Harnessing Liberia's Potential Demographic Dividend: *The Education that Works*

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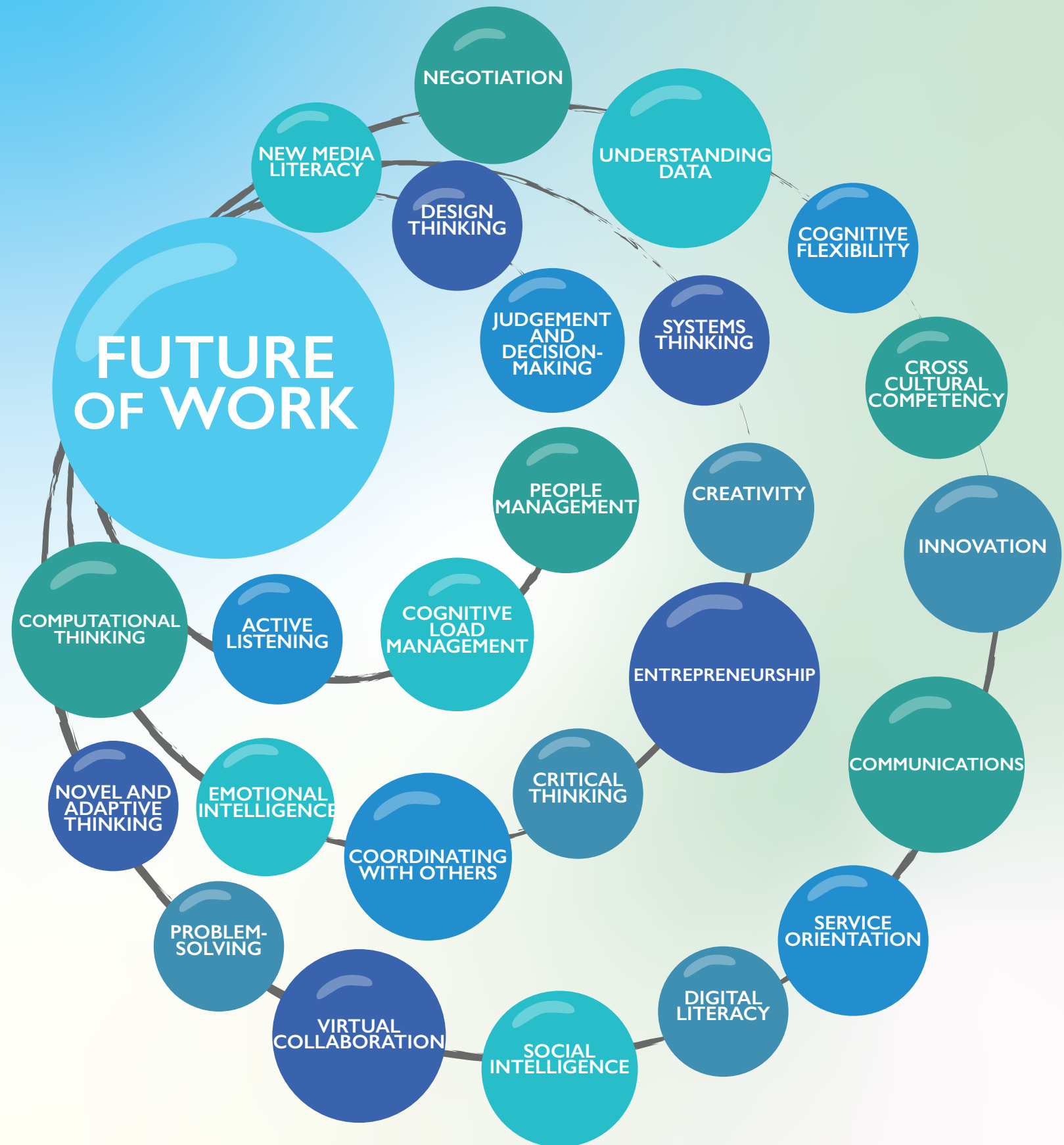
Watson Institute at Lynn University

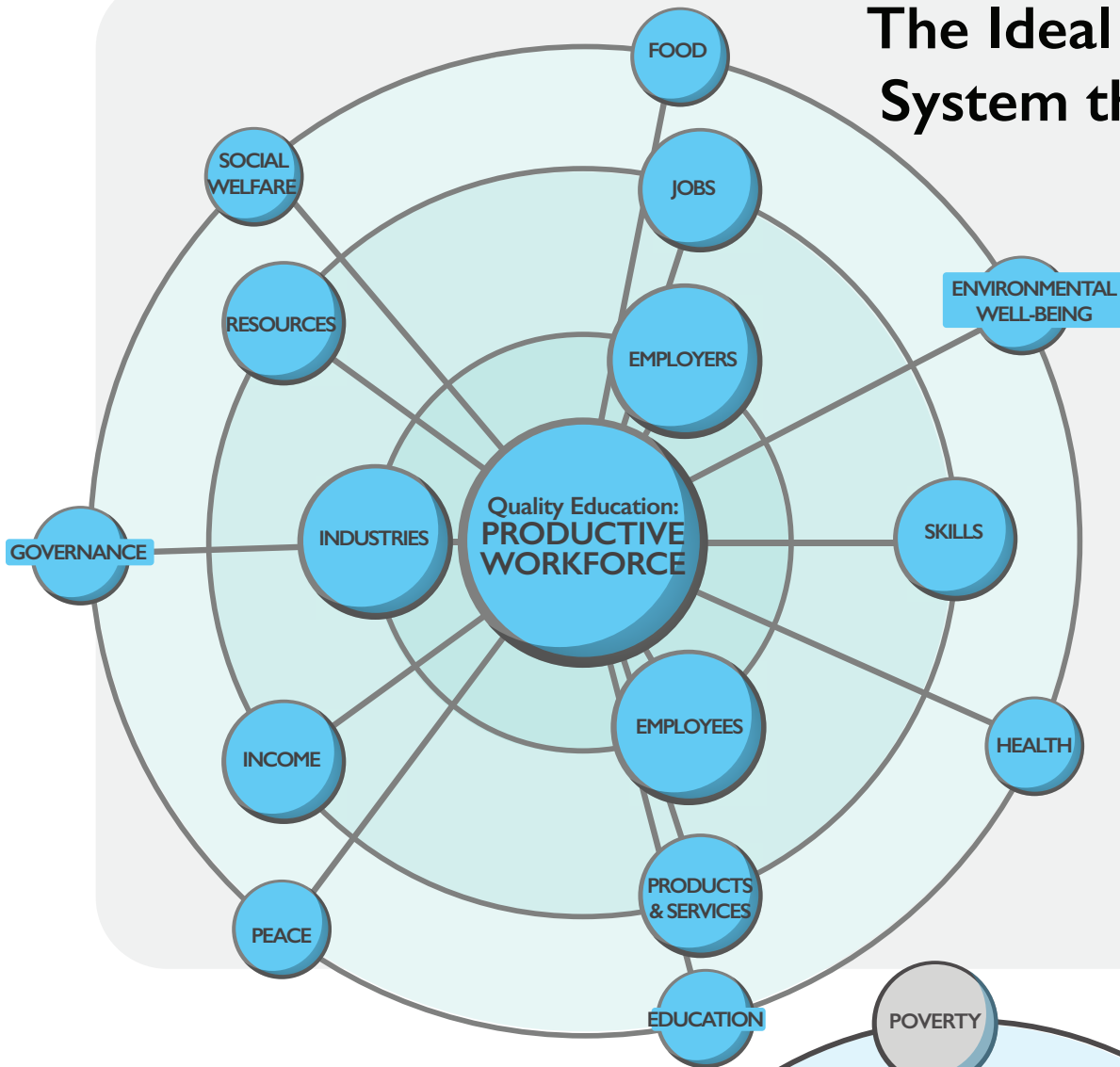## The Workforce, Sustainable Development Goals and Society

The workforce is the nucleus of a society. A nation's socio-economic, political, and cultural growth is dependent on a productive workforce. The World Health Organization (2014) reports that "A Universal Truth is, There is No Health Without a Workforce." Without a healthy life, we lose on all fronts. Health is wealth, and health is happiness.
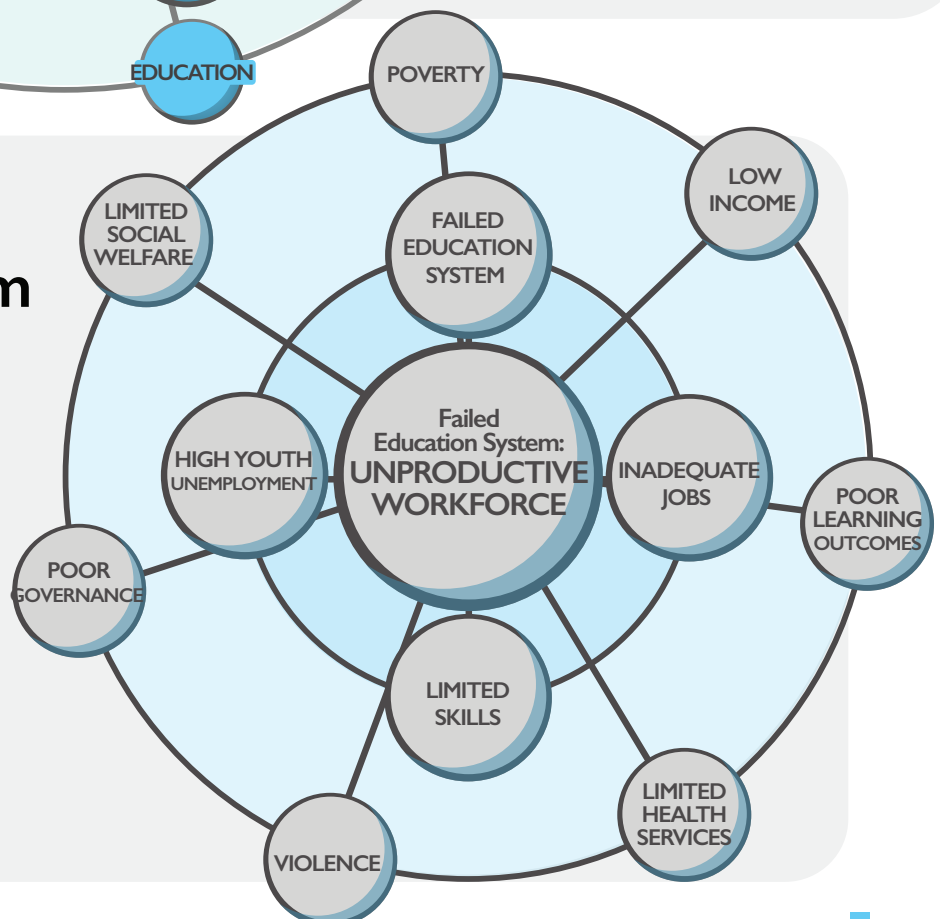
Skills Catalogue

FUTURE OF WORK

NEGOTIATION

NEW MEDIA LITERACY

UNDERSTANDING DATA

DESIGN THINKING

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

JUDGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

SYSTEMS THINKING

CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCY

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

CREATIVITY

COMPUTATIONAL THINKING

ACTIVE LISTENING

COGNITIVE LOAD MANAGEMENT

INNOVATION

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

COMMUNICATIONS

NOVEL AND ADAPTIVE THINKING

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

CRITICAL THINKING

COORDINATING WITH OTHERS

PROBLEM-SOLVING

SERVICE ORIENTATION

VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

DIGITAL LITERACY

The Ideal Education System that Works

FOOD
SOCIAL WELFARE
JOBS
RESOURCES
EMPLOYERS
ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING
GOVERNANCE
INDUSTRIES
Quality Education: PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE
SKILLS
INCOME
EMPLOYEES
HEALTH
PEACE
PRODUCTS & SERVICES
EDUCATION

The Current Education System

POVERTY
LIMITED SOCIAL WELFARE
FAILED EDUCATION SYSTEM
LOW INCOME
HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT
Failed Education System: UNPRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE
INADEQUATE JOBS
POOR LEARNING OUTCOMES
POOR GOVERNANCE
LIMITED SKILLS
LIMITED HEALTH SERVICES
VIOLENCE

Understanding the Education-Workforce System
Both supply and demand face severe headwinds

DEMAND
INTERVENTION:
JOBS

WORKFORCE

SUPPLY
INTERVENTION:
SKILLS
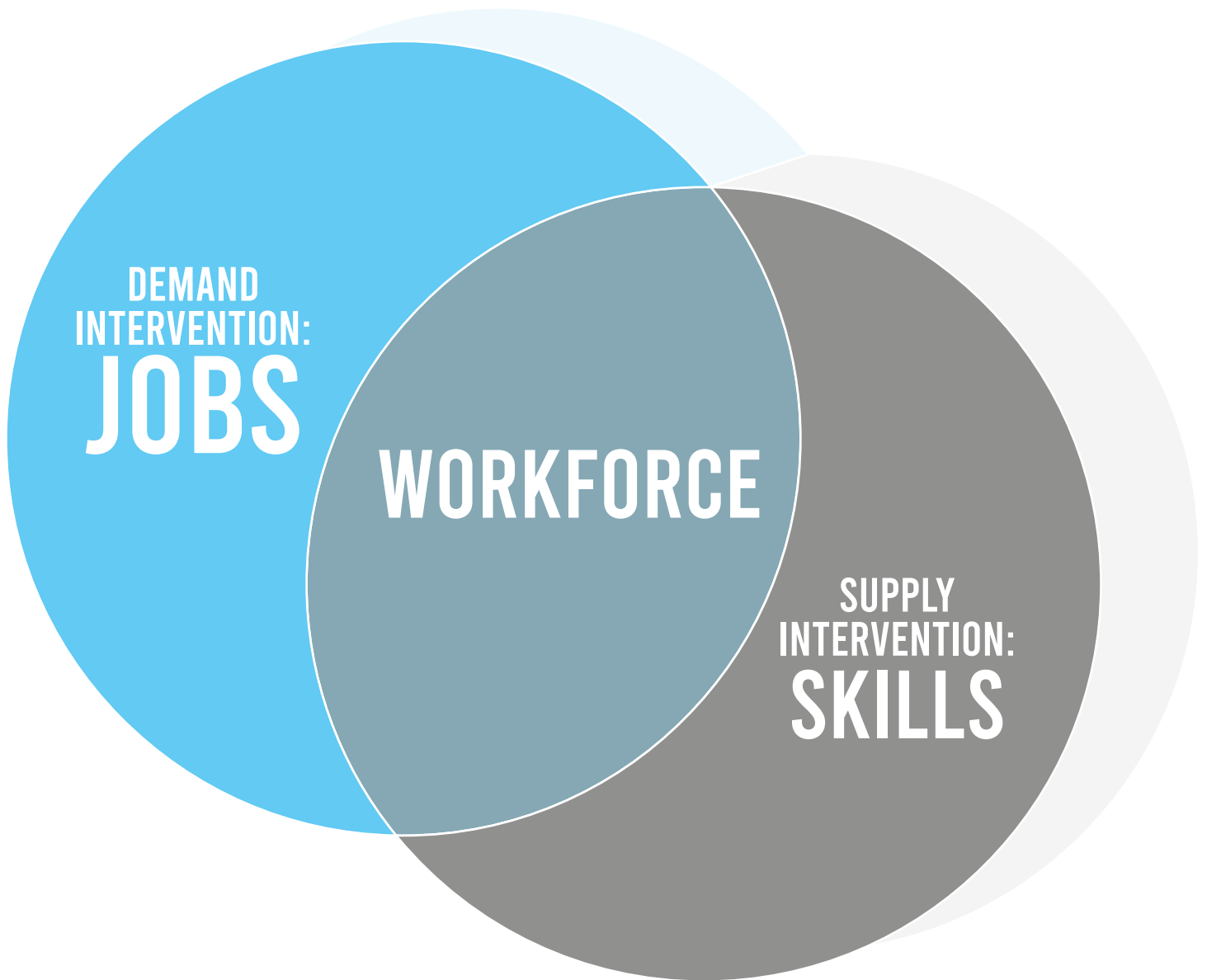
Who are the stakeholders, and our expectation of their function?

TEACHERS
Informing students with the information and practical knowledge they need in order to succeed in the real world

FAMILY
Supporting kids, funding their kids

STUDENTS
Doing homework, participating in class, engaging in profound conversations and activities and excelling in grades

SCHOOLS
Informing students with practical education and training to succeed in the workforce, well thought out curriculums

EMPLOYERS
Getting well thought out and exceptional students with practical knowledge and technical skills that add value to the company

GOVERNMENT
Creating policies, funding education, paying teachers on time.

FUNDERS
Supporting individuals, helping organizations who hire and create more programs, fund exceptional entrepreneurial business models which will create jobs and boost the economy

PRACTITIONERS
Adequate resources and programs available to provide practical. training and mentorship

YOUTH
Not putting too much pressure, engaging with ventures and like-minded individuals

RELIGION
Respecting the difference

ORGANIZATIONS
Building programs, supporting ideas and sparking creativity and innovation.

MARKET
Offering more opportunities

Engaging with the Stakeholders

30 INTERVIEWS

**190** SECONDARY SURVEYS

85 POST-SECONDARY SURVEYS

40 PROFESSIONAL REPORTS

How do we find out if the system is working?

1. What is the framework for curriculum development across Liberia?
2. What is the current scenario for learning outcomes and students' success in the workforce?
3. Of what "quality" is the education available across Liberia and what are the gaps?
4. What are the current local and global solutions and their framework?
5. What implementable policy and program framework can be suggested to improve learning outcomes and workforce development?
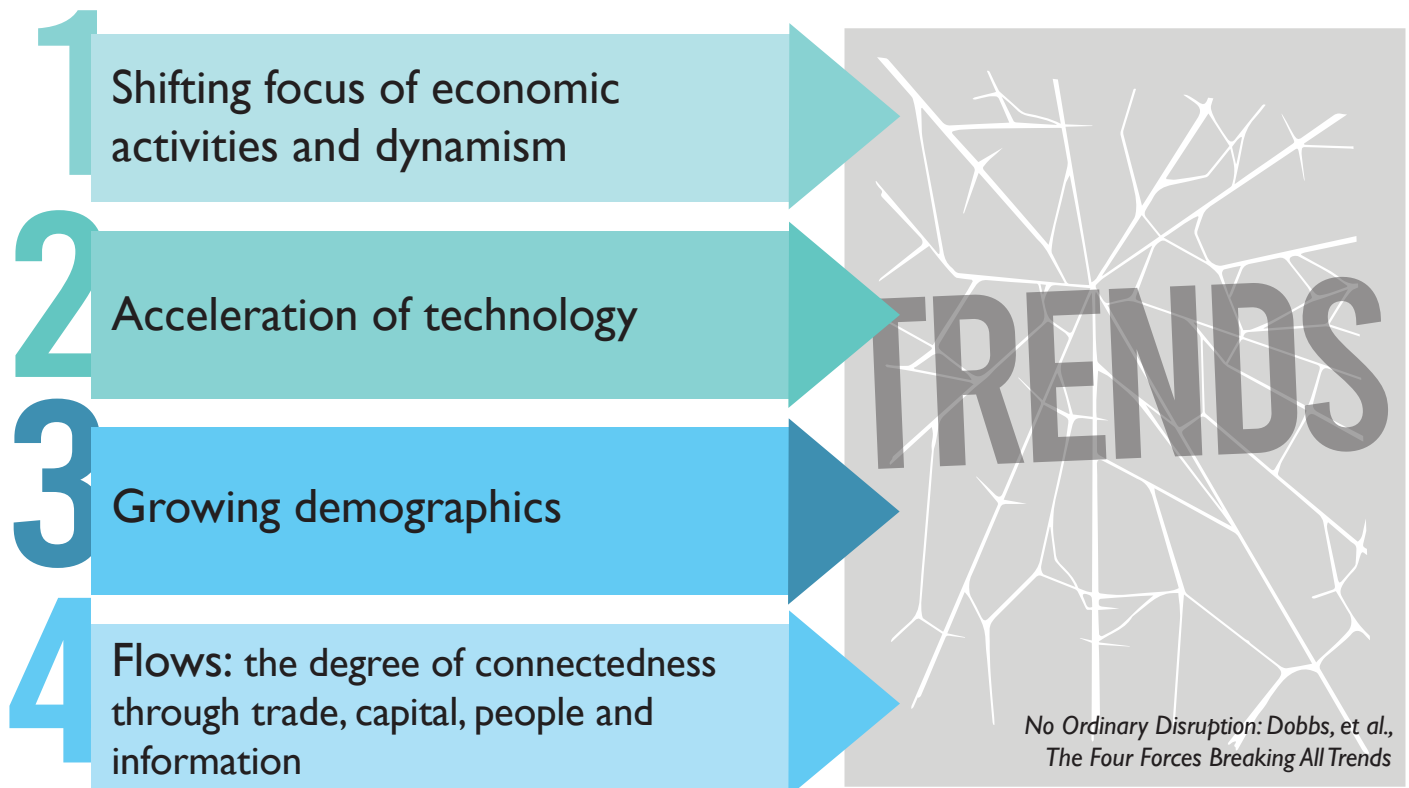
Liberia's Potential Demographic Dividend

60% YOUTH
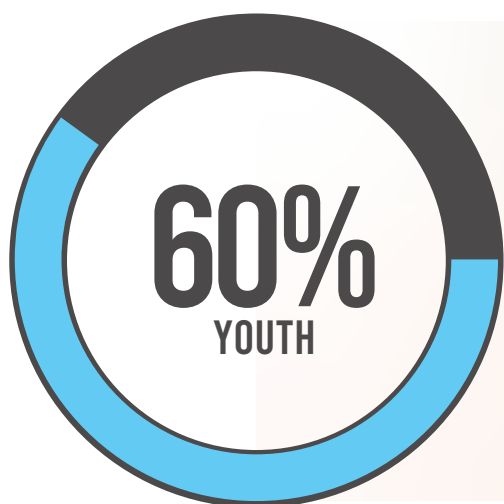
YOUTHFUL POPULATION

Over 60% of the country's population is below 35.

# Setting the Narrative:
The Stakeholders' Perspective

STUDENTS
We are not learning, no jobs; our parents cannot afford; education is nonsense.

EMPLOYERS
We cannot find the right talents.

FUNDERS
We do not see the result from investment.

YOUTH
There are no jobs; the education system is failing us.

ORGANIZATIONS
Young people are incompetent, schools are failing the students.

MARKET
We do not make profits.

PRACTITIONERS
There are lack of resources available to help train people to be able to have jobs; government does not prioritize education.

TEACHERS
Students do not want to learn; government is not paying; I'm not paid well.

COMMUNITY
There are drug cartels in the cities and villages because people do not have something to do with their lives.

POLICY MAKERS
We have insufficient funds to execute effective policies.

GOVERNMENT
Education is our priority; young people are not serious; schools are messy.

SCHOOLS
We do not have the resources.

FAMILY
The economy is terrible, no income to provide our needs and educate our children; education/schools are expensive.

The Problem Landscape

Four Forces are Breaking All Trends

1 Shifting focus of economic activities and dynamism

2 Acceleration of technology

3 Growing demographics

4 Flows: the degree of connectedness through trade, capital, people and information

No Ordinary Disruption: Dobbs, et al., The Four Forces Breaking All Trends

90% STAKEHOLDERS reported they struggle to find talents for open vacancies due to inadequate skills
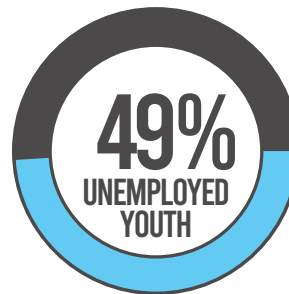
49% UNEMPLOYED YOUTH reported lack of or limited jobs
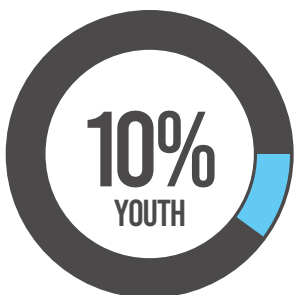
10% YOUTH reported their university or schools did not prepare them for the workforce

Problem Statement

There is a mismatch between the skills schools are teaching students and the workforce demand.

"Education is a fundamental human right that should fulfill the promise of freedom for all, boosting more jobs, higher wages, innovation, and stronger societies. And it must be based on measurable Learning Indicators and Outcomes."
— *Ignite Africa*

Education is a Fundamental Right

1990

THE WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND ACCESS

2000

DAKAR FRAMEWORK

DECLARED EDUCATION AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD

Quality Education

QUALITY

ACCESS

RELEVANCE
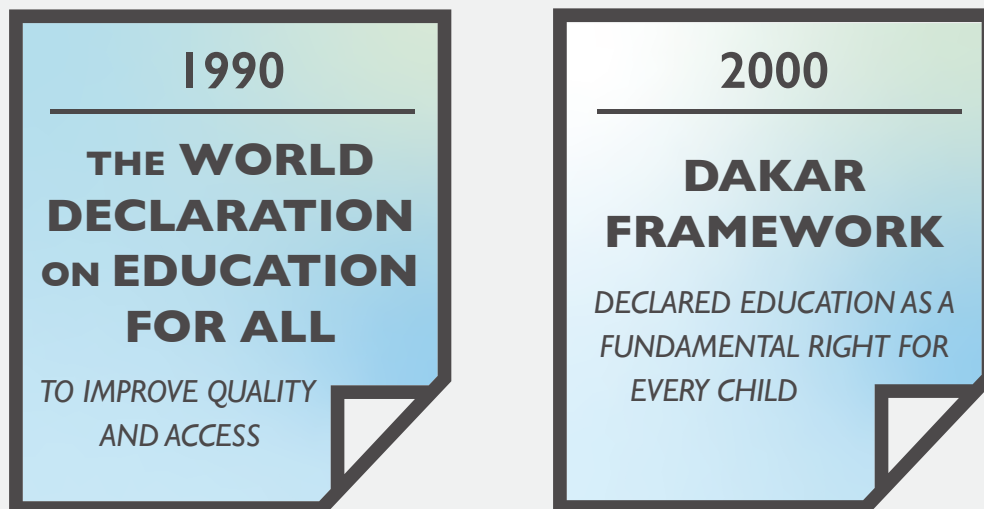
Liberia's Learning Crisis is a *Moral Crisis*

Teaching and learning do not align to develop students' cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills and abilities.

POOR LEARNING FRAMEWORK AND OUTCOMES

INADEQUATE SCHOOL STRUCTURES

UNPRODUCTIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM
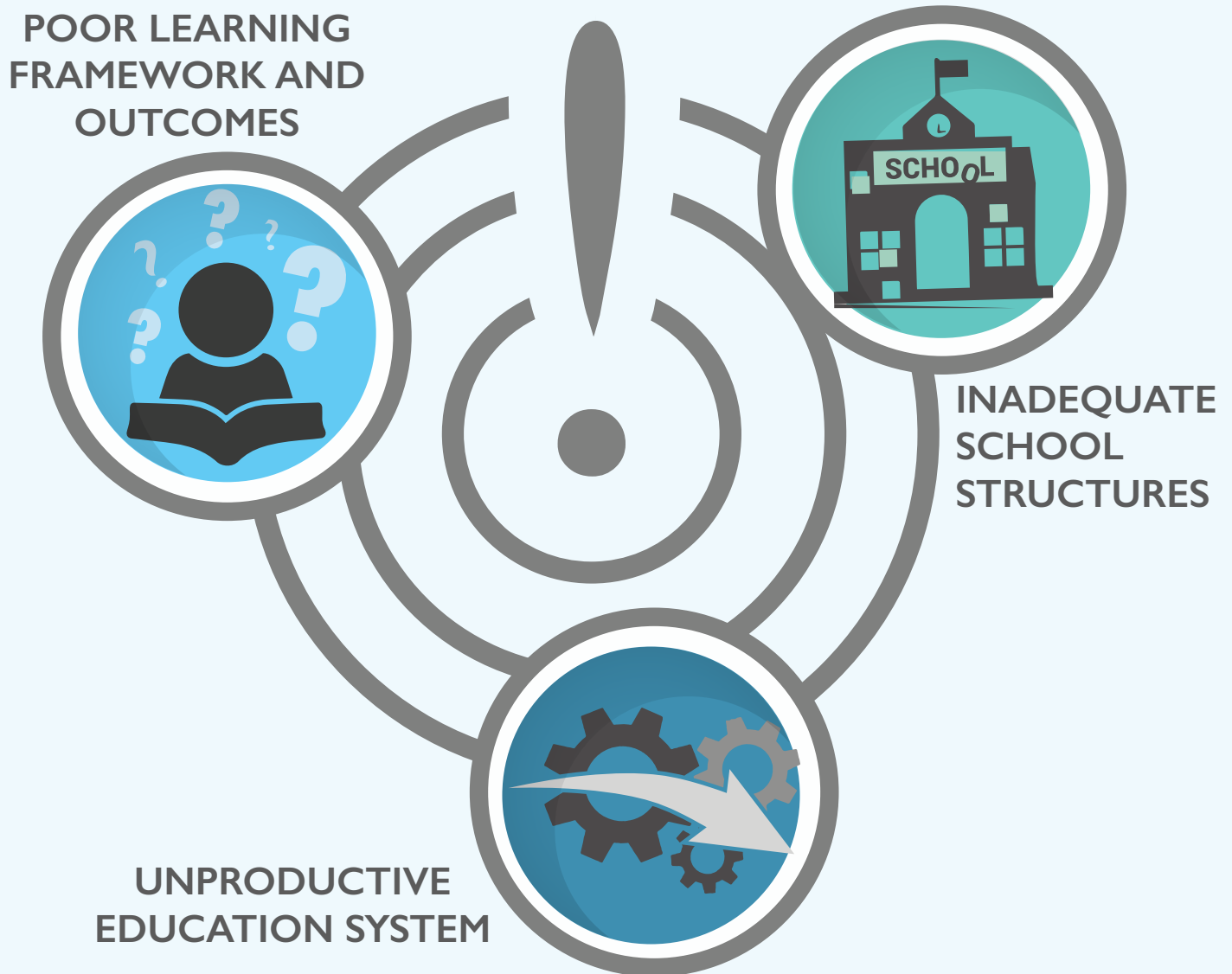
Poor Learning Framework and Outcomes
Two pathways to inform proper outcomes

The degree of the cognitive development of students

The role of education is to develop students' creativity, emotional development and expand their social capital

"A well-educated, enlightened, and active mind, able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence."
UN CESCR, 1999

The Scope of the Problem
STUDENTS ARE NOT LEARNING
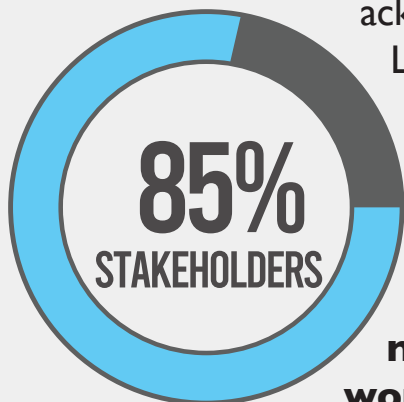
85% STAKEHOLDERS acknowledged that Liberian students are by and large **not learning the essential skills necessary to succeed in the modern workforce.**

According to the country's leading professionals, there is a lack of motivation and inadequate resources within the Liberian Government and Education Ministry to facilitate students to develop the right mindset in the classroom, and apply their knowledge as productive resources as graduates.

"People are not learning, they are only getting education. Learning is bad."
Jefferson Krua, CEO, THE BUSH CHICKEN

"Students lack basic real-world skills.
Students are not independent and critical thinkers."
Atty. Mmonbeydo Harrell, TEACHER, FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

"Students at both secondary and college levels do not come out of Liberian schools with skills necessary to succeed in the modern workforce."
Mahmud Johnson, CEO, J-PALM LIBERIA

B LEARNING OUTCOMES ARE INADEQUATELY MEASURED

Of crucial importance to the long-term outlook of Liberia's long-term development, both the qualitative and quantitative results of our study suggest that the nation's schools measure learning outcomes based on rote memorization scores rather than on productive indicators with more direct correlations to domestic growth.
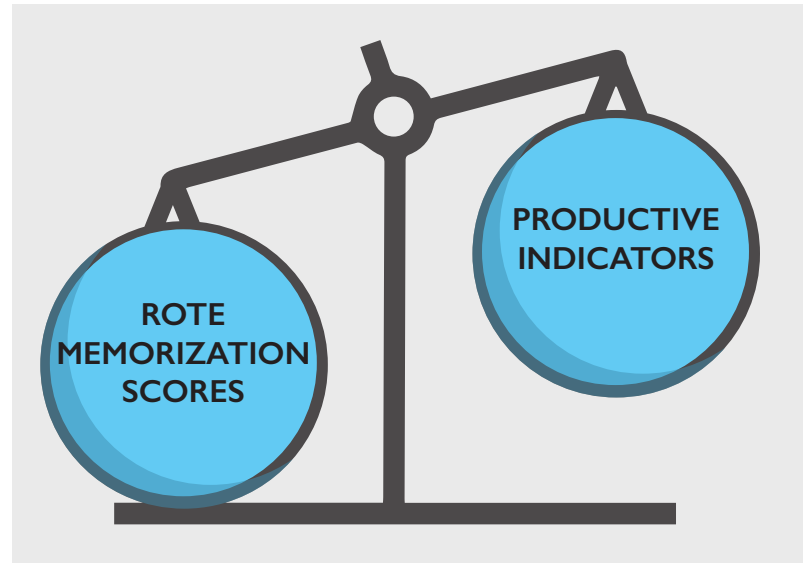
"Schools are not following up where their students are employed, enrolled or absorbed."

Lakshmi S. Moore, COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ACTIONAID LIBERIA

C CURRICULUM ARE OUTDATED

Based on our interviews with students, graduates, and professionals, it became evident that the government's current school curriculum is widely perceived as being outdated and insufficient. This finding has been substantiated by recent evidence suggesting that the national curriculum has been updated only once in the past decade, accounting in part for gaps in graduate knowledge of essential technologies.

"One of the fundamental problems we had after our assessment was the curriculum, it was content-based and teacher-centered and did not meet students' learning demands."

Latim Da-Thong, DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION

D TEACHERS ARE DEMOTIVATED AND UNTRAINED
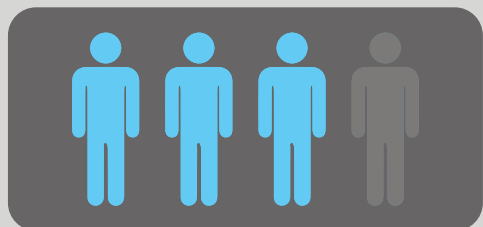
Data shows that 3 in every 4 Liberian teachers reported having to take on more than one teaching job to provide for their families.

Employment for many teachers offers returns that often fail to cover the baseline costs of weekly food, transportation, and communications. As a result of these low wages, teachers often lack motivation hindering long term student development.

"Most teachers lack the capacity to fully prepare the students in the classroom for out of class success."
Desmond Diggs, FOUNDER & CEO, TEACH FOR LIBERIA

E DATA IS UNAVAILABLE

The abhorrent lack of data poses a great threat to understanding the depth of Liberia's learning crisis and interventions. Indicators from learning objectives to learning performance and learning outcomes have little to no data available to track both at the school and national levels
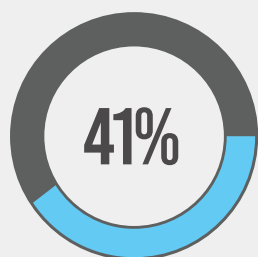
DATA UNAVAILABLE
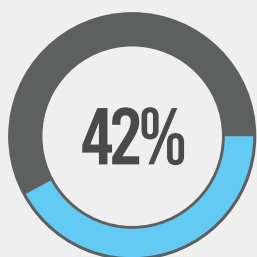
2 Inadequate School Structures

The Scope of the Problem
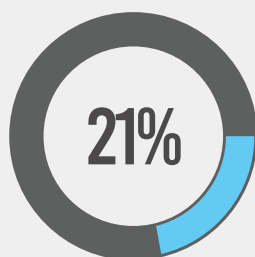## A THERE ARE POOR SCHOOL AND LEARNING CONDITIONS

SCHOOLS IN LIBERIA

41%
Operate within solid, standing structures

42%
Equipped with access to safe and functional water supply

21%
Lack functioning toilets

There are 1.49 million students and 5,438 schools across Liberia. Without fundamental inputs, it is unsurprising that both computer and science laboratories remain an out-of-reach luxury for many Liberian students.

"There are only a few good schools."
Atty. Mmonbeydo Harrell, Teacher, Founder & Executive Director, Organization for Women and Children

B LACK OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

In addition to poor infrastructure, effective career development programs are privileges that come with being enrolled at some elite schools. Schools do not invest in market research or analysis to ascertain where opportunities exist for students beyond the classrooms.

"The system is burdening high school students with irrelevant materials and it translates into poor choices for career and employment opportunities."
Hh Zaizay, Executive Director, President's Young Professionals Program

"There is a limited focus by schools to support students career development."
Lakshmi S. Moore, Country Director, ActionAid Liberia

3 Unproductive Educational System

Enrollment remains a major challenge for Liberian schools. For the students privileged enough to be able to be considered students, they struggle with limited access to relevant materials and inadequate infrastructure, which directly disrupts the quality of their education.

RATE OF ATTENDANCE IN LIBERIAN SCHOOLS

38%

"The entire ecosystem is set up to fail students. If you are only functionally literate, but you can't read, comprehend, write, analyze, etc. -- you are set up for failure."

Dr. Robtel Pailey, Fellow, Oxford University
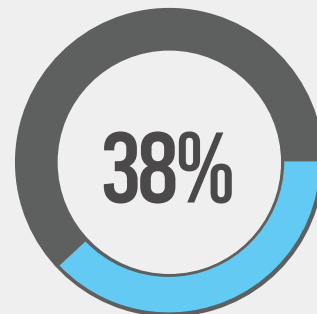
The Scope of the Problem

A INADEQUATE INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

The national budget does not prioritize adequate investment in education.

8%

Funds from the 2019/2020 national budget directed toward the operations of the Ministry of Education

$40M
Administrative Costs & Compensation

$4M
Programming
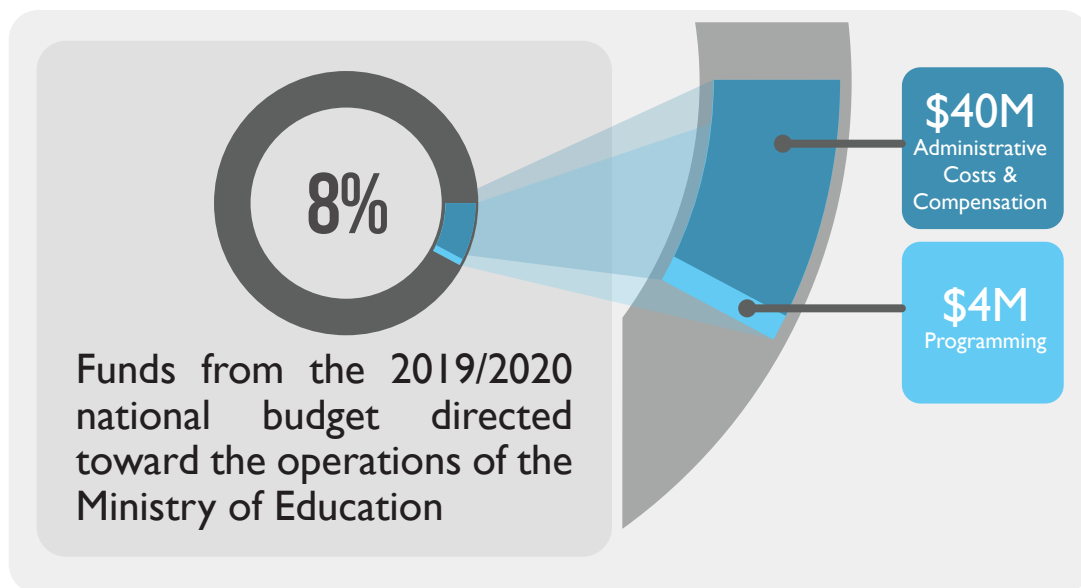
There are many factors for a bad education, but it's a matter of priority -- we have not prioritized young people and education in Liberia."

James Kiawoin, Co-founder, SMART Liberia

SHORT TERMISM AND LACK OF PRIORITIES

Liberia runs a six-year term, and depends largely on donor funding. In most cases, donors dictate what the priorities are without experiencing or encountering the student's lived-in realities. For education, as transition takes place between leadership at the Ministry of Education, so does current priorities and program interventions. As a result, each leadership is solely focused on what short-term goal this can achieve while in leadership, and not on the long-term systemic challenges.

GENDER GAP

Young girls are mostly not recognized for their skills and competence and as formidable candidates for the classrooms and employment, but sexual tools.

"Sexual harassment and sexual pleasures in return for grades and jobs are common concerns in both the education and employment settings."
Dr. Robtel Pailey, FELLOW, OXFORD UNIVERSITY
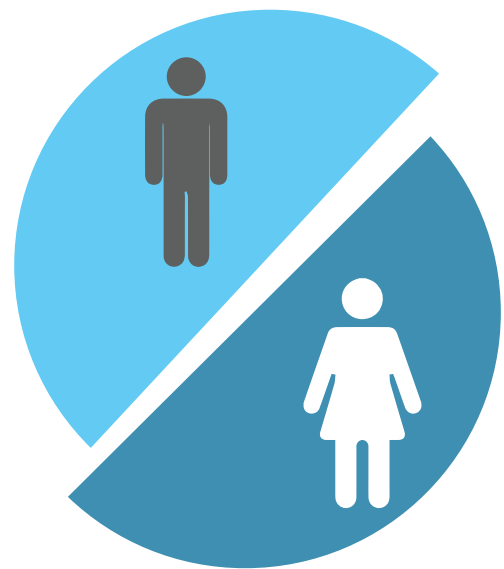
THE EMPLOYMENT NIGHTMARES

85% STAKEHOLDERS

acknowledged the **lack of or limited standards for meritocracy** in employment, where people are hired and not competent or qualified

15% JOB APPLICANTS
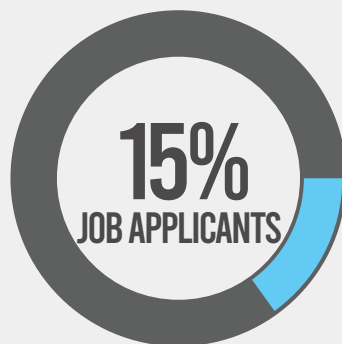
usually **meet the full recruitment criteria and qualification,** as reported by employers

There is a shallow talent pool across the country, and such is the standards for recruitment.

"Most of the roles we need to recruit people for you will have to take them off their jobs because there is limited pool of talents."
Dieudonne K. Perry, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SMART LIBERIA

"Staff members we recruit lack the basic skills and tools to work, even being the best students in their schools."
Anonymous

Assessing the Solution Landscape

The past decade has seen the rise of various efforts ranging from public policies to public-private partnerships and entrepreneurial solutions geared towards addressing the persistence of gaps in the education-employment nexus.

GOVERNMENT

INVESTMENT

Invested in bilateral scholarship partnerships and foreign educational programs to students in fields that are not offered in Liberia **to boost national capacity for development.**

PARTNERSHIP

Global Partnership for Education promised the Ministry of Education that if the government can commit about 20% of its national budget to education, they **will provide more funding to Liberia's education.**

CURRICULUM

The Ministry of Education conducted a nation-wide assessment of the nation's education systems, and based on the findings, developed **a new curriculum consisting of the skills and learning outcomes demanded by the contemporary workforce.**

POLICY

The Ministry launched a new policy called *'Adopt a School,'* which **encourages individuals and institutions to adopt and provide financial resources and technical support** to underserved and underperforming schools across Liberia.

ORGANIZATIONS

Capacity and Career Development

SMART Liberia

implements programs to bridge the skills and employment gaps. The organization runs programs that prepare and match high school graduates with universities abroad. Locally, the organization equips young Liberians with relevant skills and matches them with employment opportunities

PYPP
(President's Young Professionals Program)

prepares young Liberians to be effective public service officials in response to Liberia's capacity gap. The program recruits, trains, and places young professionals in public service roles, and provides continuous coaching and guidance that are crucial to their success.

Teacher's Capacity and Early Childhood Development

Teach for Liberia

addresses Liberia's teacher challenge and educational crisis by recruiting passionate college graduates or professionals, and providing them with tailored, high-quality training for placement in rural and urban primary schools for two years.

KEEP Liberia

offers varied educational support to Liberian primary students, promoting the culture of reading and comprehension through tailor programs across various schools in Liberia.

SCHOOLS

CURRICULUM AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PRESCRIBED CURRICULUM

ABEKA BOOK CURRICULUM SYSTEM

SCHOOL

SOLTIAMON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM
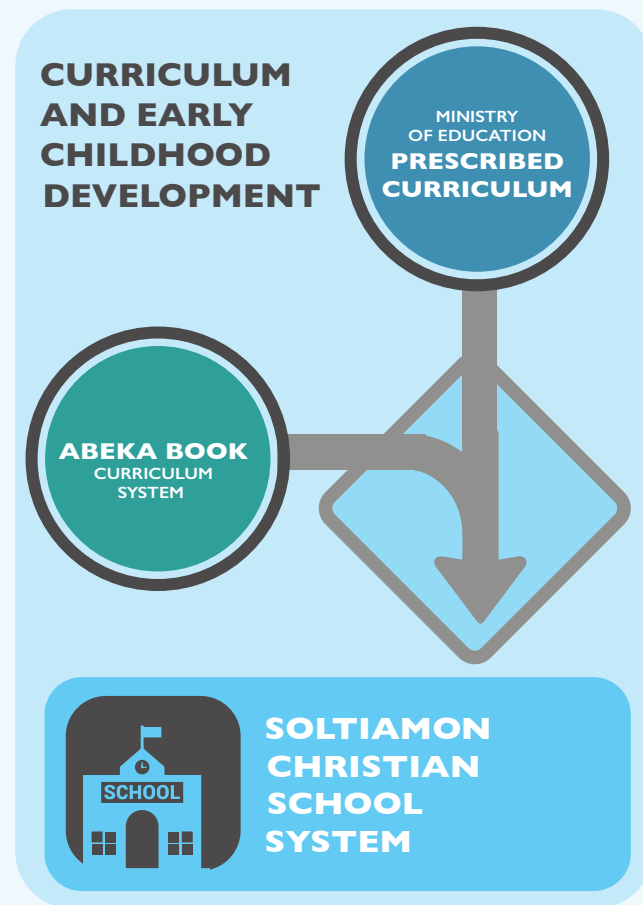
Soltiamon Christian School System requires and teaches students to read and think critically from a young age, it offers effective advance planning to teachers, promotes mandatory student research and interactivity, and encourages students to take initiatives and be independent thinkers.

EMPLOYERS

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LIBERIAN EMPLOYERS

Cachelle International Creative Arts Center

J-Palm Liberia

The Kreative Zone

RECRUITMENT

Organizational values alignment
Critical thinking
Problem-solving
Taking on initiative
Innovation
Independent

INVESTMENT

Mentorship
Training

CONTINUED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Networking
Projects
Reskilling
Training
Opportunities

Gaps and Levers of Change

Workforce development efforts have mostly focused on post-secondary education. However, primary and secondary education are crucial for the design of an education system that works. As we think critically about the education that works, reimagining education practices beyond the classroom and preparing students from a young age for the workforce and the variety of career opportunities would have a significant impact on the nation's productivity and economy.

POLICY
A law requiring at least 20% of national budget committed to education, with at least 40% of this commitment used for programming

Increase the salary and benefits of teachers across the country

GOVERNMENT
Subsidize local organizations and programs that are working to address the education-employment nexus and replicate the program across Liberia

DONORS
Avoid quick impact solutions;

Prioritize and invest in programs addressing systemic issues offering long-term benefits, impact

EMPLOYERS
Partner with and offer financial investment to local solutions addressing the workforce challenge and outsource training and recruitment

Invest in female recruitment, development, and retainment and provide a safe space for their growth

SCHOOLS
Form relationships with employers, conduct market assessment;

Facilitate students' placement post-graduation

ORGANIZATIONS
Build relationships with employers, assess workforce demands and trends;

Leverage insights to build programs relevant to employers' demands

STUDENTS
Pursue mentorship and career development opportunities available through various networks

BUILD SYNERGY AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN THE ECOSYSTEM

LACK OF COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT

POLICY

Address short-termism; mandate national education leaderships to prioritize and allocate resources to long-term systemic solutions, not short-term political mandates

GOVERNMENT

Complete or modify programs from past leaderships, don't create new priorities for each leadership.

EMPLOYERS

Functional systems; investment in personal development, not quick deliverables;

Provide resources to support the emotional and mental development of talents, in addition to work output

MINDSET

CULTIVATE A MINDSET THAT EDUCATION IS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM

SCHOOLS

Cultivate a sense of entrepreneurial leadership and workforce preparation in students from young ages;

Recruit, train, and maintain teachers who have the values and skills to prepare students adequately;

Teach students to think critically and develop the drive to be curious and solve problems.

ORGANIZATIONS

Incorporate programs that build up the socio-emotional and behavioral skills of students, in addition to their cognitive abilities.

STUDENTS

Cultivate entrepreneurial, problem-solving mindset and invest time in personal development beyond the classroom

POLICY

Update national curriculum every three years

Reduce the number of subjects for students to seven per class, math and English being required; students select the subjects that align with their career interests

Mandate all institutions of learning to integrate career develop programs into their academic programs

GOVERNMENT

All schools must adopt the prescribed contemporary curriculum and ensure schools and teachers are effectively delivering on the learning objectives

EMPLOYERS

Offer career development opportunities to high schools students;

Facilitate students' development and successful transition into the workforce through internships, mentorships, and apprenticeship

DESIGN CURRICULUM AND BUILD PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS CONTEMPORARY DEMANDS AND THRIVE THROUGH UNCERTAINTIES

OUTDATED CURRICULUM AND LACK OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Teach students skills that are relevant for the workforce;

Offer career develop programs for students throughout their studies;

Reduce the number of subjects students take per year of study; align their course load to their career interests;

SCHOOLS

Ensure teachers are equipped to facilitate a collaborative and participatory class, not a teacher-centric class;

Encourage mentorship and internships within the learning system for students

Build and strengthen alumni system to foster mentorship, resource mobilization, and support towards the current student network

ORGANIZATIONS

Offer career development and skill training to high school students;

Incorporate the workforce demand into the curriculum and program development processes

Facilitate mentorship for youth and students who participate in career development programs

POLICY

Create a policy to mandate all employers to frequently report on the state of affairs of their workforce

GOVERNMENT

Conduct biennial monitoring and evaluation assessment on well-defined learning outcomes and the state of affairs of the Liberian education system

EMPLOYERS

Conduct internal evaluations and publish public report on their state of workforce, skills demand, and career opportunities

INADEQUATE DATA AND UNMEASURABLE LEARNING OUTCOMES

BUILD AND EXECUTE EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS ACROSS THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRIES

SCHOOLS

Define clear learning objectives and outcomes for teachers and students, and develop an evaluation framework
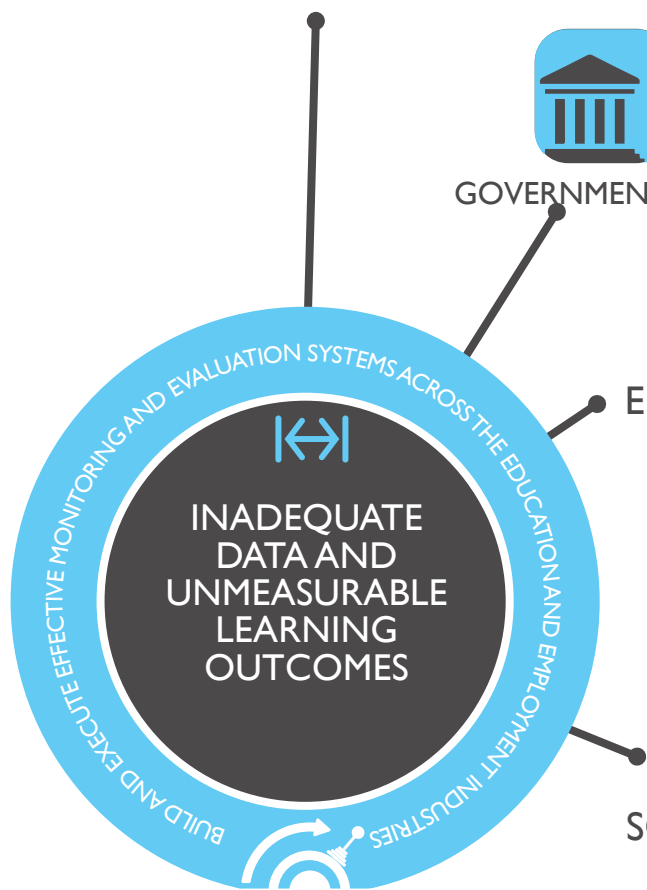
Collect data on the defined learning indicators and track students' post-graduate performances, employment, or higher education

ORGANIZATIONS

Define clear learning objectives and outcomes for career development programs

Conduct routine data collection from employers, schools, and students and leverage insights to design programs

The Ideal System Map

By incorporating our recommendations and focusing workforce development on primary and secondary students, we can achieve this ideal economic growth.

Increased income, social welfare, food, decent healthcare, peace, quality education affordability, environmental well-being, governance

Increased Quality Employment

Employers, Employees, Skills, Industries, Jobs, Products and Services, Resources

Productive Workforce = Economic Growth and Sustainability

Employment and Job Creation

Employers, Employees, Skills, Industries, Jobs, Products and Services, Resources

Career Development

Effective career development programs available to secondary school students

Effective monitoring and evaluation systems to measure learning outcomes and ensure increased productivity

Adequate Data and Progressive Learning Outcomes

Collaboration and Investment in Education

Strengthened synergy among funders, government, schools, and career development organizations to develop students

Trained and equipped teachers using up-to-date curriculum to teach primary and high school students relevant skills and tools to thrive in the contemporary workforce

21st Century Curriculum and Skills

Paradigm shift: Developing Mindset and Building Confidence

Cultivate a mindset that education is a tool for social and economic freedom

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