

Policy Brief: The Impact of Recent U.S. Policy Changes on Early Childhood Education in Liberia – By Dr. Alovett Joel King, DM,

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Executive Summary

Liberia's education system has historically relied on international aid, with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) playing a pivotal role in expanding access to and improving the quality of education. In 2023, USAID launched the Education Systems Strengthening Activity (ESSA), a five-year, \$23.5 million initiative designed to enhance Liberia's education system at the county and district levels. ESSA focuses on strengthening institutional capacity within the Ministry of Education (MoE) to drive, measure, and incentivize the delivery of quality and inclusive education. A key priority of the program is early childhood education (ECE), ensuring that Liberia's youngest learners receive the foundational support necessary for long-term academic success.

This policy brief examines the impact of recent U.S. foreign aid and education policy shifts on Liberia's early childhood education sector, analyzing the challenges posed by funding cuts and exploring strategies to mitigate their effects.

Scope of the Problem

In January 2025, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 14169, titled *"Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid,"* which mandated a 90-day suspension of all U.S. foreign development assistance programs to allow for a comprehensive review of their effectiveness, alignment with national interests, and fiscal sustainability. The abrupt suspension led to the immediate termination of approximately 90% of USAID-funded programs, including key initiatives in Liberia that supported early childhood education (ECE), teacher training, and infrastructure development. The sudden halt in funding disrupted ongoing projects, left schools without critical resources, and created uncertainty for educators, students, and policymakers alike. Simultaneously, the newly established Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) — headed by Elon Musk—implemented sweeping budgetary reforms across multiple federal agencies, including USAID. DOGE's mandate centered on reducing government expenditure, streamlining operations, and eliminating programs deemed inefficient or non-essential. As a result, USAID faced substantial funding reductions, leading to the cancellation of numerous contracts and grants that supported educational initiatives worldwide. For Liberia, this meant an abrupt end to vital funding streams that had sustained educational programs for decades, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of the nation's education system, particularly for vulnerable populations reliant on international aid.

These policy shifts signal a significant transformation in U.S. foreign aid priorities, moving away from broad development assistance toward a more selective, efficiency-driven approach. For Liberia's education sector, this transition poses severe challenges, particularly in ensuring access to quality early childhood education for the nation's youngest learners. The next sections of this brief will explore the direct and indirect consequences of these policy changes on early childhood education in Liberia, as well as potential strategies for mitigating their impact.

Impact on Early Childhood Education in Liberia

The abrupt cessation of USAID funding has had profound consequences for Liberia's education sector, with early childhood education (ECE) being particularly affected. Many key initiatives designed to strengthen the education system, including ECE programs, have been suspended or entirely canceled, leaving critical gaps in early learning support. Additionally, the funding cut has forced numerous local NGOs and educational institutions that relied on USAID support to downsize or shut down, resulting in widespread job losses among educators and support staff. Beyond financial and employment concerns, the disruption has also severely impacted essential services such as teacher training, curriculum development, and the distribution of learning materials. Without these foundational resources, the quality of early childhood education in Liberia is at risk of significant decline, potentially affecting an entire generation of young learners.

Policy Recommendations

A multi-pronged approach is necessary to mitigate the adverse effects of funding cuts on early childhood education (ECE) in Liberia. The Liberian government should seek alternative funding sources by engaging with international donors, private sector partners, and philanthropic organizations to secure financial support for critical ECE programs. Additionally, implementing strategies to increase domestic revenue—such as tax reforms and improved public financial management—can help allocate more resources to the education sector. Strengthening public-private partnerships is also essential, as collaboration between the government and private entities can drive investment in ECE infrastructure, teacher training, and the provision of educational materials. Finally, reaffirming Liberia's commitment to early childhood education by integrating it as a national development priority and ensuring sustained funding will be crucial in maintaining progress and preventing further disruptions in the sector.

Policy Implication

The suspension of USAID funding and broader U.S. foreign aid reforms pose significant risks to the sustainability of early childhood education (ECE) in Liberia. Without immediate intervention, the loss of critical funding will hinder access to quality education, disrupt teacher training programs, and exacerbate existing

educational inequalities. This crisis underscores Liberia's overreliance on foreign aid and highlights the urgent need for policy reforms that prioritize domestic resource mobilization, diversified funding sources, and stronger public-private partnerships. Failure to address these challenges could lead to long-term setbacks in educational development, limiting opportunities for the next generation and weakening Liberia's overall human capital growth.

Conclusion

The recent U.S. policy shifts and the resultant reduction in USAID funding have posed significant challenges to early childhood education in Liberia. It is imperative for the Liberian government and stakeholders to proactively seek alternative funding and implement strategic measures to ensure the continuity and enhancement of ECE services, thereby securing the educational foundation for the nation's future generations.

Additional Readings

1. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/30/2025-02091/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid>
2. https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/ct-save-the-children-trump-foreign-aid-freeze-20189299.php?utm_source=chatgpt.com
3. https://nypost.com/2025/03/10/us-news/rubio-says-83-of-usaid-programs-to-be-scrapped-after-initial-plan-to-cut-58b-in-contracts-grants/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
4. https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/397399/usaid-omb-purge-government-agency-spending-leave?utm_source=chatgpt.com