susceptible to floods, erosion, and sea-level rise.[147] Coastal flooding is the most prevalent hazard, to which the coastline population remains highly vulnerable, particularly in the densely populated areas and the informal settlements where impoverished households lack the capacity to mitigate exposure to natural disasters or manage the consequences of environmental shocks (See Climate Box 3). Monrovia, the capital and largest city, is particularly exposed to this shock, with 35% of schools and 14% of hospitals located in flood-prone zones.[148]

In response to these shocks, households adopt a variety of strategies to cope with food shortages (reducing the number of meals per day, reducing the type of foods consumed). Female-led households and women are more vulnerable to these strategies. In 2021, Moderate to severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) results was estimated at 78% in Liberia. Low purchasing power and high prices were the top causes of food insecurity, leading over 40% of the households to engage in emergency coping strategies, such as selling their last productive female animal or gathering unconventional wild foods, due to insufficient food or lack of funds to purchase food.[149]

Social protection schemes as a tool to prevent, protect, promote and transform the lives of vulnerable populations exist, but remain insufficient in the face of the shocks experienced, particularly by vulnerable populations. Between 2008 – 2011, donor financing represented 93.8% of all social safety net expenditures, equating to 1.5% of the country's GDP which is slightly higher than the regional average.[150] A number of formal or state social protection mechanisms, supported by donor financing, such as social assistance or social safety nets, social insurance and some forms of social services including labour market support have been put in place, however, these programs are not fairly distributed. The social assistance programs are reaching approximately 830,000 beneficiaries representing 24% of the total country population.

On the national level, the government of Liberia established the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP) to provide social insurance protection to old age retirement, and occupational and job-related injuries, covered under the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS), and the National Pension Scheme (NPS). As of 2010, there were 4.4% of recipients out of 69,080 people enrolled.[151] To address poverty and strive to achieve SDG1 (No Poverty) in Liberia, five projects related to social protection and primarily funded by grants are ongoing. These projects aim to establish a social protection scheme in Liberia, enabling the government to register

[146] FAO, 2022a
[147] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[148] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[149] FAO, 2022a
[150] World Bank, 2012
[151] World Ban, 2012

vulnerable households, offer food assistance and cash transfers to those facing food insecurity, and enhance the National social safety net system to mitigate vulnerability across the country.[152]

To address diverse gender needs and promote women's empowerment, the Liberian government has developed several policy papers, strategies, and initiatives aimed at enhancing social protection mechanisms. The New National Gender Policy (NGP), revised in 2017, aligns with the Constitution of Liberia and serves as a foundational framework for promoting unity, liberty, stability, equality, justice, and human rights, while providing opportunities for social, economic, and political advancement for all citizens, regardless of gender.[153] Significant strides have been made in enacting important legislation to ensure gender equality and empower women. Key pieces of legislation include the Domestic Relations Law; the Inheritance Act of 1998 (which guarantees equal rights in marriage and inheritance under both Customary and Statutory Laws); the Rape Law of 2005 (which criminalizes gang rape and imposes life sentences for severe forms of rape); and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2005, which prohibits human trafficking, although it does not explicitly address the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation. Additionally, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) has produced various resources to support gender mainstreaming across line ministries, including the National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action (2006), the Policy on Girl Child Education (2006), and the Mental Health Policy (2009), among others.[154]

In the rural communities, where state-sponsored social protection schemes are virtually non-existent, non-state or community-based social protection mechanisms are predominant. Susu groups (daily, rotational and yearly), funeral, wedding and religious groups, labour exchange and the village saving and loan association are community-based social grouping shaping the informal social protection sector in Liberia and has been mostly driven by women. While these community-based and centred mechanisms and organisations have their disadvantages, often excluding certain demographics that are not able to contribute monetarily (such as children, youth, the elderly and the disabled), they fill an important gap and represent one of the key drivers for strengthening resilience, especially in rural areas. A clear example of this is the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), which has made great progress toward giving women access to low-interest loans in Liberia, although the loans provided are frequently not enough for women to start large-scale businesses.

[152] MFDP, 2023c
[153] UN Women, 2022
[154] Ibid

Climate Box 3. Risk Hotspots: The Overexposure of the Urban Poor

Liberia's population is unevenly distributed, with nearly two-thirds living in the Montserrado and North Central regions, where **Monrovia, the capital city, is notably populous**.[155,156] This region is undergoing rapid and unplanned urbanisation, leading to the growth of informal settlements. These settlements pose significant health risks and threaten long-term peace and stability if not properly managed.[157] **Residents of these informal settlements face multiple challenges**, including insecure land tenure and income instability. Despite about 56% of the labour force being urban-based[158], urban areas experience unemployment rates that are twice as high as in rural areas and even three times higher among the youth. Furthermore, the level of access to basic services such as electricity, water, and sanitation in some informal settlements is poorer than in rural areas.[159]

The environmental challenges are also concerning: in the last ten years, the impact of rising sea levels and coastal erosion has led to the displacement of over 6,500 people and the destruction of 800 homes in the West Point slum of Monrovia. It is projected that more than 230,000 people and 2,150 km² of land will be at risk due to a one-metre rise in sea level by the end of the century.[160] Moreover, other current environmental health and human wellbeing challenges stem from various forms of pollution. A key issue is the **inadequate waste management**, with sporadic waste collection services are sporadic, and largely ineffective, especially in urban-rural and rural areas where services are often nonexistent.[161] In turn, the prevalent waste disposal methods include open dumping, burning, burial, and landfilling, all of which contribute to disease spread and public health risks. Similarly, **most urban areas lack wastewater treatment plants or extensive sewerage systems**. This situation has led to the severe degradation of important wetlands due to municipal waste and wastewater. Although the surge in waste generation in Liberia can be attributed to rapid urbanisation, this increase is further compounded by environmental stressors such as artisanal and large-scale mining operations and rubber plantations, which are primary contributors to surface water pollution and watershed degradation. [162]

Furthermore, **Liberia cities are witnessing a significant trend of population migration inflows from rural to urban areas.** The country's population is growing at an annual rate of 3%[163] and large metropolitan areas still absorb a significant number of migrants, as an aftermath of the impacts of the civil crises. Overall, in the past 60 years, urban population has increased from 19% to 54.5%.[164] In order to anticipate future growth and population needs while accounting for the needs of the people currently living in fragile urban ecosystems, the government, in collaboration with development partners, is proactively planning to enhance infrastructure. This entails ensuring the availability and affordability of basic services such as electricity, upgrading and expanding sewer systems, improving water supply and sanitation, enhancing roads, and developing community facilities.[165]

In alignment with addressing urban and environmental challenges, the **National Urban Policy (2016)** and **the National Environmental Action Plan for 2019–2023**, crafted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2019, demonstrate a proactive approach. These initiatives aim to tackle the uncontrolled growth of urban populations, plan for future expansions, and handle the associated responsibilities more effectively. The latter focuses on managing displacement and resettlement issues by proposing the creation of an Environmental and Social Management Framework, a Resettlement Policy Framework, and legislation for resettlement that is specifically designed for the Liberian context.[166] These efforts underscore the political commitment and strategic vision to confront and manage these critical issues effectively.

In this vein, **investments are essential for Liberia to adapt its water management, urban planning, and sanitation systems to address the structural changes needed for quality drinking water and to mitigate climate change effects**.[167] In 2021, the Green Climate Fund granted $17.2 million for a climate resilience project in Monrovia targeting approximately 250,000 vulnerable people and focusing on mitigating the adverse effects of sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and the encroachment on mangroves. With implementation by the Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia (EPA) and support from the UNDP, the initiative is part of the **Monrovia Metropolitan Climate Resilient Project (MMCRP)** also known as the West Point Coastal Defense Project.[168] Additionally, the **Enhancing Climate Information Systems for Resilient Developmen**t in Liberia project aims to bolster the resilience of Liberia's population and infrastructure against climate change, targeting 7.7 million beneficiaries.[169] Integrating climate change considerations into water management strategies is vital for ensuring Liberia's environmental safety and a sustainable freshwater supply in the short and long term.[170] However "the duplication of climate activities and funding, due to weak institutional coordination within government and among donors and the ineffective targeting of the most vulnerable hinders significantly their impact.[171,172]

Due to their dense population and concentration of resources, along with their expansive nature and coastal locations vulnerable to various threats—both natural and human-made—u**rban areas are recursively at the forefront of climate change impacts.** The urban poor -often found in the most precarious parts of cities- are at the centre of these shock and stress hotspots. Nevertheless, this also means that **cities hold significant potential for innovative thinking in territorial management, and land-use development to lead shifting pathways towards sustainability**.[173]

2. Factors that Constrain Human Development in Liberia.

The progress and ongoing challenges in Liberia's human development highlight the critical need for sustained and strategic efforts in bolstering both infrastructure and

[155] UN-Habitat, 2017
[156] Government of Liberia, 2020
[157] UNEP, n.d.
[158] Government of Liberia, 2020
[159] UNEP, n.d.
[160] UNEP, n.d.
[161] David, John, & Hussain, 2020
[162] USAID, 2021; UNEP, n.d.
[163] LISGIS, 2022a
[164] LISGIS, 2022a
[165] World Bank, 2018
[166] World Bank, 2018
[167] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[168] EPA, n.d. [PPT]
[169] UNEP, n.d.
[170] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[171] EPA, 2021.
[172] UNEP, n.d.
[173] Denton et al., 2022

education. This dual focus is essential for creating a robust foundation for long-term national growth and development. Investing in infrastructure is key to improving access to essential services and facilitating economic activities, while nurturing education (including healthcare and food security) is vital for unlocking the potential of Liberia's predominantly young population. These concerted efforts are pivotal in steering the nation toward a more prosperous and sustainable future.

Key hurdles in human development are primarily driven by:

- **Demographic dynamic and pressures:** growing and youthful population requiring
  - Quality education;
  - Quality job creation;
  - Quality sexual and reproductive health services and education;
  - Mental health and protection from substance use disorders services; and
  - Other essential services (electricity, water supply, waste management).

- **Weak Institutions and Ineffective Service Delivery**
  - Poor coordination among government agencies responsible for human capital development often results in unresponsive or suboptimal service delivery; and
  - Ineffective resource allocation.

  This translates into sector specific challenges such as poor service delivery in the health and education sectors. Significant investments have been made into increasing access to basic social services, but health and education sectors face constraints due to resource allocation.: "*The health and education sectors face significant constraints, including resource allocation, with 80-90% of the budget going towards public sector salaries of support/administration personnel, leaving little for county and community levels. Human resources are another challenge, with many health facilities relying on unpaid and untrained volunteers. While donors attempt to provide supplementary support, the sustainability of the efforts remains a concern. Service delivery is hindered by insufficient government support and resources".*[174]
  Thus, some of the persisting challenges include:

  - Poor maternal, newborn and infant health outcomes. Maternal mortality rates have been reduced over the past 10-15 years, but still remain high and stagnant.
  - Food insecurity and poor nutrition.
  - Negligible financial protection in accessing health care by all. Out-of-pocket health expenditure remains high.
  - Inadequate health infrastructure including WASH, electricity and infrastructure.
  - Weak health systems and inadequate preparedness and response capacities to public health threats.
  - The burden of communicable, non-communicable and neglected tropical diseases.

- **Poor Infrastructure:**
  - **Poor road conditions.** Although Liberia has made substantial progress in road connectivity, particularly in linking major towns and facilitating trade routes, the road network remains a challenge, with many areas still inaccessible during the rainy season. The government, in collaboration with international partners,

[174] KII insights

continues to prioritise infrastructure development. Additional information is provided in the economic transformation section dedicated to challenges.

- **Weak energy infrastructure.** Liberia's energy infrastructure faces significant challenges but is undergoing noteworthy development efforts aimed at improving electricity access and reliability. As of 2020, Liberia had an estimated 27.5% of the population with access to grid electricity.[175] Rural areas mostly depend on decentralised solutions such as solar panels and mini-grids. Increasing access to reliable sources of electricity and energy will have a catalyst effect on the overall social and economic development.

- **Socio-Cultural Norms and Traditional Gender Roles**
  - Liberia's societal framework is deeply entrenched in **patriarchal gender norms,** constraining not just the prospects for women and girls but also stalling the nation's overall advancement.
  - Traditional gender norms serve as significant catalysts to one of the major obstacles to progress in the country: **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).** In September 2020, as cases of sexual violence surged amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic—including the closure of victim support services, police stations, confinement with perpetrators, and restricted mobility—Liberia's president George Weah declared rape a national emergency.[176] The latest data on SGBV underscores this concerning pattern. Up until 2019-20, 60% of females aged 15-49 years had suffered physical violence, while 9% had experienced sexual violence, marking a significant increase compared to 2007, where the respective figures were 44% and 18%.[177] Additionally, females who have experienced pregnancy also reported instances of violence. The report reveals that among females who have ever been pregnant, 7% have encountered physical violence during pregnancy.[178] **Trends in attitudes towards wife beating remain concerning; however, recent data indicates a slight improvement in this regard.**

[175] Ritchie, Roser & Rosado, n.d.
[176] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020
[177] LISGIS, 2021
[178] LISGIS, 2022b

3. Drivers that Propel Human Development Forward

Liberia is often described as a country with significant potential and opportunity for growth. To unlock this potential and address the constraints on human capital development and well-being noted above, Liberia's development drivers must be strategically leveraged and strengthened. Key among these drivers are its youth, community-based organisations, and community workers; fostering effective partnerships with international development partners supported by improved public finance management; advancing gender equality and expanding access to sexual and reproductive rights; promoting digitalisation, particularly in agriculture; and cultivating an environment conducive to entrepreneurship. Strengthening these areas will help accelerate Liberia's progress toward inclusive and sustainable development.

- **Harnessing Youth**

In the previous section, the rapidly growing population was identified as a constraint placing pressure on the Liberian economy and its systems. While this large youth demographic necessitates targeted investment to meet their needs and help them start life on solid ground, it also represents a tremendous source of potential, energy, and creativity. This young population offers significant opportunities for expanding the labour market and fostering new industries. However, their potential remains largely untapped due to inadequate access to basic services, quality education, and job opportunities. Addressing these gaps is crucial for harnessing the full potential of Liberia's youth and driving economic growth.

- **Building on Community-Based Organisations and Community Oriented Services**

Community-based local organisations play a vital role in the development of both rural and urban areas in developing economies. Their proximity to the communities enables them to serve as essential links between local populations and broader governmental and non-governmental entities, facilitating service delivery and the implementation of development projects.

These organisations often address local needs more effectively than larger institutions due to their intimate understanding, knowledge and extensive engagement with the communities they serve. In the **health** sector, they play a pivotal role by bridging the gap in service delivery. Similarly, in **education** and **agriculture**, extension service workers that are embedded in the communities are instrumental in the development of these sectors. At the same time, these organisations face major challenges such as lack of funding and lack of qualified and trained personnel. Therefore, it is essential to:

- In health services, invest in training more community health workers;
- In the agricultural sector, increase the number of extension support workers that work with communities;
- In education, similarly, recrute and invest in training more teachers and assistants to improve the quality of education services and the quantity of education personnel.

- **Collaboration with the International Development Partners**

International aid and development projects play a crucial role in supporting health, education, infrastructure, and economic development initiatives. However, aligning these efforts with sustainable development and local needs remains a challenge (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). AfDB, World Bank, and Sweden are the largest development partners in the Infrastructure and Basic services sectors in Liberia.

- 28 projects are ongoing in the infrastructure and basic services sectors, and 9 are implemented by the Ministry of Public Works. Developing partner countries and number of projects: Sweden (4), Germany (2), Japan (2), Kuwait (2).
- Developing partner institutions and number of projects: EU (7), USAID (6), International Development Association (3) BADEA (2). Around the same developing partners are observed in the social development sector. There are 33 ongoing projects, 5 are implemented by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

- **Investing in Comprehensive Digitalization**

Digitalisation represents a significant opportunity for Liberia to leapfrog and improve both public and private service delivery, as well as to enhance transparency and accountability in governance and public management. However, substantial hurdles remain that must be addressed for digitalisation to succeed.

Opportunities Looking Forward

In addition to the drivers previously mentioned that contribute to improved human development outcomes, the primary opportunities for solidifying these gains and advancing sustainable and inclusive development are:

A. Investing in Quality TVET Education

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Liberia has the potential to transform the labour market by equipping youth with relevant skills and creating new economic opportunities. However, the sector currently faces challenges, including a lack of funding and coordination, which exacerbates the shortage of skilled workers. To strengthen the TVET sector, it is recommended:

- to establish a National Commission on TVET to align curriculum with market demands;
- to improve access to microfinance to empower youth entrepreneurship;
- to enhance degree recognition to encourage skilled individuals to return to Liberia after studying abroad.[179]

B. Fostering Value-Chain and Innovation-Oriented Approach in Agriculture

Agriculture could play a pivotal role in transforming the Liberian economy by creating jobs, ensuring food security, eradicating malnutrition, developing the private sector and local markets, and generating economic value. However, several constraints hinder youth involvement in the agricultural sector. These include the lack of targeted strategies for youth engagement, a limited perception of the sector concerning agricultural production, and insufficient support for innovative approaches.

Moreover, the lack of basic necessities and access to land, coupled with inadequate training opportunities and irrigation systems, further discourage youth participation in the sector. To unlock the potential of agriculture and transform it, a particular focus should be placed on the expansion of the value chain, modernization and innovation to attract more youth.

C. Improving Health Service Delivery and Affordability

As presented in the previous section, efforts have been made to improve access to health services through community health workers and overall health outcomes have improved. Despite these gains, health security has declined, with a decrease in the workforce capacity, limiting health centres' ability to deliver services. Only 50% of health facilities in Liberia meet the WHO standards for capacity and readiness, impacting service utilisation, availability, and health outcomes. The health workforce stands at 11 per 10,000 people, far below the WHO recommendation of 44.4. Healthcare financing is strained, with 53% of expenses being out-of-pocket. Additionally, the availability of essential medicines for mothers and children is low, with only 35% availability out of 600 health facilities.[180]

"Critical needs for timely access to appropriate medicines, and for provision of quality health services remain. This means health workers are not always equipped with the necessary tools and skills to deliver healthcare. Global health security remains challenging, with animal health having been largely neglected. WASH infrastructures have not been well-maintained and well-operated for sustained health improvements."[181]

To develop the health sector in Liberia, the following are essential:

- Address service delivery and utilisation by ensuring health services are available at all levels (centres, communities), facilities are equipped with necessary services and health workers are present to deliver health services.
- Health workforce management should be improved and key essential medicines must be available at all times.
- Investment in the health sector must increase, while addressing inefficiencies and corruption issues. Strengthening transparency and accountability will ensure funds are allocated to the right activities, enhancing access to low-cost treatments.

D. Maximising the Impact of Remittances

Remittances play a significant role in global development, acting as a crucial source of external finance for many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In 2023, remittance flows to LMICs were estimated to grow by 1.4%, reaching $656 billion, illustrating their resilience even in periods of economic downturns and reduced foreign direct investments. Remittances are a vital source of income for many Liberian households, helping to alleviate poverty and improve living standards. They provide financial support that can be used for basic needs, such as food, housing, and clothing, and enable better educational outcomes and improved accessibility of health services. In 2022, remittance flows in Liberia represented 689.74 million USD, an increase of almost 30% from the previous years; compared to 485 million USD in net official development assistance (ODA). Given the value and significance of remittances, it is crucial to adopt policies that maximise their impact.

[179] KII insights
[180] KII insights
[181] KII insights

4. Potential Conflicts and Trade-Offs

With the population growing rapidly at the rate of 3% annually, Liberia faces a number of urgent challenges in terms of human development. At the same time, the resources at disposal for investment are limited and require prioritisation.

4.1. **Investments into physical infrastructure need to be balanced with investments into improvements of the quality of services and training of the personnel.** While access to social infrastructure such as health and education facilities remains a problem as ultimately the number of these facilities remains insufficient to cover the entire population, the question of maintenance and supplying the existing facilities with quality services and qualified personnel is a major issue. Therefore, there needs to be a careful review and mapping.

4.2. **Investing in and developing road and energy infrastructure outside the capital could create a multiplier effect on various social and economic outcomes. However, this focus might divert attention and resources from enhancing the quality and maintenance of existing physical and social infrastructure.** If these investments are not carefully planned and targeted regarding geographic locations and long-term sustainability, they may fail to achieve the expected outcomes fully, leading to inefficiencies. Achieving a spatial balance in infrastructure investments, along with proper prioritisation, would enhance productivity across the economy.

- **Transport:** An estimated 80% of roads in rural areas remain unpaved, which presents significant challenges for rural populations regarding access to services and markets (KII with UNFPA). This situation is **exacerbated during the rainy season**, when floods often make certain regions of the country virtually inaccessible. Improving road connectivity will enhance access for the population to major economic and social hubs, thereby providing better access to health and education services, as well as economic opportunities. For farmers, this improvement is crucial for enhancing their access to markets.

- **Energy infrastructure** is essential for improving access to electricity, which is fundamental for progress in education and job creation. Achieving the right **balance between social policies** aimed at improving access for the poor (who often require subsidies) **and making strategic investments** in transmission and distribution to boost firm productivity is crucial. Developing a strategy that ensures an appropriate balance in the energy generation mix is also needed, with a larger focus on **renewable and sustainable sources** like hydro and solar power rather than fossil fuels.

4.3. **Inclusive Digital Transformation,** including investments into expanded use of technology both at the government and population levels, is another factor driving development globally. In the Liberian context digitalisation or digital transformation can also play a crucial role in a number of fields. For human development specifically, digitalization and improved use of technology presents a number of significant opportunities in education, healthcare and livelihoods developments, especially in the agricultural sector, as well as in enhanced access to microfinance.

Increased digitalisation and modernisation can also have a positive effect in attracting youth into the agricultural sector, which is currently dominated by females and older persons, by presenting more innovative and creative opportunities to work in the sector. At the same time, Liberia's digitalisation readiness is hindered by limited smartphone ownership and usage, sparse internet coverage, high data costs, inadequate infrastructure, and low electricity access. Startups in this sector face obstacles, and digitalisation is primarily confined to Monrovia.

Similarly to transport and energy infrastructure, the relationship between digital transformation, including digital connectivity and progress in education, health and agriculture sectors is symbiotic. It holds significant potential for enhancing agricultural productivity by streamlining communication with farmers and providing tools for disease control, irrigation management, crop selection, and weather forecasting. However, it requires deliberate investments into the digital infrastructure to create a critical capacity.

All digitisation policies and programs should be accompanied with programs and support to increase the access and ownership of digital devices, Internet access, digital literacy and access to affordable energy. Extension support workers can act as the community liaisons and support for increasing digital literacy and adoption of digital tools in various fields, including agriculture, education and health. A review and critical analysis of the opportunities presented by the digital technologies and data revolution in education, specifically with regards to the skills needed to respond to the current and future demands in the workforce.

Chapter 2. Governance & Peacebuilding

Liberia is at a crossroads, given the combination of current opportunities opened by the incoming government and the systemic, chronic nature of some factors of fragility, such as corruption and weak public administration.[182] Insights from the KIIs range from anger:

"*There's a lot that the population is still very traumatised and very angry that there's been so much impunity*"

and concern

"When the government does not protect the system, the system will spoil"

to cautious optimism

"I think a war crimes court would be very, very important for the enormous amount of healing the country still needs",
"We are going in a positive direction because even the missteps that are currently being noticed are leading towards the greater good".

The UN and World Bank define governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" and peacebuilding as "action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict." This Governance and Peace chapter includes Administrative governance (public administration, central and local); Political governance (democracy, human rights, rule of law, state-society relations); and Peace (post-conflict reconciliation, inter-group relations).[183] Economic governance is closely related to administrative and political governance, but is addressed in the Chapter on Inclusive Economic Transformation.

This chapter presents a SWOT analysis of how governance and peace issues influence inclusive growth and sustainable development in Liberia (Figure 2.1). It begins by defining policies, institutions, and systems within the Liberian context, highlighting their critical role in fostering stability, inclusive growth, and sustainable development [Goal 2.1]. The chapter then identifies key factors that promote, or have the potential to promote, inclusive growth and development, drawing from a desk review of both recent and historical analyses, alongside insights from nine key informant interviews [Goal 2.2]. Following this, it examines the main

[182] KII Insights

[183] The administrative governance theme focuses on capacities and institutional development, or the effectiveness of administrative processes and the integrity of public institutions. It encompasses topics related to the prevention of corruption and the transparency of government operations, including issues such as judicial corruption, legislative corruption, and irregular payments in both the public and private sectors. Access to public information, legislative records, and procurement procedures are vital components of a transparent administrative system. Political governance focuses on the foundations of a democratic and just society. This category includes topics related to the adherence to the rule of law, democratic principles, and human rights. It examines the compliance of the executive branch with the constitution and judicial decisions, as well as the impartiality and independence of the judicial system. Access to justice, due process, and equality before the law are central to upholding the rule of law. Additionally, it involves issues related to civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, media freedom, and protection against discrimination. Peacebuilding and the promotion of social cohesion across groups focuses on human security and positive peace. Topics in this category address the prevention of armed conflict, both state-based and non-state-based, as well as the protection of civilians from violence and human rights abuses. Ensuring the absence of forced migration, internally displaced persons, and refugees is essential for lasting peace. Furthermore, it encompasses efforts to combat human trafficking, organised crime, and homicides as they relate to overall societal security and stability.

obstacles to inclusive growth and development [Goal 2.3]. Additionally, the chapter discusses opportunities and risks associated with governance and peace.

Figure 2.1. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to Governance and Peace for Development

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
↗ Stability of democratic institutions ↘Respect for the rule of law ↘Political participation →State monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, limited violence and relative social cohesion →Gender-responsive governance and peacebuilding	↘ A poor and deteriorating business climate ↘ Worsening corruption, limited transparency and accountability → Policies and approaches that promote spatial inequalities and elitism
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• A new administration from 2024 and possible impetus to leverage support from development partners • Public demand for transparency and accountability • Technological advancements for better and more transparent service delivery • Deforestation regulations in the EU (also a potential risk)	• Inefficiency, corruption, and limited capacity in the public sector • Persistently high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality that, combined with adverse conditions globally, could fuel discontent

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018-2021

KEY
↗: improvement between 2018-2021
↘: deterioration between 2018-2021
→: unchanged between 2018-2021

1. What are Governance and Peace, and why they matter

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels are both development goals in their own right, as well as foundations for inclusive development and shared prosperity. Each is an essential factor in fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development (Figure 2.2). This is specifically true for a country like Liberia: The outgoing government's national development agenda notes the legacy of entrenched inequality in access to development, among other things, as one of the binding constraints to future growth and prosperity for the nation.[184] The Unity Party manifesto devotes two of six pillars to the rule of law and governance, recognizing that good governance and justice are essential to sustainable economic growth and inclusive development, and that fighting corruption is needed to restore integrity and trust in the governance system.[185] The manifesto also acknowledges the promotion of peace and reconciliation and religious and ethnic coexistence as foundational to attaining sustainable development in the country.[186]

Liberia has been a complex mix of governance and conflict challenges since its founding in 1847 by freed American slaves. From its onset, the governance structure of the country favoured the emigrated slaves/ settlers who considered themselves the "elites" against the majority of Indigenous Africans who they encountered upon arrival, leading to longstanding historical social and economic disparities between the two classes.[187] Unsurprisingly, the dominant minority settler rule over the majority Indigenous populations led to inter-ethnic tension and sporadic tribal revolt throughout its history. From the loss of approximately 250,000 lives, to large-scale institutional collapse and infrastructural damage, the civil wars (1989-1996 and 1999-2003) led to untold suffering, from which the country has yet to fully recover.

From 2006, when Liberians chose the country's (and Africa's) first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the country has been on a journey of reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation, and recovery. Unfortunately, however important the recognition by successive governments of the role governance and peacebuilding in sustainable development, critical challenges persist: a poor business climate; corruption, limited transparency and accountability; and policies and approaches that promote spatial inequalities and elitism (Section 3 on Constraints). Interviews conducted in 2024 underline the importance of the economy for stability and social cohesion: "*Corruption is one of the key limiting factors for development in Liberia. It has been eating the fibres of success*"; and "*The economy is the superstructure that needs to be considered critical moving forward*." By addressing these deficits and building inclusive institutions, Liberia can become a beacon of renewed democratic governance and peacebuilding in Africa, echoing the principles on which it was initially founded:

[184] Government of Liberia, 2018

[185] Pillar 4, calling for improved foreign relations, national security, rule of law and justice, stronger integrity institutions and accountability in public service, transparency and integrity in electoral processes, and peace and national reconciliation) and the fight against corruption (pillar 6).

[186] Unity Party Platform, 2023

[187] The minority freed slaves, generally known as Americo Liberians, created and perpetuated a system of governance modelled after that of the United States from which they came, established absolute control over the three branches of government, and, for more than a century, used this method of governance to dominate every dimension of the nation state including the country's politics, its economy and social and religious spheres. Due to this system of governance, indigenous Liberians faced large-scale discrimination, political exclusion, limited education and extreme limitations on access to economic opportunities.

- Liberia's history, marked by civil wars and political instability, underscores the importance of these elements in rebuilding trust, ensuring social cohesion, and fostering economic recovery. Inclusive and accountable governance can help address the root causes of conflict, promote equitable growth, and ensure that all segments of society benefit from development initiatives, reducing the risk of social unrest.
- Accountability ensures that government actions are more responsive to the needs of the population, which is crucial for maintaining public trust and support. Therefore, in the Liberian context, inclusion and accountability are not only essential but foundational for achieving long-term peace and prosperity.
- Conversely, a pathway to development that does not prioritise inclusion and accountability is likely to be unsustainable and could perpetuate cycles of conflict and inequality.

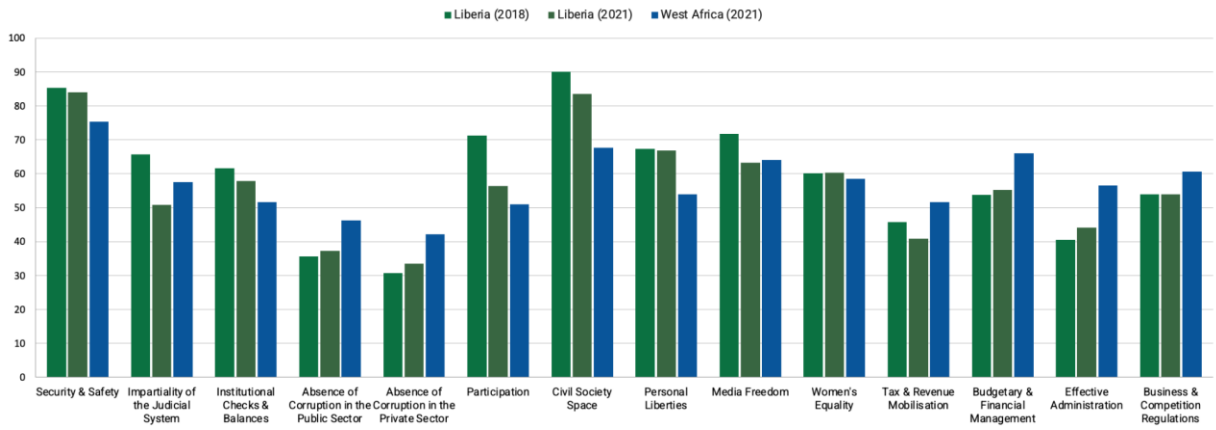
Figure 2.2. Governance is a Foundation of Peace, and Together form the Foundations for Inclusive Development

Source: Authors' Own

2. Five Main Drivers of Inclusive Development in the Areas of Governance and Peace to Protect and Promote

What are the main factors that either currently promote or could promote inclusive growth development? Top drivers of inclusive development in the area of governance and peacebuilding include the stability of democratic institutions; political participation; respect for the rule of law; states monopoly on the legitimate use violence, limited violence and relative social cohesion; and gender-responsive governance and peacebuilding. Among these drivers, most are static or in decline since 2018 (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Selected Governance and Peace Indicators in Liberia (2018 vs. 2021), with West Africa scores as Reference



Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018-2021

2.1. Stability of Democratic Institutions

Robust and effective governance foundations are critical for maintaining national cohesion, peace, and stability, and Liberia has had democratic institutions since its independence in 1847. Liberia's history and a political culture oriented toward the United States mean democratic institutions are, in principle, endorsed by the political class. Over the years, the country has suffered weak administrative and governance structures and, since a 2017 peak[188], a decline in rule of law. However, in the post-civil war period, the three branches of government have been able to establish a significant degree of autonomy, although the executive branch remains dominant.[189] The legislature and judiciary in Liberia have, at times, been able to assert their roles as checks and balances to the executive branch. Still, the Liberia 2nd Fragility Index Report highlights that the separation of powers remains weak and inconsistent. Recurring instances of power struggles between the executive, legislative, and judiciary indicate that the principle of separation of powers is not fully enforced.[190]

[188] Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018-2021
[189] Kwabo, Thompson and Kaba, 2017
[190] Kwabo, Thompson and Kaba, 2017

The report notes that political influence from the executive branch often manifests in legislative decisions and, to some extent, judicial practices. This undermines the independence of these institutions, reducing their ability to act as true checks on executive authority. While there have been instances of the legislature and judiciary resisting executive overreach, such occurrences are not the norm, as the influence of the executive frequently prevails.

From Gavel to Growth: Improvements and Barriers in the Judiciary

The Liberian judiciary is formally independent and institutionally differentiated, and improvements in justice sector reform are noted.[191] All courts, including those in magisterial areas, are now staffed with judges holding at least a law degree or training from the Law School or the newly formed Judicial Institute when in the near past, most magisterial courts had been overseen by persons with little or no judicial training. The country established a commercial court in 2010 to support investor's confidence in the business climate of the country and ensure the expedient adjudication of disputes arising out of business dealings.

Yet, the courts teeter under the weight of systemic inadequacies, ranging from limited availability of court houses, insufficient justice administrators and lawyers and other logistical support to the court, hindering the efficient administration of justice and increasing judicial corruption.[192] Over the past few years, the judiciary has had to depend on international partners such as United Nations bodies and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to construct and refurbish court houses, provide training for judicial staff and procure other logistical support.[193] According to an interviewee, this can be initially good for building the foundation for state institutions but when not considered strategically, can serve to weaken the state structure as the government abdicated its responsibilities to donor partners and then in cases of donor partner fatigue, government infrastructure deteriorates. For example, at the Court opening in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County in 2021, one associate justice noted that due to limited funding within the national budget, at least one court in Rivercess County was rented by magistrates from their own resources saying that a similar situation exists in other magisterial areas.

The judiciary's autonomy is routinely imperilled by powerful actors from the private and governmental arenas, with some justices facing removal for dissent.[194] Inefficiency due to manual handling of court records, and in other instances, lack of electricity or fuel to run court generators create heavy case backlogs leading to limited access to justice and strengthening respect for the enforcement of contracts in the country. This has been an age-old problem dating back to 2017, as insights from the fragility assessment highlighted a backlog of cases caused by the above challenges, which underscored how these operational challenges contribute to the persistent delays in the judicial system.[195]

[191] Constitution of Liberia (1986)
[192] Frontpage Africa, 2021
[193] Chief Justice Address at Opening of Court (2018)
[194] Recent cases include the impeachment of Associate Justice Kabineh Ja'neh from the Supreme Court Bench and the dismissal of Magistrate Ernest Bana-both attributed to their ruling against the sitting government's interest.
[195] Kwabo, Thompson and Kaba, 2017

An unshackled judiciary stands as a bulwark against corruption, fostering economic development through impartial adjudication and contract enforcement. Liberated from external pressures, it can uphold the legal rights of all citizens and settle the scores of past conflicts. As Liberia recovers from civil strife, its journey toward economic revitalization is tethered to the robustness of its legal institutions. The enforcement of laws—be they environmental, labour, or health—fuels a vision of sustainable progress, and with it, the well-being of its population. For Liberia, judicial integrity is not just a pillar but the bedrock of its burgeoning economy. As several interviewees indicated, businesses are concerned about how courts protect the sanctity of contracts and the transactional costs of undue delays in assuring legal redress. “Other multilaterals can only be assured of their own investments when they see how existing business institutions are treated by the courts” , the interview noted.

The Legislature

The legislature as the first branch of government is responsible for making laws, representing their constituencies and exercising oversight over the other branches of government. Yet, like the judiciary, the legislature historically functioned in most cases at the behest of the executive and legislators’ private interests sometimes come before national priorities. The legislature is mainly “effective in that the president must ensure significant elite support to pass decisions.”[196] Between 2006-2018, attempts by members of the legislature especially within the leadership to exert legislative checks over executive agencies and the presidency led to removal of House Speakers and President *pro tempore* of the Senate with allegations that their removals were executive induced.[197] This may explain why the legislature between 2019 and 2023 was considered a rubber-stamping Parliament with very little or no dissent with the executive.[198] Over recent years, the legislature has faced accusations of *quid pro quo* passage of laws, passing laws without respect to guidelines, the disproportionate award of incentives to concession companies and same-day passage of the national budget without properly reviewing it.

The legislature also faces limited technical capacity, which hampers policy making and its ability to hold the executive to account. This is largely due to limited capacity and low salaries on offer for legislative staff as compared to persons of similar seniority within the executive and judicial branches. According to several interviewees, one of the reasons cited as to why the legislature has not been able to adequately analyse and allocate the national budget is due to how little support there has been for the Legislative Budget Office (LBO). The LBO is often not the central focus of legislative budget analysis support as its staff capacity and manpower is low.

At the same time, the legislature has occasionally been able to pass legislation that was opposed by powerful vested interests, such as the 2019 law harmonising public sector wages, aiming at cutting salaries of some 9,000 employees while raising pay for the lowest-paid 15,000.

The Civil Service: Limited Capacity but Reforms are Ongoing

Liberia’s civil service faces persistent challenges due to years of political instability, which have impacted education, caused significant brain drain, and kept salaries low, all contributing to a reduced capacity within government institutions. Much of this limitation

[196] Bertelsmann, 2022.
[197] Voice of America (VOA News), 2009
[198] Peters, 2023

results from the civil war, years of disrupted or insufficient education, and limited capacity within schools to prepare a workforce for 21st-century demands. Additionally, corruption within the civil service is prevalent, with workers often requiring kickbacks to fulfil their duties. Nepotism and political patronage in civil service appointments further undermine its effectiveness. Other systemic issues include overlapping mandates among state agencies, limited coordination, competing interests, and poor infrastructure and technology, all of which hinder the efficient functioning of government services.

Efforts to retrain and professionalise the civil service are ongoing. These include a 2019 law passed to standardise payment according to qualification and rank, and cut allowances, which were discretionary and represented the largest pay component for many civil servants, leading them to seek personal favour with superiors. Such reforms are often thwarted by vested interests, but the IMF documented a 10% wage bill reduction across the three branches of government and complementary reforms aimed at limiting further growth in the wage bill: consolidating the base wage and allowances, centralising recruitment at the Civil Service Agency, standardising grades and pay across the civil service, and implementing biometric verification for all civil servants.[199] A civil society actor during the PEA stated that more civil service reform is needed particularly in the area of recruitment to the service. He stated, “people who are knowledgeable, qualified and able to get the work done should be recruited and they should not be politicians, they should be technicians.”

Local Government: Cautious moves Towards more Decentralisation

The state is strongly centralised, with its public administration historically concentrated in Monrovia.[200] Keeping a highly centralised model of governance might seem easier for Liberia due to its history and political culture, small size, and the complexities of implementing decentralisation. However, the centralization approach risks perpetuating governance inefficiencies, limiting local empowerment, and failing to address regional disparities effectively. There is little or no popular participation in decision-making on issues affecting local communities. Juridical services are in principle available in the hinterland, but associated costs in terms of fees, transportation, time and legal representation are prohibitive for many. Health services are limited, and quality is poor (see Chapter 1). While public schools do exist in remote areas, they are not necessarily functional (see Chapter 1). The complexity of administration under decentralisation requires careful planning and capacity-building but could ultimately lead to more sustainable and equitable governance outcomes. For McIntosh (2020), “policy reorientation and consolidation of government institutions alongside effective decentralisation of powers are pivotal for economic revival and sustainability.”[201]

In recent years, efforts to decentralise governance have been attempted. A National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance was developed in 2011 with the executive branch making an effort to take service delivery to the people through the introduction of local county service centres in all counties. Subsequently, a Local Government Act (LGA) was signed into law in 2018 and the Revenue Sharing Law (RSL) came into effect in 2022. The two instruments introduced large-scale reforms to county administration and how local resources are mobilised.

[199] IMF, 2022b

[200] Liberia operates a unitary form of government with local administrative powers divided among 15 subdivisions called counties. Each county is headed by a superintendent who is appointed by the president and reports to the president through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

[201] McIntosh, 2020

These have however been undermined by low funding support to the service centres and limited capacity of staff. The creation of regional security hubs, which were active in 13 of the 14 counties in the interior by 2018, has improved the reach of state security but about 3,800 of the country's 5,000 police are still based in Monrovia. State provision of law and order is very limited, and local and customary mechanisms play a major role in maintaining security.

More recently, the LGA and the RSL have enabled the election of local county officials such as county councils, and helped ensure a framework for equitable revenue distribution among the counties. As local government plays a decisive role in service delivery, county development, and stimulating popular participation in decision-making processes, local governance should be supported to enhance state legitimacy and support peace. During an interview centralization was framed as a contributor to the civil crisis: "*over-centralization of governance gave rise to lack of participation, exclusion, marginalisation of rural people, they lacked the involvement in decisions that affected them, so they agitated, they wanted to be heard, they wanted to form part of the governing processes in this country. Because they were not given the opportunity, the agitation increased and it culminated into a series of violence and then subsequently culminated into the war*."

In this vein, as a recommendation for the LGA and RSL to be successful, the new administration needs to address trust issues linked to corruption and the challenges faced in addressing various social issues, emphasising the need for inclusive processes in the full implementation of laws. Alternatively, other interviews suggested that the government can strategize to do decentralisation differently from what the current practice is. They noted that aside from the service centres, delivery of social utilities such as electricity and water could be more efficiently delivered if the services were decentralised at the district level.

2.2. Rule of Law

For the proper functioning of democracy, as well as for growth and inclusive development, a country must uphold the rule of law. Given the history of conflict, violence and inequality, the rule of law is a major concern throughout the country. Liberia practises constitutional democracy with reliance on statutory and elements of customary law. In court cases, it can borrow from the traditions of the English common law and American judicial precedent.

The country has made strides to strengthen the rule of law with increased support to accountability in the public sector by enacting new laws governing the General Auditing Commission (GAC) and enacting enabling legislation for the formation of the Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC), the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), an Internal Audit Agency (IAA). International organisations have contributed to provide continuous technical capacity and logistical support to these institutions, although much more effort needs to be placed on ensuring unhindered implementation of their core mandate areas.

The country has also made some progress towards addressing human rights abuses and atrocities steaming from the war years with continuous public discussions on implementing the Truth And Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations including the establishment of a war and economic crimes court. As a product of the TRC's recommendation, an Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) was created in 2005 and appeared to be prepared to hold the executive to account, although its resources have been very limited since then challenging support to initiatives aimed at memorialization, palava hut reconciliation and the establishment of the recommended war and economic crimes court. The new president initially has made a policy commitment to ensure that a war and economic crimes court is established.

He has now subsequently followed that up by endorsing through Executive Order, a legislative resolution outlining the framework for the Court. In general, civil rights in Liberia have been strengthened over time, and the *de jure* situation is in general terms satisfactory.[202] **The major challenge to civil rights comes from the dysfunctional judicial system.**

For rule of law to be fully realised, key improvements must be made to address corruption through prosecution, strengthen rule of law institutions by providing needed resources and ensuring access to justice and economic equality for all citizens. Corruption and impunity remain a major constraint to growth and development, threatening to undermine the nation's developmental aspirations (see Section 3 below).

2.3. Political Participation: From Exclusion to Empowerment

Liberia's history shows that participation in governance and peacebuilding efforts is needed to reduce alienation and resentment, restore trust across groups and in government, to hold the government to account and engage in constructive dialogue. Historically, the country faced low participation of people on the margins ranging from neglect of Indigenous groups to stifling civil society voices, underrepresentation of women and youth (Box 2) in the democratic space are said to have been key contributors to the country's low democratic credentials and triggers for the civil war.

Public liberties and civil rights in today's Liberia encompass a range of fundamental freedoms and protections under the law that are essential for the functioning of a democratic society, are by and large respected, with some documented exceptions:

- These rights include freedom of speech and expression, freedom of assembly and association, the right to vote and participate in free and fair elections, the right to equality before the law, and protection from discrimination.

- Civil society and civil society organisations have played a vital role in advancing peace, highlighting public sector corruption and overall, promoting good governance in the country although much of civil society itself needs capacity to sustain its work and ably analyse and advocate on issues from a much-improved perspective. Today, "*civil society organisations like Centel, Nemo, and Accountability Lab are deeply focused on combating corruption and are very vocal about necessary reforms*."[203]

- The principles of free and fair elections are understood and respected. After the war, Liberia held presidential and lower house elections in 2005, 2011, 2017 and 2022: all elections were rated satisfactorily free and fair by international observers.[204] For the second time in two consecutive elections (2017 and 2023), the wheels of power shifted from one political party to another. In established democracies, this might be seen as the norm, but Liberia's history is replete with anti-democratic tendencies, from 133 years of one-party state (1847-1980), the Guiness World Record for the most fraudulent election (1927) and vote rigging (1985). The positive trend in recent years has largely been attributed to institutional independence and transparency within the National Elections

[202] United States Department of State 2023; Bertelsmann, 2022.

[203] KII Insights

[204] The midterm Senate elections in December 2020 were also considered broadly free and fair, despite logical shortcomings and some incidents of violence.

Commission (NEC). The country enjoys multi-party democracy with registered political parties totalling 46.

- The right to assemble “in an orderly and peaceable manner” and the right of association have been broadly upheld, except for some recourse to violence by the police against protesters.

Political participation contributes to higher state legitimacy and citizen trust in the state, and "*political participation is increasing, with more citizens engaging in the democratic process*"[205], but these outcomes also hinge on the ability of the state to deliver basic services (Chapter 1) and provide socioeconomic opportunities (Chapter 3) for all.[206]

Box 2. Young People in Governance, War and Peace: From "Time Bombs" to Leaders

Historically and to this day, young people in Liberia have faced multiple challenges ranging from high unemployment rates, limited access to education and healthcare, and political marginalisation:

- Significant youth marginalisation, according to the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, contributed to the country's long years of civil war where they were mostly used by warlords to perpetrate some of the most gruesome atrocities of war.[207]
- While they are often seen as victims or perpetrators, their roles in peacebuilding and community leadership are critical yet underrecognized.[208]
- Post-conflict, there were large-scale efforts by local and international actors to rehabilitate war-affected youths through reintegration programs, providing psychosocial support, and skills training initiatives through technical and vocational education.[209]
- The government also provides small-scale budget support to the Federation of Liberian Youths through the Ministry of Youth and Sports to help integrate young people more into political life and enable their participation in decision-making at the county level. The new Local Government Act also ensures young people have a seat on the county councils in all counties. Sustained engagement and addressing systemic barriers are necessary for meaningful youth participation in governance.[210]

Despite these efforts, young people in Liberia still face limited participation in public affairs, as well as additional challenges: a drug epidemic and high levels of teenage pregnancy. These social issues underscore the need for comprehensive policies that recognise and promote youth agency and leadership, and address not only the economic and political inclusion of youth but also their well-being and health education.

[205] KII Insights

[206] The World Bank (2018) reports that "the Liberian public so mistrusts the government that the Ebola epidemic was initially believed to be a ruse designed by the authorities to syphon funds from the international community":

[207] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009

[208] Mutisi (2019, p.103) : "Given the role of young people in the civil war and its impact on this demographic, it becomes almost natural to cling to despondent conceptual frameworks. However, theories such as the 'youth bulge', 'youth crisis' and 'lumpen youth' are hugely negative in their conceptualisation of youths. They underestimate the youth and fail to highlight their role as positive agents of change and key actors in peacebuilding, both by policy makers and academics."

[209] Quaynor, 2018

[210] Boas, M., & Woods, K.,2020

2.4. Limited Violence and Relative Social Cohesion

Since Liberia's founding, achieving an acceptable level of social cohesion has been a major challenge for the country and as a result, periods of violence have ensued especially during the civil war years. Tensions between settlers and Indigenous populations largely contributed to the gaps in social cohesion. Other contributing factors include land conflicts, economic, educational, infrastructural, and religious marginalisation of ethnic minorities based on geographic and demographic factors.

In recent years however, guns have been silenced and the country has taken steps to reduce violence and made progress on social cohesion. In a significant turnaround, post-war Liberia, with United Nations assistance, disarmed over 100,000 individuals by 2018, offering psychosocial counselling, rehabilitation, and reintegration support to nearly half of them. Security sector reform has contributed to reduced violence also and prepared the security sector for maintaining the peace. The Armed Forces of Liberia and the National Police were completely decommissioned with new soldiers and police officers recruited to maintain the peace and ensure social order.

By contrast with the 1997-2003 period, the state has maintained a full monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The armed forces report to the Ministry of National Defense and civilian authorities generally maintain effective control over them. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses, but much work has been done to ensure that law enforcement actors remain professional. All state security agencies are required to have embedded complaints mechanisms. Liberia has also made efforts to protect its borders with agents of the Liberia Immigration Service service assigned to all major border postings. The police and army are present in major cities and towns to enforce legitimate use of violence where necessary.

Post TRC, peacebuilding and land settlement initiatives by the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and other international and local civil society groups have contributed to fostering dialogue between religious and ethnic groups. The Land Authority, with limited resources, has embarked on landmark programs to provide land title deeds to some communities to settle long running conflicts related to land. Despite this progress made, inequality, poverty and unemployment levels are still noted as high (Chapter 1) and if not addressed adequately, may undermine the notable progress made on violence and social cohesion.

2.5. Gender-Responsive Governance and Peacebuilding

Gender discrimination is generally discouraged under Liberian laws and policies, with the constitution providing for equal protection and nondiscrimination based on sex. The government has also made efforts to ensure its policy and practices are gender responsive through budgetary allocations, the formulation of the NGP (revised in 2017), and the establishment of the MGCSP, and Liberia's women's equality scores rose above the West Africa average from 2017 onward.[211]

Liberian women have demonstrated notable agency in shaping the political landscape of the country. The aftermath of Liberia's civil wars prompted the introduction of policies aimed at

[211] Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018-2021

reconciliation and peacebuilding, with a crucial emphasis on the involvement of women.[212] While women were initially sidelined in the formulation and execution of disarmament and reconstruction policies, their advocacy efforts eventually played a significant role in advancing peacebuilding processes.[213] This demonstrated the indispensable contribution of women as a key component in attaining peace, security, and development in Liberia. The post-conflict peacebuilding process in Liberia is recognized as one of the initial endeavours to view gender as a cross-sectional issue. This set a precedent for integrating women into political and conflict-resolution processes on both national and international fronts.

Liberia has made history with the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Africa's first female president in 2006. Legislative advances, such as the Gender and Development Act and the National Gender Policy, have laid the groundwork for continuous improvement in gender equality. Liberia has made strides in women's political participation, legislative advances, such as the Gender and Development Act and the National Gender Policy, have laid the groundwork for continuous improvement in gender equality. Despite these achievements, women's representation in the legislature has seen fluctuations, with a peak in 2011 and a decrease in subsequent elections.

The implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 through the Liberian National Action Plan underscores a focused effort to embed gender considerations within the security sector, highlighting initiatives like Gender Units and Peace Huts, which empower women in rural communities.[214] Various NAPs and policies, championed by national and grassroots women's organisations alike with the support of development partners, are being executed by the MGCSP with the overarching goal of fostering economic, social, and security frameworks that enable the full and effective participation of women and girls in Liberia's peacebuilding, reconstruction, recovery, and development endeavours.[215]

Despite these advancements, patriarchy, cultural practices and beliefs enable the persistence of gender inequalities:

- **Significant gender disparities persist at both national and local levels of governance and peacebuilding**, exacerbated by structural gender discrimination and sexism: "*Women's rights are frequently sidelined in political discussions and decision-making processes*".[216] Between 2014 and 2018, women's political empowerment consistently scored low in Liberia's overall gender index across diverse sectors, emphasising the enduring presence of gender inequality at decision-making levels.[217] The exclusion of women from decision-making processes is especially evident in areas such as land rights. Despite initiatives to promote gender equality, such as the Gender Parity Law, significant challenges remain in turning policies into effective, tangible changes.[218] According to UNDP's Gender Inequality Index

[212] Basini, 2013; Jennings, 2009
[213] Letouzé et al., 2021
[214] Lawson and Flomo, 2020
[215] Government of Liberia, 2019
[216] KII Insights
[217] Masitoh, 2020: *"According to 2014 figures, about 10 percent fewer women registered to vote than men; 14 percent fewer women voted in the 2014 Senate elections; and 17 percent fewer women participated in campaign activities. In addition, women currently hold 15.8 percent of cabinet positions, comprise 24.5 percent of deputy minister positions, and 25.9 percent of assistant ministers. Of the 15 counties, three have a female superintendent and of the 30 mayoral positions, only ten are held by women."*
[218] KII Insights

2022, Liberia ranks among the countries with the most pronounced gender disparities globally. Particularly concerning is still the significant gap in women's political representation, with only 9.7% of parliamentary seats held by women, compared to a staggering 90.3% held by men.[219] This places Liberia at 161st out of 166 countries evaluated in terms of gender parity.

- **In part a legacy of the country's 14-year civil war and a certain lack of accountability, the country has one of the highest statistics on rape and domestic violence** despite several advocacy actions by women organizations with support from the international community and government.[220]

[219] UNDP, 2022c
[220] LISGIS, 2021

Opportunities Looking Forward

Looking forward, top opportunities for improved governance and peace are:

➔ **The advent of a new administration from 2024 and possible impetus to leverage support from development partners to implement reforms and development projects**: The incoming administration brings innovative ideas and new approaches to governance and peacebuilding (see above), and carries a fresh mandate from the electorate, potentially giving it the political capital to implement reforms. The extent to which the incoming Liberian government is able to leverage support from development partners for implementing reforms and development projects would depend on several key factors, such as whether the government is able to demonstrate clear commitment to reform and a stable policy environment, specifically to continue civil service reform, to bolster the judiciary, to create mechanisms for public sector accountability, to fight corruption, to promote inclusive decision-making processes to strengthen social cohesion and peace, to diversify the economy and reduce dependency on extractives, and to invest in human capital. The continued and even increased engagement of development partners is fundamental to support such development projects, particularly in the face of decreasing grant funding as a share of GDP as is detailed in the economic transformation section.

➔ **Growing public demand for transparency and accountability:** Interviews underlined that "*Public demand for transparency and accountability is creating a powerful impetus for change*." 63% of the citizenry preferred an accountable government over one that can get things done without being answerable to its citizens in 2020, up from 53% in 2015 (Afrobarometer).

➔ **Technological advancements for better and more transparent service delivery:** Liberia has ambitions to leverage technology for governance, inclusivity, and development, but is still in the early stages of digital transformation. Efforts towards e-government and digital identification are underway but face challenges such as limited infrastructure, the need for capacity building, and the necessity for regulatory frameworks. Initiatives like the Liberia Revenue Authority's digital tax services and pilot projects for digital ID systems indicated progress, yet widespread implementation and integration into public services remain work in progress. Digital transformation in Liberia could accelerate not only the performance of public services and growth, but also transparency and accountability.

➔ **Deforestation regulations in the EU** (an opportunity that could also be a risk): Liberia, with its significant forest cover and dependency on forestry and agriculture (including rubber, palm oil, and timber), is directly impacted by such regulations. Liberia's economy is heavily reliant on exports of timber and agricultural products like palm oil and rubber, which are under scrutiny for their environmental impact. Adhering to the EU's stringent sustainability and traceability requirements might necessitate significant investments in supply chain management, certification processes, and sustainable practice adoption, and the EU's deforestation regulation could restrict access to one of the world's largest markets if Liberian products are not compliant. At the same time, The regulation encourages Liberia to invest in and transition towards sustainable forestry and agricultural practices. This could lead to long-term environmental benefits, such as reduced deforestation, conservation of biodiversity, and enhanced ecosystem services, aligning with global sustainability goals. Liberian products verified as sustainably produced could fetch higher prices and appeal to a broader range of consumers, particularly in markets where environmental sustainability is a significant concern. The EU Regulation presents opportunities for Liberia to demonstrate environmental leadership, gain access to new markets, and improve the sustainability of its economic development. The extent to which these regulations represent a risk or opportunity will largely depend on how effectively Liberia can implement sustainable practices,

leverage international support, and adapt its economic activities to meet these new standards.

➔ **Despite the progress made to improving data infrastructure and analytics in Liberia, there are still important data gaps.** The country has advanced conducting national censuses, demographic and health surveys, the development of a National Statistical Development Strategy and increased funding for population and development data. The importance of strengthening national statistical capacity consists of supporting evidence-based analysis, policy studies, and efficient monitoring and evaluation of development frameworks. In particular, there is a need to establish a functional civil registration system at all levels and the generation and use of quality and timely data from various sources for planning, monitoring, and evaluation purposes.

3. Governance and Peace Issues that Constrain Inclusive Development

What are the main factors that, in the area of governance and peacebuilding, constraint inclusive development? A poor business climate comes up as the main constraint, followed by corruption, limited transparency and accountability; and by policies and approaches that promote spatial inequalities and elitism.

3.1. Poor Business Climate Policies

The main policies leading to a poor business climate are discussed in Chapter 3. Beyond its impact on growth, a poor business climate in Liberia can have significant adverse effects on social cohesion:

1. A challenging business environment often leads to limited job opportunities and widespread unemployment, underemployment, and informality. Disparities can fuel social tensions between different groups. Economic hardships and competition for scarce resources can ignite old tensions, threatening peace and social unity.

2. In Liberia, where rebuilding trust in institutions is critical post-civil war, a poor business climate can hinder this process, undermining the social contract between the state and its citizens. Interviews underscore "*we don't see real movement when it comes to economic empowerment yet*." Moreover, limited domestic revenue mobilisation implies less government spending on basic services, impacting the quality of life and widening gaps between different societal groups

3. An unfriendly business environment can lead to a brain drain, where the most educated and skilled individuals leave the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This loss of talent further weakens the economy but also society.

3.2. Corruption, Limited Transparency and Accountability

Corruption in the public and private sectors is probably Liberia's biggest challenge to sustainable development, circumventing monies that could be used to improve public service delivery and peacebuilding initiatives into private pockets. Virtually all of our interviews underline how "corruption is one of the key limiting factors for development in Liberia. **"**Virtually all of our interviews underline how "*corruption is one of the key limiting factors for development in Liberia*." While corruption in the public sector is on par with the West Africa average, it is much worse than the West Africa average for the private sector, both types of corruption have gotten worse since a peak in 2015-2016.[221] Since its founding, the country has faced entrenched corruption permeating all echelons of government to include the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government. Liberia continues to rank very high in various Corruption Perception Indices and reports.[222] Government efforts to address corruption have been

[221] Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2018-2021

[222] Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked Liberia among the poorly performing countries in the fight against corruption. Out of 180 countries captured, Liberia ranked 136, with a score of 29, climbing just one step above the 2020 ranking of 28. A recent State of Corruption Report by the civil society organisation, Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) found that 90 percent of Liberians surveyed indicated that corruption is extremely high in Liberia with respondents noting the police, medical services, court and education services as most prone to corruption.

largely lethargic and reactive, frequently lacking the political will necessary to fully implement the recommendations put forth by integrity institutions such as the General Auditing Commission. Enforcement of the code of conduct remains selective, creating an environment of impunity.[223] Despite successive presidents labelling corruption as a "public enemy" with vows to "end corruption in public service," the vice of corruption has proved endemic with CENTAL noting limited progress in addressing corruption.

Challenges to addressing widespread public service corruption in the country have been attributed to nepotism and cronyism with little political will by state actors to hold persons accused of corruption accountable for their actions. In some of the few grand corruption cases that are actually prosecuted, judges and jurors have been accused of receiving bribes to acquit. In some instances judges "accept bribes to award damages in civil cases" and others would extend to soliciting bribes to "try cases, grant bail to detainees or acquit defendants in criminal cases."[224] Defence attorneys and prosecutors are reported to also ask defendants to pay bribes to secure favourable decisions from judges, prosecutors, and jurors, or to have court staff place cases on the docket for trial. Petty corruption is as widespread as grand corruption with high poverty levels and low public sector pay deemed to provide incentives to individuals for corrupt behaviour.

Liberia also faces challenges with transparency in the public sector. The Open Budget Survey finds that the country's budget process tends to be opaque with limited public participation and publicly available budget information. Audit reports have also shown that procurement laws are often disregarded with impunity. Freedom House reports that the Freedom of Information Act is rarely used and in 2023 the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission reported that a two-third of public officials required to declare assets had not done so. The transparency group Global Witness has over the years documented how public officials including those responsible for licensing, regulation, the award and enforcement of contracts, providing utilities and issuing permits often demand money from businesses in exchange for the performance of official duties.[225]

Interviewees emphasised the need to harness political will to improve governance by allowing institutions to carry out their mandate and functions. For example, one participant noted how during the last six years, the Governance Commission, set up to "promote good governance by advising, designing, and formulating appropriate policies and institutional arrangements and frameworks required for achieving good governance and promoting integrity at all levels of society" played little or no role in the country's governance process. Policy experts at the institution were not consulted on key governance issues and seemingly had limited support from the executive and legislative branches of government. Another participant questioned the new government's announcement of the establishment of an Asset Recovery Taskforce when the already existing Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission has a similar mandate. In general, integrity institutions like the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and General Auditing Commission (GAC) often do not receive the full allocated budgets, hindering their effectiveness.

High citizen perception of corruption and limited government transparency and accountability can increase grievances and erode trust in public institutions, exacerbate social and economic inequalities, and undermine social cohesion, threatening the fragile fabric of unity and stability in a post-conflict society. Conversely, fighting corruption is crucial for

[223] Kwabo, Thompson and Kaba, 2017
[224] United States Department of State, 2023
[225] Global Witness, 2018

social cohesion because it restores public trust in institutions, ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities, and reinforces the foundation of fairness and justice essential for uniting communities.

3.3. Policies and Approaches Contributing to Spatial Inequalities and Elitism

In Liberia, certain policies and approaches can contribute to spatial inequalities and social exclusion, such as uneven development strategies that favour urban over rural areas, certain regions over others, inadequate infrastructure investment in remote regions, and land tenure systems that disenfranchise certain groups, all of which exacerbate disparities and hinder inclusive social and economic participation across the country. For the World Bank, in 2019, "going forward, Liberia's central political challenge will be to eliminate entrenched patterns of elite capture and develop more inclusive, participatory public institutions"[226], echoing its earlier 2018 Systematic Country Diagnostic: "The entrenched disparity between the coastal cities and rural inland areas led to an oppressive and corrupt system of Government marked by elite capture, confiscatory taxation, forced labour, and the arbitrary appropriation of land and resources".[227] Deeply rooted settler-era marginalisation of indigenous communities tilted development into settler enclaves, leaving the majority indigenous areas scarce benefits from the country's resources and little or no attention sustainable development in the hinterlands contributing to high levels of inequality social and economic outcomes.

As underlined in Chapter 1, investments in education, technology, roads and other basic infrastructure has tended to favour urban elites in cities at the expense of rural inhabitants, and data indicate inequality is high, and rising.[228] This policy has contributed to high internal migration as people in rural communities move to urban areas in search of better life. As a result, there is a visible increase in slums and ghettos around urban cities such as Monrovia, the capital, Gbarnga in Bong County, and Ganta in Nimba County.

Although an adequate framework is now in place to help resolve and restore order to the country's land crisis, resources for its implementation are scarce. Contrary to stipulations within the Land Rights Act, the land is still heavily owned and controlled by government who can in turn dole it out to concessions with limited attention to assure the free, prior, and informed consent of communities as required by law. As a result, there have been several cases of community resistance to concession expansion in what they view as ancestral land or land used for subsistence farming, needed to sustain local livelihoods.

An entrenched concentration of national economic policy focus on the rent-seeking extractive sector is a constraint to inclusive development. Due to a still heavily centralised system of government, resources from extractives are used to support recurrent expenditure for the running of government bureaucracies, contribute to the construction of small-scale infrastructure around concession areas meaning only a small section of the population and few regions benefit from the national pie leaving huge populations outside the economic enclaves with little benefit. This in turn fuels disaffection between deprived communities on the one hand and government on the other.

[226] World Bank, 2019
[227] World Bank, 2018
[228] Republic of Liberia, 2023; ECVP, 2023.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities and same-sex sexual orientation within national governance and social cohesion regimes remain a challenge to the country. Most of the country's infrastructure is built with limited consideration for accessibility for persons with disabilities including those for education and health access. An interviewee observed that the government's obligation to mainstream PWDs issues in all policies and processes is limited. Acknowledging that the government has established the National Commission on Disabilities, the participant noted low funding to the Commission, low support to PWDs education infrastructures and health systems and low employment of PWDs across other areas of government. Consensual relationships between same-sex people is illegal under Liberian laws and persons suspected of engaging in acts deemed to be of such nature have reported discrimination, beating and threats on their lives.

Risks Looking Forward

Looking forward, top risks for Liberia's hard fought gains in governance and peace are:

- The Liberian public sector continues to struggle with issues of inefficiency, corruption, and limited capacity. These challenges undermine the effectiveness of governance, hinder the implementation of policies, and weaken the trust between citizens and the state. Improving public sector governance is crucial for development and stability.

- "*High levels of poverty and inequality, combined with global conditions, pose a risk of fueling discontent*" (interviews, 2024), especially as:

  - (i) food and fuel prices, influenced by global tensions and supply chain disruptions, can significantly impact Liberia's economy, given its reliance on imports for these essentials;

  - (ii) the population is rising, especially in urban settings; and

  - (iii) climate change (Climate Box 4), extensive deforestation and illegal logging (Climate Box 5), and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources threaten Liberia's environmental sustainability and impact livelihoods dependent on natural resources.

- **Climate Change:** Liberia has good policies in place (Climate Box 4), but its ability to manage the anticipated effects of climate change remains insufficient, exacerbating its vulnerability. The potential for climate change to escalate resource conflicts and the broad socioeconomic effects of changing weather patterns necessitate careful observation. Furthermore, the nation's capability in addressing environmental challenges and enacting environmental policies falls below regional norms, with Liberia positioned at 167 out of 178 countries in the latest Environmental Performance Index.

Climate Box 4. Institutional and Governance Arrangements for Climate Action: Priorities & Challenges

Progress in accelerating climate action and advancing a just transition, both crucial for fulfilling sustainable development goals, is shaped by the institutional and governance frameworks in place, which set standards across policy areas and influence the willingness among stakeholders to comply and collaborate.[229] Conversely, climate change vulnerability creates risks of resource-related displacement and conflicts.[230]

Liberia has made significant strides toward environmental sustainability and climate resilience, as evidenced by its comprehensive legislative and policy framework:

- Internationally, Liberia is committed to various environmental agreements, highlighting its dedication to global sustainability efforts.[231]

- At the national level, the country's environmental laws, anchored in the Liberian Constitution, advocate for broad participation in managing natural resources and the right to a clean environment. The National Climate Change Steering Committee (NCCSC), established in 2010, plays a pivotal role in coordinating Liberia's climate change policies and activities, supported by the National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS) within the Environment Protection Agency (EPA).[232] In turn, the EPA collaborates with a wide range of national and international partners to manage environmental and climate change issues, guided by several strategic documents including the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP).[233] These documents detail Liberia's urgent adaptation needs and outline a coordinated approach to address medium and long-term climate challenges.

However, Liberia's climate action, particularly its adaptation strategies, faces financial shortfalls. Of the estimated US$2 billion required, only US$700 million has been allocated, mainly targeting infrastructure and coastal defences, despite the country's relatively low greenhouse gas contributions,[234] and much of the climate change funding is donor-dependent and project-specific. Moreover, there is a notable lack of adequate information and awareness about climate change, hindering community engagement and effective response strategies; a dearth of technical expertise and technologies across various adaptation sectors; and policies and frameworks for adaptation are lacking in some sectors, impeding cohesive and sector-wide action against climate change challenges.

[229] Denton et al., 2022

[230] Lundy and Adebayo 2016, and Government of Liberia, 2018

[231] WRI, 2022: under the Paris Climate Accord, Liberia has set adaptation and mitigation goals, prioritising coastal management among its key objectives, and the country's strategies are aligned with global and regional frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and more, demonstrating a concerted effort to integrate climate change considerations across development agendas.

[232] IMF, 2022b; EPA, 2008

[233] UNEP, n.d.. The NAPA identifies essential projects across vulnerable sectors: Agriculture, Forestry and Wetlands, and Fisheries [See Climate Box 6] Energy [See Climate Box 7]

Climate Box 5. Forests, Revenue Mobilisation, Services and Conflict

Liberia's forests encompass half of the remaining Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem, and the majority of Liberians depend on these forests for their livelihoods and daily lives (See Climate Box 1 and Climate Box 6). However, the potential of the forestry sector to drive sustainable development has historically been compromised by various forms of exploitation.[235]

Efforts have been made to reform the forestry sector, aligning it with international standards and agreements to ensure sustainable management: introduction of the National Forestry Reform Law in 2006, offering communities a decision-making role and establishing a new system for industrial concessions; strategic documents such as National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and partnerships with international organisations, such as the Letter of Intent with the Government of Norway to reduce greenhouse emissions, deforestation, and forest degradation.

However, multiple issues persist: the sector faces critical challenges due to persistent non-compliance and a failure to act on previous recommendations, undermining sustainable forest management and rural livelihoods.[236] Despite strong legal frameworks, forestry operations frequently violate legal standards, including issues with licence transfers, forest allocations, and meeting environmental obligations. This is compounded by a lack of transparency and accountability, as operations fail to fulfil social, financial, and environmental responsibilities. In turn, these challenges are exacerbated by limited budgetary allotment for environmental sustainability; inadequate coordination among institutions; and a lack of climate change awareness or education.

These issues not only compromise the safety and benefits of workers and communities but also diminish government revenue, ability to provide vital services, and enforce environmental policies effectively. The forestry sector's minimal contribution to Liberia's overall budget highlights these issues of underperformance and mismanagement. Moreover, the lack of effective coordination among government agencies and stakeholders exacerbates governance challenges, often reducing interactions to symbolic gestures rather than substantive collaborative efforts.

Finally, these challenges heighten Liberia's vulnerability to climate change and risk re-igniting resource conflicts, which threatens to undermine efforts toward peace. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive sector-wide reform, extending beyond regulatory enforcement to include meaningful engagement with government entities, local communities, and various stakeholders, fostering sustainable forest management practices that are equitable and beneficial for all involved.[237]

Water and Public Health [See Climate Box 2]; Coastal Zones [See Climate Box 3]; Meteorological: Re-establishing the national meteorological monitoring network.

[234] IMF, 2022b

[235] Forest Trends, 2024 : "According to the economic crimes section of Liberia's Truth & Reconciliation Commission, past administrations used the sector as the foundation for an illicit patronage network, enriching corrupt leaders, trafficking weapons, and using the security forces of logging companies as private militias to control territory, wage violence, and extort money." (p.6)

[236] World Bank, 2018; Forest Trends, 2024

[237] World Bank, 2018; Forest Trends, 2024

4. Potential Conflicts and Trade-Offs

Trade-offs arise when progress in one area results in setbacks in another. While many trade-offs are short-term, they tend to converge positively in the long term. For example, fighting impunity and corruption may pose political challenges and short-term risks, but over time, justice demands accountability for serious crimes, and prosperity depends on addressing both petty and grand corruption. Good practices exist to balance these trade-offs, such as aligning special criminal courts with ordinary justice and harmonising customary and formal justice systems.

4.1. Governance

1. **Strong checks and balances can help prevent power abuse, but they may also lead to government gridlock if institutions hinder each other's initiatives.** Recently in Liberia, tensions have surfaced between the executive and legislative branches, with each accusing the other of exerting “undue” influence over its operations, leading to notable conflicts and delays in governance.[238]

2. **Promoting media freedom, which is a pillar of democracy, while also ensuring that media outlets do not exacerbate social tensions or spread misinformation.** The country has made progress on media freedom over the last twenty years.[239] As press penetration increases, so too does the responsibility of the press to report responsibly, mindful of the country’s historic need to promote national unity and social cohesion. The relationship between the media and governance is not always harmonious. Liberian media outlets have faced allegations of being inaccurate, unprofessional and poorly trained[240] with the US Department of State adding that politicians have occasionally sponsored stories in the press.[241] Over the years, many media institutions in the country have been arbitrarily shut down by state actors without due process. Courts have also been used to institute defamation proceedings against media outlets including the Frontpage Africa Newspaper, Roots FM and Spoon Network in recent years. Additionally, there is the less discussed element of state actors feeling threatened by the media.

3. **Implementing anti-corruption measures can help ensure accountability, but if not managed carefully, they can also create an atmosphere of suspicion, which undermines trust in these institutions.** The fine line between clamping down on

[238] Butty, (2016): Two House Speakers were removed (2007 and 2016) from their position allegedly by executive influence when attempts by them to exert legislative checks against the authority of the presidency did not go down well with the sitting president. Inversely, a Senate president *pro tempore* resigned in 2009 after several attempts by members of the Senate to remove him amidst allegations that he was too subservient to the will of the presidency against the constitutional dictates of checks and balances among the branches of government. The mentioned instances created months-long legislative gridlocks delaying the passage of legislation and the performance of legislative oversight over various sectors of the executive branch of government.

[239] Laws and policies have been reformed and media practices have improved substantially. The sector has seen the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act and repeal of draconian criminal libel laws within the last ten years. According to Reporters Without Borders global press freedom ranking (2022), Liberia ranked 75/180 countries in the survey, an improvement of 23 points over the 2021 report. By 2022, the country had reported the presence of 130 radio stations, 50 newspapers, and at least 3 television stations. That is a vast increment over 20 year figures of only three independent newspapers and less than 5 independent radio stations nationwide. The Liberian media has largely tended to be a powerful voice for reporting on governance and peacebuilding issues especially on corruption, transparency, the promotion of democratic values and the need for true reconciliation through calls of the establishment of a war and economic crimes court as recommended by the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009.

[240] Media Foundation for West Africa, 2022

[241] United States Department of State, 2022

corruption and dodging allegations of “witch hunting" has been a contemporary subject within Liberian political governance since 2007 when the country’s first post-war auditor general (AG) assumed office after being appointed by then president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.[242]

4. **Implementing decentralisation and local governance, as per democratic and inclusivity standards, while ensuring that the central government maintains enough control to implement policies effectively and uniformly.**

5. Expanding the tax base to include more taxpayers and reduce evasion is often economically efficient but can be politically difficult, especially when it affects powerful interest groups or the general population.

6. Progressive tax systems aim to tax citizens according to their ability to pay, but excessively high taxes on high earners may discourage entrepreneurship and lead to capital flight, which is important in Liberia.

7. Taxing the (large) informal sector can increase revenues but might push the economically vulnerable into deeper poverty, or provide further incentives for tax evasion.

8. As Liberia seeks to attract investment and grow its economy, there is a trade-off between giving economic players the freedom to operate and establishing strong regulatory oversight to prevent abuses.

4.2. Peace and Security

1. **Freeing public resources by reducing security spending vs. having more professional and accountable security forces.** Ensuring security sector reform has been a high priority for successive Liberian governments after the end of the civil war. This effort amidst a shrinking economic space and competing obligations from other sectors led to a small, more manageable force, but also massive cuts to logistics and a moratorium on recruitment of new security forces. The resulting effect was low deployment levels across the country, high attrition rates for an already depressed sector, high levels of corruption and declining respect among the public for security forces.[243]

2. **Disbanding non-state armed groups vs. integrating them into the political settlement, the economy, and the security sector.** A country reeling from civil war will of course have to determine how to handle the vestige remnants of warring armed factions as it builds up to reforming the security sector. In Liberia’s case and with the assistance

[242] Between Morlu and the current auditor general, Garsuah, each AG has faced claims and sometimes career threatening allegations (Robert Kilby) and protests from interests groups, political parties and affected persons accusing the auditing office of carrying out targeted audits aimed at bringing powerful elites down for their own political interests. When AG Morlu opined in a Voice of America (VoA) interview in 2007 that the executive branch was “three times more corrupt than the previous transitional government,” he laid the foundation for a rocky relationship between the auditor general’s office and the executive branch of government which neither has ostensibly recovered from to date. On the one hand, in successive perception surveys in the country, Liberians have reported distrust of the integrity and transparency of the executive branch of government with perennial stamps of “corrupt” while the auditor general’s office has faced allegations of “bias,” and “targeted audits” undermining the integrity of the AG office. This has led to the AG’s office receiving less and less budgetary funding to support its anti-corruption engagements.

[243] United States Institute of Peace, n.d.

of the United Nations, the country handled this by implementing an arguably elaborate disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration process that saw ex-rebel soldiers disarmed and given some form of quick-impact skill training. Yet, outstanding questions still remain as to the full impact of the rehabilitation and reintegration process. One of such questions is how, over the period, some well known 'rebel actors' have manoeuvred to make grand appearances at high levels of state security instituions. Another question surrounds the metamorphosis of rebel factions into mainline political parties and state institutions, many of whom have strong stranglehold on the current state of politics in the country with larger implications for reconciliation and peacebuilding in the immediate future.

3. **Enforcing formal law to prevent land conflicts vs. allowing local dispute resolution mechanisms to address issues, which may be more sustainable and relevant to local contexts but not always gender- or youth-sensitive nor enforceable.** One of the post-conflict sectors undergoing major reform in Liberia is the land sector. The country's Land Rights Act (LRA) enacted in 2018 is hailed as one of the most radical land reform laws in Africa.[244] These efforts though have not abetted land conflicts in the country. Ranging from large land conflicts between community and multinational corporations to communal conflicts over land ownership, persistent conflicts around land persist. Delays in giving community title deeds to their land and initiating cadastral registration of land continue to hinder land conflict resolution in the country. Women and youth are highly disadvantaged.[245]

4. **Land reform must balance the needs of returning refugees and internally displaced persons with the push for land development for economic purposes.** Liberia's push for economic development, including agricultural expansion, mining, and forestry, often pits commercial interests against the land rights of communities and returning displaced persons.

5. **Retributive justice vs. restorative justice (healing for victims and rehabilitation for offenders).** Liberia continues to struggle with how to handle its post war peacebuilding process. The TRC in 2009 recommended a hybrid of retributive and restorative justice. On the one hand, the TRC recommended forgiveness and a clean slate for actors it deemed had been forthcoming and contrite during their testimonies before the TRC panel. On the other hand, the commission recommended accountability by lustrations for 50 political actors barring them from holding public offices in the country for 30 years and a further recommendation for establishing a war and economic crimes court for those it deemed to have borne the greatest responsibility for war and economic crimes during the civil war. Anchored between the two recommendations were suggestions for reparations through the building of memorials, providing physical and psychosocial support for victims, palava hut forums for national healing and reconciliation. The country has made efforts to implement the TRC recommendations through the formation of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), memorialised massacre sites and introduced the

[244] Landesa, 2023

[245] Although the legal framework grants women equal rights and opportunities to land, facing high economic constraints, they bear the brunt of constraints in the land tenure system ranging from access to marital and inheritance rights to land. For youths, young women face similar conditions as adult women and male youths reportedly face conditions of hindered access until they can be perceived as "adult" and can then be "trusted" with ownership of land. A retort of both demographic groups to the formal legal system can be frowned upon at the community level with allegations that each is introducing a "strange culture" and not listening to the dictates of the tradition requiring adherence to older male influenced decisions on who owns land, where and how.

palava hut forums on a lower scale. Fully implementing the TRC recommendations have proven difficult, as many of those listed for lustrations and possibly facing the war and economic crimes courts when established, continue to be high-level decision makers in the executive and legislative branches of government, which have allegedly stalled full TRC implementation.

6. **Pursuing justice for serious crimes, which can be resource-intensive and potentially destabilising, and focusing on investing in the ordinary legal system** including infrastructure for physical access to justice, which prevents future conflicts.

Chapter 3. Inclusive Economic Transformation

The chapter on inclusive economic transformation provides an in-depth examination of Liberia's economic landscape, highlighting key sectors and their potential for growth and development. The chapter begins by outlining the current status of Liberia's economy, focusing on major sectors such as agriculture, energy, and services, and their contributions to national GDP [Goal 3.1]. Through a comprehensive analysis of the economic context, the chapter identifies the main constraints and structural challenges that impede economic progress, such as infrastructure deficits, limited human capital, and an unfavourable business climate [Goal 3.2].

Additionally, the chapter explores the primary drivers and untapped opportunities that could spur economic transformation, emphasising the importance of leveraging natural resources, enhancing macroeconomic reforms, and increasing international support [Goal 3.3]. It also considers the potential trade-offs and synergies involved in prioritising different policies and investments, aiming to provide a balanced perspective on how to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Liberia.

1. Economic Context

Ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth is fundamental for addressing and overcoming Liberia's development challenges. During the past two decades, Liberia faced important economic difficulties, with factors such as external shocks, the impact of global events, and internal constraints decreasing its economic performance. However, efforts to enhance economic stability and resilience have been put in place, which, in the more recent years have improved Liberia's macroeconomic outlook.

1.1. Macroeconomic overview

GDP Tends and Sectoral Contributions

Liberia experienced a strong economic decline during the last year of the civil war. Since then, and despite fluctuations, the overall tendency has been positive thanks to greater political stability, external support, favourable conditions for key export oriented sectors and sound macroeconomic policies. Liberia experienced its greatest GDP decline in 2003, with a 31.3% reduction during the last year of its civil war (Figure 3.1a). From 2004 to 2013, the Liberian economy saw a rather fast recovery, with an average yearly growth of 8%, driven by political stability, substantial external support, increased foreign direct investment (FDI), aid, and the private sector taking the lead in the context of a robust macroeconomic framework.[246] During this period, real GDP per capita rose from approximately $200 USD in 2000 to around $500 USD in 2010, indicating significant economic improvement on a per capita basis (Figure 3.1b).

In 2014 economic advancement was interrupted due to the Ebola outbreak, a decline in the prices of iron ore and rubber and a decrease in United Nations peacekeeping forces.[247] After 2016, growth in real GDP per capita recovered, although it was slower than the growth recorded during the decade that followed the civil war. However, GDP per capita, which had peaked at around $800 in 2015, declined to about $650 by 2019. In 2019, due to deteriorating terms of trade, and with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Liberia's GDP per capita contracted by 2.5% and 3%,

[246] However, due to Liberia's elevated fertility rate, the growth in per capita GDP was more moderate, averaging 3% annually.
[247] World Bank, 2021

respectively [248]. More recently, economic growth was regained. In 2021, growth in GDP per capita was driven by significant expansions in key sectors such as rubber (40% growth), gold mining (80% growth), and cement (30% growth), resulting in a recovery to approximately $800. Based on the IMF's Article IV data, real GDP growth would be maintained, going from 3.7% in 2022 and 4.7% in 2023 to an expected 5.7% in 2024. This expectation relies on positive prospects for rubber and gold, and an expansionary fiscal policy which would compensate for the decrease in purchasing power tied to increased oil prices and the war between Russia and Ukraine.[249]

Figure 3.1a Real GDP growth rate (%) (2001-2022)

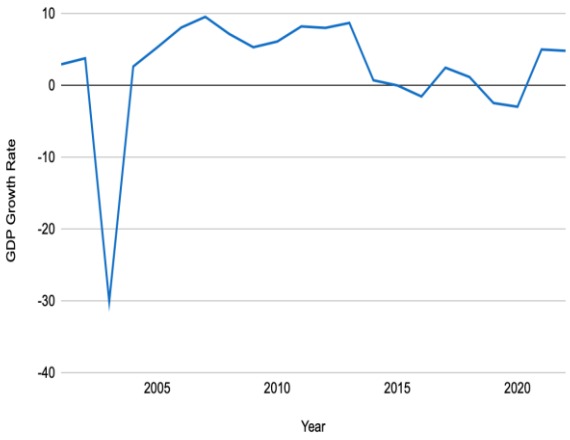
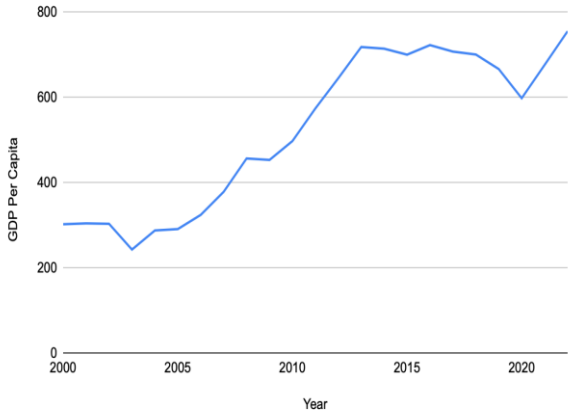


Figure 3.1b Real GDP per capita (USD) (2001-2022)



Source: World Bank

The Liberian economy is characterised by an important primary and tertiary sector and a smaller secondary sector. Concretely, agriculture and forestry, mining and the service sector are the most prominent sectors in Liberia. Liberia's economy is primarily centred around its rich natural resources and agriculture. Agriculture stands out as the mainstay of the Liberian economy, with more than 75% of the population dependent on it for their livelihood.[250] Agriculture accounts for 40% of employment and fisheries provide 65% of Liberian's protein intake.[251] The primary sector contributes significantly to the nation's GDP and offers vast opportunities for investment and growth due to the country's fertile land and favourable climate for crops like rubber, palm oil, cocoa, and coffee. According to 2017 estimates,[252] agriculture contributed to 34% of Liberia's GDP, industry to 13.8% and the service sector to 52.2%.

Liberia has encountered significant fluctuations in its most important sectors, with significant decreases in mining in 2016 and an important recovery thereafter, and significant decreases in the service sector, particularly between 2019 and 2020. However, between 2021 and 2022 all the sectors show a recovery (Figure 3.2). In 2016, a nearly 4% decline in mining led to a 1.7% decrease in real GDP, despite nearly 2% growth in agriculture and

[248] AfDB, 2021
[249] IMF, 2022a
[250] National Investment Commission, 2022
[251] IMF, 2022a
[252] Central Intelligence Agency, 2024

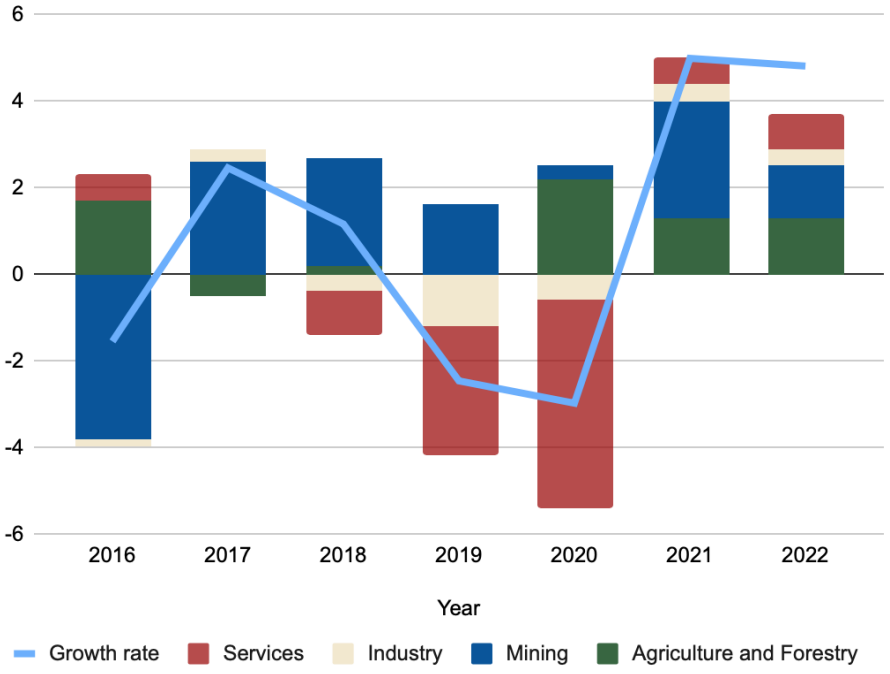
forestry and about 0.5% in the service sector. Between 2019 and 2020, decreases in the service sector of around 2.5% and around 5% led to a 2.5% and a 3% contraction in real GDP respectively. It is important to note that the recovery in GDP growth that followed 2020 has been driven by growth in all sectors, with important increases in mining, services, agriculture and forestry. The KIIs results reveal that the sharp decline in the industry and service sectors between 2019 and 2020 was due to economic instability, reduced foreign investment, political unrest, policy changes, and the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused reduced consumer demand, supply chain disruptions, and business closures.

The Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Development Programme attributed the **stagnation in the agriculture sector from 2017 to 2019 to severe climatic shocks.** During this period, Liberia experienced intense droughts and frequent flooding, which were notably more severe compared to previous years (see Climate Box 1). These extreme weather events significantly disrupted agricultural activities, leading to reduced crop yields and damaging essential infrastructure (see Climate Box 6). The persistent challenges of inadequate infrastructure including inadequate roads, limited access to modern farming technologies, and insufficient support services for farmers were exacerbated by these climatic shocks, compounding the sector's difficulties and hindering its recovery.[253,254] Without significant intervention and reform, these obstacles could lead to a prolonged period of stagnation.

These are concomitant with current research indicating that **Liberia is highly dependent on international prices of natural resources**, and the deterioration in the terms of trade of Liberia[255] and the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on these sectors. In terms of growth, in 2022, the agricultural sector saw an increase in growth to 5.9 percent, up from 3.3 percent in 2021, driven by enhanced production of rice and cassava. The industry sector also saw significant growth, with a 10.4 percent increase mainly due to a surge in gold production (mining). However, the growth rate in the service sector dipped slightly to 2.8 percent from 3.0 percent in the previous year, due to a decrease in construction services and the hospitality industry.[256]

[253] FAO, 2019
[254] UNDP, 2022b
[255] AfDB, 2021
[256] World Bank, 2023a

Figure 3.2 GDP growth and sector contributions (%) (2016-2022)



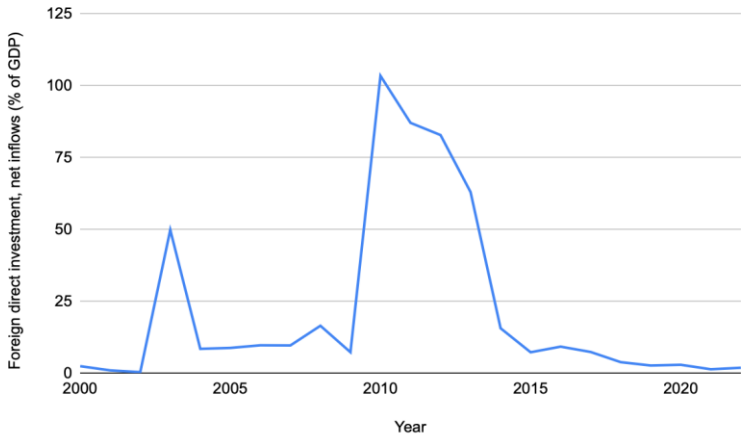
Source: IMF, 2022a

External Sector

Liberia's trade and current account deficit further indicate its vulnerability to and dependence on international prices. However, this deficit is financed through grants, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and inexpensive loans from donors. Liberia experiences an imbalance in its external sector, where the trade balance, and the current account balance, both including and excluding grants are negative. In this sense, the cost of imports, net income and transfer outflows, are greater than income from exports, net income and transfer inflows, even after accounting for foreign aid. For instance, between 2019 and 2023, estimates from the IMF Article IV inform that imports represented a low of 30.3% (2019) and a maximum of 38.1% (2021) of GDP. While in those same years, exports accounted for 17.5% (2019) and 25% (2021) of GDP.

Net grants from donors constituted 5.4% (2019) and 5% (2021) of GDP. According to the IMF, even though the current account balance is important, it is currently financed by project grants, Foreign Direct Investment Flows and inexpensive donor flows. For example, between 2012 and 2021, grants by donors have represented around 7.6% of GDP and have allowed to finance part of the current account deficit without creating debt. Similarly, FDI represented 8.3% of GDP between 2017 and 2021.

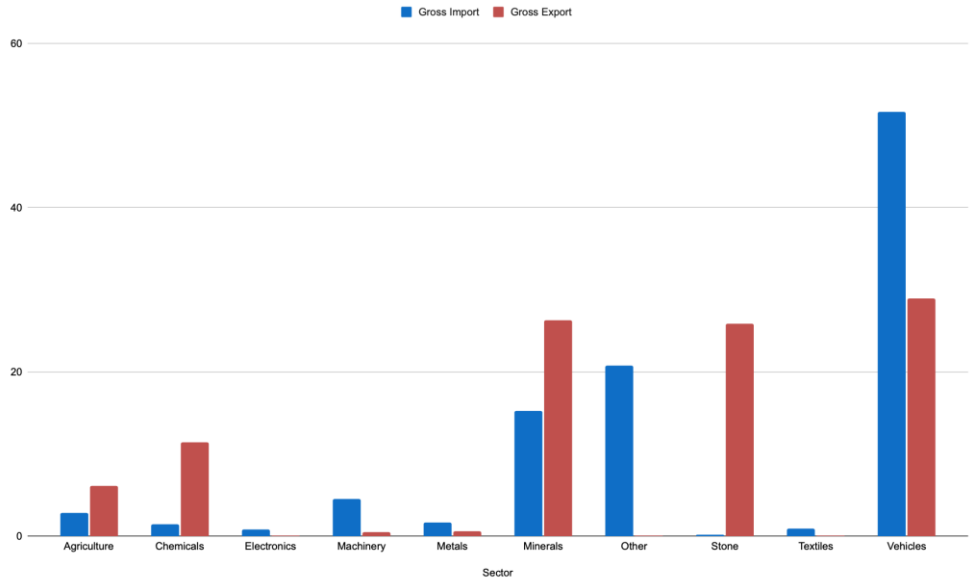
Figure 3.3. Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (% of GDP)



Source: World Bank Open Data, 2022

By sector, Liberia is a net exporter of agriculture products (rubber, cocoa, coffee, etc), chemicals, minerals and stone, while being a net importer of vehicles, machinery, metals, textiles and electronics. In this sense, Liberia tends to import more complex goods and export less complex ones, indicating a low level of economic transformation, or low level of value added in the country's external sector. In relative terms, Figure 3.4 shows that the two most important imports in Liberia are vehicles and minerals. Solving the trade deficit in Liberia will require economic diversification and improving the country's competitiveness.[257]

Figure 3.4. Imports and Exports by Sector (%) (2021)



Source: The Growth Lab at Harvard University, 2021

[257] IMF, 2022a

Public Finance

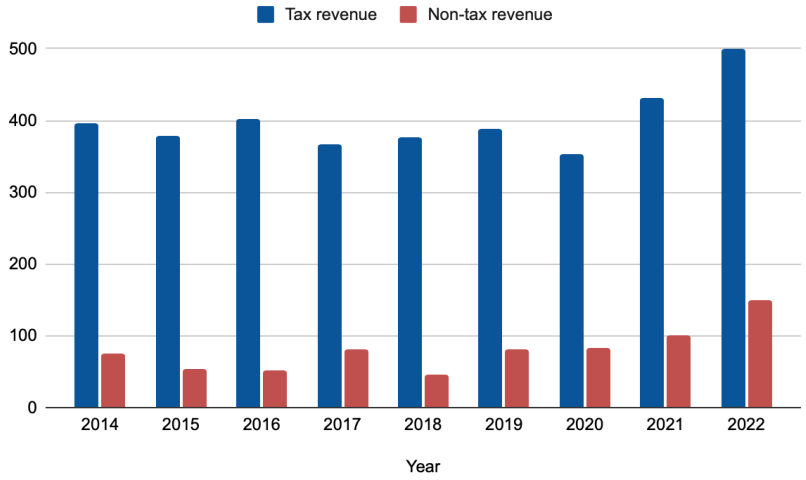
The post-war national and international efforts were humanitarian in nature with the main goal of reconstruction and rebuilding, as well as increasing human development levels back to the pre-war baseline. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a peacekeeping mission, was deployed in 2003 as the peace agreement was signed to aid with the reconstruction efforts and help maintain peace and stability in the country. As the country started to gradually recover from the devastation of the conflict, with successful disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes of the former combatants and three peaceful elections, the UNMIL ended its mandate and left the country in 2018. With this positive transition, however, humanitarian aid has been slashed significantly reducing the available financial resources and forcing the country to address the challenges of long-term sustainability, donor-dependency and socio-economic sustainable development.

Liberian government revenue has decreased as a share of GDP due to a reduction in grant funding. However, when taking into account Liberia's economic growth, government revenue has increased in absolute terms. Between 2019 and 2023, Government revenue as a share of GDP has seen a slight decrease, moving from 27.4% to 24.1% of GDP. This reduction is driven by a decrease in grants, which moved from 13.5% to 8% of GDP, while total government revenue (without grants) increased from 13.9% to 16.1% of GDP. However, it is important to consider that the total amount of government revenue is increasing in absolute terms when accounting for Liberia's Real GDP growth between these years (2019 and 2023).

The government relies mostly on tax revenue, which has increased in the past years. However, this income source is vulnerable to changes in the price of goods and commodities and also susceptible to increase with the current increase in FDI towards Liberia. Most Government income comes from tax revenue, as illustrated in Figure 3.5. Although international donor funds continue to supplement the nation's financial resources, they represent a smaller fraction of the overall fiscal pool. A majority of tax income comes from taxes on international trade, and on income, profit and capital gains taxes.[258] This means that the government revenue is particularly vulnerable to changes in international prices, which affect international trade, while the increase in FDI in the country can increase tax income, from taxes derived from the businesses related to FDI, related income, and related business growth, all of which could potentially compensate for decreases in tax revenue coming from international trade.

[258] IMF, 2022a

Figure 3.5. Tax Revenue vs Non-Tax Revenue Over the Last Ten Years



Source: IMF, 2022a

Government expenditures have decreased as a share of GDP and increased in absolute terms. Within the expenditures, the importance of current expenditures when compared to capital expenditures indicates shortages in long term investments, such as infrastructure development. Total government expenditure decreased, moving from 32.2% to 27.6% of GDP between 2019 and 2023. This trend is driven by a decrease in both current and capital expenditure from the government. Current expenditures moved from 21.4% to 19.2% of GDP, while capital expenditures moved from 10.8% to 8.4% of GDP. Similar to percentage changes in revenue, when taking into account real GDP growth, government expenditures have increased in absolute terms as well. On average, current expenditures represent close to 70% of government expenditures, and capital expenditures 30%. The IMF acknowledges that the expenditures from domestic financed expenditures remain overly focused on current expenditures. In terms of expenditures, while the IMF reports that Liberia reached targeted levels in Social Spending in 2021 and 2022, and that spending in health has increased[259], social benefits represented less than 0.5% of GDP between 2019 and 2023. In this sense, Liberia could benefit from increases in spending in benefits, given the overall needs in welfare from the population.

Since 2018, disbursements from development partners and government Public Sector Investment Plans (PSIPs) have been predominantly directed toward infrastructure and basic services, alongside energy and the environment. In contrast, areas such as agriculture, public administration, social development, security and rule of law, and industry and commerce have received a smaller portion of funding. As illustrated in Figure 3.6 below, in 2018, infrastructure and basic services took up the largest share of PSIPs with 29%, followed by energy and environment at 22%. By 2022, there has been a re-adjustment in these allocations, with Infrastructure and Basic Services receiving a slightly reduced proportion of 20%, while energy and environment have increased to 25%.

Furthermore, the government has significantly increased its investment in road infrastructure, allocating USD 20 million for the construction and rehabilitation of major highways and rural roads in 2024. This represents a substantial increase compared to the previous year, which saw an allocation of just USD 12 million. The focus on enhancing road connectivity aims to

[259] IMF, 2022a

improve access to remote areas, facilitate trade and commerce, and stimulate economic activities in underserved regions.[260]

The energy sector has also seen a notable increase in investment, with the 2024 budget allocating USD 15 million towards expanding access to electricity, compared to USD 9 million in the previous year.[261] This budget includes funding for new power generation projects, extending the national grid, and promoting renewable energy sources such as solar power. These initiatives aim to reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels, enhance energy sustainability, and provide reliable electricity to rural communities, thereby supporting Liberia's long-term development goals .

Additionally, water and sanitation infrastructure investments have been significantly increased in the 2024 budget, with an allocation of USD 10 million, up from USD 5 million in the previous year.[262] This funding is directed towards constructing new water supply systems, rehabilitating existing ones, and improving sewage systems to ensure clean and safe drinking water and better sanitation facilities. These efforts are crucial for enhancing public health and hygiene, particularly in underserved communities, and are aligned with the government's objective to improve the overall quality of life for Liberians.

2024 has seen an increase in share of the budget allocated towards education, with 14% of the national budget dedicated to this sector. The 2024 National Budget, which totals approximately $649.98 million USD, includes larger allocations for education than in the previous year (5%). This allocation covers the payment of WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination) fees and the launch of a digital training program aimed at enhancing the ICT skills of 10,000 youth, funded through start-up initiatives. Additionally, substantial expenditures are directed towards revenue-raising and debt management strategies.[263] This comparison highlights the improved commitment to education funding in 2024, demonstrating a significant increase from the previous year's allocation.

The security and rule of law sector faced cuts, with its funding being halved from 7% to 3%. The Liberian government has prioritised the development of roads, ports, and energy systems within its National Development Plan[264]. In the 2018 and 2019 fiscal years, domestically funded capital expenditures reached $135 million, with $27.8 million (16.1%) designated for road and bridge construction or rehabilitation. Additionally, $5 million (3.7%) was allocated for the development of ICT infrastructure and networks, and $4.7 million for the purchase of vehicles and transport equipment. **Similarly, public administration also saw a decrease in investment, from 7% to 3%. The agricultural sector wasn't spared, seeing a decrease from 5% to 4%, which suggests a lower priority or a shift in strategy towards this sector.**

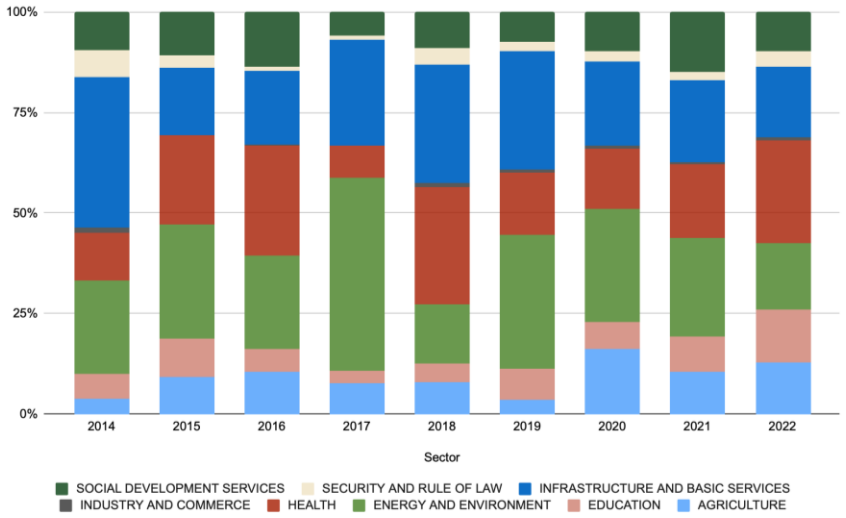
It is worth noting that the total amount of funding dedicated to all the sectors mentioned above may be decreasing. The planned disbursement of development projects found in the Liberia Project Dashboard suggests that planned disbursements for development projects decreased from more than 800 M USD in 2014/2015, to about 300M USD in 2023.[265] This finding

[260] New Dawn, 2024
[261] *Idem*
[262] Wilson, 2024
[263] MFDP, 2024
[264] Foster & Pushak, 2011
[265] MFDP, 2023c

is likely aligned with the decreasing share of grant funding from donors as a share of GDP mentioned at the beginning of this section. In this sense, Liberia may struggle to make further long term investments in some of its key development needs (infrastructure, health, agriculture, transparency, among others).

Overall, Liberia runs a budget deficit, with a negative budget balance that improved in recent years, but remains negative and important. Between 2019 and 2023, the overall balance including grants moved from -4.8% to -3.5% of GDP and the overall balance excluding grants moved from -18.3% to -11.5% of GDP. In this context, Liberia finances part of its deficit with a growing public debt, which moved from 48.5% to 55.3% of GDP between 2019 and 2023. On average during the same period, this debt is composed of public external debt (71%) and public domestic debt (29%). As grant funding continues to decrease, debt is becoming a more prominent source of Development Partners funding.[266]

Figure 3.6. Share of Disbursements, 2014-2022



Source: MFDP, 2023c

Inflation and Prices

Liberia has faced high inflation in recent years, although commendable strides have been made to reverse the sharp inflationary spiral that characterised the period between 2018 and 2020. The nation grappled with staggering year-on-year inflation rates, peaking at an alarming 24% in 2018, a slightly lower but still concerning 23% in 2019, and easing somewhat to 17% in 2020—marking the apex of inflationary pressures in recent memory. A turning point was observed in 2021 as inflation rates began to recede, dropping to an approximate 7.9%. This trend of deceleration continued steadily through the end of 2022, with inflation further contracting to 7.4%. The year 2023 saw a marginal uptick, with inflation rates hovering around 8.2%.[267] This achievement is attributed to a steady decline in domestic food prices, a combination of prudent monetary and fiscal policies, and a shortage of suitable Liberian dollar banknotes.[268] Projections

[266] MFDP, 2023c.

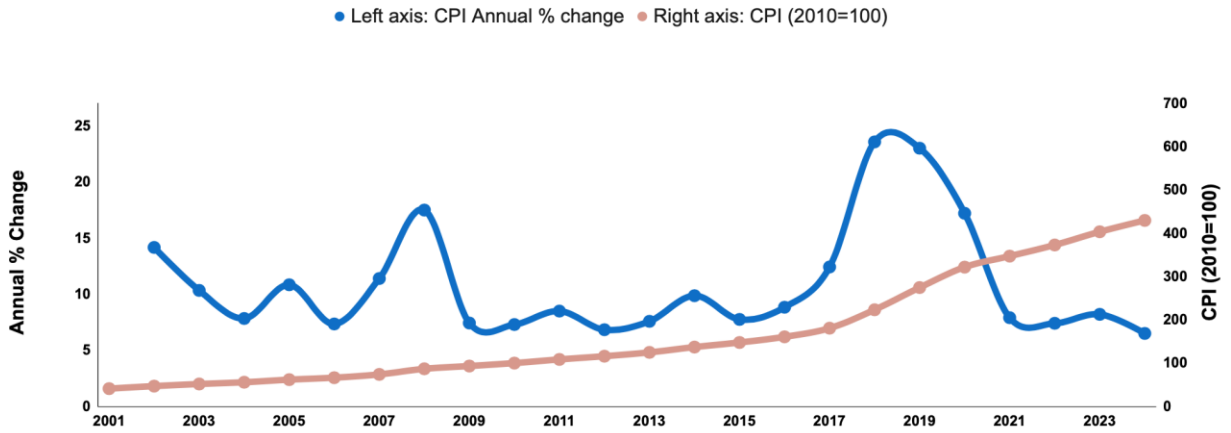
[267] World Bank, 2024; AfDB, 2023a

[268] IMF, 2022b; Interviews will aim to shed light on the link between changes in domestic food prices and the performance of the agriculture sector.

indicate a subsequent deceleration in inflation to around 6.5% in 2024, aligning with the expected easing of the surge in international prices.

High inflation and high interest rates are some of the macroeconomic difficulties harming household purchasing power and business development, both of which have a negative impact on inclusive economic growth. In order to maintain positive real interest rates, the Central Bank of Liberia intends to maintain interest rates at 20%[269]. While high inflation decreases the purchasing power of Liberians and therefore affects their livelihoods, the high interest rates used to counter this inflation make access to credit harder, hindering the potential for longer term investments. In this context, the level of non-performing loans (NPL) is also a matter of concern. In 2022, only one bank had non-performing loans undear the 10% threshold. Between 2016 and 2021, the share of NPL to total loans increased from 14.6% to 22.9%, respectively.

Figure 3.7. Consumer Price Index (2001-2018)



Source: World Bank, 2024, AfDB, 2023a.

1.2. Employment and the Informal Sector

According to the IMF, the informal sector accounts for approximately 60% of the total labour force, indicating a high level of informality that restricts tax collection and reduces funds available for social services.[270] Government spending on social services has remained relatively low, at about 4.5% of GDP, compared to an average of 6.5% with higher levels of formal employment.[271] For instance, the inability to collect adequate taxes from those currently in the informal sector means that the government has fewer resources to invest in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and social security. If the level of informality were reduced, greater tax revenues could be generated, allowing for higher investment in these essential services. **Studies indicate that formalising even a portion of the informal sector could increase tax revenues by up to 15%,** significantly boosting government capacity to fund social programs and improve overall economic stability and growth.[272]

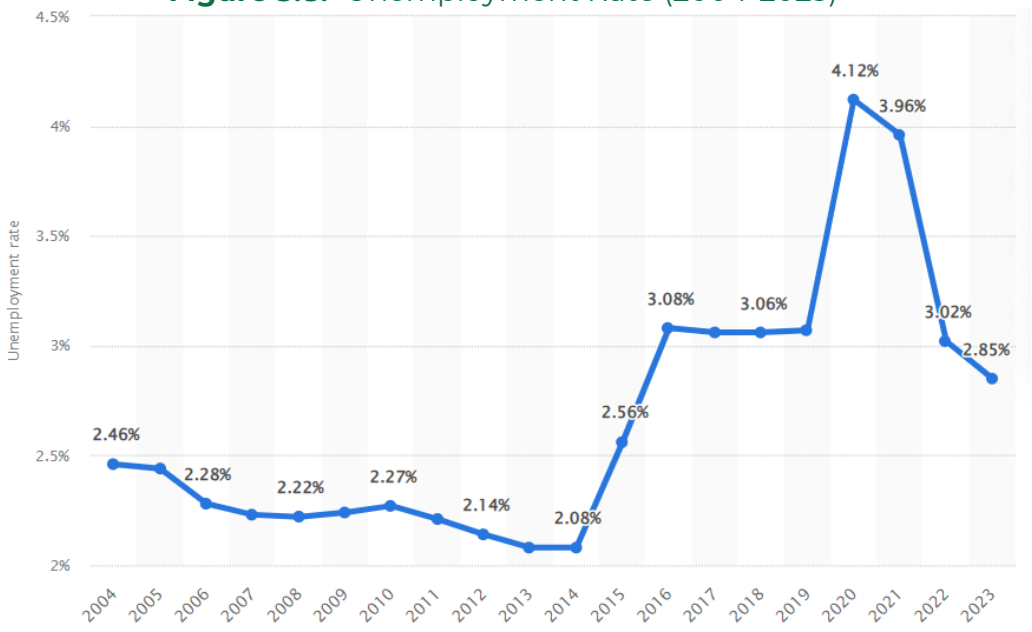
Moreover, **informal businesses** often lack access to finance, technology, and formal markets, which limits their growth potential and efficiency. This results in a predominantly low-productivity

[269] IMF, 2023
[270] IMF, 2021a
[271] IMF, 2021a
[272] IMF, 2021b

economy that struggles to compete globally and attract investment.[273] The rate of unemployment from 2004 to 2023[274] reveals a decline from 2.46% in 2004 to a low of 2.08% in 2014, suggesting a period of economic stability and growth likely fueled by post-conflict recovery and investment (Figure 3.8). This stability persisted with slight fluctuations until 2019. However, a surge in unemployment occurs in 2020, peaking at 4.12% in 2021, which can be attributed to the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent decline to 2.85% by 2023 indicates a recovery phase, possibly supported by government interventions and the resumption of economic activities, reflecting resilience in the face of global economic challenges.

The prevalence of informal employment and capital flight limits the government's revenue base and restricts public investment in social services and infrastructure, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Also, informal employment, often vulnerable and low-paying, does not provide adequate social protections.[275] The informal sector and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are crucial to Liberia's economy but are more susceptible to shocks like COVID-19 due to lower capital accumulation, savings, investments, and productivity.

Figure 3.8. Unemployment Rate (2004-2023)



Source: World Bank Open Data, 2024

Women and the Informal Economy

In the informal sector, women disproportionately experience vulnerabilities and insecurities. Several factors contribute to their prevalence in informal jobs in Liberia, including disparities in access to technology, limited access to financial services, lack of control over land

[273] APEC, 2022

[274] The low unemployment figures is attributed to factors such as high informal employment, where many individuals work in sectors not captured by formal labour statistics, the dominance of agriculture which often involves self-employment, and limitations in data coverage and accuracy in collecting labour market information, particularly in developing countries. These factors collectively result in potentially lower reported unemployment rates.

[275] UNDP, 2022d

and resources, and the predominance of men in managerial roles.[276] Moreover, the limited access to capital, land, and credit often compels women to seek self-employment in low-productivity fields like retail and trade.[277] Female ownership of MSMEs is about 30%, typically in smaller service-oriented businesses, where women often work in less secure, unpaid family roles without social protections. The pandemic has reduced MSME revenues by impacting demand and supply chains, leading to increased prices and affecting primarily the trade and industry sectors.[278]

Lower levels of educational attainment further restrict their opportunities for job advancement, reinforcing their presence in these informal, less secure roles. As discussed in Chapter 1, while completion rates for primary and lower secondary education are higher for girls than for boys, there is a significant decline in upper secondary and tertiary education completion among girls. Traditional cultural norms, early marriage, and teenage pregnancies are major contributors to the high dropout rates for girls.[279] These challenges result in limited access to quality education and vocational training, further restricting women's opportunities for gainful employment and entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the Liberia National Transfer Accounts Profile Report indicates that nearly half a million workers lack formal education.[280] In 2010, of the 1.1 million people in the labour force, fewer than 3%—approximately 24,000 males and only 6,000 females—had completed an academic degree. This disparity also underscores that women are significantly less likely to participate in formal occupations due to restricted access to higher education.[281]

Insights from KIIs suggest that low literacy levels impede women's understanding of the advantages of formal business practices, while a scarcity of job opportunities forces many into informal employment out of necessity. Furthermore, women and girls often bear the brunt of unpaid household labour, including caregiving for children, the elderly, sick family members, and individuals with disabilities. Much of this labour goes unrecognised, leading to a devaluation of women who provide care, both socially and economically. These factors create a cycle of poverty for women and exacerbate gender disparities, particularly among those in rural communities and marginalised sectors [KII].

The prevalence of informal employment among youth was also markedly higher for women, with 85.7% of young women engaged in informal work, compared to 70.5% of young men.[282] Employment rates tend to increase for women as they get older, but only slightly varies by age among men, with married women remaining twice as likely as men to be unpaid for their work (34% versus 17%).[283] For rural women working in the agriculture sector, disparities are even more highlighted, with 57% of these women not receiving compensation for their efforts, compared to 17% of women in non-agricultural work.[284] KIIs support this observation, showing

[276] KII Insights
[277] UNDP, 2022d
[278] MFDP, 2020
[279] UNESCO, 2022
[280] United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa, 2021
[281] Parvazian, Gill & Chiera, 2017
[282] ILO, 2017
[283] LISGIS, 2021
[284] LISGIS, 2021

that economic opportunities are limited and unevenly distributed, with women being the most adversely affected.

Although women play an important role in the informal sector, which employs the majority of the population, their participation is not often considered in most government policies and programs, contributing to their disproportionate representation in unregulated, lower skilled and low paying jobs. Promoting opportunities for women in formal employment can mitigate the absence of safeguards and protections, thereby reducing income disparities and risks common to the informal sector, particularly evident during crises, as was seen in the Covid-19 pandemic.[285] This driver heavily depends on the proper implementation and robust enforcement of existing laws and incentives.

1.3. Women's Role in the Economy

Liberia has taken steps to enhance women's participation in the formal economy by encouraging involvement through public budget allocations and inclusive labour rights. A notable example of this commitment is the implementation of the Small Business Empowerment Act (SBA), which mandates that 25% of government procurement be awarded to Liberian-owned businesses, with at least 5% specifically designated for women-owned enterprises.[286] Furthermore, the Decent Work Act, while not solely focused on women, establishes equal working conditions for all individuals, regardless of gender or other characteristics. This legislation encompasses provisions for equal pay, paid maternity and paternity leave, safe and healthy workplaces, and equitable job opportunities for mothers returning from maternity leave.[287] By encouraging women's engagement in productive activities through these initiatives and others, Liberia aims to enhance economic diversification, stimulate growth, and reduce income inequality in the country.

Women, Agriculture and Forestry

According to Liberia's 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), women have played a crucial role in the economic growth of the forestry and agriculture sectors.[288] Recognizing and empowering Liberian women in these industries is vital for unlocking their potential and promoting sustainable development in the country. Agriculture, which includes forestry, is a cornerstone of the Liberian economy, providing livelihoods for over 70% of the population[289] and contributing to 35% of the nation's GDP (including fishing).[290] Without the contributions of women, these figures would likely be significantly lower, as an estimated two out of five employed women work in agriculture, comprising approximately 80% of the agricultural labour force.[291]

Forestry, like agriculture, plays a significant role in household income and is crucial for the subsistence of women and their families, as well as for environmental protection. In Liberia, the majority of forest users—those who rely on wood for fuel, medicinal plants, and wild foods—are women.[292] However, women are often marginalised in forest governance and management

[285] World Bank, 2022b
[286] Government of Liberia, 2016b
[287] Government of Liberia, 2015
[288] Government of Liberia, 2008
[289] Government of Liberia, 2023
[290] World Bank Open Data, 2023
[291] LISGIS, 2021
[292] World Bank, 2020c

efforts, with Liberia's forest policy regulations only addressing their participation in a superficial manner. Given that forest resources act as a safety net, helping people avoid extreme poverty during challenging times, it is vital to prioritise their protection.[293] Without actively including women in these conservation efforts, strategies for safeguarding these resources will be inadequate.

Despite studies highlighting that women "feed the world" and are pivotal in protecting and restoring forests[294], they frequently remain invisible in development efforts. This oversight is critical, as their involvement is essential for both the country's economy and for alleviating household poverty and food insecurity. In Liberia, as in many countries, women play a fundamental role in poverty reduction from the grassroots level. They are primarily responsible for food preparation, caregiving, and marketing, significantly contributing to improved nutrition and well-being within their households.[295]

Despite often being overlooked, there are positive initiatives in Liberia that recognize the potential and importance of women in agriculture and forestry. Notable examples include the **Government of Liberia's Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project** (STAR-P)[296] and the **Rural Economic Transformation Project** (RETRAP)[297], both of which aim to enhance the productivity and commercialization of smallholder farmers while empowering women through training and access to financial services. Additionally, **Liberia's Community Forestry Law**[298] acknowledges the significance of women's participation in forest governance and management, although many references to women's roles within the document remain vague. International organisations have also taken steps to empower women in these sectors. For example, the **ITC SheTrades West Africa** project and USAID's **Feed the Future Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity** (LADA) both aim to improve conditions for smallholder farmers, including women, by increasing their income and influence in value chains for crops like cashew, shea, and cassava.

Projects specifically designed for and clearly targeted at women in agriculture and forestry could significantly enhance Liberia's economic and environmental development. However, as noted by one of the interviewees, while initiatives to boost women's economic participation exist, they often "*face challenges in accessibility, especially those in the informal sector*" [KII]. This sector is primarily composed of workers in agriculture and forestry, highlighting the need for tailored approaches that effectively reach and support these women.

Efforts must prioritise rural women, who represent 66% of the employed female population in agriculture.[299] Despite their crucial contributions, these women encounter significant barriers in accessing agricultural finance, education, training, land ownership, technology, and markets. These disparities not only impede productivity but also restrict women's participation in the sector, which has declined by 17% from 2007 to 2020.[300]

[293] Agyeman et. al., 2022
[294] FAO, 2011
[295] Ministry of Agriculture of Liberia, 2008
[296] World Bank, n.d. https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160945
[297] World Bank, n.d. https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P175263
[298] Government of Liberia, 2009
[299] LISGIS, 2021
[300] LISGIS, 2021

Persistent Barriers and Challenges

In addition to the challenges discussed above, women face several economic barriers that hinder their full and equal participation in the formal labour sector. **One major obstacle is their limited access to financial services.** In Liberia, financial services are accessed through commercial banks and mobile banking (formal services), or through community-based rotating credit associations (informal services).[301] **Only 12% of Liberian women have a bank account, compared to 21% of men.**[302] The 15.1% gap in account ownership between men and women in Liberia is larger than the 12.3% gap observed across Sub-Saharan Africa.[303] Additionally, the Central Bank of Liberia reports that 27.2% of the population cannot meet the documentation requirements to open an account, with women constituting 53.1% of this group.[304] Various supply and demand factors exacerbate the difficulty women have in accessing credit, as they are often considered higher risk. Young women, in particular, face challenges due to a lack of financial skills and literacy.[305] Moreover, women are less likely than men to own a phone, use mobile money, or access mobile internet, with these gaps being even more pronounced in rural areas.[306]

Women's frequent challenges in accessing formal financial services result in unequal participation in the financial sector and a dependence on informal and precarious community financial organisations. Non-banking microfinance institutions (MFIs), like Susu clubs and village savings loans, have become vital sources of capital for women. These local organisations gather money on a regular basis—daily, weekly, or monthly—by collecting set amounts from each member, pooling the funds, and distributing the total to one individual at a time.[307] Such rotating credit associations are crucial for marginalised groups, including women, to access substantial funds. During Liberia's civil wars, they played an essential role in providing food and have continued to be significant in the post-conflict period. Notably, women constitute 98% of the nearly 310,000 active Liberian MFI borrowers and have received over $5.5 million in loans.[308]

Another significant barrier to women's equal participation in the formal labour market and their access to financial credit is asset ownership—particularly land and housing, which financial institutions typically require as collateral. This lack of collateral restricts women's ability to secure loans for business ventures or education, ultimately limiting their employment opportunities and economic independence. Gender disparities in asset ownership are evident, with only 24% of women owning housing compared to 31% of men, regardless of whether ownership is individual or joint.[309]

Moreover, trends in asset ownership reveal further inequities: **a higher percentage of women lack proper documentation for titles and deeds or are unsure if their name appears on these documents** (3% of women versus less than 1% of men for housing-related titles and deeds).[310] However, the likelihood of having one's name on a property title or deed increases with

[301] IMF, 2016
[302] LISGIS, 2021
[303] World Bank, 2021
[304] Central Bank of Liberia, 2020
[305] LISGIS, 2021
[306] UN Women Africa, 2023
[307] Cruz, 2014
[308] Best, 2020
[309] LISGIS, 2021
[310] LISGIS, 2021

higher wealth and education levels.[311] These patterns underscore the challenges women face regarding financial literacy and access to financial services, which hinder their pursuit of entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, and full participation in the economy.

2. Main Economic Drivers

This section delves into the key drivers propelling Liberia's economic growth and development trajectory. **Liberia's abundant natural resource endowment**, including rich forests, mineral reserves, and fertile agricultural land, presents significant potential for economic expansion if managed sustainably (see Climate Box 1 and Climate Box 6). **The agriculture sector**, dominated by crops such as natural rubber, rice, cocoa, coffee, cassava, bananas, and palm oil, **along with the thriving timber and mining industries, contributes substantially to the nation's GDP and Liberian livelihoods**.

Moreover, **recent reforms aimed at achieving macroeconomic stability,** including efforts to enhance fiscal and debt sustainability and broaden the tax base, signal a proactive approach by Liberian authorities to foster economic growth. In tandem with tax policy reforms, initiatives to strengthen Public Financial Management and governance institutions underscore the government's commitment to creating a conducive environment for investment and business growth. Additionally, ongoing **support from international actors through grants and investments** has played a crucial role in implementing development projects and mitigating economic deficits, further fueling Liberia's economic progress.

2.1. Natural Resource Endowment

Liberia is endowed with rich natural resources, including forests, minerals (iron ore, diamonds, gold), and agricultural land. These resources present significant opportunities for economic development if managed sustainably. Liberia has a favourable climate for agriculture, with potential for expanding into high-value crops like cocoa, coffee, and oil palm, alongside agro-processing to add value before export. These resources play a crucial role in the country's economy and have the potential for further development and export. The country's natural resources include valuable timber species, significant biodiversity (See Climate Box 1), and mineral resources such as iron ore, gold, and diamonds.[312]

Agriculture plays a crucial role in Liberia's economy, providing the primary livelihood for over 60% of the population. It accounted for 31% of the country's GDP, with major crops being natural rubber, rice, cassava, bananas, and palm oil. Timber also represents a significant export, generating around USD 100 million annually.[313] The agriculture sector is dominated by crops such as natural rubber, rice, cassava, bananas, palm oil and timber. The latter being a major export, contributing significantly to annual revenue.[314]

- **Rubber** as a major cash crop is a key driver of Liberia’s economy, significantly contributes to Liberia's revenue, with almost 65% of export earnings generated from rubber production. Rubber employs approximately 20,000 individuals in commercial rubber farms, while around 35,000 smallholder households cultivate rubber trees. However, the

[311] LISGIS, 2021
[312] International Trade Administration, 2022
[313] FAO, 2022c
[314] FAO, 2022c

rubber sector is highly vulnerable to international prices, experiencing setbacks due to fluctuations between 2011 and 2018. Although there was a slight increase in production from 2018 to 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decrease in rubber yield in 2020, exacerbating food insecurity in the country.[315]

- **Palm oil** is another key driver, primarily consumed domestically but with increasing interest from smallholders and large investors for export. A 12.4% rise in palm oil production was recorded in 2021, attributed to increased labour mobility resulting from the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, as indicated by the Central Bank of Liberia's report.

The mining and minerals sector is another key area of economic activity, contributing substantially to national GDP. Liberia's soil is rich in mineral deposits, including iron ore, diamonds, and gold, which present a considerable opportunity for further exploration and value addition.

➔ Beyond exporting raw materials, Liberia could develop its mineral processing capabilities for products like iron ore, diamonds, and gold, creating more jobs and increasing the value of exports. Diversifying beyond extractives is essential to mitigate volatility and enhance sustainability. Implementing sustainable management and conservation practices can safeguard natural resources for future generations while supporting economic growth.

2.2. Enabling Macroeconomic Stability

Over recent years, Liberian authorities have concentrated their efforts on enhancing fiscal and debt sustainability. This focus has yielded tangible results, as evidenced by the contraction of the fiscal deficit (excluding grants or donor-funded projects) from 2.2% of GDP in 2020 to 0.9% in 2021, according to the International Monetary Fund.[316] The marked improvement in Liberia's primary fiscal deficit can be attributed to a series of strategic fiscal reforms. These include the implementation of a fuel excise tax, modifications to the personal income tax structure, improved border tax collection mechanisms in response to robust import activity, and comprehensive revenue administration reforms. These measures have collectively contributed to the bolstering of Liberia's fiscal health.

The Liberian government is also taking proactive steps to augment revenue mobilisation by broadening the tax base in the coming years. For instance, the Liberian government amended the Revenue Code, particularly with the Excise Tax Law which shifted from 35% to 45%, increasing tariffs on items such as alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.[317] According to the IMFs Article IV, this strategic move includes transitioning from general sales taxes to a more comprehensive value-added tax system and rationalising tax exemptions. Efforts also entail scaling back the investment tax incentive, halving the number of qualifying sectors from eighteen to nine, and shortening the validity period from five to three years.

[315] AfDB, 2023a
[316] IMF, 2023
[317] Sieh, 2019

A pivotal part of this revenue enhancement strategy is the shift from tax exemptions to tax rebate systems, **especially concerning petroleum taxes**. This reform is anticipated to mandate that all government contracts incorporate taxes, thereby improving the government's fiscal oversight capabilities. Additionally, the possibility for online tax filing and payment is available, with 8,544 taxpayers registered, 14,843 tax returns filed, and US$201 million paid through the system by April 2023.[318] Finally, the strategies on Domestic Revenue Mobilisation aimed to increase available tax revenue, among other strategies, and to compensate for decreasing grant funding by addressing issues related to informality, corruption, capital flight and low human and institutional capacity.[319]

In addition to tax policy reforms, there is a focus on fortifying Public Financial Management. Notable progress is being made on operationalizing the Treasury Single Account (TSA), which will consolidate government resources by transferring the commercial bank account balances of Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions (MACs) to the Central Bank.[320] To reinforce regional fiscal decentralisation, approximately 45 accounts are exempted from the consolidation to enable them to cater to the unique fiscal needs of regions where the Central Bank's presence is minimal.[321]

Monetary policy on the other hand is progressing despite being faced with other challenges. The Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) has adhered to judicious macroeconomic policies.[322] These policies are aligned with the government objectives aimed at maintaining stability, securing favourable international reserves, and ensuring the sustainability of the national debt, which as mentioned before, is high, but is currently financed by non-expensive loans, grants and FDI.[323] The CBL retained its monetary policy rate at 15% (although the IMF reports a 20% rate since August 2021, IMF 2022) while upholding the Liberian dollar and US dollar reserve requirement ratios for banks at 25% and 10%, respectively.[324] Generally, the financial sector in Liberia has demonstrated notable stability, evident in its robust capital adequacy ratio[325], which stood at 34.03% as of September 2022, surpassing the targeted 10%. Despite this strength, there are concerns regarding non-performing loans, with a ratio of 23.43%, exceeding the established 10% target. These factors underscore the need for continued vigilance and strategic measures to ensure the overall health and resilience of the financial system.

Liberia's governance reform context has been progressing, primarily focusing on enhancing the transparency and efficiency of its institutions. As mentioned in the Governance section, these reforms include the legislative package to strengthen governance institutions, involving amendments to the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission Act (LACC), the Code of Conduct, and the Whistleblower and Witness Protection Act.[326] A notable improvement under these amendments is the optimization of the integrity and impartiality in the appointment process of Commissioners for the LACC, which is already in effect. This revised process marks

[318] MFDP, 2023f
[319] LRA, 2020
[320] IFRS, 2021
[321] IFRS, 2021
[322] IMF, 2022a
[323] IMF, 2022a
[324] Daily Observer, 2023
[325] Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), also known as Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio (CRAR), is a measure used to assess the stability and health of a financial institution.
[326] IMF, 2022a

a significant step towards ensuring fair and unbiased governance. Moreover, efforts are underway to enhance the transparency of government operations, particularly in improving the quality and timeliness of the government's audited annual financial statements. The General Auditing Commission's FY2024 audit report revealed irregularities in GoL's financial management, including unauthorised borrowing of USD 50.2 million from the CBL for payroll, and an additional $32.85 million for salary payments and bank obligations, both lacking legislative ratification. These violations of the Constitution and CBL Act, with repayment scheduled from 2029 to 2044, underscore a significant departure from legal financial protocols.[327] These measures are designed to enforce compliance and address any deficiencies in financial governance.

To further improve the business climate, the government is focusing on enhancing the one-stop shop by digitising and decentralising its operations.[328] This initiative involves aligning the business registration processes across the Liberia Revenue Authority, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, thereby streamlining business operations and reducing bureaucratic barriers. The government is also focusing on securing a reliable supply of electricity for courts, including commercial, with the goal of increasing judicial efficiency. Finally, measures are being planned to reduce the number of checkpoints used for cross border trade. All of these measures are meant to support improving the business environment in Liberia.

2.3. Ongoing Support from International Actors

Liberia has benefited from grants and investments from international actors, which have allowed the country to start and progress on development projects for the country, while mitigating the deficits in the current account balance and the government budget balance. In this section it is noted that despite challenges in the business environment and decreasing grants in recent years, Liberia has relationships with several development partners that have committed to continue to support and develop projects in the country. Prominent among Liberia's development allies are global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the European Union (EU), among others. Furthermore, bilateral relationships with nations like the United States—primarily through aid from agencies like USAID—and other countries including China, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, have played critical roles in financing development initiatives within Liberia. In total, Liberia counts with around 376 ongoing development projects, with 31 partners, 132 implementing partners and totaling 3 billion USD in disbursements between 2018 and 2023.[329] Even if funding seems to be shifting away from grants and towards loans, the work with development partners is key to promote human capital development, infrastructure development, economic development, poverty reduction and other key development goals for the country. In this sense, development partners support is a key lever for capacity strengthening, by bringing technical support to develop skills in the country. The strengthening of Liberia's infrastructure development is without a doubt one of the main priorities to enhance its economic transformation, and development partners can mediate to find the best bids to develop the next stages of Liberia's infrastructure. Overall, the role of development partners is fundamental to facilitate Liberia's investments on its priorities while the country strengthens its domestic revenue mobilisation and its export oriented capacities to further decrease its reliance on grants and loans.

[327] General Auditing Commission, 2024
[328] Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2023
[329] MFDP, 2023d

3. Challenges for an Inclusive Economic Transformation

This section explores the constraints that hinder the nation's economic growth and development trajectory. Liberia, despite its rich resource endowment including rivers, minerals like iron ore, rubber, gold, and timber, as well as substantial arable land and a climate favourable for agriculture, continues to face significant deficits including poor infrastructural development, limited human capital development, difficult business climate, low productivity and informal employment, and challenges in monetary policy and trade related to the country's dependence on the external sector. These limitations prevent Liberia from leveraging its natural wealth to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, which are critical for enhancing quality of life for its citizens.[330] Addressing these constraints requires concerted efforts from both the Liberian government and international partners. Priorities should include enhancing the financial sector, improving business regulations and their enforcement, investing in infrastructure, formalising the economy, and developing a coherent trade and monetary policy framework. These efforts should aim to create a more diversified, competitive, and inclusive economy, reducing vulnerability to external shocks and laying the foundation for sustainable development.

3.1. Infrastructure Development

The Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development prioritizes infrastructural development as a crucial element of its national strategy, with a particular focus on building roads and other essential infrastructure to drive economic growth, support social investments in underdeveloped areas, and enhance overall national productivity and access to basic services. However, despite increases in investment for infrastructure projects, such as roads (mentioned in the context section), progress in infrastructure development has been inadequate, underscoring the ongoing challenges in fully achieving these developmental goals[331] (see Chapter 1; Climate Box 7). This is unlike the ARREST agenda, where the government has significantly increased investment in road infrastructure. For 2024, USD 20 million has been allocated for constructing and rehabilitating major highways and rural roads, a notable rise from the previous year's USD 12 million. This substantial investment aims to improve road connectivity, facilitate trade and commerce, and stimulate economic activities in underserved regions. **The lack of robust infrastructure -spanning transportation, electricity, and digital networks- severely limits economic activities and hampers the country's integration into regional and global markets.** Liberia's infrastructure, particularly in transportation (roads and ports), is underdeveloped. Weak road infrastructure impedes access to markets, while port inefficiencies complicate import and export activities. Inadequate infrastructure increases operational costs, limits economic integration, and constraints access to global markets, significantly impacting trade and economic growth. **Issues** including poor institutional arrangements, operational inefficiencies, delayed National Road Funds delivery, and lack of continuity in government policies underscore the need for restructuring the sector into separate ministries for roads and for water and sanitation, holding quarterly coordination meetings, ensuring the timely delivery of road funds, and robustly implementing national laws and policies on infrastructure development.[332]

Infrastructure development, particularly in roads and ports, is also identified as crucial for supporting equitable growth across various economic sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Enhancing transportation infrastructure is vital for connecting

[330] World Bank, 2018
[331] Government of Liberia, 2023; Marie S. [Insights], 2021
[332] MFDP, 2023e

rural areas, reducing production and distribution costs, and improving access to markets and basic services. With abundant natural resources like sunlight and rivers, Liberia can invest in solar and hydroelectric power generation, reducing dependency on imported fuels and attracting industries seeking sustainable energy sources. Power generation and distribution improvements, including expanded electricity grids and increased access to renewable energy, are essential for boosting the competitiveness of manufacturing and services sectors. These initiatives can directly impact poverty reduction and sustainable development indicators positively.[333]

Limited internet connectivity poses considerable challenges to service delivery, hampers the implementation of impactful interventions, and creates numerous obstacles to efficient input management. Despite growth, internet access remains scarce in Liberia, with only 32% of the population having access to the internet in 2021.[334] The scarcity of internet connectivity in schools, often reliant on external organisations for access, complicates sustainability. Moreover, the availability of computers and digital devices in public schools is minimal, with no dedicated ICT budget or government funding for ICT usage in education, leading to a focus on more fundamental needs over investment in computer equipment. In this sense, the development of digital solutions for the country's development is untapped due to the lack of the necessary infrastructure to implement it and the human capital to utilise it.

The government has expressed intentions to invest in infrastructure, however there is a strong need to increase investments in this area and to dedicate funding to maintain the existing infrastructure. The efforts to improve Liberia's infrastructure were reflected in development plans and investment plans, as mentioned earlier in this section. Similarly, international projects aimed at the rehabilitation of infrastructure, highlight the commitment to rebuilding and modernising the nation's foundational systems from donors. The government of Liberia has also been actively encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), highlighting the importance of FDI in achieving its economic development goals. However, according to interviews, there is an urgent need to allocate funding for infrastructure development and also for maintenance of infrastructure, given that several infrastructure projects are damaged due to insufficient funds for maintenance, and the fact that grant funding dedicated to infrastructure mostly focuses on delivering the infrastructure, but not maintaining it.

3.2. Human Capital and Job Creation

The revitalization and sustainability of Liberia's economy crucially depend on leveraging and enhancing human capabilities. Unfortunately, a review of Liberia's human capital reveals significant deficiencies across various professional sectors (see Chapter 1). The development of core competencies and the strategic implementation of essential capabilities are vital for the country's economic revival. These elements are fundamental for selecting appropriate industrial factors, engaging in competitive markets, and establishing strategic market positions. For Liberia to diversify its economy and gain a sustainable competitive edge, it is imperative to cultivate and utilise necessary core competencies and institutional capabilities.[335]

However, Liberia's workforce is predominantly composed of individuals lacking substantial skills and falls short of global competitive standards in experience and competence across professions like medicine, economics, agriculture, engineering, and education, among

[333] McIntosh, 2020
[334] World Bank, 2024
[335] McIntosh, 2020

others, with women being disproportionately employed in informal, lower skilled and low paying jobs.[336] This skill gap poses a significant challenge to lifting individuals out of poverty and contributing meaningfully to the national economy's transformation.

Unemployment and informality pose considerable challenges, with a large portion of the labour force engaged in low-productivity jobs and informal employment, undermining social security systems and limiting the potential for economic advancement. Workers in the informal sector typically do not have access to benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and unemployment support**.** This leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and lifecycle-related risks, perpetuating poverty and economic instability. The lack of contributions to social security systems from informal workers means that these systems are underfunded, reducing their effectiveness and reach.

Liberia faces low productivity with low returns on labour and capital investments, creating barriers to growth in its key sectors. This decreasing productivity is particularly strong in times of external shocks due to Liberia's vulnerability to international prices, high imports and low exports. **The service sector,** increasingly predominant as the Liberian economy shifts towards the tertiary sector, is characterised by low labour productivity. Despite employing a significant number of individuals, the service sector struggles with lower returns due to a lack of skills and technological advancements. Similarly, **the non-service sector**, encompassing primary and secondary industries, experiences low returns on capital investments.[337] In **agriculture**, productivity issues stem from inadequate technologies, a shortage of productive seeds, and insufficient climate-smart agricultural practices. The primary sector also faces challenges such as insecure land tenure, input scarcity, and limited use of modern cultivation methods, resulting in low productivity. This sector is largely composed of subsistence farming, with minimal engagement in cash crop cultivation using contemporary techniques.[338]

Returns to capital investments in the industry are also low, which disincentivize further investments. In the last two decades, Total Factor Productivity's (TFP)[339] has been volatile and declining on average, which underscore low levels of efficiency, technological adoption, and the adverse effects of external shocks and conflict on growth, such as global commodity price fluctuations and pandemics like COVID-19.

To compete internationally and against imports, Liberian firms require workers with advanced skills, even in traditional sectors like agriculture, where technology adoption can significantly boost productivity. Embracing technology and innovation is pivotal for enhancing health care outcomes and productivity across various sectors. Importantly, innovation does not necessarily mean high-tech solutions; often, significant impacts are achievable with cost-effective, simple technologies. Fostering **entrepreneurship and innovation** can drive job creation and economic diversification, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A

[336] Government of Liberia, 2018

[337] AfDB, 2023a

[338] MFDP, 2023e

[339] Total Factor Productivity (TFP) is a measure of the efficiency with which all inputs (labour, capital, land, etc.) are utilised in the production process to generate output. It captures the effects of technological advances, efficiency improvements, and innovation that are not directly attributable to input quantities. TFP is indicative of an economy's overall productivity and technological progress.

survey among SMEs highlighted the demand for basic to advanced ICT/digital skills among future employees.

It is also critical to invest in improving **physical infrastructure** as poor connectivity impacts job creation and the development of necessary skills. Upgrading and extending transportation networks, including roads, will connect remote farmers to national and regional markets, improve access to better inputs, encourage the transfer of technology, and support the delivery of research and extension services.[340]

Present levels of technology, inputs, infrastructure, and skills—especially from a gender perspective—provide limited opportunities for increasing output. Without the right human capital investments, the potential of Liberia's youthful population to drive economic growth will remain untapped.

3.3. Poor Business Climate

In terms of the business climate, Liberia continues to face several challenges that inhibit its economic potential, despite ongoing efforts to foster improvements (see Chapter 2).[341] The country grapples with regulatory and bureaucratic impediments that slow business operations and deter investment. Access to finance remains a critical hurdle for many entrepreneurs, with limited options for affordable credit. Infrastructure deficits, particularly in energy and transport, further complicate the business environment, impacting operational costs and efficiency. Despite the government's openness to foreign investment, the country's capital market remains severely underdeveloped, with limited credit and investment options for private investors. The absence of a domestic stock market and an effective system to encourage portfolio investments further restricts capital market activities.

While the commitment to non-discriminatory foreign exchange auctions signals progress, chronic liquidity shortages, particularly in Liberian dollars, have eroded confidence in the banking system. Although the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) oversees the financial sector, weaknesses persist, including high rates of non-performing loans, low profitability, periodic cash shortages, and inadequate policing of financial crimes. Women face severe limitations in accessing finance. Before COVID-19, women accessed a mere 6% of commercial bank credit.[342] Because banks often ask for collateral such as real-estate or land in order to provide loans, women’s difficulty in accessing credit can also be attributed to cultural patriarchal norms that keep them from owning such assets.[343]

The challenges in land tenure in Liberia pose significant obstacles for the business environment, impacting both local and foreign investors.[344] While Liberian law protects property rights, weak enforcement mechanisms undermine the security of land tenure arrangements. Restrictions on land ownership further complicate matters, as only Liberians can own land outright, with limited exceptions for certain institutions. Non-resident investors can only

[340] World Bank, CDC n.d.
[341] United States Department of State, 2023.
[342] MFDP, 2020
[343] MacQuarrie, et al., 2022
[344] United States Department of State, 2023.

acquire land through leases, subject to fixed terms and lacking official waiver mechanisms for foreign ownership limitations. The Liberia Land Authority (LLA) serves as a central entity for land-related matters but faces constraints in systemic enforcement, resulting in low rates of land registration and conflicting ownership records. Despite efforts such as the Land Rights Act enacted in 2018 to address historical land disputes, land tenure issues persist, leading to costly and complex land dispute issues for investors. As public awareness of land rights legislation grows, there is a need for enhanced clarity and enforcement mechanisms to mitigate risks and improve the investment climate in Liberia.

Liberia faces significant challenges in protecting intellectual property rights (IPR)[345], which adversely affects the business environment. The legal and regulatory framework for IPR enforcement lacks enforcement. The Liberia Intellectual Property Office (LIPO), responsible for overseeing IPR matters, operates with limited technical and financial resources, hindering its ability to address infringements effectively. Furthermore, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights[346] highlight that foreign investment facilitation often takes precedence over responsible business conduct, neglecting the needs and rights of local communities. Weak implementation of legal reforms, further compounds these challenges. The experts also noted limited employment opportunities, dominance of a few multinational corporations, poor labour conditions, and pervasive gender-based violence.

Challenges to the business climate in the country include a poor infrastructure for electricity which is both unreliable and insufficient to meet the country's energy needs. The cost is prohibitive for businesses with medium voltage rates at 0.209$/kWh + 55.00$/Month giving the country one of the most expensive in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to the cost of energy supply from the national grid, unreliable power supply forces businesses to operate their own generators, an additional expense they could do without the national grid being reliable. Moreover, with Liberia being among the lowest performers on the attainment of education, the pool of nationals with high level of technical and managerial skills for the 21st century is a factor constraining business to hire expensive expats from abroad to provide much needed services.

Corruption and misgovernance continue to impede growth, investment, and job creation.[347] Pervasive government corruption and low public trust in the banking sector further constrain investment and development efforts. Liberia's regulatory environment suffers from inconsistent enforcement of international financial reporting standards (IFRS) and national laws. While companies are mandated to adhere to IFRS, the lack of systematic oversight and enforcement mechanisms results in uneven application by authorities. Moreover, transparency in accounting, legal, and regulatory procedures remains limited, hindering investor confidence and obscuring distinctions between high and low-quality investments. The absence of requirements for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) disclosure further complicates transparency efforts. It has been found that in Liberia, the government's actions often discourage investors, with reports indicating difficulty in meeting with officials without offering bribes. This context hinders Foreign Direct Investment, which is an important lever for advancing the changes that Liberia needs in all of its sectors, as well as for formal job creation and subsequent growth.

[345] United States Department of State, 2023.
[346] OHCHR, 2022
[347] United States Department of State, 2023.

3.4. Monetary Policy and Trade

Liberia faces challenges in its monetary policy framework. These issues include excessive dollarization, high inflation and high interest rates mentioned above, and difficulties in the management of foreign exchange and remittances[348]. Excessive dollarization hinders the Central Bank's capacity to control inflation through monetary policies. As a result, the main mechanism used by the bank has been the use of high interest rates.

One of the key priorities for the Central Bank would be to gain monetary autonomy, which is currently affected due to the excessive dollarization in Liberia. Furthermore, increasing monetary autonomy would also facilitate the accumulation of reserves and would bring revenue in the form of seigniorage.[349] With regards to foreign exchange, while foreign investors are permitted to convert, transfer, and repatriate funds associated with investments, the country's monetary system operates under a floating exchange rate regime, leading to currency exchange rate fluctuations based on market dynamics.

Although Liberia allows 100 percent repatriation of funds and does not impose currency exchange restrictions, the absence of currency exchange limitations does not alleviate concerns regarding exchange rate volatility and its potential impact on investment returns. Additionally, while remittance policies facilitate the inflow of funds through various channels such as electronic fund transfers and specialised remittance institutions, the lack of announced plans to change investment remittance policies may raise uncertainties for investors regarding future access to foreign exchange for investment purposes.

The essence of the argument for a foreign exchange constraint in developing countries is tied to their growth process, which relies heavily on importing technologies, services, and inputs necessary for modernising production that cannot yet be domestically produced. The import dependency in Liberia, which is present in other developing countries, is related to the low availability of goods developed in the country for upgrading production capabilities. Developing countries must then navigate a critical reliance on foreign exchange to purchase necessary imports, contrasting with advanced economies that can often rely on domestically-produced technologies and inputs.[350] This reliance on imports to foster economic development and modernise production creates a higher and more inelastic demand for imports. However, the ability to generate the needed foreign exchange through exports is often constrained by various factors, including government policies fixing exchange rates above market-clearing rates or rigidities in the export sector that prevent it from responding effectively to exchange rate signals. This scenario, where there's a significant demand for foreign exchange coupled with a limited supply response from the export sector, leads to what is described as a "foreign exchange constraint" on growth. The strategic utilisation of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the export sector is highlighted as a means to circumvent this constraint. By importing management and technology from international firms and integrating local firms into these firms' supply chains, countries can foster significant growth in exports, foreign exchange generation, employment, and production capabilities.

Liberia's dependence on imports makes it vulnerable to external shocks such as Ebola, COVID-19, as global commodity price fluctuations have posed significant challenges to

[348] United States Department of State, 2023.

[349] IMF, 2022a

[350] Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, 2023

the trade balance. [351] Liberia has grappled with trade disruptions and soaring import costs as the conflict reshapes global trade, exacerbates supply chain issues, and inflates the price of transporting essential goods. Following the Ebola outbreak, Liberia faced even greater inflationary pressures, exacerbating economic instability and contributing to an expanding fiscal deficit. In response, the Liberian Government enacted a wide range of fiscal measures to mitigate these pressures including reductions in both current and capital expenditures, efforts to enhance domestic revenue collection, and a deferral in the repayment of Liberian-dollar-denominated Treasury bonds. Currently, the government is maintaining fiscal discipline by avoiding the introduction of fuel subsidies and limiting rice subsidies, aiming to temper the rising costs of shipping and imports.[352] However, the economy is still vulnerable to shocks in commodity prices.

Another significant hurdle is the limited possibilities for domestic revenue mobilisation (DRM), which is crucial for funding development projects and public services. While progress was reported in previous sections, it is still crucial to increase domestic revenue to compensate for the deficit in balances and increasing loans. This challenge is compounded by the pressing need for comprehensive tax reforms to enhance efficiency, fairness, and revenue generation. It is crucial for funding social services and infrastructure to foster growth and reduce poverty in developing nations. It represents a significant, yet underutilised, source of finance for national development agendas. Liberia, having endured civil wars and considered a fragile state, has seen fluctuations in its domestic savings and reliance on foreign aid for recovery and development.

4. Potential Conflicts and Trade-Offs

Inclusive and sustainable development comes with inherent conflicts. By recognizing and addressing these trade-offs, policymakers can better navigate the complex landscape of economic transformation, balancing immediate needs with long-term sustainability and inclusivity.

4.1. Diversification vs. Human Capital Constraints: Diversification is essential for reducing Liberia's reliance on traditional sectors like mining and agriculture. Services sector offers opportunities for inclusive economic growth given its potential for more qualified employment, particularly for the youth. In Liberia, significant investment opportunities exist in various service sectors such as renewable energy, port management, housing, logistics, waste management, software development, call centres and tourism[353] (see Box 3).

However, human capital constraints, characterised by low school enrollment and a lack of skilled labour, slow progress towards diversification. Investments in education and vocational training are critical but require time and resources, potentially delaying immediate economic benefits and requiring focus on specific skills prior to a diversification strategy led with national human capital.

[351] ECVP, 2023
[352] Frontpage Africa, 2023
[353] International Trade Administration, 2022

Box 3. Tourism

Unlocking Liberia's tourism potential has been identified as a significant opportunity for diversification. The country has made considerable progress in tapping into the tourism sector, which is recognized for its potential to stimulate economic growth and create jobs, contributing to a more diversified and resilient economy. Tourism is identified as the fourth-largest export category globally, significantly contributing to the world's economy. The sector is labour-intensive, fosters SME growth, and is expected to continue expanding, with international tourist arrivals projected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. There has been a shift towards emerging economies as tourism destinations, with their market share expected to surpass that of advanced economies in the future. This shift represents an opportunity for Liberia to position itself as a desirable destination.[354]

Tourism is highlighted as a major source of employment, especially for women and youth, and as a driver of socioeconomic development through its spillover effects on related sectors. Acknowledging Liberia's transition and progress post-conflict, tourism is a priority sector for driving economic diversification and development. The establishment of a Liberian national tourism authority and efforts to incorporate tourism into key policy instruments are among the planned initiatives to stimulate the sector's growth. While recognizing the challenges Liberia faces in reviving its tourism industry, lessons from other post-conflict destinations that have successfully rebranded and revitalised their tourism sectors are models for Liberia. The aim is to enable the exploration of new niches and the adoption of more visionary approaches to tourism development in the future.[355]

On the demand side, the increasing interest in culture, particularly as a means of forging identity and standing out in a globalised world, is driven by a confluence of factors. There's a notable rise in cultural capital, attributed to elevated levels of education. Developed regions are experiencing demographic shifts towards ageing populations. Furthermore, there's a move towards postmodern consumption styles that prioritise personal development over material gain. People are increasingly seeking direct experiences, emphasising the importance of intangible cultural aspects such as images and atmospheres. Additionally, improved mobility has facilitated easier access to diverse cultures, further contributing to this trend.[356]

The success of ecotourism in Africa is largely dependent on the quality of wildlife experiences offered, with destinations rich in diverse animal species and unique natural environments being particularly attractive. Enhancing this appeal are cultural activities, such as local crafts or canoeing, and the knowledge and safety provided by local guides. Flexibility in travel and subjective comfort preferences also play key roles. African countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Namibia are notable for their ecotourism investments, benefitting conservation efforts and local communities through initiatives like community-built ecolodges. Additionally, Africa's extensive coastline is becoming a hub for surf tourism, with countries in West Africa gaining popularity for their surfing potential. This growth in surf tourism not only diversifies coastal economies but also promotes sustainable practices, with the sport of surfing drawing visitors who prioritise environmental conservation, thereby supporting both the economy and the ecosystem.[357]

However, on the supply side Liberia faces important challenges to unlock this potential. There is an imperative requirement to accelerate the development of products within the tourism sector. The array of tourism products currently available to consumers, irrespective of the niche, is deficient in robustness, resulting in challenges for tourism operators to devise offerings that are comprehensible and engaging for tourists. The market exhibits a pronounced scarcity of organised tourism experiences, including but not limited to guided tours initiated by hotels or tour operators, as well as offerings that facilitate easy exploration of urban, coastal, and wildlife environments. Consequently, it is essential for operators to not only formulate but also rigorously assess these products within the marketplace, with a view towards sustaining and amplifying those that demonstrate potential. High operational costs related to electricity and fuel significantly burden sector operators. The near-total destruction of the country's energy and safe water supply capacity during the civil war has left basic infrastructure severely lacking, posing a considerable obstacle for tourism operators, compounded by low investment in these sectors. Electricity availability and reliability, especially in rural areas, are inadequate, forcing operators to incur substantial expenses to provide power throughout the day using privately owned diesel generators. Furthermore,

the development of skills presents a significant challenge that demands immediate attention and support. The country hosts only two hospitality training institutes, both of which face considerable difficulties in maintaining their operations. Major universities lack a focused approach towards tourism education. Currently, skill development in the hospitality sector is addressed sporadically, with some hotels offering on-the-job training programs based on immediate needs.[358]

The transportation infrastructure connecting Monrovia with other regions is notably inadequate, necessitating consideration of alternative transportation methods like seaplane or ferry boat services, alongside enhancements to road infrastructure. Currently, five international airlines operate flights to Liberia, albeit not on a daily schedule. Despite some airlines having suspended or cancelled their services to Roberts International Airport, there has been a gradual resurgence in flight frequency since Liberia was declared free of Ebola. Currently, five international airlines operate flights to Liberia, albeit not on a daily schedule. Despite some airlines having suspended or cancelled their services to Roberts International Airport, there has been a gradual resurgence in flight frequency since Liberia was declared free of Ebola. Direct flights from major European Union markets to Monrovia are absent, with the majority of flights being diverted through Freetown. The overall frequency of flights to Liberia, including those connecting within Africa, remains notably low. This situation stems largely from the significant reduction in commercial flights following the 2014 Ebola outbreak, with recovery efforts slowly making headway towards normalcy. Moreover, the infrastructure at airports designated for domestic flights within Liberia is lacking. Enhancements in this area have the potential to compensate for the challenges presented by substandard road conditions. While not always officially regulated, various travel services are available within the country. These include car rentals, motorcycle transport services, as well as the rental of boats for sea or lake travel, and canoes.[359]

Regarding the preferences of tourists, security and health infrastructure are paramount. The majority of international tourists consider these factors crucial when choosing a destination. Unfortunately, Liberia is perceived to have poor performance in both areas, which must be addressed to enhance its appeal as a tourist destination.[360]

4.2. Mining and Mineral Processing Economic Growth vs. Environmental Degradation: Mining significantly contributes to Liberia's GDP but can also cause substantial environmental harm, including pollution and habitat destruction. This creates a policy conflict between various stakeholders: mining companies, investors, government bodies focused on economic gains, and international mining corporations advocate for expanding mining activities. Conversely, environmental NGOs, community groups affected by mining, and international advocacy organisations push for stricter regulations to mitigate environmental damage. As mining is not inherently inclusive or sustainable, it is crucial to carefully monitor and regulate this sector to balance economic benefits with environmental protection.

[354] Government of Liberia, 2016a
[355] Unity Party Platform, 2023
[356] The International Trade Center, 2015
[357] The International Trade Center, 2015
[358] The International Trade Center, 2015
[359] The International Trade Center, 2015
[360] The International Trade Center, 2015

4.3. Agricultural Potential vs. Environmental Impact Increased agricultural activity could be a key driver for inclusive and sustainable development but it could also lead to deforestation and loss of biodiversity, impacting later agricultural activities (see Climate (see Climate Box 6).

4.4. Concession Led Growth vs. Smallholder Farming Developing inclusive economic growth in agriculture requires the successful integration of smallholder farmers into a viable economic system. However, smallholder farmers do not have access to the technology or infrastructure needed to increase productivity and lead the economic growth path. On the other hand, concessions allow for third parties with the capacity to invest in technology and infrastructure to improve the agricultural output, although the gains are not shared with the general population. Negotiating concession agreements and ensuring inclusion of smallholder farmers within those new agreements could be a way of fostering inclusive growth.

Climate Box 6. The role of AFOLU in Climate Resilience

"*Natural disasters related to climate change, such as increased flooding, are already affecting the agricultural sector, with negative consequences for food security and household income*" [361]

The Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Uses (AFOLU) sector is anticipated to be crucial in the array of mitigation strategies to halt climate change. This includes the feasibility of removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through methods like afforestation/reforestation, enhanced forest management, and the sequestration of carbon in soil. Nonetheless, the AFOLU sector may also lead to conflicts over land allocation for food production, energy, forestry, and biodiversity conservation.[362]

According to Denton et al. (2022), there are several options that can help mitigate such trade-offs:

- agricultural practices
- forest conservation
- soil carbon sequestration
- the removal of carbon dioxide, etc.

In Liberia, the AFOLU sector, along with fisheries, is pivotal for the country's inclusive and sustainable development, extending beyond their capacity for climate change mitigation. As a key economic sector, the largest employer, and the primary source of livelihood, AFOLU and fisheries also significantly contribute to land degradation and pollution due to unsustainable and irresponsible practices. In particular, **the agricultural sector is vital for both Liberia's food security and its economic growth.** The majority of the country's agricultural land (85% approx.) is devoted to growing rice, cassava, and vegetable, and subsistence farming -which relies heavily on rainfall- constitutes 80% of Liberia's agricultural activities.[363]

However, Liberia's natural capital faces various constraints. **Agricultural productivity,** especially for subsistence crops like rice and maize, is among the lowest in the region. This situation is expected to worsen with increasing temperatures and rainfall variability. The country, which imports 73% of its food requirements, faces threats to its food security due to climate-induced disruptions in regional transportation and rising food prices. The **lack of robust infrastructure** also hampers income opportunities, and inflates the costs of goods and services. Specifically, **poor road networks** -mainly in rural areas during the rainy season- impact the transport of food, exacerbating food insecurity, [364,365]

Moreover, **the agricultural sector, vital since the civil war, faces declining productivity due to climate change, which affects soil moisture and water availability**. Significant losses estimated at around 40% annually for food crops, are caused by pests, diseases, and inadequate storage facilities. **Climate change particularly affects rice, a staple crop cultivated by 74% of farmers**[366] as it is vulnerable to heavy rainfall and pests. Although rising temperatures might open new areas in the north for rice cultivation, potential flooding events could counteract these benefits by eroding nutrient-rich soil. The country's major agricultural exports, including rubber, cacao, and coffee, also face risks from changing weather conditions, potentially harming rubber production and challenging the maintenance of plantations. **The fisheries sector,** which plays a critical role in ensuring food security and supporting livelihoods, particularly for coastal communities (See Climate Box 3) is also subject to climate-related alterations that are expected to adversely impact the ecosystems vital for fish, posing significant risks to food security and livelihoods.[367]

Liberia also faces challenges in preserving its natural resources for future generations. Current economic growth and livelihoods strongly depend on Liberia's natural resources. The struggle to balance immediate economic needs with the sustainability of its natural environment is evident in the institutional, social, and economic factors that pose direct threats to biodiversity, forest conservation, and water resources. Across the country, illegal logging and mining operations, unsustainable charcoal production, and large-scale infrastructure and agriculture development projects are damaging local ecosystems.[368] In particular, **Liberia's forests** face considerable threats. The rate of net

forest depletion[369], surged from 0.5% to 32% between 2005 and 2015. This dramatic increase highlights the intense pressure on forests, primarily due to the expansion of industrial logging and plantation agriculture.[370,371,372]

In short, the country's abundant land and water resources could support agricultural expansion, but this potential is limited by inadequate policy, legal frameworks, and investment environments, including issues related to property rights and land administration.[373] According to USAID (2018) the key structural factors driving unsustainable use of resources in Liberia include (p.viii)[374]:

- Institutional
  - Inadequate enforcement of resource use regulations
  - Ineffective land use policies and insecure land tenure and property rights
  - A shortage of data and information for sustainable resource management
  - Insufficient technical capacity for resource management
- Social
  - High prevalence of people living in poverty
  - Limited recognition of the long-term value of natural resources
- Economic
  - Lack of sustainable income sources
  - Economic incentives that encourage resource depletion
  - Unfulfilled energy needs

Sustainable management of natural resources and addressing current and future climate change impacts, - such as altered rain patterns, heavy rains, flooding, and pest outbreaks- **is crucial for the AFOLU sector's resilience.**[375] Despite the challenges inherent in sustainable development within this sector, it is important to develop strategies that not only enhance resilience but also promote employment and contribute to economic and social value. For example, climate-resilient agriculture and investment in green industries can open new economic opportunities and reduce dependency on vulnerable sectors.[376] This situation significantly impacts women's lives, as they heavily rely on agriculture and forestry for their livelihoods. An interviewee noted that Liberia's vulnerability to climate change exacerbates existing gender inequalities, particularly in agriculture and natural resource management [KII]. Women, who are often responsible for household food security and water collection, disproportionately bear the burden of climate-related shocks and environmental degradation [KII].

4.5. Agricultural Potential vs. Environmental Impact: Striking a balance between supporting smallholder farmers and attracting large agribusiness investments for scale

[361] Government of Liberia, 2018
[362] Denton et al., 2022
[363] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[364] UNEP, n.d.
[365] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[366] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[367] UNEP, n.d.
[368] Government of Liberia, 2018
[369] A measure of unsustainable use of the forest (as percentage of gross national income)
[370] World Bank, 2020a
[371] UNEP, n.d.
[372] Forest Trends, 2024
[373] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[374] USAID, 2018
[375] WRI, 2022
[376] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021

and efficiency presents a significant challenge. On one hand, NGOs and civil society organisations advocate for the rights and support of smallholder farmers, emphasising their importance in promoting inclusive growth. On the other hand, large agro-industrial firms, investors, and financial institutions prioritise economies of scale and large-scale agricultural investment opportunities. These conflicting interests highlight the need for careful policy considerations to ensure both sustainable development and economic efficiency.

4.6. **Renewable Energy Benefits vs. Initial Investment Costs and Environmental Priorities:** Developing renewable energy infrastructure entails high upfront costs, particularly for large-scale hydro projects, which can potentially disrupt ecosystems and local communities. This creates a conflict in policy priorities: on one side are environmental groups, renewable energy companies, governments, and international bodies advocating for clean energy transitions; on the other side is the pressing need to provide affordable electricity to all, despite the significant initial investments. Additionally, communities affected by large renewable energy projects must be considered, highlighting the necessity of balancing environmental sustainability with immediate energy access needs (see Climate Box 7).

Climate Box 7. The Lag in the Energy Sector: An Opportunity to Leapfrog Towards Sustainable Development

"Liberia is endowed with significant primary energy sources, including biomass, hydroelectricity, petroleum and renewable energy resources, and these play a crucial role in the development of Liberia's economy."[377] Renewable energy offers nations a pathway to mitigate climate change, stabilise volatile energy prices, and reduce overall energy expenses. Moreover, decentralised solutions based on renewable energy can facilitate electrification efforts.[378] However, a significant portion of Liberia's infrastructure, especially in the energy domain, is either damaged or obsolete.[379]

Consequently, despite these energy sources, access to electricity remains limited. Liberia ranks among the ten countries with the lowest percentage of access to electricity.[380] As of 2022, only approximately 25.3% of households are connected to the grid provided by the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC), with a smaller proportion relying on generators (4.8%) and solar panels (5.7%).[381]

Electricity consumption is predominantly urban (53.7%).[382] The civil war left Monrovia's energy systems almost entirely devastated. Coupled with the city's population growth from about 500,000 before the war to over a million today, the demand on the energy sector has intensified, leading to significant gaps in power generation, transmission, and distribution.[383] To cope with the inadequate supply, many urban households have turned to self-generation using diesel generators. However, this method is considerably more expensive, averaging US$3.96 per kilowatt-hour, compared to the much lower LEC rate of about US$0.22 per kilowatt-hour. This disparity underscores the challenges and costs faced by Liberians in accessing reliable electricity.[384]

Currently, **electricity generation primarily relies on portable generators and hydro-power plants**, with the country boasting **some of the highest water availability in Sub-Saharan Africa.** However, seasonal variations can significantly affect the flow rates and efficiency of hydro-power generation, particularly at the crucial Mount Coffee Dam, which is a key source of electricity for Monrovia. [385] T**he primary sources of energy in Liberia include 1-wood fuel**s like charcoal and firewood, which dominate over 90% of the country's cooking energy needs, **2-petroleum** products used mainly for transportation and some power generation, and **3-electricity.** The heavy reliance on biomass has resulted in uncontrolled charcoal production, leading to widespread deforestation and loss of biodiversity.[386]

Climate change poses several risks to Liberia's energy sector, including: a) potential damage to infrastructure such as power stations and transmission lines; and b) challenges in accessing biomass fuels due to sea level rise and flooding. These issues are compounded by the fact that Liberia's energy mix is not very diversified, relying heavily on fossil fuels, charcoal, and wood. [387] **Studies suggest that transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy can significantly influence sustainable development,** affecting food security (SDG 2), jobs, and economic expansion (SDG 8) and land use (SDG 11, 15 & 14). In this view, the decreasing costs of renewable energy technologies provide a window of opportunity to leapfrog over outdated, carbon-heavy systems towards adopting greener, more durable energy solutions. [388] Thus, the Government of Liberia, in collaboration with development partners, is taking significant steps to revamp its electricity infrastructure following the civil war. Several development partners, such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the European Union (EU) are involved in enhancing the grid network within the greater Monrovia region .The Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy oversees policy, while the Liberia Electricity Regulatory Commission provides regulatory support. The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) serves as the national utility, and the Rural and Renewable Energy Agency focuses on expanding rural electrification. [389]

"Liberia is still at a nascent stage of rebuilding its electricity infrastructure, institutions, and human capital"[390]. Post-war infrastructure projects in Liberia face considerable delays and complexities due to competing priorities and limited resources, leading to incomplete or constantly evolving infrastructural landscapes. The LEC, apart from facing capacity issues, also deals with administrative, and technical

inefficiencies, including high tariffs and inadequate revenue protection mechanisms, contributing to a high rate of illegal connections.[391] Despite these challenges, Liberia has made some progress in reforming the energy sector since the introduction of the National Energy Policy (NEP) in 2009, aiming for universal access, sustainability through renewable resources, and regional cooperation in electricity trade. The 2015 Electricity Law updated the legal and regulatory frameworks to support these goals. However, limitations in transmission and distribution (T&D) infrastructure and financing constraints hinder LEC's ability to expand its customer base and leverage its generation capacity for economic growth.[392]

Therefore a significant portion of public institutions and health facilities lack access to electricity, and for the minority that are connected, the power supply is often unreliable and of low quality (See Human Dev. Section). Out of approximately 835 health facilities across the country, only around 40, primarily in Monrovia, have access to grid electricity. Beyond the capital city, only a limited number of hospitals and clinics have electricity, mostly through cross-border supply, while the rest depend on diesel generators or have no power at all. Given the current electricity access challenges and the slow progress in electrification, attaining universal electricity access demands a concerted effort involving both grid expansions and off-grid solutions. The Micro Utility Licensing Regulations in Liberia define off-grid electrification as autonomous power systems that operate independently of the National Grid. These systems include privately owned generators (mostly fossil fuel-based), solar PV stand-alone home systems, solar lanterns, and mini-grids powered by solar, small hydro, or hybrid systems.There's a critical need for rapid advancement in off-grid electrification for public facilities, including health centres and schools, requiring coordinated donor support for funding. [393]

In conclusion, electricity stands as a cornerstone for Liberia's socio-economic advancement, yet its accessibility remains markedly restricted.[394] This gap underscores the imperative for well-coordinated strategic efforts aimed at expanding electricity access throughout the nation. Addressing the access to this basic need can create substantial synergies, particularly in the realms of education and healthcare by prioritising the electrification of educational and health facilities. Moreover, ensuring a development based on renewable energy sources presents an opportunity for Liberia to reduce its reliance on unsustainable energy practices. Such a transition not only aligns with environmental sustainability goals but also mitigates the depletion of forests and land degradation, thereby preserving the country's natural resources for future generations.

4.7. Digital Transformation vs. Digital Divide: Digital transformation can foster economic development by enhancing operational efficiency, streamlining processes, and promoting inclusivity and sustainability. Digital technologies can enhance productivity across sectors, from agriculture to services, through innovative solutions. Developing the digital economy can open new avenues for commerce, education, and government services, reducing transaction costs and improving efficiency. However, without addressing the digital divide, particularly for women and rural communities, these advancements could exacerbate existing inequalities.

[391] Innis, & Van Assche, 2023
[392] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021
[393] Climate Risk Profile: Liberia, 2021; Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, 2023
[394] Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, 2023

Examples of Current Policy Conflicts and Trade-Offs

The government has implemented measures to reduce the cost of living, such as removing tariffs on rice and suspending surcharges on petroleum prices. Despite these efforts, the outcomes have been mixed due to external factors affecting global markets that illustrate some of the trade-offs and conflicts that need to be considered for inclusive and sustainable development.

- **Rice Tariff Removal vs. Local Production Challenges:** Executive Order 125 removed tariffs on rice to lower prices and make this staple more affordable. However, despite the intended benefits, the retail price of a 25kg bag of rice increased from USD 17.50 to $20.[395] This increase is attributed to global price fluctuations, increased transportation costs, and logistical challenges rather than the tariff removal itself. However, this scenario underscores Liberia's reliance on imported goods and highlights the need for increased local production and improved infrastructure and/or concurrent policies to mitigate such vulnerabilities.

- **Petroleum Surcharge Suspension vs. Economic Stability:** The government also announced the suspension of the surcharge on the country's petroleum pricing structure.[396] This move is intended to provide relief to Liberian citizens who have been grappling with the high cost of fuel. The surcharge, which was previously in place, had contributed to the overall increase in fuel prices, putting a strain on household budgets. This measure is expected to have a positive impact on the country's economy, as reduced fuel costs can lead to lower transportation expenses and potentially lower the prices of other goods and services. However, long-term financial implications of reduced surcharge revenues needed to be considered, as well as increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

[395] Dolo, 2024a; Dolo, 2024b
[396] Ministry of States for Presidential Affairs, 2024

DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

Part IV.

Selecting Catalyst & Development Pathways

The **"Study on the Future Drivers of Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Liberia" (DoD)** aims to identify key factors that will shape Liberia's path towards inclusive and sustainable development. Part III Thematic Analysis reviewed major economic and social sectors, as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) intervention areas, encompassing dimensions such as human development, economic and social well-being, political and economic integration, governance, and resilience to stressors, shocks, and crises.

The primary goal of the study is to identify current development constraints, opportunities, and entry points for tangible actions that foster transformative change. **The focus of the Development Pathways lies on identifying catalytic drivers and policies for socio-economic transformations capable of bringing about substantial shifts towards inclusive and sustainable development;** to effectively fight corruption and promote public accountability in Liberia, paving the way for a transition from a commodity-driven economy to a diversified, robust, upwardly mobile economy, a multifaceted and inclusive strategy must be employed.

The DoD aims to be a relevant tool informing the forthcoming phase of development planning for the national government and development partners. It aims to provide valuable insights to relevant stakeholders, aiding them in identifying strategic development priorities, potential conflicts, and pathways aligned with the country's needs, challenges, and opportunities over the next 5-8 years (2024-2030).

The Development Pathways of the DoD study intends to be a practical document, informing feasible policy actions in the main sectors of society and economy to advance inclusive and sustainable development. The selection of the development pathways comprise determining:

- **Envisioned Sustainable & Inclusive Development:** The desired change towards sustainable and inclusive development based on the current context analysis and various drivers, constraints, and potential trade-offs per thematic pillar.
- **Key Transformative Entry Points:** Derived from scholarly research and the Liberian context, including Political Economy Analysis (PEA) interviews and Survey on societal aspirations and priorities. These transformations aim to trigger systemic change by interlinking sustainability goals through strategic actions that navigate budgetary and resource constraints.
- **Key Actor Mapping:** Summarising and presenting stakeholders relevant for each thematic pillar across the influence/interest axis to effect change. Analysing how each stakeholder can contribute to or affect achieving the desired change.
- **Strategies and Actors Required for Change:** Analysing various strategies and actors needed to achieve the envisioned change, focusing on practical steps and necessary involvement.

1. Envisioned Sustainable & Inclusive Development

Sustainable development, as outlined in the SDGs, is all encompassing, including social, economic, governance and environmental dimensions and drivers. The realisation of the transformative vision critically depends on acknowledging the intricate interlinkages and integrated structure inherent in the SDGs.

The goals of this study include fostering social cohesion, building resilience, and enhancing institutional strength by leveraging interconnected drivers across social, economic, environmental, and political spheres. Thus, the development pathways section integrates the three thematic and three transversal pillars, outlining the desired changes identified in each pillar by harnessing and building on local knowledge and assets.

To achieve these changes, a **systemic approach** that leverages Liberia's strengths, such as its natural resources and young workforce, while addressing challenges like physical, financial, informational, and human capital constraints is crucial.

Figure 4.1. Overview of Liberia's Envisioned Sustainable & Inclusive Development

Source: Author's own

2. Determining Transformative Entry Points

To counteract prevailing development practices that favor isolated approaches and result in disparate and competing strategies,[397] this study aims to illuminate potential transformation pathways that emerge from the interplay of drivers, constraints, and conflicts. It **provides strategic insights for navigating complex scenarios and fostering informed decision-making within the broader context of the study's focus.**

This entails discerning potential synergies and trade-offs among the SDGs and their associated targets while crafting context-specific, integrated policy interventions to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the goals. In particular, 1-Food systems; 2-Energy access and affordability; 3-Digital connectivity; 4-Education; 5-Jobs and social protection; and 6-Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution have been identified as key transformative entry points with multiplier effects in achieving the 2030 agenda.[398]

Identifying key transformative entry points with catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs for Liberia required considering:

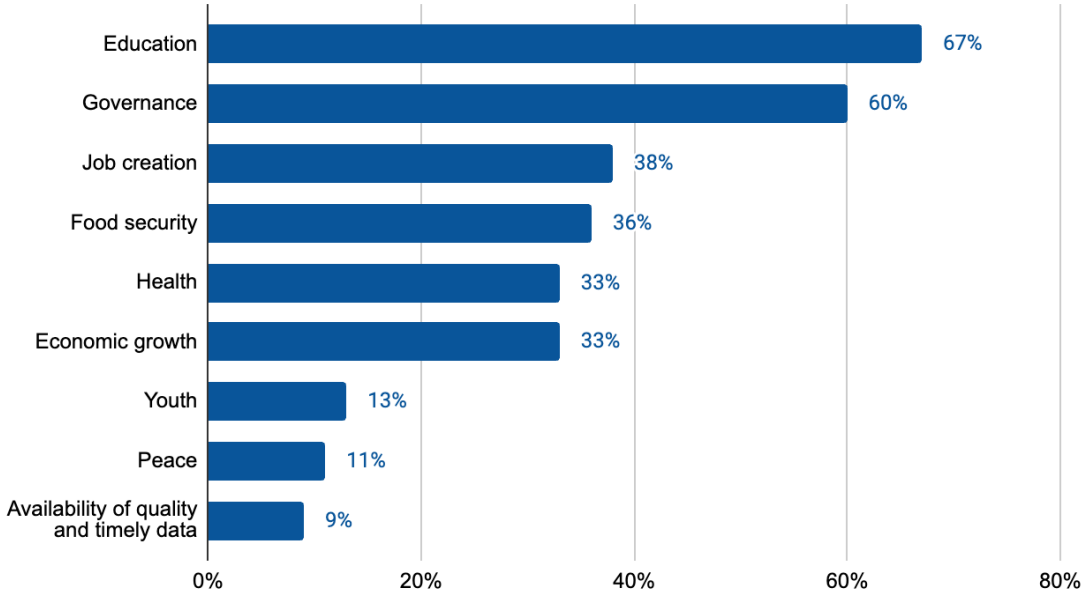
- Insights from the Thematic Analysis (literature and desk Review);
- Key Informant Interviews, including Political Economy Analysis (PEA) interviews; and
- Survey on societal aspirations and priorities.

By way of example, regarding the general and immediate priorities identified in the *Survey on societal aspirations and priorities* (Figures 4.2 and 4.3), these were found to be strongly aligned with the selected entry points for accelerating transformation. Overall the survey results corroborated and aligned with the findings from the literature review and insights from KIIs, with no major difference between sectors.

This alignment reinforces the strategic approach of leveraging Liberia's strengths—its abundant natural and youthful population as available workforce, source of creativity and job creation—to create synergies that drive sustainable and inclusive development while tackling its main challenges (Figure 4.4).

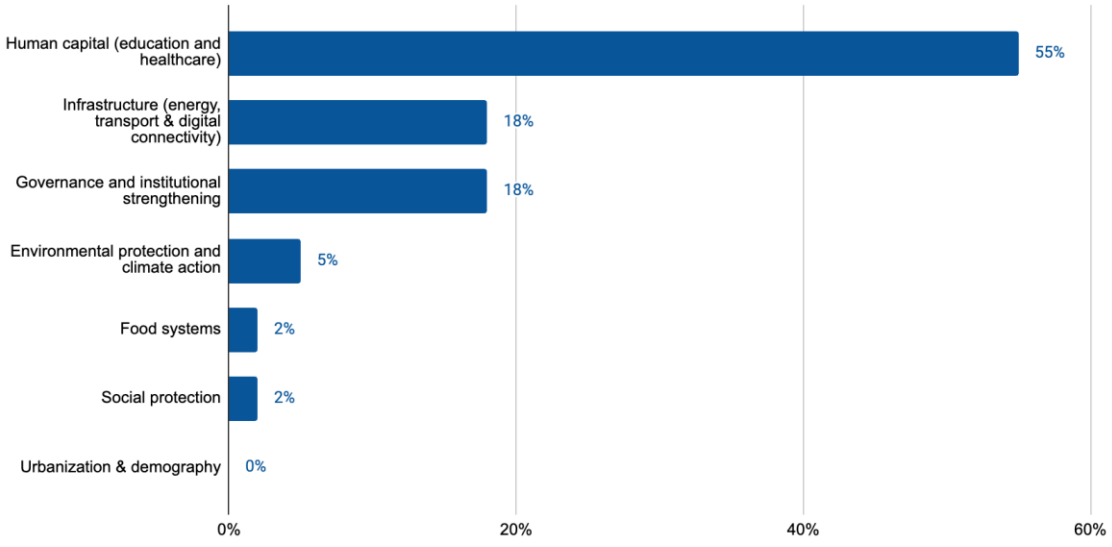
[397] UN SDG, 2023
[398] Sachs et al., 2019; UN SDG, 2023

Figure 4.2. Survey on Societal Aspirations and Priorities
Top Priorities for Inclusive Sustainable Development in Liberia



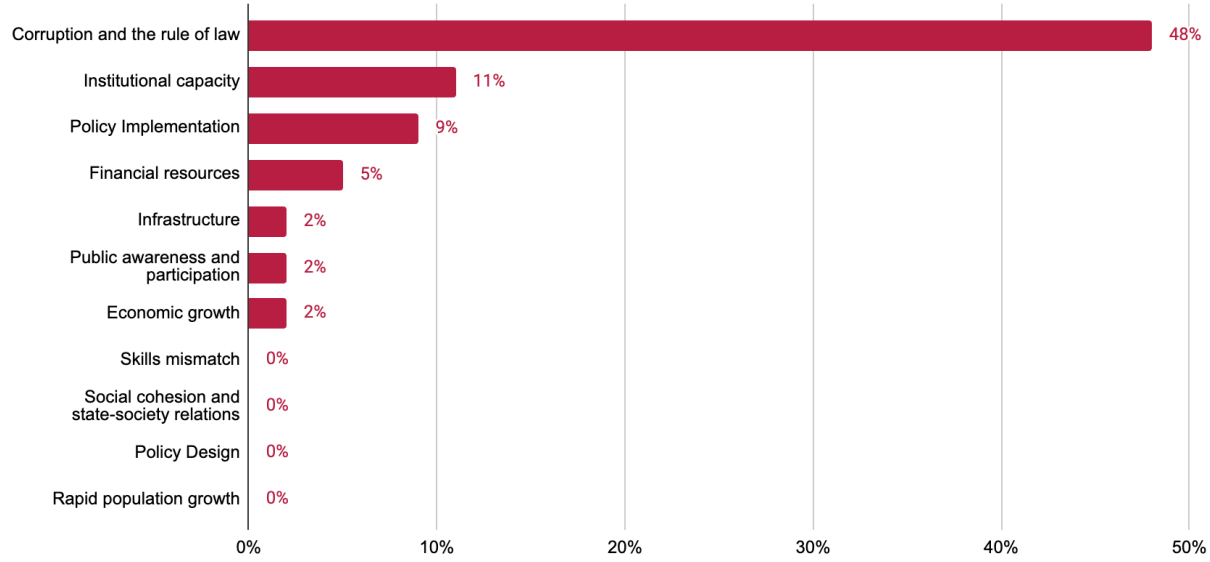
Notes: N=135. Up to three options per respondent (n = 45) | **Source**: Author's own.

Figure 4.3. Survey on Societal Aspirations and Priorities: Areas that Require the Most Immediate Investment for Inclusive Sustainable Development in Liberia



Notes: N=44 | **Source**: Author's own

Figure 4.4. Survey on Societal Aspirations and Priorities:
Main Constraints Currently Hindering Sustainable Development Efforts in Liberia



* 9 respondents (20%) replied “Other”

Notes: N=44 | **Source**: Author’s own.

Recognizing the impossibility of addressing all of Liberia's development challenges simultaneously, and taking into consideration all the insights mentioned above, including the mapping of actors with their intentions and influence, **four key transformative entry points were identified:**

1. **Just and Strong Institutions:** This transformation focuses on building just and strong institutions to combat corruption, uphold the rule of law, and strengthen governance frameworks. It aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of public institutions to support sustainable development and ensure equitable access to justice and services for all citizens.

2. **Sustainable and Secure Food Systems:** This key transformative entry point prioritises the reform of food systems to enhance sustainability, resilience, and equity. It underscores the necessity for practices that ensure food security, improve nutrition, and support the livelihoods of farmers while minimising environmental impact.

3. **Bridging Divides: Energy, Transport, and Digital Access**: The third key transformative entry point aims to develop inclusive and sustainable energy, transport, and digital infrastructure. It seeks to improve accessibility to essential services, reduce inequalities, and foster economic growth by enhancing infrastructure to ensure service access for both rural and urban populations.

4. **Empowering Youth: Advancing Education for All**: The last key transformative entry point emphasises the importance of creating inclusive educational opportunities aligned with labour market opportunities to create decent jobs. It prioritises education for all at every level (primary, secondary and tertiary), particularly targeting girls and marginalised communities, to improve literacy and promote sustainable practices.

3. Identifying Key Actors

One of the primary focuses of the Political Economy Analysis (PEA) was to identify and map the main actors associated with each transformation entry point. This included assessing their alignment with current priorities and financial trends across various levels, from public and national authorities to NGOs, community-based organisations, and local stakeholders. Key informant interviews provided insights into the willingness and capacity for specific actions and policy implementations within the Liberian context.

Once the objectives and outcomes for sustainable development were outlined, key players were analysed. This analysis considered both drivers and constraints identified in the thematic analysis, combined with results from key informant interviews and survey findings. This evaluation aimed to identify the main local, national, and international actors in tandem with the key entry points. Understanding the different actors, their level of influence and interest, and their ability to either promote or hinder sustainable development was crucial. This understanding helped determine and prioritise the feasibility of various policy options.

While not exhaustive, this effort aimed to leverage expert knowledge from actors within the public, private and international communities, understand existing networks and strategies, capitalise on learned experiences, and synchronise stakeholder interests toward common goals. The findings in the key actor sections can be enriched with the consultations with UNDP and the CPG.

4. Expected Outcomes and Feasibility

The expected outcomes and feasibility of the proposed transformations will be discussed within the main transformation channels. The primary aim of this analysis is to recognize trade-offs and limited resources, which require efficient prioritisation. By examining the benefits and challenges associated with each entry point, particularly within the Liberian context, a grounded understanding of potential impacts will be provided.

This section explores the rationale for each transformation, key interventions, and how they generate intermediate outputs. We also explore issues arising from implementation and the contributions each transformation makes towards meeting the SDGs. Additionally, this discussion includes an analysis of the transmission channels and the sequence of the proposed policy options, along with their direct and indirect impacts on the different SDGs.

Part V.

Sustainable & Inclusive Development Transformations

Transformation 1:
Just & Strong Institutions

T1. Summary

Liberia faces significant governance and peace challenges, including pervasive corruption, a challenging business climate, and entrenched social, gender, and economic inequalities. Despite these obstacles, opportunities exist to leverage new governance models and technological advancements toward building a more stable and prosperous future. Corruption erodes trust in public institutions, discourages investment, and diverts critical resources from public services and peacebuilding initiatives. Efforts to address corruption are often undermined by nepotism, cronyism, tribalism, and limited political commitment.

Economic growth and investment are hindered by over-regulation, transparency issues, and insufficient infrastructure, which restricts job creation and exacerbates economic hardship, contributing to social tensions. Additionally, policies favouring urban over rural areas intensify spatial inequalities and social exclusion. Discrimination against marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, teenage mothers[399], certain tribal communities, and those perceived as political opponents, further challenges social cohesion. Nonetheless, Liberia's post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives, particularly the inclusion of women in political and conflict-resolution processes, highlight the potential for more inclusive governance.

Strengthening institutions and legal frameworks is essential, including the enforcement of anti-corruption laws, improved policy implementation, and greater transparency in budget processes. Enhancing accountability through institutional reforms, community engagement, and targeted improvements will foster public trust and ensure effective policy execution. Promoting new sectors and increasing the competitiveness of existing ones—such as through infrastructure investment and support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs)—is also crucial. Implementing e-government and digital identification systems can improve service delivery and governance; however, care must be taken to prevent these initiatives from exacerbating the digital divide.

Policy interventions include:

- Legal reforms to strengthen governance and combat corruption;
- institutional strengthening to enhance regulatory capacities and ensure effective policy implementation;
- community engagement to involve local populations, including marginalised groups, in decision-making and ensure that development initiatives are sustainable;
- economic diversification strategies to stimulate investment in non-traditional sectors and support economic activities; an
- enhancing data management for better planning and evaluation of development initiatives.

It is worth noting that while entities like the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and international donors actively support anti-corruption measures, some government officials and business community members resist reforms that threaten their interests, and groups like the

[399] GNN Liberia, n.d.

judiciary and educational institutions support reforms but lack the power to enforce changes. The successful implementation of these strategies and interventions will hinge on the new government's commitment to reform and the active engagement of all sectors of society. By addressing these systemic issues, Liberia can set the foundation for a more equitable and prosperous future as goals for accountability and transparency can contribute to building trust in public institutions, essential for achieving sustainable development.[400]

T1. Summary Table

Benefits

- **Enhanced governance and reduced corruption:** More effective allocation of resources, reducing waste and increasing funding for essential public services like education and healthcare. Improved transparency and reduced corruption enhance domestic and foreign investor confidence, fostering economic growth.
- **Strengthened public accountability:** Increased public trust through accountable governance, which is crucial for the stability and effectiveness of democratic institutions. Enhanced accountability ensures that policies are implemented as intended, improving development outcomes and the fair distribution of resources.
- **Improved business environment:** A more transparent and less bureaucratic business environment attracts investments, encouraging entrepreneurship and creating jobs. Streamlined regulations and support for SMEs enhance the competitiveness of the economy, promoting diversification beyond traditional sectors like mining.
- **Social inclusion and cohesion:** Addressing spatial and social inequalities helps integrate marginalised communities, promoting a more cohesive society. Empowering vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and the disabled, through inclusive policies and community engagement.
- **Digital transformation:** Improved efficiency in public service delivery through digital transformation, enhancing accessibility and reducing delays. Better data management enables evidence-based decision-making and more effective monitoring and evaluation of policies.

Challenges

- **Entrenched corruption:** Entrenched interests may resist reforms that threaten their positions, making anti-corruption efforts difficult to implement. The existing weak institutional framework makes it challenging to enforce new laws and policies effectively.
- **Lack of infrastructure:** Inadequate infrastructure can hinder the implementation of reforms, especially in rural and remote areas. Significant investment is required to improve infrastructure, which may strain national budgets and require careful prioritisation.
- **Political will and stability:** Fluctuations in political will, due to changes in government or policy priorities, can disrupt the continuity and effectiveness of reforms. Reforms may exacerbate tensions among different political factions or with vested interests, leading to instability.
- **Economic dependencies:** Shifting from a commodity-driven economy to a diversified one is challenging and may face resistance from sectors that benefit from the status quo. Economic transformation can lead to short-term job losses in traditional sectors, creating social unrest.
- **Capacity and skills shortages:** Limited local expertise and skills to implement and sustain new systems and policies, necessitating extensive training and possibly foreign expertise. Ongoing emigration of skilled workers and professionals can deplete the pool of human capital necessary for reform initiatives.
- **Digital divide:** Implementing digital solutions may widen the gap between those with access to technology and those without, potentially increasing inequalities. Ensuring the privacy and security of digital systems is crucial but challenging, requiring robust cybersecurity measures.

[400] Governance Commission. Republic of Liberia (n.d.)

T1. Main Current Challenges

Corruption, Public accountability, and Business climate

Liberia's journey towards inclusive growth and sustainable development is fraught with challenges but also ripe with opportunities. By addressing systemic weaknesses, embracing new governance paradigms, and capitalising on technological advancements, Liberia can forge a path to a more stable, equitable, and prosperous future.

Addressing corruption, public accountability, and the business climate sets the foundation for all other development initiatives, leveraging opportunities presented by an engaged civil society and strong policy statements from the new incoming government favouring better governance.

Currently, **corruption is widespread across all sectors in Liberia, undermining trust in public institutions and discouraging both domestic and foreign investmen**t. The institutional framework for holding public officials and entities accountable is weak and often ineffective. Thus, corruption is Liberia's biggest challenge, diverting funds from public services and peacebuilding efforts. According to the latest results from Ibrahim Index of African Governance, both public and private sector corruption have worsened since 2015-2016.[401] Entrenched nepotism and cronyism, coupled with limited political will, hinder anti-corruption efforts.[402] Lack of transparency in the budget process and widespread petty corruption further erode public trust and exacerbate inequalities.

Additionally, the **business environment** is constrained by complex regulations and transparency issues, further exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure, all of which collectively impede investment and economic growth. Liberia's poor business climate also hampers growth and social cohesion. Limited job opportunities, widespread unemployment, and economic hardships fuel social tensions and undermine trust in institutions. This challenging environment also leads to a brain drain, weakening both the economy and society.

Moreover, inclusion challenges persist. Policies favouring urban over rural areas and certain regions over others contribute to spatial inequalities and social exclusion. Inadequate infrastructure investment and unfair land tenure systems exacerbate disparities, leading to high internal migration and growing urban slums. The focus on the extractive sector and centralised resource allocation limit inclusive development. In particular, persons with disabilities and those of same-sex orientation face significant challenges. Infrastructure often lacks accessibility, and same-sex relationships are illegal, leading to discrimination and violence. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving social cohesion and ensuring equitable development in Liberia.

[401] Giahyue, 2023
[402] Boayue, 2024

T1. Key actors: Interest and Influence

Just and Strong Institutions

In Liberia, the landscape of actors influencing governance reforms can be distinctly categorised into three groups based on their stance and influence on anti-corruption initiatives (see Figure A1 in the Annex). The number of actors can be increased with the contributions from UNDP and the CPG in general.

The first group, Pro-Reform and Influential, includes entities that actively support and enforce anti-corruption measures. This group comprises the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and the General Auditing Commission (GAC), which are pivotal in investigating and promoting transparency. Civil society organisations and independent media also fall into this category, playing crucial roles in monitoring government activities and exposing corrupt practices. International donors and UN agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, USAID, EU, and UNDP are instrumental in providing the necessary financial and technical support conditioned on governance improvements.

Conversely, the Spoilers and Influential group consists of actors who may resist reforms due to vested interests or a desire to maintain the status quo. This includes certain government officials and their supporters members of the Liberian Legislature whose positions might be compromised by increased transparency and accountability. Some in the business community who benefit from lax regulations or corrupt dealings also resist changes that could undermine their interests.

Additionally, trade unions and professional associations are key actors needed to determine the feasibility of the actions. Their buy-in can translate into a force of good to implement necessary reforms. Their definite position for or against the reforms will need to be determined through dedicated discussions, but decision-makers should work closely with these actors.

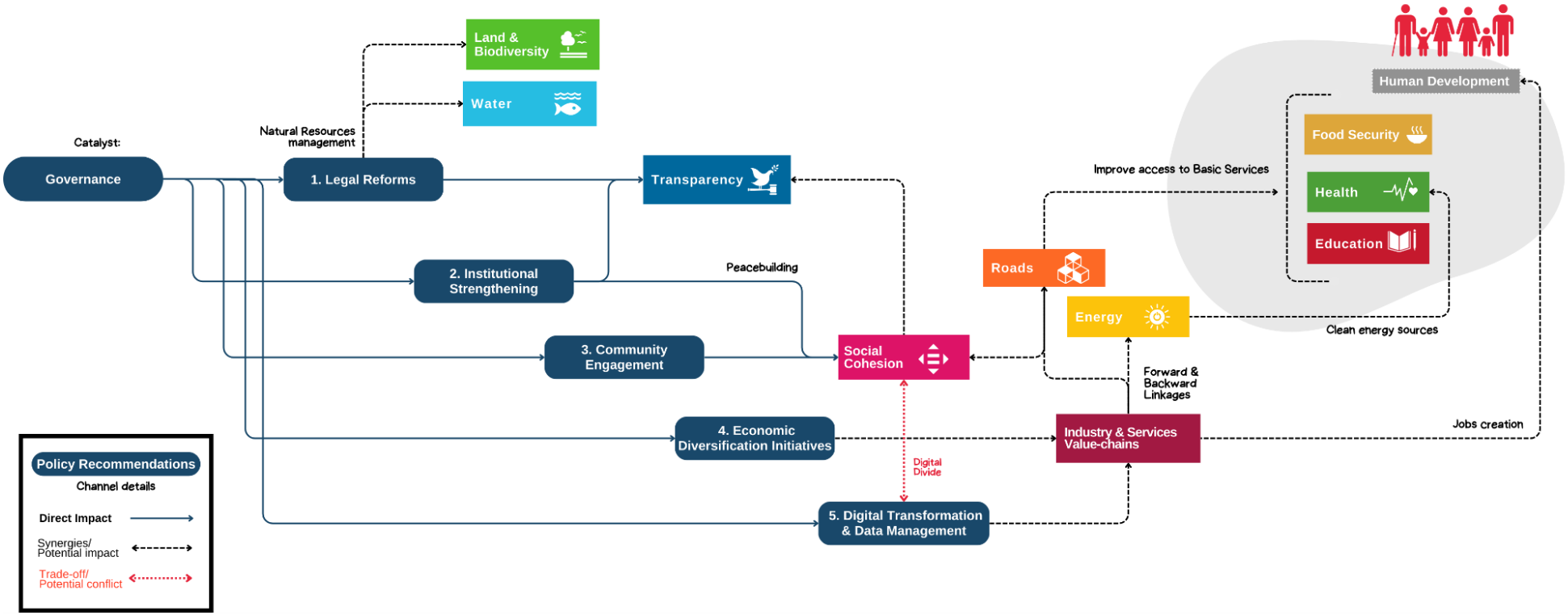
Lastly, the Limited Influence group supports reforms but lacks the power to enforce or advocate for substantial change. This includes the Judiciary, which, despite its crucial role, often struggles with underfunding and external pressures. The Public Procurement and Concessions Commission (PPCC), although central to procurement reforms, faces limitations due to more powerful sectors. Religious leaders, educational institutions, and informal sector leaders are respected in their communities and contribute to the moral and educational support for reforms but typically do not wield significant political power. These actors are important for grassroots support but require strengthening and more strategic alliances to enhance their influence on national policy.

Overall, the PEA analysis highlights governance and in particular, the Government's leadership to address its challenges for good governance as a critical enabler for all the transformations that are presented in this document.

T1. Main Transformation Channels & Proposed Set of Policy Interventions
Just and Strong Institutions

Liberia stands at a critical juncture, balancing the promise of new governmental leadership with enduring challenges of corruption and weak public administration. The nation's future hinges on its ability to harness current opportunities while transforming systemic fragility. Thus, **strengthening governance is a pivotal transformative entry point for Liberia.** Effective governance ensures that development and growth policies are implemented efficiently, fostering a socio-economic environment conducive to sustainable and inclusive progress (See Figure T1).

Figure T1. Main Transformation Channels through Just and Strong Institutions



Source: Author's own

T1. Main Transmission Channels

- **Controlling corruption is crucial.** When corruption is minimised, resources are allocated more effectively, reducing waste and increasing funds for social programs that contribute directly to human development. Therefore, initiating policy interventions with anti-corruption measures and legal reforms is recommended. Mitigating pressure on land and addressing the absence of effective regulation, which resonates with past causes of conflict, and fuels new conflict and the potential for violence is key.[403] This approach not only aids with **transparency** in all sectors but in particular, it can promote proper natural resource management, which positively impacts the **environment** and ensures the sustainable use of Liberia's natural capital assets.

- Moreover, government accountability is integral to maintaining public trust and ensuring the effective implementation of policies. It is a goal and a means in itself for securing human rights, strengthening the rule of law, and sustaining peace and social cohesion.[404] This leads to better development outcomes and a fair distribution of resources. **Enhancing accountability involves institutional strengthening through targeted policy reforms, providing training and resources to key institutions.**

  Additionally, supporting **peace-building** initiatives, including consideration of women's advocacy roles in these processes, can further reinforce institutional independence and stability..

- **Community engagement** is a vital policy intervention that enhances transparency and social cohesion. To achieve this, organising community workshops and participatory planning sessions, as well as developing integrated, multi-stakeholder action plans, is crucial. These initiatives should target local NGOs, women's groups, youth associations, and rural cooperatives, prioritising the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, disabled individuals, and rural populations, ensuring no one is left behind.

  Implementing Liberia's legislation on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (**FPIC) is key to ensuring these communities' rights and participation are respected.**

  Moreover, a significant portion of Liberia's economic actors are foreign. To better integrate Liberian citizens into the economy, it is important to formalise systems that encourage **local participation and investment.** This approach ensures that economic growth benefits the broader population and supports the development of a more inclusive and sustainable economy. A potential conflict to consider is the challenge of land disputes between communities and concessionaires.

- A transparent and accountable government attracts foreign direct investment (particularly the efficiency seeking type of FDI which confers higher development benefits) and encourages local businesses by ensuring a level playing field. This fosters a **healthier business environment**, **supporting economic diversification**.

[403] Platform for Dialogue and Peace [P4DP], 2015
[404] Nyei & Cleary, 2023

- Promoting economic diversification involves initiatives that develop new sectors and enhance the competitiveness of existing ones, thereby **creating more and better jobs.**
- Additionally, focusing on value-added products can reduce reliance on imports and stabilise prices. **Improved infrastructure,** particularly in energy and transportation, will support social cohesion and enhance access to basic services, positively impacting **human development** dimensions.

➔ Finally, embracing digital transformation and data management policies can further enhance **transparency and business environments**. Implementing e-government and digital identification systems for civil registration and certification should be prioritised. However, it is crucial to ensure that these digital policies do not exacerbate **the digital divide or undermine social cohesion.**

To leverage these transmission channels to crate development synergies while accounting the potential conflict, the following policy interventions are proposed to how addressing issues of corruption and appropriate use of funds, land ownership, concession agreements, the business environment, and appropriate investments in skills and education **can all enable transformation and contribute to building just and strong institutions.** Collectively, these policy options aim to enhance transparency, accountability, and foster robust, inclusive growth with tangible development results .

T1. Sets of Policy Interventions

[1] Legal Reform

1. **Strengthen Governance and Legal Structures** by building upon and implementing Robust Anti-Corruption Laws:
   - 1.1. **Investment in Regulatory Agencies:** Enhance the capabilities of regulatory bodies like the Liberia Agriculture Commodities Regulatory Authority (LACRA), National Bureau of Concessions and others through *training and updated frameworks*.
   - 1.2. Strengthening regulatory agencies will ensure that Liberia's **agricultural products** meet international standards, boosting the country's export potential and economic growth.
   - 1.3. Strengthen **land tenure reforms** and community-based land mediation programs.
2. Target **corruption,** in particular judicial corruption, as a major barrier to sustainable development, focusing on both public and private sectors by *implementing and enforcing anti-corruption laws* and supporting independent anti-corruption *bodies* with the power to investigate and prosecute by enforcing the new Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission Act.
3. Address difficulties in policy implementation and adherence to legal standards to ensure effective governance. *Develop clear guidelines and mechanisms* for policy implementation and ensure regular audits and evaluations to enforce compliance with legal standards. As well as robust public service *reform and training* through the civil service agency. Consider the implementation of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms

Successful examples:

- **Indonesia**: Enacted the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) law in 2002, establishing an independent anti-corruption agency with strong investigative powers. This has led to the successful prosecution of numerous high-level officials. [405]
- **Singapore**: Implemented strict anti-corruption laws and empowered the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau to aggressively investigate and prosecute corruption cases. This has contributed to Singapore's reputation as one of the least corrupt countries in the world.[406]

[2] Institutional Strengthening

4. Improve policy implementation and strengthen institutional structures by *providing training and resources (budget)* for more effective policy implementation.

4.1. Ensure full budget allocations for institutions like the General Auditing Commission (GAC), Internal Audit Agency and other relevant agencies.

5. Shift from policy formulation to implementing actions that yield tangible results, adopting more action-oriented strategies. *Launch pilot projects* to test and refine policies, ensuring that successful strategies are scaled up for broader implementation.

6. **Stability and Security:** Establish and support *peacebuilding initiatives,* such as supporting the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and its initiatives aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation, *reinforce judicial independence, and enhance law enforcement capabilities,* including supporting the New War and Economic Crimes Court Office.

7. **Gender Integration:** Incorporate gender-responsive budgeting and ensure that key agencies, such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, receive adequate funding and institutional support to promote gender equality.

Successful examples:

- **Rwanda**: Established the Rwanda Governance Board to coordinate and monitor the implementation of governance reforms across government institutions. This has improved policy coherence and accountability. [407]
- **Costa Rica**: Invested in strengthening the capabilities of the Comptroller General's Office, which oversees public finances and procurement. This has enhanced transparency and reduced corruption in public spending.[408]
- **Ecuador**: Initiated national gender budgeting in 2005 with support from the Ministry of Finance and UNIFEM (now UN Women). The establishment of the National Directorate of

[405] KPK, n.d.
[406] CPIB, n.d.
[407] UNDP, n.d.
[408] Q Costa Rica, n.d.

Fiscal Equity within the Finance Ministry has helped direct and assess fiscal policies for closing gender equity gaps.[409]

[3] Community Engagement

8. Partnership and Collaboration: Leverage the role of development partners, civil society, and government ministries to drive development. For example, facilitate *multi-stakeholder platforms* to encourage collaboration between government, civil society, and development partners on key initiatives.

9. **Develop integrated action plans** that address multiple issues simultaneously, such as combining education, health, and economic initiatives in community programs. This includes integrated and multisectoral strategies to address the interconnected nature of development constraints.

10. Foster community involvement in development initiatives to ensure they are relevant and sustainable. *Organise community workshops* and *participatory planning sessions* to involve local populations in decision-making processes and ensure initiatives meet their needs. In

[409]Coello, 2015

Liberia, where rural populations often feel marginalised, policies must prioritise their inclusion to ensure equitable development.

11. Develop policies that specifically target women, youth, and rural populations to ensure their active participation in development initiatives. Reassess *decentralization policies* to improve their effectiveness, focusing on strengthening governance structures at the local level to ensure equitable and responsive service delivery.

Successful examples:

- **Philippines**: Implemented the Seal of Good Local Governance program, which incentivizes local governments to engage with civil society and the private sector in development planning and service delivery. This has improved local governance and accountability.[410]
- **Brazil**: Established participatory budgeting processes in cities like Porto Alegre, where citizens directly decide on the allocation of municipal budgets. This has increased transparency and citizen engagement in local governance.[411]

[4] Economic Diversification Initiatives

12. Tax Incentives for Non-Traditional Sectors: *Provide tax breaks and incentive*s to stimulate investment in sectors like manufacturing agriculture, tourism, and technology. Establish an *oversight committee and/or other mechanism to monitor and audit the incentives* annually, ensuring beneficiaries fulfil their commitments. Address public concerns about the abuse of tax incentives by enforcing time-bound conditions and maintaining transparency and accountability.

13. Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): Develop *financial instruments and training programs* to support SMEs and promote entrepreneurship.

14. Shift from a commodity-based to a knowledge-based economy, focusing on diversification, value addition, and enhanced domestic capital.

15. **Invest in critical infrastructure**, such as roads, electricity, and digital connectivity, to support diverse economic activities.

Successful examples:

- **Morocco**: Launched the "Moukawalati" program to provide financial and technical assistance to SMEs, helping to diversify the economy beyond traditional sectors.[412]

[410] Open Government Partnership, n.d.
[411] Abers, R., King, R., Votto, D., & Brandao, I., 2018
[412] World Bank, 2019

- **Malaysia**: Implemented the SME Master Plan 2012-2020, which included measures to improve access to financing, technology, and markets for SMEs, contributing to economic diversification.[413]

[5] Digital Transformation & Data Management

16. Develop **e-government and digital identification** systems to improve governance and service delivery.

16.1. Initiatives like the Liberia Revenue Authority's digital tax services and pilot projects for digital ID systems show progress but need *scaling* to ensure nationwide impact, transparency, and accountability.

17. Liberia needs to enhance its **civil registration systems and data collection methods** to support effective planning, monitoring, and evaluation of development initiatives. *Strengthen national statistical capacity* for evidence-based analysis, policy studies, and monitoring and evaluation, and inter-government interoperability.

18. **Certification and Standards:** Align local standards with international requirements and invest in the newly constituted National Standards Authority[414] to strengthen standard laboratories to enhance product quality and marketability, to improve regulatory frameworks and certification processes.

19. Promote innovation and technology for development by establishing policies and programs that incentivize technological advancements, foster digital literacy, and support innovation hubs as emphasised in the National Vision 2030 for Liberia.[415]

Successful examples:

- **Estonia**: Pioneered the use of digital ID cards and e-government services, improving public service delivery and reducing opportunities for corruption.[416]
- **India**: Launched the Aadhaar digital ID system, which has improved the targeting and delivery of social welfare programs and financial inclusion.[417]

Mining Sector Spotlight
Recommendations to Secure Revenues

Enhancing governance and regulatory frameworks will reduce revenue leakage, improve transparency, and ensure that mining operations adhere to environmental and social

[413] World Bank, 2020d
[414] Food Safety Africa, n.d.
[415] Governance Commission n.d.
[416] E-Estonia, n.d.
[417] Banerjee et al., 2016

responsibility standards. Strengthening the capacity of local institutions to manage and oversee mining activities is crucial for achieving better outcomes and ensuring that the sector's benefits are more widely distributed.

1. Develop and enforce robust **regulatory frameworks** that ensure fair and transparent dealings in the mining sector. In particular, **raise awareness and strengthen regulations** to protect the environment and the health of ecosystems and communities, particularly to reduce mercury runoff in rivers by implementing and enforcing stricter environmental protections.[418]

2. Implement effective **fiscal policies** to ensure that mining revenues are reinvested into critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

3. **Promote Local Participation and Value Addition:** Incentivize the development of local mining industries and negotiate better terms in mining concessions to include investments in community development and domestic processing capabilities.

By implementing these governance recommendations, Liberia can maximise the economic contributions of its mining sector, ensuring that the benefits are more broadly shared and contribute to sustainable national development.

[418] FAO, 2018

Transformation 2:
Sustainable & Secure Food Systems

T2. Summary

Liberia's strategic policies aimed at transforming food systems are crafted to leverage its abundant natural capital and a young, available workforce, simultaneously addressing and bolstering the nation's physical, financial, human, and information capitals. By capitalising on the nation's fertile land and rich biodiversity through agroforestry, agriculture modernization and agricultural value chain development, Liberia taps into its natural wealth while creating jobs, appealing to its demographic advantage of a youthful labour force ready for employment.

These jobs not only demand labour but also nurture expertise, thereby incrementally enhancing the **human capital** through on-the-job training and formal educational initiatives tailored to sustainable agriculture practices. In tandem, the emphasis on **added-value production and integrated resource management** aids in building physical capital, as it necessitates and thus encourages the development of infrastructure like processing facilities and efficient water management systems.

Access to **financial capital** can be promoted through targeted microloans and subsidies that empower smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs, particularly women, fostering a more equitable economic landscape. Moreover, by establishing a framework that prioritises **information** dissemination through participatory governance and education, Liberia aims to bridge the information gap, ensuring that farmers and policymakers alike are equipped with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions that align with both immediate and long-term sustainability goals.

The PEA analysis highlights the potential for inclusive economic growth through agriculture value chain development, decreasing import dependence, and improving farmer livelihoods. Key actors, including the government and international organisations, show high interest and influence in this transformation, which enhances its feasibility. Despite this, structural challenges like inadequate infrastructure, skills, and finance, along with resistance from foreign actors and cartels, hinder progress.

Effective government leadership is crucial to align political and economic interests, secure land rights, renegotiate concession agreements, and promote community empowerment. Improving the business climate to attract international investment is also vital. In FY 2023, significant funding was directed towards food security and agricultural projects, but better coordination is needed for greater effectiveness. The government's role in channelling funds towards a cohesive strategy is essential for successful transformation. Vision 2030's focus on economic diversification and natural resource management aligns with promoting agriculture, particularly small-scale farming, Vision 2030 supports the DoD's goal of enhancing food security and resilience, fostering an environment that allows agriculture to thrive sustainably.[419]

[419] Governance Commission. Republic of Liberia (n.d.)

This integrated approach sets in motion a virtuous cycle where improvements in one area of capital inherently strengthen the others, propelling Liberia toward a future where sustainable development is not merely an aspiration but a tangible reality.

T2. Summary Table

Benefits	Challenges
• **Stakeholder engagement**: Many development partners and national projects, particularly from the MOA, are active in this area. These established channels can be utilised and expanded for effective implementation. • **Immediate impacts:** Certain interventions can show quick results in terms of food production, food security, and income generation, providing tangible benefits to the targeted population. • **Sustainable development**: Adopting climate-smart natural resource management can set Liberia on a sustainable and inclusive development path, minimising trade-offs and preserving resources for future generations. • By adding value to products and creating new ones, Liberia can expand its market reach and potentially increase exports, enhancing economic diversification.	• **Long-term effects on human development:** While immediate effects on food security and income are evident, positive impacts on other areas of human development, such as education and healthcare, may take longer to manifest. • **Indirect infrastructure improvement:** The effects on infrastructure development are less direct and may occur over a more extended period. Conversely, infrastructure development is key to enhance food systems in Liberia. • **Comprehensive planning needed**: Implementing an integrated management plan for climate-smart agriculture requires detailed planning and coordination, which can be resource-intensive and complex

T2. Main Current Challenges
Agroforestry & Natural Resources Management

Liberia's economic landscape is still developing, with a heavy reliance on a narrow range of exports, primarily rubber, iron ore, and palm oil. This focus on raw materials, which require less sophistication and technological input, makes Liberia's economy vulnerable to global commodity price fluctuations. The economy's reliance on low-value-added commodities and natural resources hampers its growth and diversification.

Key informant interviews highlight **several critical challenges** in Liberia's pursuit of inclusive economic transformation, including outdated agricultural practices, significant gaps in technology use, heavy reliance on manual labour, and inadequate investment in technological and human capital. Additionally, the lack of modern infrastructure, such as adequate storage facilities and transportation systems, results in significant post-harvest losses, especially for staple crops like rice, cassava and plantain.

The predominant use of traditional, labour-intensive farming methods does not appeal to youth, who view agriculture as unattractive and unprofitable. This, along with urbanisation, has led to an **ageing farming population** with little succession planning, posing a significant threat to the sector's sustainability.

Access to finance is another significant challenge underpinning the lack of investments. The perceived high risks associated with agriculture, coupled with the long gestation periods required for agricultural returns, particularly in cash crops like cocoa and rubber, make financial institutions hesitant to extend credit to farmers, especially women farmers who continue to be marginalised in the sector. This is exacerbated by low penetration of organised cooperative farming systems that could provide more security through shared resources and collective bargaining, as well as the absence of an agricultural bank that could tend to the financial needs of farmers, and elevated interest rates tied to the country's high inflation and challenging investment climate.

The lack of effective agricultural extension services is a critical issue. Most farmers have limited access to the knowledge and tools needed to improve their farming techniques, adopt new technologies, or increase their yields. This gap in extension services and general education in agricultural practices contributes to ongoing inefficiencies and the underutilization of potential agricultural outputs.

Moreover, **the agricultural sector suffers from a lack of supportive and inclusive policy frameworks and governmental investment**. Investments are often not prioritised, and when they are made, a lack of coordination among governmental agencies leads to ineffective implementation. This results in missed opportunities for growth and development within the sector, as can be particularly seen with the lack of targeted policies for women in agriculture. The implementation of effective policies is lagging while there is an urgent need to target and implement land reform to secure property rights, strike a balance between incentives given to

multinational companies in large scale concessions and local communities, as well as in the development of small scale farming, potentially through outgrower mechanisms.

Despite these challenges, significant opportunities exist to transform agriculture into a major growth engine for Liberia. As a central pillar of the economy, agriculture supports the livelihoods of approximately 70% of the population, making the modernization of this subsistence-focused sector essential for advancing inclusive development. Prioritising skill development and expanding access to resources for women—who form a substantial part of the agricultural workforce—will be key to enhancing their contributions to sectoral progress. The government will play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for sustainable food systems and inclusive growth, particularly by advancing agriculture value chain development plans and enforcing property rights.

T2. Key actors: Interest and Influence

Establishing sustainable and secure food systems as catalysts for growth will require unified efforts from government, private sector, and international stakeholders. Together, these partners can build a resilient and dynamic agricultural economy that aligns with Liberia's broader economic goals and fosters long-term development.

The PEA analysis showed that agriculture value chain development has great potential for inclusive economic growth, both for its capacity to decrease import dependence, particularly for food staples such as rice, and for its capacity to improve livelihoods through increased revenue for farmers. Most of the actors involved in this transformation have a high level of influence and interest in promoting this transformation (see Figure A2), which favours its feasibility.

The Government, which interviewees agreed will lead this transformation, has several ministries and entities with the capacity and influence to advance it, particularly through the Ministry of Agriculture's current value chain development plan. Several international organisations and development partners are also ready to support such transformation. Currently, efforts are underway to empower Liberian youth to invest in agriculture and food systems, which are crucial for achieving sustainable food security, reducing youth unemployment, and combating rural poverty.[420] In particular, the government has shown strong support for the agriculture sector, with significant investments aimed at increasing productivity and promoting commercialization through private sector investment. Recently, as part of the government's 100 Days Deliverables, a National Agricultural Investment Plan has been produced, with a focused emphasis on value addition. This plan, when implemented, will ensure that more agricultural commodities are processed and enhanced, rather than being sold in their raw form, thereby increasing their market value and contributing to the overall economic growth.

However, despite high interest and influence of key actors, advancing this transformation will require action to solve structural challenges in Liberia and to manage conflicting political and economic interests. According to interviewees, the main reasons that agricultural transformation has not taken place, despite the interest and influence of different actors, are tied to structural challenges in the country. These challenges include a lack of access to: road and energy infrastructure, tools, practices and skills for innovative agriculture, and finance. Beyond the formal structural challenges for this transformation, interviewees stated that some of the largest informal blockers for this transformation will be the resistance from foreign actors who benefit from Liberia's import dependence, and cartels, particularly rice cartels. The leadership of the government will be crucial in aligning the political and economic interests of these actors, in a way that allows Liberia in securing land rights, renegotiating large concession agreements in favour of local communities and promoting outgrower and cooperative schemes to empower communities; who have the most interest and least influence. Improving the business climate is also an important step to align international actors with national interests, as it could create

[420] EITI, 2016

competition between international actors and attract those who are willing to invest in Liberia through more favourable agreements for community development and inclusion.

In FY 2023, food security was the second most targeted SDG by donors, receiving USD 59 million in funding. The agriculture sector, in particular, was allocated USD 54.49 million, funding 39 projects.[421] Currently, there are 27 ongoing projects scheduled to continue through 2024 or later (see Table A2).[422] This data indicates that both international and national actors are committed to food security and agricultural development. A significant advantage of these projects is their distribution across Liberia, promoting integrated development and ensuring no region is left behind.[423] However, the large number of projects and programs, some of which are not nationally coordinated, reveals a lack of coordination and siloed efforts that should be addressed for greater effectiveness. Overall, several financial flows are found towards the advancement of agriculture, and again, the leadership of the Government will be fundamental to channel the funding towards a well coordinated and effective strategy for this transformation.

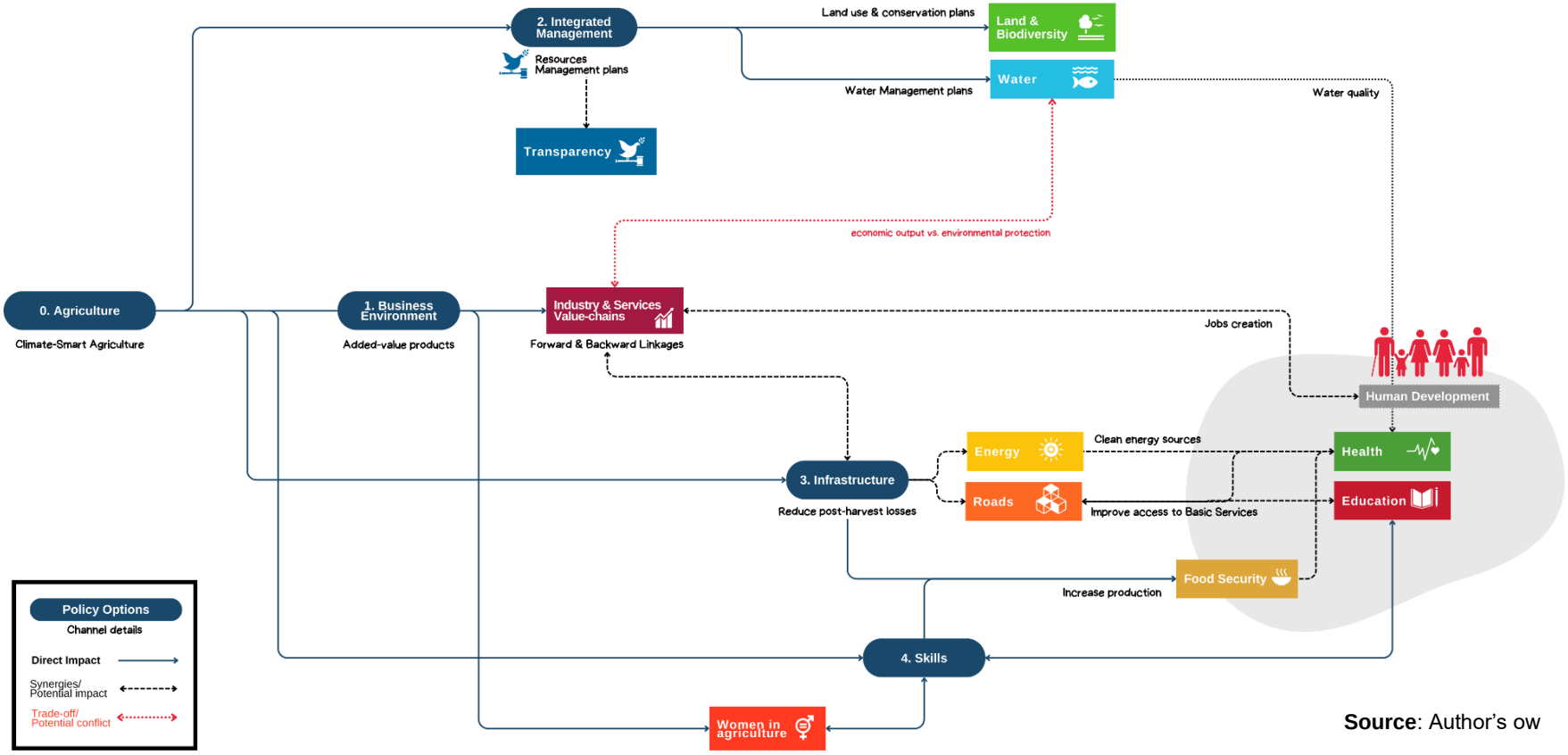
[421] Ministry of Agriculture [Presentation], 2023
[422] MFDP, 2023c
[423] Ministry of Agriculture [Presentation], 2023

T2. Main Transformation Channels & Proposed Set of Policy Interventions

Sustainable & Secure Food Systems

Investing in the development of Liberia's pathway to sustainable food futures hinges on a comprehensive transformation of food systems, intertwining agricultural innovation with a steadfast commitment to environmental conservation. Figure T2 describes the pathway centres around sustainable and secure food systems and how the sequences and synergies of the proposed policy options interact with each other.

Figure T2. Main Transformation Channels through Sustainable & Secure Food Systems



Source: Author's ow

Agribusiness in Liberia is a vital part of the economy, providing livelihoods for a significant portion of the population and contributing notably to the country's GDP. The sector has the potential for substantial growth, with over 4 million acres of arable land available for various agricultural activities. Some attractive sectoral opportunities in Liberia include the production of food crops like rice and cassava, tree crops such as rubber and palm oil, and other areas like horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, and aquaculture.[424]

Liberia's favourable climate and fertile soil present ideal conditions for the commercial cultivation of a wide range of horticultural crops. There are significant investment opportunities within the agricultural value chain, particularly in crop processing and storage capabilities during the off-season. This sectoral enhancement not only promises to stabilise the market supply throughout the year but also paves the way for the potential export of these crops, contributing to foreign earnings for the country. Furthermore, investing in cold storage and supply chain improvements represents a critical area for bolstering Liberia's agribusiness infrastructure, enabling the country to increase the shelf life of perishable goods and meet international market standards, thereby boosting its export potential.[425]

Significant investment opportunities are present in enhancing Liberia's rice sector through irrigation and mechanisation, alongside boosting domestic production and processing capacities. Such advancements can lead to increased efficiency, higher yields, and the ability to meet local demand more effectively. Furthermore, cassava presents a unique investment prospect due to its versatile nature and the wide range of value-added products it can produce. With over 150+ different products derivable from cassava, from food items to industrial goods, its cultivation and processing offer a pathway to diversify Liberia's agricultural output and create new markets. This strategic focus on cassava and rice not only aims to strengthen food security but also holds the potential to stimulate economic growth through increased agro-industrial activities.[426]

For Liberia to harness the full potential of its agricultural sector, **agriculture must be prioritised across the fifteen subdivisions of Liberia through targeted policy interventions.** The government must take a proactive role in investing in agriculture, setting clear policies, and creating an environment conducive to both local farming and international investment. Agriculture (forestry and fisheries) need to be leveraged as transformative entry points towards a more diversified economy. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to provide the necessary investment and expertise to develop the sector further.

[424] National Investment Commission, 2022
[425] National Investment Commission, 2022
[426] National Investment Commission, 2022

T2 Main Transmission Channels

There are significant market opportunities and investment potential within the agribusiness sector for vegetables, fruits, poultry, and fisheries. Liberia's climate is well-suited for horticulture, enabling the year-round cultivation of high-demand produce such as peppers, okra, onions, tomatoes, and squash. The adoption of lowland farming techniques and affordable irrigation methods could enhance productivity and increase the market presence of these essential crops. Additionally, Liberia's extensive 580-kilometre Atlantic coastline, along with its inland water bodies, offer a rich habitat for a variety of marine life, including crab, lobster, shrimp, tilapia, tuna, shark, croaker, barracuda, grouper, and cassava fish. Despite this abundance, Liberia's fishing industry remains largely undeveloped, with a notable absence of commercial fishing operations and domestic fish processing, leading to the majority of catches being sold informally in local markets. This scenario presents untapped opportunities for the development of a structured fishing industry and value-added fish processing activities.[427]

To hasten diversification and boost involvement from the private sector, it is essential to move past reliance on the resource sector by fostering a conducive environment for business and innovation. Achieving this begins with maintaining macroeconomic stability and implementing trustworthy policies to bolster investor trust. Furthermore, it's critical to eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, lower regulatory obstacles, and guarantee sufficient availability of fundamental public utilities (such as transport, electricity, water, and sanitation) to make investment ventures in emerging sectors feaſsible. Enhancing digital capabilities and expanding internet connectivity can open up broader markets and unleash the inherent vibrancy and inventiveness of the region.[428]

- **Ensuring Food Security:** All the above strategies converge to bolster food security. Practical policies might include establishing community seed banks to safeguard against crop failures and creating emergency food reserves, as well as agricultural banks to provide agriculture loans.
  - **Enhancing Health:** Better nutrition from improved food security, along with access to clean water, underpins the policies aimed at health improvements, like nutrition education programs and public health campaigns on the importance of safe water practices.
- **Economic Enrichment:** Strengthening Liberia's food value chains through policies that promote agribusiness entrepreneurship can stimulate job creation and income growth. The basis for this plan can lie in the plans of the Ministry of Agriculture for value-chain development.
  - **Infrastructure Expansion:** As agricultural markets grow, the demand for better infrastructure will increase and vice-versa, as road infrastructure increases,

[427] International Trade Administration, 2022
[428] IMF, 2023

farmers will have greater access to markets, decrease their post-harvest losses and increase revenue, while being able to lower the prices of products and incentivize the economy. Strategic planning and investment in rural road networks is key for the development of value chains in Liberia.

- **Balancing large-scale and small scale farming development:** Concession contracts need to be renegotiated, by ensuring that the terms are more favourable and inclusive of local communities. At the same time, given the financial risks related to small scale farming, it is important to implement cooperative and outgrower schemes to allow small scale farmers to share risks and facilitate financing opportunities for them.

- **Strengthening education:** Educating young Liberians on sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship, through school curricula and community workshops, builds a knowledgeable workforce for the future. It is important to account for the fact that the young population in Liberia will have incentives to continue the urbanisation process, meaning that solely targeting education in agriculture practices may not have enough demand. In this sense, education could be targeted at the whole value chain around agricultural production, transportation and sales to ensure youth's engagement in rural and urban areas.

- **Investing in technology:** Strong investments in digital technologies and farming technologies are important to increase productivity. However, funding tends to be limited. A starting point could be in the renegotiation of concessions, where technology sharing programs can be included as part of the contracts to enable large concessions to share improved seed varieties, modern farming techniques, fertilisers and pesticides, mechanisation, training and support, market access and infrastructure support among others.

- **Collaborative governance:** Implementing participatory decision-making processes that include local farmers in policy dialogue ensures that governance is inclusive and grounded in local realities.

    - **Building social bonds:** Community-driven agroforestry projects and inclusive resource management plans can foster a sense of ownership and solidarity among Liberians, knitting together the social fabric through shared goals and efforts. Programs related to outgrower schemes and cooperatives can further incentivize social bonds, representation, risk sharing and productivity.

    - **Developing policies to empower and acknowledge women's key role in agriculture value-chain development:** Such policies should promote women's cooperatives, secure land rights, and provide access to financing and training in advanced agroforestry and agricultural techniques. By strengthening women's capacity in agriculture, these measures are expected to boost productivity and enhance food security. Tailoring programs to Liberia's cultural context is crucial, as women are often bound by traditional roles in childbearing and child-rearing, which influence their time and availability. Given that women make up a significant

portion of the agricultural workforce, policies must adapt to their unique needs, including flexible hours for skills development and initiatives to encourage a balanced distribution of household responsibilities between men and women, allowing for greater engagement in agricultural activities.

Government incentives play a crucial role in bolstering agribusiness ventures, which are vital for economic diversification and job creation in the agricultural sector. The current threshold for eligibility, set at a capital expenditure of USD 50,000, while a positive start, may not be sufficient to fully stimulate the growth and development of agribusinesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that might struggle to meet this level of investment. There's a compelling argument for the government to reconsider and potentially lower this threshold, or to offer a tiered incentive system that makes it more accessible for smaller agribusinesses to benefit. Additionally, expanding the scope of incentives to cover not just capital expenditure but also operational costs, training, and technology adoption could significantly enhance productivity and sustainability in the sector. By creating a more inclusive and comprehensive incentive package, the government can encourage wider participation in agribusiness, foster innovation, and ultimately strengthen the sector's contribution to the economy. This approach would not only support the establishment and growth of agribusinesses but also ensure that the benefits of such growth are more evenly distributed across the economy, contributing to rural development and poverty alleviation.[429]

Thus, the agricultural sector in Liberia presents significant potential for driving economic revitalization and sustainable development. By addressing the challenges of mechanisation, financial access, and infrastructural deficits, and by leveraging opportunities for youth involvement and value chain enhancements**, Liberia can transform agriculture into a sustainable and profitable sector.**

T2 Sets of Policy Interventions

[1] Transforming the Business Environment
to promote added-value products and develop value chains

1. **Increasing Added Value of Crops**: Developing integrated value chains for **key food and non-food crops** (rice, cassava, cocoa, rubber etc.) can enhance productivity, improve market access, and increase product quality, thus adding value beyond the primary production stage. Promoting a transition from subsistence food production toward commercial agriculture, with value addition.

    1.1. *Establishing local processing facilities* that can turn raw agricultural produce into higher-value goods, supported by *tax breaks* and *start-up grants*, can transform Liberia's agricultural outputs into **less perishable, more marketable products.**

    1.2. *Investment* in climate-smart agriculture and related **MSMEs** to promote food security and enhance income and livelihood. This can be done by supporting local farmers through *loan schemes,* with special attention to women farmers, to enhance sustainable food production. The introduction of *warehouse receipts* by the Central

[429] National Investment Commission, 2022

Bank of Liberia serves as an asset **registry for rural communities, allowing them to access loans.**

2. **Increasing Agricultural Productivity:** Encouraging the use of organic fertilisers through *subsidies*, promoting seed *sharing programs* for robust crop varieties, providing *access to microloans, cooperative and outgrower schemes* for small-scale farmers to invest in **productivity-enhancing tools** and *strengthening crop and livestock research* through institutions like the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI).

   2.1. This includes increasing the awareness, development and application by smallholder farmers of better crop rotation methods, pest management techniques, and soil fertility practices that can lead to higher yields and better-quality products.

   2.2. **Increasing the application of cooperative farming models,** inspired by successful practices in East Africa, could lead to better resource acquisition, utilisation, shared learning, and reduced costs. These models have proven successful elsewhere and could significantly benefit Liberian agriculture by making farming more appealing and financially viable.

   2.3. Additionally, making **affordable and appropriate technology** available to farmers can dramatically increase efficiency and yields. Institutions such as CARI in coordination and partnership with other public, private and multilateral organisations and agencies, play a crucial role in developing and making this technology available for smallholder farmers. Large scale farmers can also support the development of small scale farming through technology and knowledge sharing schemes.

Successful examples:

- **Ethiopia**: Established Commodity Exchange Platforms that connect smallholder farmers to processors and exporters, improving market access and value addition for crops like coffee and sesame. This has increased incomes and food security for farmers.[430]
- **Vietnam**: Promoted the development of integrated value chains for agricultural products like rice, coffee, and cashews, leading to increased productivity, quality, and exports. This has made Vietnam's food system more sustainable and secure.[431]
- **Kenya**: Provided financial and technical support to small-scale farmers and agribusinesses to adopt climate-smart practices, boosting food security and incomes. This has made Kenya's food system more resilient to climate change.[432]
- **India**:
  - Launched the Warehouse Receipt Financing System, allowing farmers to use their stored crops as collateral to access credit, improving their ability to invest in productivity. This has increased food security and reduced post-harvest losses.
  - Made systematic investments to enhance women's participation and productivity in agriculture through the MKSP initiative; a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission. This was done by giving women better access to inputs and services, including technical knowledge on modern agricultural practices.The initiative has helped sustain agriculture-based livelihoods, especially for rural women.[433]

[430] IFPRI, n.d.
[431] Apeh et al., 2022
[432] World Bank, 2022b
[433] Business Today, 2016

[2] Natural Resource Management

3. **Integrated Resource Management:** Holistic resource management plans are pivotal for harmonising agricultural expansion with environmental preservation. This could involve:

    3.1. **Water Management:** Developing infrastructure to distribute water to household and industrial users.

    3.2. **Clean Energy for Agriculture:** Introducing *renewable energy incentive*s and capital expenditure subsidies through special schemes for smallholder farmers for farming operations, such as solar-powered irrigation, to reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

    3.3. **Sustainable Land Use:** Securing land rights is important for agriculture development and inclusive growth for small scale farmers. While the Liberian Land Authority and the government in general have taken steps towards securing land rights, the implementation needs to be strengthened, along with clear delineation of areas for agriculture, forest conservation, and urban development, ensuring balanced land utilisation, for instance through Free, Prior and Informed Consent practices implementation.

    3.4. Implement and enforce sustainable practices to meet **EU deforestation regulations.**

    3.5. Invest in **supply chain management and certification processes** to ensure compliance.

    3.6. **Community engagement:** Local communities and Local Knowledge should be an integral part of the Natural Resource Management policies. Implementing Liberia's legislation on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) to ensure these communities' rights and participation are respected and their voices heard.

Successful examples:

- **Costa Rica**: Implemented a Payment for Ecosystem Services program, compensating landowners for preserving forests and watersheds, leading to increased forest cover. This has helped ensure the sustainability of Costa Rica's food system.[434]
- **China**: Developed comprehensive land-use planning and zoning policies to balance agricultural expansion, urban development, and environmental protection. This has made China's food system more sustainable in the long-term.[435]

[434] Inter-American Development Bank, n.d.
[435] Chen et al., 2023

[3] Infrastructure

4. Significant investment is required to improve **agricultural infrastructure.** This includes the **development** of

4.1. Better roads for transporting goods,

4.2. Enhanced **storage facilities** to reduce post-harvest losses.
- Policies *promoting the use of solar-powered cooling systems* for **storage** can keep produce fresh for longer.

4.3. More sophisticated **soil management system**s to ensure crops can be cultivated year-round, as crops are currently cultivated only in the dry season to prevent the torrential rains from washing away topsoil, and

- Implementing water distribution technologies and introducing practices like crop rotation to make the most of Liberia's fertile land without exhausting it.

Successful examples:

- **Morocco**: Invested heavily in irrigation systems, roads, and storage facilities to support the growth of its agricultural sector, particularly for high-value crops. This has increased productivity and reduced post-harvest losses, contributing to food security.[436]
- **China**: Developed an extensive network of rural roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities, contributing to increased agricultural productivity and reduced post-harvest losses. This has made China's food system more efficient and secure.[437]
- **Bangladesh:** In Bangladesh, the government invested in flood control systems and promoted water-tolerant crops and floating agriculture. This significantly reduced crop losses during the monsoon season, allowing farmers to maintain productivity. As a result, the agricultural sector strengthened, ensuring a stable and secure food supply.[438]
- **Senegal:** In 2020, the government introduced solar-powered cooling systems for storing agricultural produce, providing reliable off-grid refrigeration. This solution significantly reduced spoilage and extended the shelf life of perishable goods. As a result, farmers experienced decreased post-harvest losses, increased income, and improved food security.[439,440]

[436] Food Systems Dashboard, n.d.
[437] Rising Nepal, n.d.
[438] The New Humanitarian, 2019
[439] European Investment Bank, 2021
[440] Amjad et al. 2023

[4] Skills - Education

5. Strengthening **agricultural education and extension services** can empower farmers with the knowledge and tools necessary to increase productivity and adopt sustainable farming practices.

5.1. Engaging the **youth** through *incentives and targeted training programs* across the agriculture value chain could revitalise the sector and help address the high rates of youth unemployment, both in rural and urban areas.

5.2. **Reduced Losses:** *Training* programs on **post-harvest management t**o minimise waste.

Successful examples:

- **India**: Expanded its network of agricultural extension services, providing farmers with training and access to new technologies, leading to productivity gains. This has helped make India's food system more productive and sustainable.[441]
- **Rwanda**: Launched the Huguka Dukore program, which provides vocational training and entrepreneurship support to youth, including in the agricultural sector. This has helped engage young people in building a sustainable food system in Rwanda. The country has also launched the Gender and Youth mainstreaming strategy, which, among other things, seeks to empower women, men and youth in decision-making within the agriculture sector through increased knowledge.[442]

[441] AgriFarming, n.d.
[442] CEGA, n.d.

Blue Economy Spotlight

Liberia's **blue economy,** centred on its marine resources, holds significant potential for economic growth and development. The country's coastal and marine environments are abundant with resources that, if properly managed and utilised, could become a major economic pillar.

However, several challenges currently hinder the effective harnessing of these resources. **The predominant issue in Liberia's blue economy is the dominance of foreign fishing vessels,** which conduct most of the fishing activities in Liberian waters. These foreign operators often fish without lending any economic benefit to the local communities or adequately involving the Liberian government in their operations. This situation not only leads to economic losses for Liberia but also raises concerns about the **sustainability** of fishing practices and marine conservation. Additionally, **there are significant governance challenges.** Reports of illegal fishing activities indicate failures at multiple levels of government, raising questions as to whether there exists actual ability to enforce the Fisheries Law. The presence of illegal fishing underlines the need for more effective enforcement mechanisms to protect Liberia's marine resources.

Despite these challenges, the blue economy of Liberia is ripe with opportunities. By developing a sustainable marine resource management framework, Liberia can enhance the productivity and sustainability of its marine industries. Key areas for development include **fishing, aquaculture, and possibly marine tourism,** all of which can provide significant employment and economic opportunities for coastal communities.

[1] **Enhance value addition in Liberia's blue economy**, the government and stakeholders need to invest in fish processing infrastructure, such as canning and cold storage facilities, to reduce post-harvest losses and extend product shelf life. Implementing quality control standards and certification programs can ensure access to premium markets. Promoting aquaculture and diversifying seafood products will cater to different consumer preferences. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives focusing on technical training, entrepreneurship, and sustainable practices, coupled with improved marketing and branding strategies, can boost the sector's economic returns and contribute to sustainable development.

[2] **Effective governance** is critical to unlocking the potential of Liberia's blue economy. The government needs to establish clear and enforceable maritime policies that prioritise sustainability and economic inclusivity. This includes *revising and enforcing fishing licences, quotas, and penalties for illegal fishing* to ensure that both local and foreign operators adhere to sustainable practices.

a. **Enhancing maritime surveillance** and patrolling capabilities would help curb illegal fishing activities and ensure compliance with fishing regulations, securing the sustainability of marine resources.

b. **Developing partnerships with local and international conservation organisations** can also aid in managing fisheries and protecting marine biodiversity. Such collaborations can bring technical expertise, funding, and increased awareness of best practices in marine resource management.

[3] Investing in marine **infrastructure** is crucial for the growth of the blue economy. *Improvements in port facilities, fishing harbours, and fish processing plants* can significantly boost the sector's efficiency and profitability.

[4] **Training and education programs** tailored to the needs of the blue economy can equip local communities with the skills necessary for jobs in new and expanding marine sectors.

Transformation 3
Bridging Divides: Energy, Transport, & Digital Access

T3. Summary

Liberia's strategic interventions include introducing lower cost financing options and encouraging investment through fiscal incentives and public-private partnerships, which can **provide the necessary capital for infrastructure projects.** Another key aspect is strengthening institutional frameworks, under the assumption that implementing robust legal and regulatory frameworks can help attract investments and protect them, thereby ensuring sustained development efforts.

Advancing technological integration is one of the main demands from different actors. Promoting the adoption of modern technologies in renewable energy and digital connectivity can leverage natural resources and enhance service delivery, particularly in remote areas. Furthermore, community engagement and decentralisation could add value to this development pathway. Encouraging local participation in planning and execution and decentralising economic activities to foster regional development are crucial for equitable growth.

Improving Liberia's road, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure is crucial for national transformation, promoting connectivity, community inclusion, state presence, business development, reduced product costs, and better access to basic services. Interviewees highlighted that many stakeholders have significant interest and influence in advancing infrastructure development, showing potential for coordinated actions. In line with the Agenda for Transformation (AfT) infrastructure development across Liberia, with an emphasis on rural electrification and ICT to foster connectivity and economic opportunities is prioritised.[443]

International actors complement national efforts through grants and loans, but issues such as insufficient maintenance funding and mismanagement impede progress. As international support shifts from grants to loans, the government must enhance resource management to benefit from these loans. Effective resource management and improving the business climate are essential to attract infrastructure investments. These investments can drive economic growth through private sector involvement, increased government revenue, and overall national inclusion and economic improvement.

Transitioning to climate resilient and/or green infrastructure, such as renewable energy sources and efficient public transportation systems, not only addresses immediate infrastructure needs but also contributes to long-term environmental sustainability. Through comprehensive policy reforms and strategic investments, Liberia can significantly improve its infrastructure, paving the way for sustained economic growth and enhanced quality of life for its citizens.

T3. Summary Table

Benefits	Challenges

[443] Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, 2012

- **Economic Growth**: Upgrading infrastructure, particularly in transportation, electricity, and digital connectivity, can significantly enhance Liberia's economic efficiency. Improved road networks reduce transportation costs and spoilage of goods, while reliable electricity and digital services stimulate business operations and social services.
- **Investment Attraction**: Developing infrastructure opens the door for both local and international investments. Financial instruments and incentives like lower lending rates, and support for public-private partnerships can make infrastructure projects more appealing to investors.
- **Decentralisation and Economic Distribution**: By focusing on decentralisation, Liberia can spread economic activities beyond Monrovia, reducing the infrastructural burden on the capital and stimulating growth in other regions. This strategy includes making governmental services more accessible nationwide, which can facilitate business formalisation and improve legal protections.
- **Sustainability and Community Involvement**: Infrastructure projects that are community-focused and environmentally friendly, such as renewable energy initiatives, not only address local needs but also promote sustainability. These projects also tend to have better social acceptance.
- **Education and Skills Development**: Investing in education and training programs tailored to infrastructure needs ensures the availability of skilled personnel required to sustain these developments. This approach supports long-term operational success.
- **Financial Limitations**: High lending rates and the absence of a robust capital market make it difficult to fund infrastructure projects. The lack of adequate financial support hampers the ability to launch and complete significant initiatives.
- **Governance**: Corruption can lead to resource misallocation and increased project costs, which undermines the efficiency of infrastructure development. Strengthening governance and anti-corruption measures is essential.
- **Technical and Skill Deficiencies**: The gap in necessary skills among the workforce makes it challenging to manage infrastructure projects effectively. This issue is compounded by inadequacies in vocational training and educational support in relevant fields, especially for women.
- **Physical and Technical Challenges in Utilities**: The electricity sector faces issues like generation deficits, transmission gaps, and maintenance challenges of mini grids. These problems, along with theft and inefficiencies, hinder the provision of reliable and affordable power.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure Maintenance**: Existing infrastructure, including roads and telecommunications networks, suffers from insufficient maintenance, leading to degradation and inefficiencies that affect daily operations and quality of life.

T3. Main Current Challenges

Roads, electricity and fragmented spaces

Infrastructure remains a pivotal factor for economic growth in Liberia, yet it is significantly underdeveloped, **characterised by**

- poor road connectivity;
- limited access to reliable electricity; and
- inadequate telecommunications.

This lack of infrastructure severely impedes economic development, market access, and the overall operational efficiency of businesses within the country.

The lack of reliable and affordable electricity substantially increases operational costs for businesses, which often rely on expensive alternatives such as generators. This is due to several critical issues: a generation deficit, gaps in transmission and distribution infrastructures, technical and commercial losses, delayed bill payments by public entities, and electricity theft, which fall into overarching management challenges and technical knowledge gaps. Additionally, many mini-grids remain dormant under community management, and the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) is overwhelmed with operating the entire electricity value chain. Moreover, there is inadequate fiscal and technical support for energy policy development and regulation.[444]

The **road network** is another critical problem area; poor road connectivity hampers the movement of goods and people, leading to increased costs and delays that affect economic efficiency. **Telecommunications** infrastructure is similarly lacking, which restricts digital connectivity and hinders the development of a digital economy. **These limitations impact not only business operations but also essential social services like education and healthcare.**

Financial constraints also play a significant role; high lending rates, typically ranging from 18-20%, limit the ability of small-scale businesses to expand and innovate. The absence of a vibrant capital market further exacerbates the difficulty in attracting significant investments, both foreign and domestic.

Additionally, **governance issues, particularly high levels of corruption, undermine infrastructure projects** by leading to resource misallocation and increased project costs.

The skills gap presents a significant hurdle; without a skilled workforce, it is challenging to sustain and manage infrastructure projects efficiently.

[444] Ministry of Energy and Mines, 2023

T3. Key actors: Interest and Influence

Enhancing Liberia's road, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure is essential for its transformational goals. Reliable connectivity across the country will foster community inclusion, strengthen state presence, support business development, lower product costs, including for locally-produced goods, and expand access to essential services. Interviewees identified several key actors with significant interest and influence in advancing infrastructure projects, underscoring infrastructure as a primary national priority and revealing potential for coordinated efforts to achieve these objectives.

Several interviewees in the PEA reported that, complementing national efforts, international actors have invested in infrastructure development through grants and loans. This finding is further detailed in the thematic analysis of this consultancy[445], it can be seen in Table A3 below, and is aligned with the high level of influence and interest of national and international actors from Figure A3 in the Annex. However, PEA interviewees report that the central issues impeding infrastructure development are related to lack of funding allocated to maintenance of such infrastructure as well as fund mismanagement. With the current shift from grants to loans from international actors[446], it becomes fundamental that the government allocates enough funding to maintain the infrastructure and improves governance and management of resources, so as to obtain the benefits of those loans. This is one of the reasons why the first transformation is related to Governance.

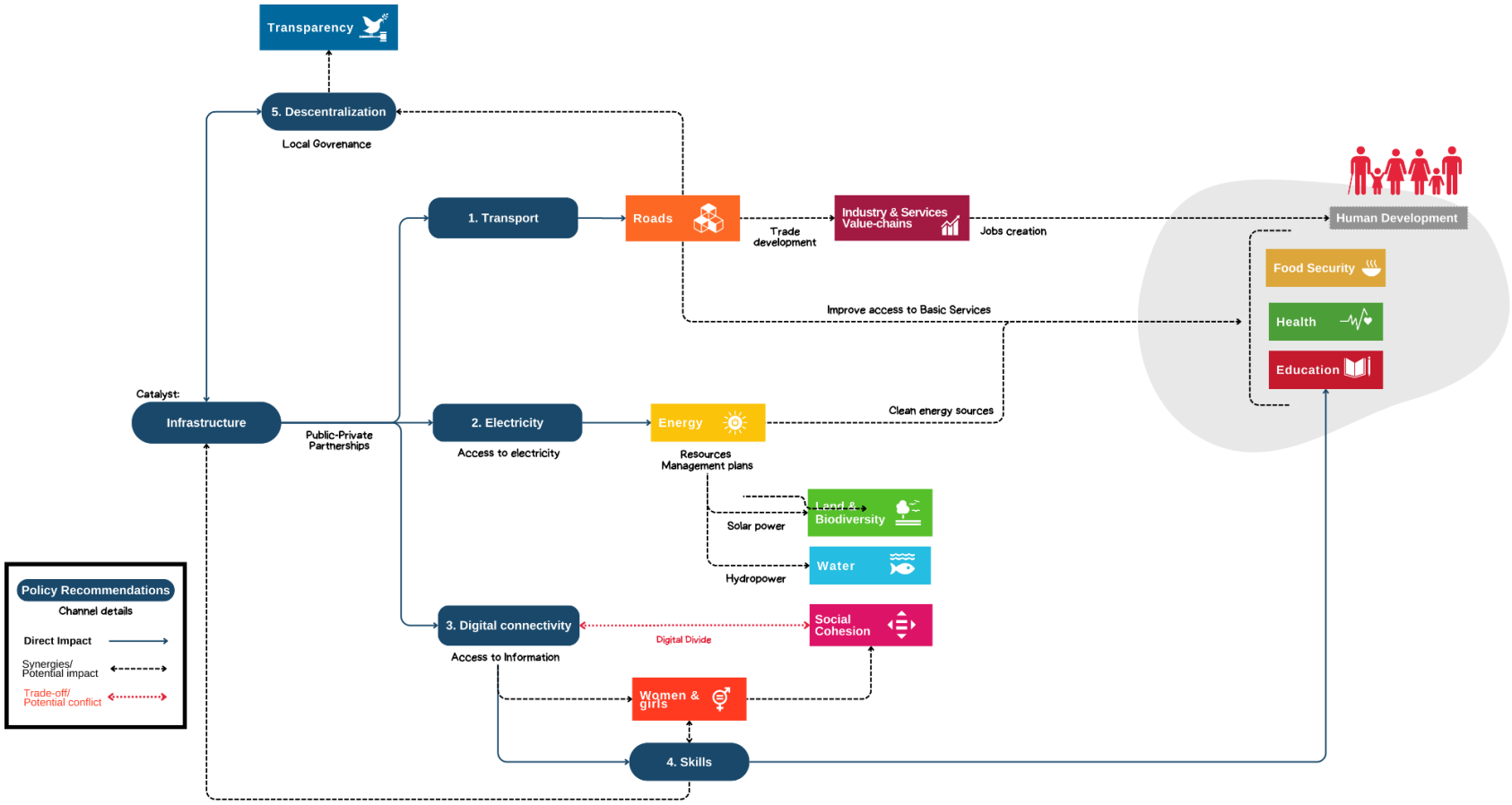
One example of these efforts is related to the US$ 18 million that the legislature agreed to use in 2022 to avert Liberia Electricity Corporation near collapse, due to infrastructure decay, power theft which neared 50%, and delayed connection through the regional power pool with Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea.[447] In this sense, promoting infrastructure development in Liberia depends on the Government's capacity to promote appropriate management of the resources. It is also likely that improving the business climate, particularly in terms of interest rates and non performing loans, can be a way to attract infrastructure investment in Liberia. The very investments in roads, energy infrastructure and telecommunications can act as catalysts for promoting economic growth through private sector investments, increased revenue for the government through effective tax collection and improve Liberia's inclusion and the economy overall.

[445] The thematic analysis shows how AfDB, the World Bank, and Sweden are the largest development partners in the Infrastructure and Basic services sectors in Liberia. At that moment, Liberia counted with 28 ongoing projects in the infrastructure and basic services sectors, from which 9 were being implemented by the Ministry of Public Works.
[446] Mentioned in interviews, in the thematic analysis of this consultancy and in the IMF article IV from 2022.
[447] IMF, 2022a

T3. Main Transformation channels & proposed set of policy interventions
Bridging Divides: Energy, Transport, and Digital Access

Liberia's pathway to improved infrastructure hinges on a comprehensive transformation of key sectors, integrating technological advancement with strategic governance. Figure T3 illustrates how the proposed policy options interact and the sequence of actions that leverage synergies for maximum impact.

Figure T3. Main Transformation channels through Bridging Divides



Source:
Author's own

T3 Main Transmission Channels

- **Enhancing Transport:** Improving road infrastructure facilitates easier access to markets, reduces transportation costs, and decreases the spoilage of perishable goods, thereby enhancing economic efficiency across various sectors. This improvement has the potential **to create quality jobs and stimulate the economy.** Sustainable and efficient mobility is a priority, including infrastructure for roads, and public transport systems.

- **Advancing Electricity Access:** Developing renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, can help mitigate the energy deficit and reduce electricity costs, leveraging Liberia's natural abundance of water, sunlight and strong winds. This promotes e**nvironmental protection and sustainable development.** For this purpose, national policies on renewable energy are necessary. Additionally, Liberia's energy integration through CLSG (Côte d'Ivoire-Liberia-Sierra Leone-Guinea) and the West African Power Pool (WAPP) are key to increasing the efficiency and reliability of energy in Liberia.

    - Smart-grid management and long-distance power transmission can address intermittency, reduce storage needs, and increase grid efficiency. Improving energy efficiency in transport, buildings, industrial use, and household.

- **Expanding Digital Connectivity:** Expanding digital telecommunications infrastructure fosters economic growth by improving access to **information** and enabling the expansion of **e-commerce.** This development supports other sectors, including **education and healthcare, especially in remote areas.**

    - A comprehensive framework of regulatory standards, physical infrastructure, and digital systems is essential to fully leverage the digital revolution for sustainable development. This framework should ensure universal access to high-quality, affordable mobile broadband, promote digital inclusion, protect privacy, establish universal identity systems, and digitise government services.

    - Effectively utilising the digital revolution in sectors such as healthcare, education, online finance, and public goods necessitates robust public institutions and strong leadership from the ministries of science, technology, and telecommunications.

- **Investing in Skills and Education:** Addressing the skills gap in the infrastructure sector ensures that local talent can manage and sustain these developments. Investing in education and training programs is crucial for building a capable workforce.

- **Strengthening Decentralisation and Local Institutions:** Strengthening local governance and institutional capacity enhances the efficiency of infrastructure projects. This includes improving transparency and reducing corruption through stringent measures and robust legal and regulatory frameworks.

- ➔ **Bridging The Gender Digital Divide:** Addressing the gender digital divide can allow the country to harness the full economic potential of its population. Given that women in Liberia have less access to mobile phones and the internet compared to men, they are also left behind in access to mobile-banking, digital financial services, and digital literacy. Bridging this gap can lead to women's higher financial inclusion, skilled formal employment and leverage online platforms for business growth.

Improving Human Development: All the above strategies contribute to improving human development by creating the enabling environment to bolster food security, enhance health outcomes, and expand employment and educational opportunities through better connectivity and access to services. Better infrastructure directly supports sectors like food security, health, and education, leading to overall human development. In turn, improving human development, and particularly human capital is a necessary condition as well (See policy set [4]).

Through these channels, Liberia can achieve a more integrated and sustainable development model. By addressing transport, electricity, digital connectivity, skills, and decentralisation, these interconnected strategies will drive the nation towards a more prosperous and equitable future.

T3 Sets of Policy Interventions

Despite existing challenges, there are significant opportunities to enhance Liberia's infrastructure. Effective policy interventions are necessary to address these challenges. *Developing financial instruments and incentives* that reduce the cost of capital for infrastructure projects could stimulate both local and foreign investment. *Encouraging public-private partnerships (PPPs)* can leverage private sector expertise and funding for critical projects, particularly in areas like energy production and road construction. Ensuring that infrastructure development projects are community-focused and address local needs will improve social acceptance and sustainability.

Key areas for infrastructure development include **Basic Infrastructure** (roads, electricity, water, and digital connectivity) that could be leap-frogged to **Green Infrastructure** (renewable energy, efficient public transportation, etc.)

Decentralisation is a crucial strategy for fostering economic growth beyond the capital city of Monrovia. The centralization of administrative and economic activities in Monrovia poses significant challenges for businesses and individuals in other parts of the country, hindering economic development and the formalisation of businesses in rural and suburban areas.

Decentralising activities could spur economic growth by distributing economic activities more evenly across the country. This would alleviate the infrastructural and administrative burden on Monrovia and stimulate local economies in other regions. Making government services more accessible nationwide would facilitate business formalisation, granting better access to finance, support, and legal protections. Additionally, this approach would encourage investment in other regions, promoting balanced economic development and enhancing stability and growth across Liberia.

Promoting decentralisation requires a comprehensive approach that includes improving infrastructure, such as roads and communication networks in rural areas, to better connect them with the country's economic hubs. Enhanced connectivity would support the operational success of decentralised services and boost local economies by improving access to markets and resources.

By committing to and investing in infrastructure and decentralisation, Liberia can foster more equitable and widespread economic growth. This strategy should focus on revitalising county service centres to make governmental services accessible throughout the country, supporting the formalisation and growth of businesses outside Monrovia.

[1] Transport [448]

1. Improving **road infrastructure** could facilitate easier access to markets, reduce transportation costs, and decrease the spoilage of perishable goods, enhancing economic efficiency across various sectors.

1.1. *Subsidies and Grants:* Provide subsidies and grants for (local) contractors to build and maintain key local/communal road networks.

- *Increase the National Budget* allocation for the road infrastructure sector. While fiscal space is limited, infrastructure development is pivotal for the development of the other development pathways and it is therefore key. Where increased budget allocation seems unlikely, efficiency gains can be made through increased control and auditing of spending, whereby the reduction of corruption can help do more with the current allocations.

- *Seek funding commitments* for constructing the coastal corridor

1.2. *PPP Programs:* Establish public-private partnership (PPP) programs to attract private investment in road construction and maintenance projects.

1.3. Develop and implement regular road *maintenance programs* to ensure longevity and safety.

1.4. Encourage the Infrastructure Sector Working Group (IWG) to foster efficient and effective coordination among actors in the sector.

1.5. Pave some of the major unpaved roads. Unpaved roads lead to an increase in land degradation, water/air pollution, deforestation, poor soil sedimentation and soil infertility.[449]

1.6. Increase road safety by designing roads that accommodate a growing number of motorbike and Kehkeh users.

Successful examples:

[448] Ministry of Public Works, 2023

[449] Apeh *et al.*, 2022

- **China**: Invested heavily in the construction of an extensive national highway network, including the world's largest expressway system. This has significantly improved connectivity and reduced transportation costs.[450]
- **India**: Launched the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana program to provide all-weather road connectivity to previously unconnected rural communities. This has improved market access and economic opportunities for rural populations.[451]
- **Brazil**: Utilised PPPs to attract private investment for the construction and operation of highways, airports, and other transportation infrastructure. This has helped address the country's infrastructure deficit.[452]
- **South Africa**: Implemented a PPP program for road infrastructure, which has led to the development of several major toll road projects that have improved connectivity and reduced travel times.[453]

[2] Electricity

2. **Strengthen the role of the Ministry i**n initiating energy projects to ensure that government strategies for meeting the country's energy needs are developed within the Ministry.

    2.1. Encourage regulatory interventions to increase private sector participation by awarding electricity distribution areas to private companies.

    2.2. Utilise new financial commitments from development partners as financial securities to attract more private investment in the sector, reducing donor involvement in project implementations.

3. The development of **renewable energy sources**, such as solar and wind, could help mitigate the energy deficit and reduce electricity costs, leveraging Liberia's natural abundance of sunlight and strong winds.

    3.1. *Draft a National Policy* for Renewable Energy

    3.2. **Renewable Energy Incentive**s: Offe*r tax breaks and subsidies* for companies investing in **solar** and **wind** energy projects.

    3.3. Installing solar panels to increase off-grid access to electricity. [454] In these cases, Feed-in-tariff policies through subsidies can help incentivize investments in renewables.

    3.4. **Investment Programs:** Launch government-backed investment programs to fund renewable energy infrastructure and attract Independent Power Producers and Public-Private Partnerships.

[450] World Highways, n.d.
[451] World Bank, 2022c
[452] Kroll, n.d.
[453] SAIIA, n.d.
[454] Yusuf, 2024

3.5. **Grid Enhancement Projects:** Implement projects to enhance the national grid for efficient energy distribution.

Successful examples:

- **India**: Introduced a range of financial incentives, such as tax breaks and subsidies, to promote investment in renewable energy projects, particularly solar and wind power. This has helped the country rapidly expand its renewable energy capacity.[455]
- **Morocco**: Developed the Noor solar power complex, one of the world's largest concentrated solar power plants, through a combination of public and private investment. This has helped the country reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.[456]
- **Ethiopia**: Invested in upgrading and expanding its national electricity grid, as well as implementing off-grid solutions to increase access to electricity in rural areas. This has improved the reliability and coverage of the country's power supply.[457]
- **Bangladesh**: Launched the Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Development II project, which has connected over 1 million rural households to the grid and promoted the use of solar home systems. This has improved energy access and economic opportunities in rural communities.[458]

[3] Digital Connectivity

4. Expanding **digital telecommunications infrastructure** can foster economic growth by improving access to information and enabling the expansion of e-commerce, which would support other sectors including education and healthcare, especially in remote areas.

4.1. *Digital Infrastructure Funds*: Ensure efficient administration and application of public funds (such as Part V of Liberia's Telecommunications Law of 2007) intended to expand internet and mobile network coverage in rural areas that are otherwise not viable markets for telecom companies, in line with .

4.2. Business environment: Develop *programs to support the growth of e-commerce* platforms and digital startups.

4.3. *Strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks* to attract and protect investments in the digital sector.

4.4. Improve women's access to digital technology and the internet to facilitate their participation in the digital economy by *offering digital literacy training* to women in e-commerce, enabling them to effectively utilise online platforms for business growth.

Successful examples:

[455] CEEW, 2021
[456] World Bank, AfDB, EIB, n.d.
[457] Energy, Sustainability and Society, 2022
[458] World Bank, 2013

- **Rwanda**: Implemented the National Backbone Infrastructure project, which has laid thousands of kilometres of fibre-optic cables to improve internet connectivity across the country, including in rural areas.[459]
- **Malaysia**: Developed the High-Speed Broadband project, a public-private partnership that has expanded access to high-speed internet services throughout the country, including in underserved regions.[460]

[4] Skills - Education

5. Additionally, *investing in education and training programs* to address the **skills gap** in the infrastructure sector would ensure that local talent is capable of managing and sustaining these developments.

5.1. **Vocational Training Programs**: Strengthen *vocational training programs* with a focus on infrastructure-related skills, including government led programs such as those led by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

5.2. Offer *scholarships* for students pursuing studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and related fields. With a special focus to female students, given their critical underrepresentation in university and the skilled labour market.

5.3. **Industry Partnerships:** Partner with industry stakeholders to align educational curricula with market needs.

5.4. Equipping education centres with *WASH facilities*, securing access to rural water.

Successful examples:

- **Singapore**: Established the Institute of Technical Education, which provides high-quality vocational and technical education to support the country's infrastructure development and industrial growth.[461]
- **Germany**: Implemented a dual-track vocational education system that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training, producing a skilled workforce for the construction and engineering sectors.[462]

[459] ITU, 2020
[460] MCMC, n.d.
[461] ITE, n.d.
[462] BMBF, n.d.

[5] Decentralisation - Strengthening Local Institutions

6. Enhancing governance through stringent *anti-corruption measures* and strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks will be crucial for improving transparency and efficiency within the infrastructure sector.

6.1. Strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in infrastructure development, such as the Ministry *of Public Works*, could help increase the efficiency of infrastructure projects and reduce corruption.

6.2. **Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks:** Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and ensure accountability.

7. Local Government Act Implementation: Fully implement the Local Government Act to decentralise authority and resources.

7.1. E-government and decentralisation of political and fiscal powers

Successful examples:

- **Indonesia**: Implemented a decentralisation program that transferred significant political and fiscal authority to local governments, enabling them to better address the infrastructure needs of their communities.[463]
- **Colombia**: Established regional development agencies to coordinate infrastructure planning and investment at the subnational level, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of project delivery.[464]

In conclusion, revitalising Liberia's infrastructure is crucial for stimulating economic growth and improving the quality of life for its citizens. By addressing the existing challenges through strategic investments, policy reforms, and sustainable practices, Liberia can harness its full economic potential and achieve significant developmental milestones.

[463] Nasution, 2016
[464] OECD, n.d.

Transformation 4:
Empowering Youth: Advancing Education for All

T4. Summary

Liberia has a predominantly young population, with 79% of its 5.3 million citizens under the age of 35, and almost two-thirds below 25 years old.[465] This demographic faces significant challenges, including high unemployment, a lack of vocational training, and limited economic opportunities, rendering them **particularly vulnerable.**[466] Albeit, the demographic dividend[467] remains one of the major drivers for sustainable and inclusive development, emphasising the need for Liberia to ensure that these young individuals receive appropriate education, skills, nurturing and resources to unlock their full potential. However, in order to be able to reap its potential, adequate commitment to education and dignified employment in the form of policies, programmes and investments are required.

Moreover, Liberia's workforce is predominantly composed of individuals lacking substantial skills and falls short of global competitive standards in experience and competence across professions like medicine, economics, agriculture, engineering, and education, among others, with women being disproportionately employed in informal, lower skilled and low paying jobs.[468] This skill gap poses a significant challenge to lifting individuals out of poverty and contributing meaningfully to the national economy's transformation.

The transformation of education in Liberia as a catalyst for development is critical given its profound implications for the well-being of its citizens and their access to secure and decent jobs. This transformation aims to overcome a series of historical and contemporary challenges that the country faces, primarily due to the devastation caused by two civil wars from 1989 to 2003. These wars severely damaged educational infrastructure and led to a significant loss of life among teachers, drastically reducing educational quality and availability. The civil wars resulted in widespread destruction of school facilities and loss of educational personnel, setting back generations of learners. Many existing educational facilities remain in poor condition, lacking basic amenities such as electricity, clean water, and adequate sanitary facilities. This environment is highly detrimental to learning and discourages attendance, particularly among girls. There is a significant lack of qualified teachers, exacerbated by underfunded teacher training programs and low compensation. Educational materials are often outdated or scarce, hindering effective teaching and learning.

Rebuilding and refurbishing school facilities to be environmentally friendly and equipped with modern resources is a key intervention. Significant disparities in educational access exist between urban and rural areas, compounded by economic factors that force children to abandon education to support their families. Girls face lower enrollment and higher dropout rates due to

[465] LISGIS, 2022a
[466] UNDP, 2023c
[467] "The demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)" [UNFPA, n.d.]
[468] PAPD, 2018

teenage pregnancy[469], early marriage, pregnancy, and societal norms. The overall quality of education is poor, with overcrowded classrooms and inadequate instructional resources, affecting students' preparedness for higher education or employment.

In terms of learning, enhancing teacher qualifications through regular, updated training programs that incorporate modern pedagogical techniques, integrating critical thinking, problem-solving, and sustainability into the curriculum to make education relevant to global challenges can have a huge impact on sustainable development in Liberia. Finally, involving communities in educational processes and supporting vulnerable groups through targeted interventions is essential. Leveraging partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, and international donors can enhance resource availability and support educational initiatives.

The PEA analysis identifies education, and its link to the job market and to formal employment, as a crucial driver and current challenge for sustainable and inclusive transformations in Liberia. The lack of trained workers hinders productivity, particularly in key sectors like agriculture value chains and infrastructure. Low labour productivity in services, agriculture, and construction, combined with low labour mobility, is linked to insufficient education levels. Short-term education strategies should target low-productivity sectors to yield the highest returns, while long-term efforts must build a robust education system for economic diversification.

The analysis highlights four key findings: Political feasibility of education investment due to strong interest and influence from key actors, the need for a clear and shared vision in education transformation, the role of infrastructure and good governance in promoting education, and the importance of aligning education priorities with youth preferences. Effective strategies should bridge rural and urban sectors and cater to the interests of the youth to ensure comprehensive development. Attention to youth with disabilities and from vulnerable groups (e.g. LGBTQIA+) must also be given, as discrimination, stigmatisation and lack of tailored facilities often keeps them out of school and impedes them from leading productive lives. Vision 2030 also prioritises inclusive educational opportunities to enhance economic prospects, particularly for youth and marginalised communities.[470]

Investing in the early years (foundational years) but also in secondary and tertiary education as a strong driver of sustainable and human development is paramount.[471] The comprehensive transformation of Liberia's education system aims not only to address the immediate deficiencies but also to lay a foundation for a resilient and sustainable educational framework that supports all Liberian children and prepares future generations for the challenges of the modern world.

[469] New Narratives, n.d.
[470] Governance Commission. Republic of Liberia (n.d.)
[471] Forkpah and Boholano, 2024

T4. Summary Table

Benefits	Challenges
• **Improved Literacy and Education Quality:** Enhancements in teaching quality and learning environments will boost literacy rates and educational outcomes. • **Increased Equity:** Targeted efforts to reduce gender and rural-urban disparities will ensure more equitable access to education. • **Economic Empowerment:** Better education will prepare students for the workforce, fostering economic development and reducing poverty. • **Sustainable Development:** An educated population is better equipped to address and solve complex global and local challenges sustainably.	• **Funding Constraints:** Despite increased allocations, funding remains below necessary levels to comprehensively upgrade the educational infrastructure and resources. • **Cultural Barriers:** Deep-rooted social norms and resistance to changes, especially concerning gender roles,and people with disabilities can impede educational reforms. • **Resource Distribution:** Ensuring that improvements reach all areas of the country, particularly remote and underserved regions, remains a significant challenge. • **Sustainability of Initiatives:** Long-term sustainability of educational reforms requires continuous commitment from both government and partners, which can be vulnerable to political and economic fluctuations.

T4. Main Current Challenges
Education & Employment

Education in Liberia faces several significant challenges that stem from both historical and contemporary issues. These challenges have profound implications for the country's development and the well-being of its citizens. Liberia has undergone two civil wars from 1989 to 2003, which devastated the country's educational infrastructure. Schools were severely damaged, and many teachers fled or were killed, leading to a **drastic reduction in educational quality and availability**. **Many educational facilities in Liberia are in poor condition, lacking basic amenities such as electricity, clean water, and sanitary facilities**. This environment is not conducive to learning and can discourage attendance, especially among girls.

There is a significant shortage of qualified teachers in Liberia. Many teachers lack proper training and qualifications, partly because teacher training programs are underfunded and inaccessible. Additionally, the profession is not well-compensated, which does not attract or retain talent. **The educational materials available are often outdated or in short supply.** Textbooks and other learning materials that are crucial for effective teaching and learning are not readily accessible in many schools. There is the need to develop curricula that integrate sustainability across all subjects and encourage an interdisciplinary approach to solving complex global issues. Foster pedagogies that encourage active and participatory learning, such as project-based learning, field trips, and student-led research projects on local environmental issues.

Access to education in Liberia is uneven, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas and between girls and boys. Rural areas suffer from a lack of educational facilities and qualified teaching staff. Moreover, gender disparities persist, with girls often having lower school enrollment, attendance and higher dropout rates due to factors such as early marriage, pregnancy, and traditional gender roles. It is worth noting that the unemployment rates are higher among the youth, so it is important to pay attention to job creation for the youth once they are educated.

Education in Liberia suffers from inadequate financial support. The national budget allocation to education is insufficient to meet the sector's needs, affecting everything from teacher salaries to infrastructure development and maintenance. Student retention is a significant issue, with high dropout rates at all levels of education. Economic factors often force children to leave school to work and support their families, while others are deterred by the poor quality of education.

The overall quality of education in Liberia is considered low, impacting students' learning outcomes and their preparedness for higher education or employment. This is exacerbated by issues such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, and lack of instructional resources.

Moreover, a significant portion of Liberia's population is young and vulnerable, grappling with challenges such as unemployment, lack of vocational training, and limited opportunities for economic empowerment. Addressing the needs of this demographic is essential for national

development, necessitating improvements in educational systems, job creation, and vocational training programs to equip the youth with market-relevant skills.

Currently, unemployment and informality pose considerable challenges, with a large portion of the labour force engaged in low-productivity jobs and informal employment, undermining social security systems and limiting the potential for economic advancement. Workers in the informal sector typically do not have access to benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and unemployment support**.** This leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and lifecycle-related risks, perpetuating poverty and economic instability. The lack of contributions to social security systems from informal workers means that these systems are underfunded, reducing their effectiveness and reach.

In particular educational attainment remains a significant barrier to gender equality in Liberia. Although completion rates in primary and lower secondary education are higher for girls—compared to boys—there is a notable drop-off at upper secondary education and tertiary levels for girls. Traditional cultural norms, early marriage, and teenage pregnancies are major factors contributing to high dropout rates among girls.[472] These factors contribute to limited access to quality education as well as vocational training, which in turn restrict women's opportunities for gainful employment and entrepreneurship.

The youth, despite being a demographic pressure point, represent a tremendous opportunity for Liberia's growth. With targeted investments, this young population, and particularly girls, can expand the labor market and create new industries. Skills development, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and fostering entrepreneurship are essential for harnessing this potential.

[472] UNESCO, 2022

T4. Key Actors: Interest and Influence

The PEA analysis sets education as one of the main drivers and current challenges to promoting sustainable and inclusive transformations in Liberia. Several interviewees informed that Liberia's lack of trained workers hinders the country's productivity, especially in the key transformation sectors highlighted in this document, namely agriculture value chains and infrastructure, among others. This is aligned with findings around labour productivity in Liberia[473], where evidence suggests that Liberia has low and or declining labour productivity in the Services and Primary sectors, particularly in trade services, agriculture, and construction (exacerbated by low returns to capital).

Furthermore, data suggests that there has been low labour mobility away from low productivity sectors towards more productive activities. According to interviewees, the challenges for labour mobility across sectors are partly explained by the low levels of education across the population, which make it difficult for individuals to change jobs.

In Liberia's context, focusing on key sectors with low productivity can provide the highest returns in the short term, since the cost and time to train the labour force for the jobs with the current highest productivity can be substantial.[474] This implies that the needs for education should be tailored in the short term to improve productivity in areas where the country's productivity is lowest, which is aligned with the proposed focus on agriculture and infrastructure in this document. In the longer term, the country needs to build a strong education system allowing the population to participate in different sectors, contributing to the country's economic diversification.

The PEA analysis provided four important findings in this sense. The political feasibility of education investment, the need for a clear and shared vision in education transformation, the interconnectedness of infrastructure development and good governance to promote education and the need to align education priorities with youth preferences.

- **Political Feasibility of Education Investment:** Key actors show strong interest and influence in improving education and skills in Liberia, suggesting political feasibility for allocating resources to this sector. This alignment of interest and influence is further supported by the number of programs targeting education in Liberia, as can be seen in Table A4.

- **Need for a Clear Vision in Education Transformation:** Interviewees reported fewer actors involved in education compared to other sectors (Figure A4). This does not mean there are fewer actors in reality but indicates a need for a clearer vision of how education can support other transformative efforts. The limited detail on education actors highlights the need to strengthen cross-sectoral communication about the role of education and human capital development in these transformations.

[473] AfDB, 2023b.
[474] AfDB, 2023b.

- **Infrastructure and Governance as Critical Enablers for Education:** Other transformative efforts, such as improving infrastructure and governance, are essential for advancing education. Interviewees emphasised the need for better infrastructure (e.g., roads, education, and health facilities) and governance for strategic resource allocation and leadership, to be able to increase the availability and access to schools and universities. Particular emphasis was placed on dedicating funding to maintain the infrastructure that is built, including in terms of education facilities.

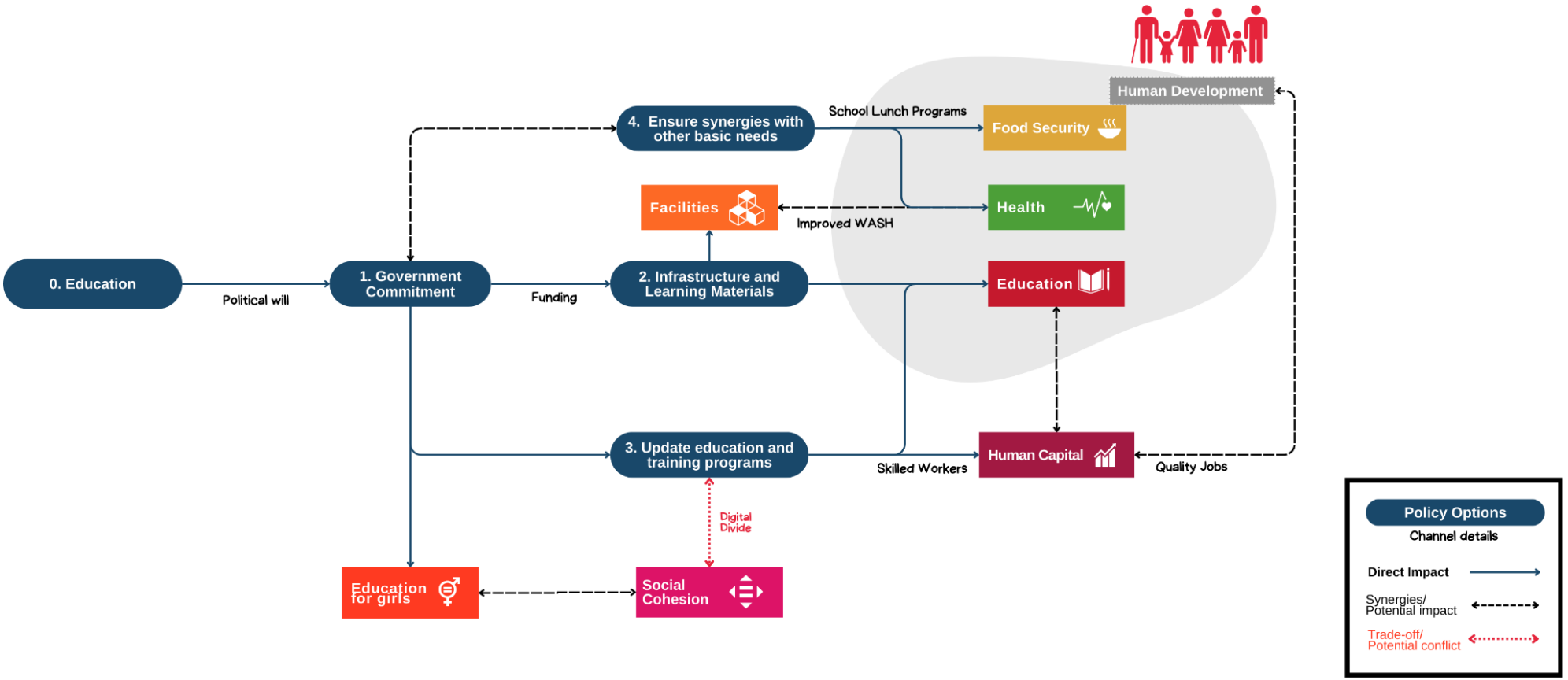
- **Aligning Education Priorities with Youth Preferences:** Education strategies should not only aim to improve productivity but also consider youth preferences and behaviours. For example, focusing solely on smart agriculture in rural areas may not attract urban-bound youth. Instead, education programs should address urban migration trends and offer skills training in sectors that bridge rural and urban areas, such as transport, sales, and services related to key economic activities in Liberia, including agriculture and infrastructure development.

T4. Main Transformation Channels & Proposed Set of Policy Interventions

Empowering Youth: Advancing Education for All

Through strategic investments and coordinated efforts, Liberia can unlock the potential of its youthful population and steer the nation toward a more prosperous and equitable future.

Figure T4. Main Transformation Channels through Education



Source: Author's own

T4 Main Transmission Channels

- **Policy and Leadership:** A **strong government commitment** is essential for transforming education in Liberia, emphasising resource allocation to boost the quality of education. This includes specific programs and policies for **girls and other vulnerable populations, particularly in rural communities,** to address disparities. Leadership at the highest levels must prioritise education, ensuring that it receives the necessary attention and resources.

- A clear need exists to improve **school facilities,** including sanitation and electricity, and to ensure better access to these facilities. Enhancing school **infrastructure** will have a ripple effect, **improving overall health and education outcomes.**

- **Access to Quality Education**: Reforming the **curriculum** to align with the needs of the students and the **labour market** is crucial. This involves incorporating modern teaching methods and focusing on critical thinking, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary approaches. It is crucial to update training programs by incorporating **ICT and tailoring them to meet the human capital needs of different industries.** This will create better **quality jobs and skilled workers, boosting the economy inclusively.** Special programs for **rural women and other vulnerable populations** are necessary to prevent a broader digital divide.

    - **Teacher Training:** Investing in comprehensive teacher training programs is necessary to improve the quality of education. This includes ongoing professional development to ensure teachers are equipped with the latest pedagogical skills and knowledge.

    - **Enhancing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)** programs will prepare students for the labour market. These programs should be tailored to meet the economic and professional demands of the country, fostering entrepreneurship and employability.

    - **Promoting youth entrepreneurship in schools for girls and boys**: Including entrepreneurial education within schools (giving the necessary attention to gender disparities) can contribute to the socio-economic development of the country by fostering a culture of innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth from a young age.

- **Synergies with Other Basic Needs:** Schools and education can act as catalysts by integrating other basic needs, such as school lunch programs, community engagement with parents, and improved WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities. Additionally, providing sexual and reproductive health education is key to enhancing human development.

- **Community Engagement:** Engaging communities and parents in the education process is vital for creating a supportive environment for students. This includes awareness programs and initiatives that encourage parental involvement in their children's education.

T4 Sets of Policy Interventions

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including increased investment in education, improvements in teacher training, enhanced school facilities, and targeted interventions to support vulnerable groups. Furthermore, policies need to focus on both increasing access to education and improving the quality of education to ensure that all Liberian children can benefit from meaningful educational opportunities. The goal is to create an educational system that not only addresses the immediate challenges but also prepares future generations for sustainable living.

In particular, in the quest for sustainable development, Liberia faces the critical challenge of building a resilient and diversified economy. Central to this transformation is the prioritisation of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. STEM education equips students with essential skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and technological literacy, which are crucial for addressing complex global challenges. By fostering a strong foundation in STEM, Liberia can nurture a generation of innovators and leaders capable of driving economic growth and sustainability.

Moreover, prioritising STEM education is essential for bridging the gender gap in Liberia. Historically, girls and women have been underrepresented in STEM fields, limiting their participation in the country's socio-economic development. Targeted interventions, such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and gender-sensitive curriculum, can encourage more girls to pursue STEM education. This not only promotes gender equality but also enhances the diversity of perspectives in STEM fields, leading to more inclusive and comprehensive solutions to development challenges.

Investing in STEM education also aligns with Liberia's goals for sustainable development, particularly in areas like agriculture, health, and infrastructure. For instance, advancements in agricultural technology can increase food security, while innovations in healthcare can improve public health outcomes. By equipping students with STEM skills, Liberia can develop a skilled workforce capable of harnessing technology and innovation to solve local problems. This will not only improve quality of life but also position Liberia as a competitive player in the global economy, paving the way for a sustainable and prosperous future.

[1] Government Commitment

1. **Funding**: *Increase governmental and international funding* earmarked specifically for education initiatives by applying local and international commitments to which Liberia is a party, such as Chapter IX of the Education Reform Law, the Incheon Declaration Benchmarks and ECOWAS and AU provisions on financing education. Liberia's government is committed to supporting education by increasing funding to meet the benchmarks set by the Education Act and the Incheon Declaration, which call for allocating 20% of the national budget to education. This commitment ensures adequate resources for improving educational infrastructure, teacher training, and student support services, essential for achieving quality education for all.

2. **Partnerships**: *Collaborate* with international donors, NGOs, and the private sector to generate additional resources, including materials, technology, and financial support.

    2.1. Public-Private Partnerships: Encourage partnerships that bring corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds and expertise to support sustainability initiatives in schools.

3. **Decentralisation**: Decentralization in Liberia's education system enhances accessibility and quality by shifting decision-making and resources to local authorities. This allows for tailored educational programs that meet community needs and promotes inclusive, equitable education for all students.

4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Develop robust frameworks to regularly assess the education ecosystem with clear indicators and benchmarks, including regular learning evaluations and capacity building for best practices and institutional strengthening.

5. Prioritise education for all, **especially girls and marginalised communities** through *scholarships* to enhance literacy, skills, and awareness of sustainable practices.

Successful examples:

- **Cuba**: Allocates a significant portion of its GDP to education, ensuring universal access to free, high-quality education from preschool to university. This has led to high literacy rates and strong educational outcomes.[475]

- **Finland**: Collaborates extensively with international organisations, NGOs, and the private sector to support its education system, drawing on global best practices and resources to continuously improve the quality of education.[476]

[475] McCloskey, 2011.
[476] Saavedra, J., Alasuutari, H., & Gutierrez, M., 2018

[2] Sustainable School Infrastructure and Learning Materials

6. **Green Infrastructure**:

    6.1. Invest in *rebuilding and refurbishing school facilities* to be environmentally friendly and resilient to local climate challenges.

    6.2. *Develop school infrastructure that uses renewable* energy sources, efficient waste management practices, and sustainable construction materials.

7. **Digital Tools***: Incorporate digital tools* and resources to enhance learning (with consideration to gender and geographic digital gaps).

8. *Establish partnerships* with NGOs, government agencies, and the private sector to support educational programs, provide resources, and create learning opportunities outside the classroom.

9. **Teacher Training and Professional Development**

    9.1. *Train teachers* not only in subject matter but also in pedagogical approaches that foster sustainable learning, such as inquiry-based, experiential, and collaborative learning. Implement incentive programs to attract and retain qualified teachers.

    9.2. **Professional Development:** Implement ongoing training programs to help teachers stay updated with the latest knowledge and methods in sustainability education.

Successful examples:

- **Rwanda**: Eliminated school fees and provided scholarships to increase access to education, particularly for girls and marginalised groups. This has led to significant improvements in enrollment and gender parity in education.[477]
- **Brazil**: Implemented the Bolsa Família program, which provides conditional cash transfers to low-income families, incentivizing them to keep their children in school. This has helped reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students.[478]
- **India**: Launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program, which has constructed thousands of new schools and classrooms using sustainable materials and incorporating renewable energy sources. This has improved the quality of the learning environment.[479]
- **Estonia**: Provides all students with digital devices and high-speed internet access, enabling them to use technology effectively in their learning. This has prepared Estonian students for the digital age and improved their educational outcomes.[480]

[477] Lartigue and Miller-Grandvaux, 2018
[478] Draeger, 2021
[479] Yadav et al., 2018
[480] Education Estonia, 2020

[3] Update Education and Training Programs

10. Critical Thinking: *Emphasise critical thinking in the curricula*, problem-solving, and participatory skills that enable students to make informed decisions.

11. *Engage local communities* in the education process to ensure learning is relevant to local contexts.

11.1. Extend education programs to include community workshops and seminars that engage students, parents, and community members, emphasising the role of education in sustainable development.

12. *Develop and implement programs* for the **rehabilitation of drug-addicted youth** and enrol them in vocational training programs.

13. **Vocational Training:** Offer vocational and skill training programs tailored to the needs of the job market.

13.1. **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Promote entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation among youth, providing *access to financial services and support for local enterprises and small-medium businesses.*

13.2. *Invest* in local enterprises, education, agriculture, and capacity-building programs to support youth development and employment opportunities

13.3. Support the link between vocational training and entrepreneurship by incorporating entities formed by vocational graduates into public procurement processes.

Successful examples:

- **Singapore**: Emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills in its curriculum, preparing students for success in the 21st century. This has helped Singapore consistently rank among the top-performing education systems in international assessments.[481]
- **Kenya**: Integrates local contexts and issues into the curriculum, ensuring that learning is relevant to students' lives and communities. This has helped students develop a strong sense of identity and engagement with their local environment.[482]
- **Germany**: Operates a dual vocational education system that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training, preparing students for careers in skilled trades and technical fields. This has helped Germany maintain a highly skilled workforce and low youth unemployment rates.[483]

[481] Koh et al., 2012
[482] KICD, 2017
[483] Deutschland.de, n.d.

- **Malaysia**: Provides financial and technical support to youth entrepreneurs through programs like the Graduate Entrepreneurship Fund and the SME Bank. This has helped young people start and grow successful businesses, creating jobs and driving economic growth.[484]

[4] Ensure Synergies with Other Basic Needs

14. School Lunch Programs

14.1. **Nutrition Plans:** *Develop and implement school lunch programs* that provide nutritious meals to students, ensuring they receive the necessary daily nutrients to support their learning and development.

14.2. *Source food locally* to support local farmers and ensure the freshness and quality of meals.

14.3. *Engage parents and community members* in the preparation and distribution of school meals to foster community involvement and ownership.

15. Healthcare Education: Integrate healthcare education, particularly for girls, focusing on nutrition, hygiene, reproductive health, and general wellness.

16. Funding: Secure funding from governmental and international sources to sustain school lunch programs and healthcare education initiatives, ensuring they are accessible to all students, particularly in low-income areas.

Successful examples:

- **Brazil**: Provides free, nutritious meals to all students in public schools, sourcing food from local farmers. This has improved student nutrition, supported local agriculture, and helped reduce food insecurity.[485]
- **Asia Pacific**: Integrates healthcare education into the curriculum, focusing on topics like nutrition, hygiene, and reproductive health. This has helped improve the health and well-being of Thai students and their communities.[486]

[484] Entrepreneur Insight, n.d.
[485] Sidaner, E., Balaban, D., & Burlandy, L., 2013
[486] World Economic Forum, 2024

Annex. **Additional Figures**

Table A1. Transparency and Accountability, Security and Rule of Law, and Public Administration Policy and Programmes ongoing projects (2024 onwards)

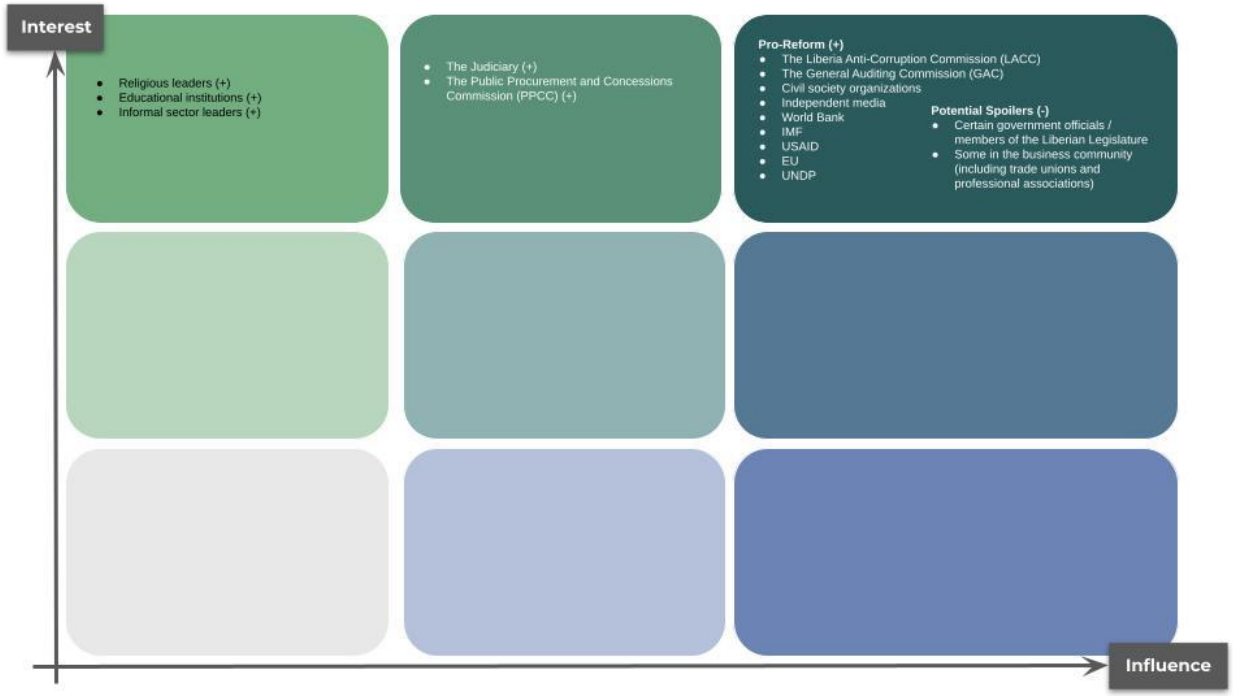
Donor	Project/ Programme	Alignment with National authority	Sum of Total Disbursements
European Union	Administration Agreement for the World Bank trust fund for the Public Financial Management Reforms for Institutional Strengthening Project		USD 2.055.654
	AHEAD LIBERIA	National Elections Commission	USD 543.808
	Promoting a More Inclusive and Accountable Democracy in Liberia	National Elections Commission	USD 7.097.980
	Aid Formulation Liberia 2023	MFDP	USD 59.271
	Civil Society Organisations as actors of Governance and Development Work in the Field Securing Land Rights for Women and Rural Communities in South-Eastern Liberia		USD 1.292.552
	Long Term Technical Assistance to the NAO of Liberia		USD 926.651
	Strengthening Democracy and Respect for Fundamental Human Rights of Prisoners in Liberia (Phase I and II)	Human Rights Commission	USD 776.639 USD 277.881
	Strengthening resilience of key population groups and Human Rights Defenders in Liberia		USD 374.958
International Development Association	Harmonising and Improving Statistics in West Africa (HISWA)	LISGIS	USD 21.833.905
	Public Financial Management Reforms For Institutional Strengthening (PFMRIS) Project	MFDP	USD 22.856.186
IOM	Promoting Peaceful Electoral Environment and Community Security in Liberia	Ministry of Justice	USD 399.641
Ireland	Liberia Electoral Support Project		USD 578.950
Japan	Training Programme in Japan	MFDP	USD 1.961.983
Norway	Integrity Watch Liberia - Scaling Up Tax Justice Mobilising CSOs media, and parliamentarians	Ministry of Justice	USD 108.619
Sweden	AIFO: Coordinated Action on Disability in Liberia (CAD-L) Inception Phase	Ministry of Justice	USD 11.628.406

	Beyond the Grid Fund for Africa - Liberia		USD 5.666.689
	Capacity Development in Land Administration		USD 6.924.455
	Carter Center support to LEON 2021-2024		USD 5.934.539
	ECOWAS Radio Liberia		USD 4.230.810
	Enhancing Anti-Corruption in Liberia		USD 5.408.166
	NAYMOTE		USD 1.768.099
	Public Financial Management (PFM) Capacity Building Programme	MFDP	USD 5.162.615
	SRHR Support, RFSU		USD 3.140.263
	Support to National Elections 2021 - 2024		USD 3.127.690
	Support to the Liberia Revenue Authority		USD 3.834.387
	VOSIEDA Climate Smart Agriculture for Resilience and Livelihood Support		USD 747.469
UNDP	Capacity for Development II	MFDP	USD 264.160
	Environment and Natural Resources Management		USD 470.370
	Peacebuilding, Reconciliation and Social Cohesion	Ministry of Internal Affairs	USD 542.551
	Strengthening the Rule of Law in Liberia II / Joint RoL Phase II	Ministry of Justice	USD 2.048.959
	Liberia Electoral Support Project	National Elections Commission	USD 752.426
United Nations Population Fund	Data availability and analysis around population dynamics	MFDP	USD 7.841.567
USAID	Liberia Domestic Election Observation Activity	Governance Commission	USD 990.000

	Elections and Democracy Activity		USD 8.449.389
	INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION ACTIVITY		USD 1.093.041
	Land Management Activity		USD 5.387.126
	Liberia Civil Society Activity		USD 6.034.590
	Liberia Domestic Elections Observation (LIDEO) Activity		USD 830.000
	Media Activity		USD 5.895.602
	Peace and Security (Youth for Peace (Y4P)		USD 1.246.827
	Program Support (Administration, oversight, evaluations, Program Development, etc)		USD 3.940.465
	Youth for Peace		USD 1.246.827
10 funders	**43 Activities (policy/ programmes)**	**7 National Partners**	**USD 165.752.167**

Source: MFDP [Transparency and Accountability], [Security and Rule of Law], and [Public Administration], 2023

Figure A1. Main actors for Key Transformative Entry Point 1



Source: Author's own

Table A2. Agriculture and Environment Policy and Programmes ongoing projects (2024 onwards)

Donor	Project/ Programme	Alignment with National authority	Sum of Total Disbursements
AfDB	Liberia - Emergency Food Production Program [1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 5.281.178
	Smallholder Agriculture Development for Food and Nutrition Security (SADFONS) [1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 4.220.052

International Development Association	Rural Economic Transformation Project (RETRAP)[1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 24.224.133
	Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P)[1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 20.035.455
	Liberia Sustainable Management of Fisheries Project (LSMFP)	Bureau of National Fisheries	USD 17.793.647
IFAD	Building Climate Resilience in Liberia Cocoa and Rice Sectors (BCRP) [1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 1.705.278
	Tree Crop Extension Project (TCEP) II [1]	Min. of Agriculture	USD 10.193.397
European Union	Liberia Fisheries Governance Project	Min. of Agriculture	USD 427.747
	Liberian Food Safety Initiative	Min. of Agriculture	USD 2.270.718
	Talking agri-business in Liberia	Min. of Agriculture	USD 176.979
	Technical Assistance for Liberia **Rice** Value Chain Project	Min. of Agriculture	USD 1.633.404
	The Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRA Project)	Min. of Agriculture	USD 4.282.721
	PROBIO - Protecting biodiversity through law enforcement and community-led initiatives	EPA	USD 766.727
USAID	AGRIBUSINESS INCUBATOR AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY	Min. of Agriculture	USD 2.796.666
	Food Security, Nutrition and Resilience Activity in Liberia (FSNR)	Min. of Agriculture	USD 3.061.881
	Conservation Works Activity	-	USD 7.072.530
Japan	Food Assistance Program (2023)	-	USD 2.090.000
	Improving Rice Production for Smallholders Project (LibRice)	-	USD 2.010.160
Sweden	GROW Liberia	-	USD 24.392.635
	Internews/ALICOR 2022-2025	-	USD 808.089
	UNFPA Liberia Country Program	-	USD 1.367.450

	UNDP/FAO Community-Based Forestry and Protected Area Management (CBFM)	-	USD 639.371
Norway	Building legal foundations for sustainable forests and livelihoods	EPA	USD 1.573.945
UNDP	Biodiversity; Conservation & Eco	-	USD 28.460
	Livelihood; DR & Climate Change	Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy	USD 59.718
	Protect coastal Community	EPA	USD 254.492
	Programme Management	EPA	USD 246.848
11 funders	**27 Activities (policy/ programmes)**	**4 National Partners**	**USD 139.413.681**

[1] Main 2023 MOA Projects. | **Source**: MFDP [Agriculture] and [Energy and Environment], 2023

Figure A2. Main actors for Key Transformative Entry Point 2

Source: Author's own

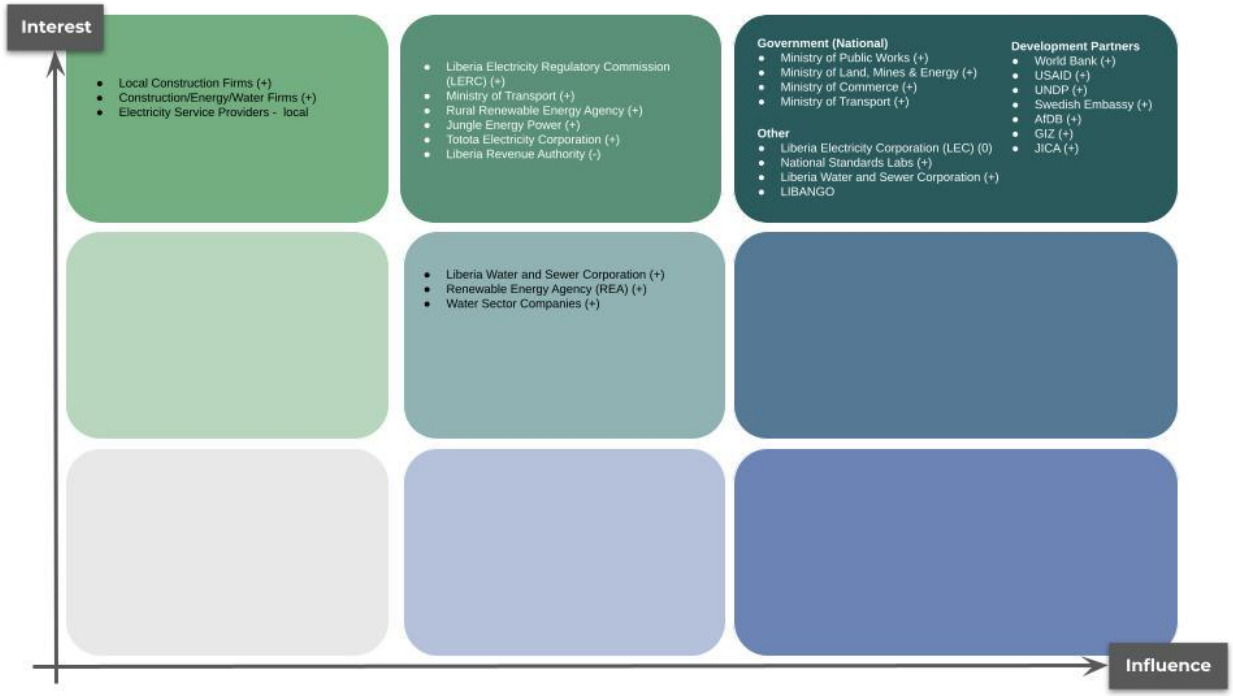
Table A3. Infrastructure and Energy Policy and Programmes ongoing projects (2024 onwards)

Donor	Project/ Programme	Alignment with National authority	Sum of Total Disbursements
Germany	Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund (LRTF) V	Min. of Public Works	USD 27.841.874
	Liberian Reconstruction Trust Fund VI		USD 9.000.000
International Development Association	Liberia Road Asset Management Project (LIBRAMP)	Min. of Public Works	USD 202.099.720
	South Eastern Corridor Road Asset Management Project (SECRAMP)	Min. of Public Works	USD 27.542.836
Foreign Commonwealth Development Office	Liberia Roads Development Programme (SECRAMP)	Min. of Public Works	USD 6.095.238
European Union	PAGODA for RIP contribution to Sanniquallie-Loguatuo road	Min. of Public Works	USD 15.429.720
USAID	USAID/Liberia Architecture and Engineering Services IDIQ	Min. of Public Works	USD 848.164
	CSQUARED LIBERIA BACKBONE		USD 800.000
	Higher Education for Conservation Activity	Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy	USD 487.334
	COLLABORATE UP MECHANISM- WASH CO-CREATION ACTIVITY		USD 155.569
Abu-Dhabi Fund	River Gee Hydropower Project	Liberia Electricity Corporation	USD 7.872
AfDB	Liberia Energy Efficiency and Access Project (EU-AITF)	-	USD 1.855.534
	Renewable Energy for Electrification in Liberia (REEL) [Off-Grid Electricity]	-	USD 3.302.482
International Development Association	Liberia Electricity Sector Strengthening and Access Project (LESSAP) [Off-Grid Electricity]	Liberia Electricity Corporation	USD 22.930.712
	Regional Emergency Solar Power Intervention Project (RESPITE)	Liberia Electricity Corporation	USD 896.250

	Liberia Urban Water Supply Project (UWSP)	Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation	USD 29.177.690
Japan	Liberia Electricity Sector Strengthening and Access Project	Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy	USD 100.203
	The Project of Capacity Development for Diesel Generator Maintenance		USD 277.549
Sweden	Forum Civ II		USD 2.789.284
	Renewable Energy and Adaptation to Climate Technologies (REACT) [Off-Grid Electricity]		USD 3.838.110
	Sustainable Waste Management		USD 131.542
UNDP	Renewable Energy Access	Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy	USD 151.444
13 funders	**22 Activities (policy/programmes)**	**4 national partners**	**USD 355.759.127**

Source: MFDP [Infrastructure] and [Energy and Environment], 2024

Figure A3. Main actors for Key Transformative Entry Point 3



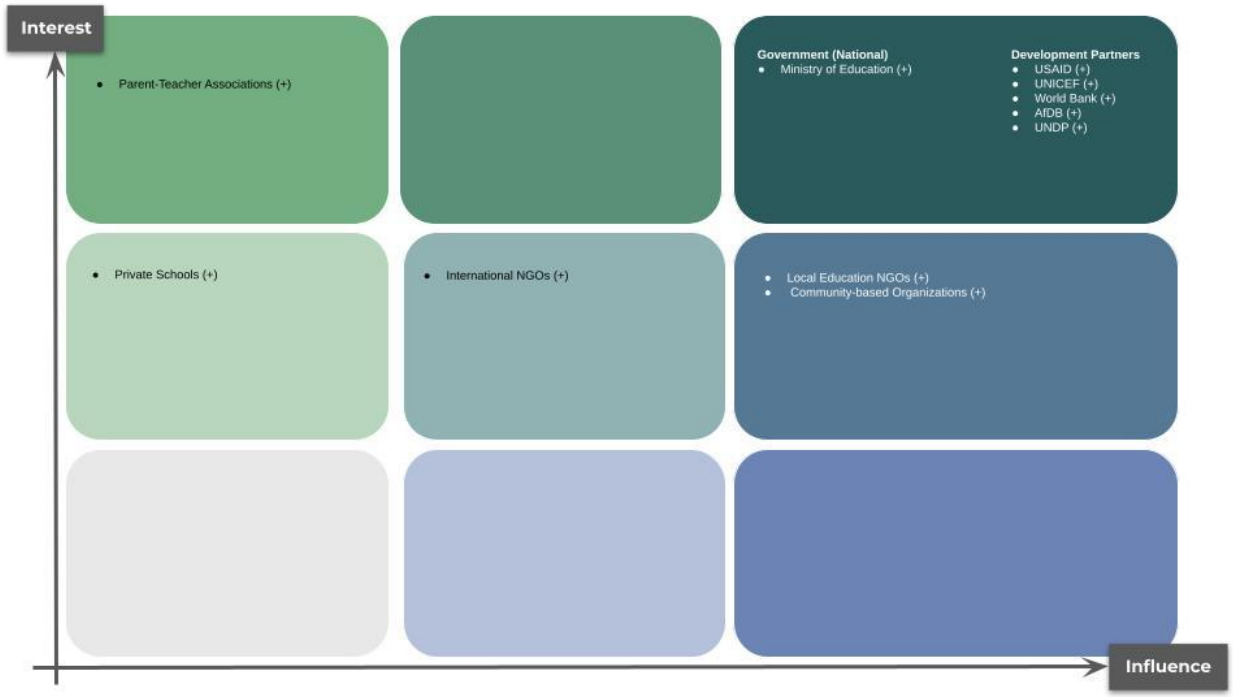
Source: Author's own

Table A4. Education Policy and Programmes ongoing projects (2024 onwards)

Donor	Project/ Programme	Alignment with National authority	Sum of Total Disbursements
European Union	Youth Rising - EU Support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Young People in Liberia	Ministry of Education	USD 22.250.542
	Youth Rising - EU Support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Young People in Liberia(Supplementary to CTR 399430)	Ministry of Education	USD 6.091.550
	Youth Rising - EU Support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Young People in Liberia II	Ministry of Youth & Sport	USD 7.091.742
France	Strengthening Integration through Vocational Education	Ministry of Education	USD 9.205.187
Germany	Capacity Development in the Transport Sector	Ministry of Education	USD 23.795.023
Sweden	Youth Rising Project	Ministry of Education	USD 14.471.382
UNESCO	Strengthening TVET in Liberia	Ministry of Education	USD 1.232.120
USAID	Data Evaluation Learning and Technical Assistance (DELTA) Activity	Ministry of Education	USD 6.640.217
	Education Systems Strengthening Activity	Ministry of Education	USD 531.463
	School Feeding Program II in Bong County	Ministry of Education	USD 3.024.718
	The Incentivize Learning Activity	Ministry of Education	USD 306.183
Japan	The project for Construction of Garbo Public Elementary School	-	USD 72.427
United Nations Children Fund	Inclusive Quality Education	-	USD 9.636.807
8 Funders	**13 activities (policy/programmes)**	**2 national partners**	**USD 104.349.361**

Source: MFDP [Education], 2024

Figure A4. Main actors for Key Transformative Entry Point 4



Source: Author's own

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