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Why we are partnering to radically improve free public education in Liberia

Statement from Bridge International Academies

April 5, 2016: We currently live in the most inequitable period in human history. Almost 10% of the world's population (702 million people) live on less than \$1.90 a day, while half the world's wealth is in the hands of just 62 people.

Lack of access to a quality basic education is a primary driver of inequality. [UNESCO's Education For All Global Monitoring Report](#) estimates that for every year a child completes of primary school, his or her income goes up by 10%, and raises the average annual gross domestic product by 0.37%. When children finish school with basic reading skills, it substantially improves their economic opportunities thereafter UNESCO reports that 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all children in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills.

And yet globally, our education systems are failing. 69 million primary aged children remain out of school, and learning outcomes for many children in school across Asia and Africa are dismal. In Liberia, where decades of civil war and the recent Ebola epidemic have destroyed the education system, 42% of children are out of school, and only 20% of children enrolled in primary school complete secondary school. A Liberian girl today has a higher chance of being married before the age of 18 than being able to read!

The people of Liberia deserve better. Parents deserve to have access to educational opportunities for their children, teachers deserve the support and resources to enable them to help children learn, and a generation of Liberian children deserve better than stumbling through a failed system.

The Government of Liberia has taken bold steps to fix a drastic problem. While maintaining its role as the guarantor of free education for all children, the government has sought partners to vastly improve the quality of education through *Partnership Schools for Liberia*. The partnership will work with education providers with proven models of school management, teacher support, and increasing learning outcomes to transform free public primary and nursery schools.

The partnership will ensure that children in free, government owned and monitored schools have all the learning materials they need to feel engaged and progress in school. It will guarantee to parents that their children will have a safe and welcoming place to spend the school day, where teachers are in class and teaching. It will give good teachers the support and resources they need to become great teachers, and it will train a new cohort of bright and dedicated teachers, equipped to change children's lives. It will create employment for Liberia's best and brightest, and it will provide the government the tools it needs to collect data about attendance and learning outcomes in order to be able to improve all Liberian primary schools.

The only aim of the partnership is to provide Liberian children with the quality education they deserve. An education that engages their hearts and minds, that enables them to gain employment, start Liberian businesses and to be the successful leaders that the Liberian people need.

Bridge International Academies is honored to serve the Liberian people as the first of many partners under *Partnership Schools for Liberia*. In a pilot program, Bridge will implement its tried and tested model in 50 public primary schools, accessing approximately 20,000 children for the 2016 – 2017 academic year. In its 8 years working in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, Bridge has been a proactive and successful partner to parents and governments, delivering statistically significant learning gains for its pupils. In Kenya, Bridge's pioneer pupils had a 40% higher chance of passing national primary exit exams in 2015.

The Bridge model empowers communities to radically change the educational opportunities for their children. Four children from Bridge's first graduating class in Kenya in 2015 were awarded full scholarships to complete secondary school at exclusive high schools in the United States. One recipient, 13 year-old Grace Kerubo described the experience, saying: "Bridge opened my eyes to dreams that I didn't know existed, and then helped me achieve them. Before I came to Bridge I felt lonely and discouraged. I thought that if I could just get through secondary school it would be enough. Being at Bridge taught me to believe I could be more. My teachers showed me that I am a clever, strong, African girl who can go on to change the world."

Bridge believes that it is unjust to let generations of children fail. We believe we can and must find solutions to the world's most pressing problems today. We believe we must try everything to give all children the opportunities they deserve, and to address inequality for future generations. We ask others to join us as partners to overcome inequality and poverty together, one classroom at a time, for every boy and girl.

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