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New research commissioned by the Government of Liberia confirms Bridge Academies are failing

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A new independent rigorous [study](#) published today, the first of its kind, confirmed that the American large-scale commercial chain of pre-primary and primary schools, Bridge International Academies, is not fulfilling its learning promises, while violating ethical principles. This research confirms many other independent studies that had raised major concerns about the model and impact of Bridge. Civil society organisations demand that Governments and investors take urgent action to stop the activities of the company.

The official evaluation of 93 Liberian schools run by eight contractors under a flagship and highly controversial public-private partnership (PPP) model reveals damning facts about the practices of Bridge Academies. Under the [Partnership Schools for Liberia](#) (PSL) programme, the 23 schools run by Bridge dismissed teachers on a large-scale, pushing an exceptional 74 percent of the teachers previously employed in those schools onto other schools, much more than any other provider. Bridge also removed thousands of students from their schools by capping class sizes. The study confirms, as was [reported before](#), that children who had been enrolled the previous year in their local school were turned away.

The study also confirms a long-standing worry of civil society that Bridge tries to skew results by pouring in large sums of money in an unsustainable way, picking better schools, and that the company is based on a flawed business model. The study shows that the cost per child in Bridge schools is an outstanding 663 - 1,050 USD per child per annum, as opposed to the Government's existing \$50 per student budget, and the [average 275 USD](#) spent in developing countries, per child.

Despite pushing out teachers, mass-expulsion of children and spending much larger sums of money than any other school it is compared to, Bridge schools only achieved limited learning gains, and it did not do significantly better than three other providers, including a local non-profit provider (Youth Movement for Collective Action).

This new study also confirms a range of [other independent studies](#) – including from [academics](#), [civil society](#), and [journalists](#) – on Bridge Academies conducted in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, that all showed similar practices, poor learning gains, and an unsustainable business model, in addition to violations of the rule of law. A [statement](#) signed by 174 organisations published, last month, called on investors to cease all investments in Bridge Academies and take immediate steps to addressing the issues identified.

The signatory organisations:

- Call on the Liberian Government to radically review whether it is worth pursuing this pilot project when there are so many other more effective ways to improve the quality of education for all children.



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- Call on the Liberian Government to immediately revoke the contract of providers that are not cost-effective, limit access, try to manipulate the pilot, or undermine the system as whole.
- Reaffirm civil society organisations' recent global request to investors to immediately cease support to Bridge Academies.
- Call on all the concerned Governments where Bridge operates (India, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda) to immediately take all necessary measures to ensure that the rights and integrity of children affected by Bridge are safeguarded and that all schools not respecting minimum educational standards be closed.

"Clearly, the PPP approach was the wrong option in Liberia. It opened the door for dodgy providers such as Bridge Academies to profit from the system, while not providing sustainable solutions. Huge investment in BIA under the pilot, with woeful results, shows its ineffectiveness. Therefore, we urge the Liberian Government to abandon the PSL program and redirect its energy to pursuing more holistic and sustainable reforms that protect the rights of all children and improve learning outcomes across all levels of the education system. The Government should start by immediately revoking the contract with Bridge, which only does not improve the learning more than any other school, but weakens the system as a whole by pushing out children and teachers onto other schools," reacted Anderson Miamen, from COTAE, the Liberian Coalition on Transparency and Accountability in Education.

"We know that Bridge has been using various techniques in Kenya to raise its results such as organising extra lessons for its students with foreign teachers or pushing out low-achieving children. It is disturbing to see the high cost of schooling per child in Liberia, which is low value-for-money, and it's once again saddening to observe that the company would resort to the expulsion of children and the destabilisation of a whole education system to achieve its objectives" stated Linda Oduor-Noah, from the Kenyan East African Centre for Human Rights.

"This research demonstrates once again that the internal studies conducted by Bridge are completely biased, and constitute a marketing tool to attract investors rather than a reliable source of data. Even looking at narrow measurements of reading and counting, learning gains in Bridge schools are extremely low and unsustainable when looking at the amount of money invested. If there's one lesson from this research, it's that, contrary to the popular belief, and despite all its flaws, increasing resources for public providers remains the most effective way to improve education. The Liberia experience shows that PPPs are rarely justified, and certainly cannot work where governments do not have the necessary regulatory capacities," added Salima Namusobya, from the Ugandan Initiative for Economic and Social Rights.

"With this study, we now have all possible evidence one may need to come to a final conclusion. Added to the extensive other evidence that have been collected for years, there can only be one outcome: investors need to withdraw their funds, and Bridge schools need to be closed in Liberia and across the continent," rejoined Teopista, from ANCEFA, the African Network Campaign on Education For All.

"The UN Special rapporteur on the right to education had [warned](#) Liberia last year that abandoning the provision of education to the commercial benefit of a private company could constitute a gross violation of the right to education. This new research clearly shows that these concerns were



founded: expelling thousands of children and destabilising the whole education system by pushing out teachers is not a small act, it is dramatic and unacceptable, especially for a country like Liberia recovering from several disasters. It also shows that there's no need for for-profit providers in education: should there be any private provider, the Liberia experience demonstrates that local non-profit can do at least as well," said Sylvain Aubry, from the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

"We welcome these initial findings from the evaluation. It is clear that the learning gains are very modest. And in my view, even these gains are largely attributable to the extra-financing. The evaluation does not help us understand causality, we need independent qualitative research," concluded David Archer, from ActionAid International.

Signatories

- ActionAid International
- African Network Campaign on Education For All
- Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (Nigeria)
- Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (Liberia)
- East African Centre for Human Rights (Kenya)
- Global Campaign for Education
- Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Initiative for Economic and Social Rights (Uganda)
- Right to Education Initiative

Resources:

- Evaluation of the PPP in Liberia: <http://bit.ly/2eJEHkh>
- Civil society call on investors to cease support to Bridge International Academies: <http://bit.ly/biainvestors>
- Monitoring page on the situation in Liberia: <http://bit.ly/PrivatEduLiberia>

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