Report on the Evaluation of the Quality of the Teaching & Learning in the Second Chance program for Out of School Children in Liberia carried out by the University of Sussex, England July 2019

This report was written by Jo Westbrook and Sean Higgins from the University of Sussex, UK, with additional input and advice from Kwame Akyeampong and John Pryor, also from Sussex.
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Acknowledgements
Thanks go to the Luminos Fund management team in Liberia, Abba Karnga Jr and Alphanso Menyon and to Nikita Khosla, LF in Liberia program manager, for their cooperation and openness in the process of the research and for their support with logistics. Thanks also to Dubai Cares for providing the funding to undertake this evaluation. Special thanks goes to Alpha Simpson, CEO of Q&A, Inc. in Liberia and his team of researchers whose hard work and insight is reflected in this report. We wish to thank the Second Chance students themselves, their facilitators, parents and community leaders and the supervisors, as well as the teachers in the Link Schools, who gave us their time and thoughts.

We also wish to thank MA International Education & Development student Catherine Richardson for her data and insights gathered during her dissertation on parental support of Second Chance graduates in Liberia and to Jeff Readman for his work on formatting.

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>Activity Based Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Building Resources Across Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GR</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAB</td>
<td>High achieving boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAG</td>
<td>High achieving girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Implementing Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIPACE</td>
<td>Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAB</td>
<td>Low achieving boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAG</td>
<td>Low achieving girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Luminos Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEG</td>
<td>Parental Engagement Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROCH</td>
<td>Restoring Our Children’s Hopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Second Chance program</td>
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</table>
Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from an extensive qualitative evaluation, funded by Dubai Cares, of the quality of the teaching and learning in the Second Chance program for Out of School Children in Liberia, itself funded and managed by the Luminos Fund, Liberia. ‘Quality’ is understood as the extent to which all students, in particular girls, were enabled to grasp curriculum content and to transition to the government Link school.

The Second Chance program in Liberia

Adapted from the Ethiopian Speed School program, the Second Chance program gives poor rural children between ages 8-12 from the most marginalised communities who dropped out of school over two years previously or have never been to school the opportunity to catch up through an accelerated learning model. It is offered to classes of 25 learners over an 8 hour day with a cooked lunch for 40 weeks (10 months) a year with the aim that 90% of students will transition to a local partner ‘Link’ government school at Grade 3 or 4. Four local ‘Implementing Partners’ or NGOs manage 66 SC classes in the two counties of Bomi (48 classes) and Montserrado (19 classes). IPs recruit supervisors and facilitators, identify students, house classes and organise the local Parental Engagement Group.

The intervention takes place in a post conflict-affected country in which many root causes and drivers of grievance and conflict still remain, 16 years after peace was officially declared. These include poverty and socio-economic inequalities; the failure of the state to deliver social services, including access to education at all levels; centralisation of power and resources by elites; inequities between urban and rural provision; exclusionary political and economic systems; and weak state-society relations. Land disputes, corruption, boundary disputes and concession-related tensions also continue to be triggers of violence.

Research Methods

The research was carried out between December 2018 and June 2019 by the University of Sussex and a team of Liberian researchers, two women and two men, from Q&A, Inc., with the following eight research questions:

1. How, and to what extent does the structure, organisation and management of the program enable it to achieve its objectives?
2. How do facilitators contribute to goals of the program, what challenges do they face and how and to what extent does their training support them?
3. What is the nature and content of the curriculum for the Second Chance program?
4. How are different groups of learners in the Second Chance program in Liberia learning?
5. How does Second Chance support graduates in making a transition to Link Schools?
6. How and to what extent do the PEGs contribute to the program’s objectives?
7. How does the program intersect with drivers of conflict and peace?
8. What are implications of findings for policy and programming priorities?
Six SC classes and two Link schools were sampled together with LF management, facilitators, supervisors and parents, as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LF management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Engagement Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC students</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC graduates in Link Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in Link Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The child-friendly methods included interviews, focus group discussions and detailed observations and informal assessments of low and high achieving girls and boys. At each of three in-country visits, the Sussex team discussed emerging findings drawing on the local knowledge and insights from the Liberian researchers. Data were uploaded on NVivo 12 by Sussex, coded with the main research questions in mind by the Sussex team and the report drafted in June and July 2019.

Findings

**Question 1: How, and to what extent, does the structure, organisation and management of the Second Chance program enable it to achieve its objectives?**

The two LF managers based in Liberia and the USA-based Senior Director are highly committed and provide inspiring leadership. They articulate the program’s vision clearly, lead by example and develop positive relationships with all stakeholders. In particular they are conscious of high levels of deprivation in rural communities targeted by the program, and the urgency of the program. Clear channels of communication provide a social infrastructure scaffolding the program’s operations with diverse information feedback loops contributing to the effectiveness of the program's management.

A key strength is the system of in-class weekly facilitator observation and mentoring by well-qualified supervisors who also receive on-going training together with facilitators. Supervisors keep records of observations and report to management every two weeks, taking rapid action where needed to support facilitators.

Supervisors’ roles to enhance pedagogical practices as in-class coaches can be further consolidated to support more learner-centred approaches, as well as cross-checking facilitator records of attendance and attainment.

**Question 2: How do facilitators contribute to the goals of the program, what challenges do they face and how and to what extent does their training support them?**

Facilitators are key to the whole program despite being poorly educated and with no background as teachers. Most are men, and many have now been with the program for 2-3 years, evidence of their commitment, living in or near the community of the SC students they teach. They express belief in the program’s vision, show creativity, humour and patience with students and take pride in their progress and visit families to check on absenteeism. LF leadership is committed to building the skills
and knowledge of facilitators through an intensive tailored program of training. This is participatory, modelling the pedagogic strategies desired in the classroom, with strong facilitators invited to lead groups.

Facilitators expressed anxiety over salaries, long working days, lack of assistance for medical needs, voice exhaustion and the difficulties of serving communities in which they did not reside. These factors may also contribute to the uneven ratio between female and male facilitators. LF have raised pay levels, but could further employ substitutes to cover for sickness, give more breaks, as well as shorten the day.

**Question 3: What is the nature and content of the curriculum for the Second Chance program?**

The highly structured curriculum takes students from kindergarten to the end of grade 3 over ten months in reading, writing and numeracy with Social Studies and Science added in Phase 3 to mirror subjects taught in the Link School. Phonics and guided reading take up the majority of curriculum time. Facilitators refer closely to each day’s timetabled content and lead the learning, but students are also very active. Of note is the evolving nature of the curriculum with adaptations made every few months, for example adding in Activity Based Learning (ABL).

Facilitators vary in their knowledge and practice and in their ability to meet the diverse needs of SC students. They must forge a difficult balance between the direct instruction required for phonics and reading and the child-centredness and ABL as promoted by LF in the training and curricular guidelines. Obedience to the SC curriculum guide sometimes limits their ability to exercise independent professional judgements and to contextualise learning.

The development of students who can read fluently through phonics is central to the vision of LF and the approach used is joyously multimodal with chanting, use of gestures and arm movements to sound out each word, drilling, whispering and writing. Low achievers show real determination to read even an unfamiliar text using phonics.

However, an exclusive emphasis on phonics can encourage a repetitive, technical and decontextualised approach to reading rather than as a way of conveying meaning. Greater contextualisation of words orally and in writing to reflect students’ experience will support word meaning.

Students have 1.5 hours of Guided Reading a day with a story read through choral and echo reading aloud, which is greatly enjoyed, individuals tracking under words with their fingers. Students have to share texts between them, however, and some low achievers memorise the story rather than read the text. With more designated time for comprehension, facilitators can make good use of comprehension activities in the curriculum guide and can be encouraged to use more open inferential questions as well as simple recall questions.

The teaching of numeracy lends itself well to ABL with a range of manipulatives that learners of all abilities appreciate, frequent use of the play bank and supermarket and appears to offer cognitive challenge and greater interaction. Reviews of previous learning are more evident in numeracy also.
The addition of Rise and Shine (Life Skills), and Social Science and Science in phase 3 offers facilitators greater opportunities to improvise and where facilitators engaged students in dialogue and referred closely to their communities students appeared engaged and to learn much.

Fridays are dedicated to doing individual running records of student reading, as well as spelling and numeracy tests, undertaken in semi-formal test conditions, and peer-marked. Copybooks however are not always looked at or written in on a continuous basis. The running record is useful but time consuming and could be shortened and include assessment of comprehension.

Question 4. How are different groups of learners in the Second Chance program in Liberia learning?

All groups come from marginalised communities, have made new friends and support one another in the SC classes. They engage in lessons, show impressive levels of learning and progression and consider transition to be ‘easy’. Students in low achieving groups are younger, have more chores to do at home, have less to eat, are more frequently absent through illness, more likely to be off task and distracted in lessons, have less writing in their copybooks, pretend to read, are playful and some fear their facilitator. There are, however, only 2-4 in each class who really struggle to read and compute. High achieving boys learn at the pace of the curriculum and receive more attention from mostly male facilitators, reflected in the Endline Evaluation that shows boys doing better overall than girls. Low Achieving Girls are more disadvantaged than other groups, are paid less attention by facilitators and at greater risk of drop out.

Facilitators are aware of the range of abilities and do their best to differentiate by peer support, repeating lesson content at lunchtime or after school, and are now paying more attention to low achievers in phase 3, with built-in time twice a week to do so. They could also further ensure all learners participate, use larger writing on the board, act as scribe and extend the high achievers through giving them more challenging work.

Question 5. How does the Second Chance program support graduates in making a transition to Link Schools?

SC graduates (from the 2017-18 cohort who followed a slightly different curriculum) liked the phonics, reading aloud, maths, singing, drawing pictures, going outside, having fun while learning, classroom displays, food and free copybooks, appreciated their kind teachers, and recognised they had made real progression from a poor baseline. All expected transition and felt well prepared for learning in the government school. There were four aspects that graduates brought with them directly from the SC program:

**Ability to adapt** to the new school, being disciplined, arriving early, being, prepared, easily making friends with others; **Attitudes to learning** were positive and graduates see learning as worthwhile and relevant to their families and future; **Learning skills & progression gained** resulted in confident reading skills, the ability to recognise a good teacher and to work hard. Graduates keep up and beyond with their classmates, are active learners and some study at home; **Self-belief and aspirations** are apparent with a sense of superiority above other students, showing off their learning. Graduates employ social skills of politeness and respect for others, elders, peers and articulated high aspirations for jobs.
While SC graduates generally said they enjoyed the Link School, there are considerable challenges they face in making the transition: **financial constraints** for parents to pay fees, chores, illness and family instability caused by poverty; **the didactic teaching methods** used and **harsher learning environment** where there are material shortages, absent teachers and violence is a real threat, apparent in the Link schools.

There were three aspects of external support that helped learners to successfully transition: **family support**, often from female relatives, who were often sole providers; **financial support from LF** to pay for high PTA fees, shoes and uniform, although from the second year parents face real issues in paying fees, and **kind, friendly teachers in the Link School** who make them feel part of the school.

Transition affects multiple actors - SC graduates, their peers, parents/carers, and community - and is a long-term process. Parents need to be well-prepared for this in the PEGs, with stronger monitoring and support of graduates beyond the first year in Link school. The plan to train Link school teachers in the SC pedagogy will be a great boon and will present opportunity to discuss why corporal punishment should not be used.

**Question 6. How and to what extent do the PEGs contribute to the program’s objectives?**

PEGs offer an excellent model of bottom-up engagement and are perceived by LF leaders as gaining the support and interest of parents who are illiterate and have had little previous contact with schools or teachers. Children’s learning is showcased here with enactment of classroom practices making a palpable impact on parents and rendering learning a social, communal event. The PEGs were also remarkably open, democratic and purposeful meetings, with active participation by many, including, significantly, women, who were actively encouraged to speak by the organising supervisor. PEG meetings also promote girls’ learning and challenge unhelpful gender norms and stereotypes that continue to constrain girls and women in Liberia. Mothers celebrated their daughters’ commitment to and enjoyment of SC learning opportunities in the PEGs.

The importance of child protection is also emphasised at these meetings, with discussion and consensus reached around contested issues of child behaviour management and where the conducive learning environment of the SC classes is celebrated for the absence of corporal punishment.

Parental concerns are also voiced at PEGs around their lack of food at home with appreciation shown of the LF feeding program, albeit fuel procured by parents is limited for the Class Parent to cook lunch with. Limited land availability reduces opportunities for parents to grow vegetables to supplement rice and beans. Another concern voiced was meeting the financial costs of uniform and PTA fees in the transition to government schools but meetings also provided a forum where parents could collaborate to save and make money. LF needs to manage high expectations by parents that they will pay fees over the long run, continue and extend the program indefinitely.

**Question 7. How does the program intersect with drivers of peace and conflict in Liberia?**

Parents expressed frustration about the financial challenges of daily survival, youth unemployment, ill health, hunger, lack of access to health and educational provision with a strong sense of neglect by the State. These structural issues influenced how the LF program was understood and appreciated by parents and condition and constrain the efforts of the program itself.
Despite these continuing grievances, most Liberians, especially young people, are committed to avoiding a return to violence. Facilitators expressed a sense of responsibility for social restoration and in promoting social change. The very activity of going to school was seen by parents as a palpable sign of the return of peace and the relationships fostered in them modelled peaceful interpersonal behaviours. The LF intervention was also significant in the longer term because of parents’ belief in the value of education to confer recognition, status, economic opportunities and future capital, escaping the material suffering they experienced. Many parents also recognised the wider significance for social cohesion and peace of the classes and PEGs pulling the community together.

What emerges from the research as a whole is not only the interconnected aspects of the whole program, but also the contingencies of endemic poverty and hunger within the post-conflict and post-Ebola context of Liberia.

**Question 8. What are the implications of findings for policy and programming priorities?**

The SC program undoubtedly meets its goals of accelerated learning, community mobilisation and capacity building. It has become a beacon of good and kind practice and hope within the communities it works in, and its pedagogic innovations have produced resilient knowledgeable learners. The program advocates for the girl child, in tandem with its work on Child Protection. The community cohesion brought about by the PEGs and the work of the facilitators and supervisors directly contributes to student retention and to local peacebuilding. The program may be the only educational provision that some students receive and in the contingent context of Liberia, this is only good.

While several major changes to the program have already been made during this evaluation, further changes are suggested below.

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<td><strong>Address gender and achievement</strong></td>
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<td>Further develop awareness and strategies to ensure that both high and low achieving girls, benefit more from the program, building on facilitator awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identify and meet the needs of disabled learners</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider extending the spirit of inclusion of the most marginalised learners to children with disabilities. The activity-based learning using multimodal resources and the space in each classroom supports children with disabilities to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhance facilitator’s pedagogical vision and practices</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support facilitators in relating SC student learning to their contexts as well as in their ability to ensure that SC students read continuous text for meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidate the role of supervisors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that supervisors monitor pedagogical strategies carefully and have a greater role in training, sharing responsibilities with LF leaders, and to check facilitator records.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teach and actively promote sustainability and environmental care</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>There is great opportunity for students to learn about sustainability, climate change and the environment, e.g. garbage disposal at school and within their local community, growing seeds and food.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengthen transition arrangements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build on current liaison with Link School teachers in terms of pedagogy, Child Protection and corporal punishment, manage parental expectations of financial support and track SC graduates for the first two years.</td>
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### Medium term
- **Take an intersectoral approach to food, income and education**
  Forge an intersectoral approach with the communities and authorities in terms of agricultural land use to support the growing of vegetables for consumption by SC classes and provide income for parents and the community.
- **Introduce learning through local languages**
  The program could reflect on the possibility of using two languages in the classroom.

### Long term
**Engagement in poverty alleviation strategies**
LF could support parents in their efforts to acquire land to grow food and develop micro-business activities, in particular through networking with elders in their communities.

**Engagement with the Ministry of Education**
Promote the SC program, its achievements, and peacebuilding significance in meeting the particular needs of out of school children in rural communities.
1. Introduction
This report presents findings from a qualitative evaluation, funded by Dubai Cares, of the quality of the teaching and learning in the Second Chance program for Out of School Children in Liberia, funded and managed by the Luminos Fund, Liberia. The evaluation took place between December 2018 and June 2019.

‘Quality’ in this context is understood as the extent to which all students were enabled to fulfil the program objectives and grasp the content and skills of the curriculum across all three phases from Grade 1 to 3. ‘Quality’ here is also underpinned by the extent to which the program supports all students to transition to the government Link school at the end of the ten months.

In particular, the research sought to understand the learning and transition through students’ perspectives, in particular girls; to understand what SC graduates from the year before had gained both academically and socially from the program, what resonated most with them in terms of the greatest support, and what challenges they met with in the Link schools.

It should be noted those graduates in the Link School whose views are reflected here undertook a different SC curriculum in 2017-18 to those SC students currently in the program in 2018-19.

We are grateful for the time, support and ongoing dialogue lent us by the LF management in Liberia for this research, and to the excellent team of Liberian researchers who went the extra mile to reach classes and students. We are also mindful of the evolving nature of the curriculum, training and pedagogical practices and are pleased that our research has already contributed towards ongoing deliberations and decisions that capitalise on the considerable strengths of the program and address areas where there is scope for improvement.

1.1 The Second Chance Program in Liberia
The Second Chance program was adapted from the Ethiopian Speed School program for the very different post-conflict context of Liberia, starting in 2016-17. It gives poor rural children between ages 8-12 from the most marginalised communities who dropped out of school over two years previously or have never been to school the opportunity to catch up through an accelerated learning model. It is offered to classes of 25 learners over an 8 hour day for 40 weeks (10 months) a year with the aim that 90% of students will transition to a local partner ‘Link’ government school at Grade 3 or 4. The stated Guiding Principles of the program are that ‘Every child can learn’ and ‘Help a child learn how to learn’, the latter adopted from the evaluation by the University of Sussex of the Speed School program in Ethiopia.

Four local ‘Implementing Partners’ (IP) or NGOs manage 66 SC classes in the two counties of Bomi (48 classes) and Montserrado (19 classes). Currently these IPs are Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), Restoring Our Children’s Hopes (ROCH), Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence (LIPACE) and the Luminos Fund themselves. IPs recruit supervisors and facilitators, identify students by visiting villages to find children ‘sitting’ out of school, find spaces to house classes, organise the local Parental Engagement Group and a class parent to find fuel, plates and cook the daily lunch for students. Initially designed as a six-month Catch-Up program following the Ebola outbreaks of 2012-16 and then a full year of ’Speed School’, the ‘Second Chance’ program – renamed to differentiate itself from the Ethiopian model – was adapted in 2018-19 with phonics as the main and innovative pedagogic method for teaching reading, made in response to the perceived
educational challenges of the Liberian context. As a result, the program aims to develop resilient, independent and aspirational learners who make a successful transition despite very real challenges.

The recent Endline Evaluation (July 2019) measuring progress in decoding, comprehension and numeracy made by Q&A, Inc., shows that the program is successful in raising levels of reading from a very low baseline to one where the majority are reading and comprehending at Grade 2 pass rate, and where numeracy gains are noteworthy. The report reflects, however, concern around drop out of SC students and differences in performance between IPs and with boys doing better than girls, although this is not seen as statistically significant.

Community mobilisation and capacity building are also central to the LF vision in Liberia. Notable is the strong community involvement in the SC programs, with the monthly Parental Engagement Groups showing pride in the program, gratitude towards the LF for its funding, and determination to support their children to transition to the Link school. Within this, the program advocates for the girl child, similarly empowering mothers and other female relatives, strongly promotes alternatives to corporal punishment, and makes parents very aware of issues around child protection. There are plans to build the capacity of the Link School head teachers and teachers who receive the SC students through inviting them to facilitator training and supporting mutual observations when co-existing on the same site.

Those researched in the two counties of Montserrado and Bomi were predominantly Christian, although some of the PEG communities were diverse with Muslims and Christians living harmoniously side by side with Imams and Elders both attending PEGs. Communities were small, rural, often with illiterate parents who spoke a local language or dialect and who had mostly not attended school themselves, disrupted by the years of conflict and the four year Ebola outbreak of 2012-16. Carers were often single parents, more often single mothers or grandparents. Their livelihoods generally came from selling charcoal, cassava or palm wine.

Classes are either housed in a classroom on a government school site or in their own building close within a community such as a church or small hall; these have a more temporary feel or are cramped, and noisy, close to traffic or people walking past. Hence, some rooms are light and spacious, others small and dark, with students squeezed in around the walls. All have some materials displayed, but some have very many, including pictures or the ABC frieze strung up across the ceiling, a pretend supermarket, a bank, and a reading ‘bin’ or corner. All have a water bucket and cup that students can drink from at any time.

1.2 The conflict-affected context of Liberia
This accelerated learning intervention takes place in a conflict-affected context in which many root causes and drivers of grievance and conflict still remain, 16 years after peace was officially declared. These include poverty and socio-economic inequalities; the failure of the state to deliver social services, including access to education at all levels; centralisation of power and resources by elites; inequities between urban and rural provision; exclusionary political and economic systems; and weak state-society relations. In addition, recent assessments show that land disputes, corruption, boundary disputes and concession-related tensions continue to be triggers of violence (US Aid, 2016).
Many of the parents of children targeted in the program were affected by the country’s two civil wars spanning the 1980s to 2003 and which resulted in great loss of life, the destruction of infrastructure including schools, extreme deprivation, forced human displacement, mass trauma and overall national instability. Parents of the SC students constitute the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in the country.

According to Liberia’s recent Education Sector Plan 2017-2021, (Ministry of Education, 2016) “an estimated 15-20% of children between the ages of 6-14 are not enrolled in school”. This amounts to 741,180 children (Ministry of Education, 2016, 65). These statistics are one of several indicators that evidence the precarity and daily suffering of the Liberian population, particularly those living in rural areas targeted by the Second Chance program. These include low life expectancy, high infant and under-5 child mortality rates, high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition and high levels of youth unemployment (UNDP, 2018, Country Profile, Liberia). Moreover, the recent Ebola crisis exposed a chronically weak health care infrastructure. Liberia ranked 181 out of 189 countries surveyed for the UNDP Human Development Index in 2018 (ibid).

Notwithstanding warnings of the likely recurrence of conflict, recent commentators (Catholic Relief Services, 2016; Applied Knowledge Services, 2014; US Aid, 2016, iii) have noted an overwhelming desire for peace amongst rural communities in Liberia, not least among the nation’s large number of youth who demonstrate a sense of responsibility to contribute to the promotion of peace and national recovery. Many features of the SC educational intervention resonate with this societal peace-building momentum. Moreover, the program’s attention to the education of out of school children aligns with a wider national concern to ensure the well-being of a new post-conflict generation. This has resulted from recognition of the atrocities and violations of children’s human rights experienced during the conflict (Priyal & Lesley, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2009).

Research Methods

1.3 Key concepts and framing

The research used child-friendly approaches such as conversations and use of photographs to garner data that accurately and fairly represented student and parental voices. Employing an experienced team of four Liberian researchers, two women and two men, well acquainted with the SC program through their involvement with the Baseline Evaluation, strengthened this approach. Intensive training with the Sussex team involved joint observations and interviews and ongoing discussion. Furthermore, recognition of the recent history and context of Liberia was uppermost in researchers’ minds as they talked to parents and community members.

1.4 Research Questions

The overall aim of the evaluation was represented by questions that sought to understand ‘quality’ in the program from the perspectives of the different stakeholders and to reflect the interconnected nature of the SC program:

1. How, and to what extent does the structure, organisation and management of the program enable it to achieve its objectives?
2. How do facilitators contribute to goals of the program, what challenges do they face and how and to what extent does their training support them?
3. What is the nature and content of the curriculum for the Second Chance program?
4. How are different groups of learners in the Second Chance program in Liberia learning?
5. How does Second Chance support graduates in making a transition to Link Schools?
6. How and to what extent do the PEGs contribute to the program’s objectives?
7. How does the program intersect with drivers of conflict and peace?
8. What are implications of findings for policy and programming priorities?

1.5 Sampling and Informants
The research sampled six SC classes across the four IPs, using whole class observations and interviews over three days with students and the facilitator. The research also explored the specific learning and actions of a high and low achieving girl and boy in each class (four students in each class albeit for Jenneh classes just two), identified by the facilitator or Link School teacher. The majority of data collection in the SC classes and Link Schools took place in February and May 2019. This allowed the Liberian team to do follow up visits to observe Phase 3 of the curriculum and note any progress of changes in the specific students observed.

Table 1. Second Chance classes sampled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementing Partner</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROCH</td>
<td>Bassa Gbateah</td>
<td>Montserrado</td>
<td>Majority Christian/mixed</td>
<td>Kpella &amp; Bassa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIPACE</td>
<td>Jenneh 1 Jenneh 2</td>
<td>Bomi</td>
<td>Majority Christian/mixed</td>
<td>Gola (&amp; Dai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Yatta</td>
<td>Bomi</td>
<td>Majority Christian/mixed</td>
<td>Kpelle/Gola/Dai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Sajilom</td>
<td>Montserrat</td>
<td>Christian/Muslim</td>
<td>Gola</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Link Schools sampled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link School</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gertrude Yancy</td>
<td>Bomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Montserrat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 Research Informants
The table below summarises the research informants, reflecting the broad span of participants involved:

Table 3. Research Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LF management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Engagement Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC students</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC graduates in Link Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in Link Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.7 Data gathering methods

Multiple methods of data gathering ensured the research questions were met and engendered different forms of data for comparison. Methods included interviews, focus group discussions, observations of the whole class over a full day and detailed observations of individual students. An informal reading test asked students to read aloud words and sentences written in their copybooks from the most recent lesson and to read a short story aloud and answer comprehension questions on it that included both literal (what?) and inferential (why?) questions, at the level of Grade 2, based on the EGRA format (See Appendix 1). This allowed researchers to gain a general picture of individual ability of the ‘high’ and ‘low’ achievers to marry up with other indicators.

Table 4. Data gathering methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Usefulness as data source</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole class observation of SC lessons</td>
<td>Enactment of the curriculum, pattern and structure of the day; facilitator practices; classroom environment for learning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close observation of one high and one low achieving girl and boy per class; follow up interviews including informal reading assessment</td>
<td>Engagement with learning; relationships with facilitator and peers; learning gains; Their perspectives and concerns on the SC program, identity as learners and learning, transition, aspirations</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with facilitators</td>
<td>Background, views &amp; understanding of SC program aims, curriculum, role in community, as peacebuilders, challenges</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups with facilitators and supervisors</td>
<td>Backgrounds, roles, views on SC program, its benefits, contextual challenges of Liberia</td>
<td>1, 2, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with LF management</td>
<td>Structure, adaptations, history of program, benefits, challenges</td>
<td>1, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of facilitator training</td>
<td>Realisation of curriculum aims through participatory training, ways of working collaboratively</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of PEGs</td>
<td>Role and management of PEGs, specific roles for men and women, community involvement, contextual challenges</td>
<td>1, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions and interviews with parents</td>
<td>Their perspectives on benefits and challenges of SC program in Liberian context, views of transition, aspirations for their children</td>
<td>5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of and interviews with high and low SC graduates in Link Schools; use of photos of a SC class to jog memories</td>
<td>Engagement in activities; learning gains; relationships with teachers &amp; peers; their perspectives on what they brought with them from the SC program; challenges faced in transition; aspirations</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Link school headteachers and teachers</td>
<td>Perspectives on SC program and graduates in terms of transition, their performance, challenges, integration</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.8 Ethical considerations
The research was mindful of the vulnerability of the students in the SC classes and in the Link Schools and sought to create a safe environment for participants to respond openly. This included ensuring that pairs of female and male Liberian researchers worked together as a team to make girl students and their female relatives feel safe. Researchers took care to ensure all respondents fully understood the reasons for the research and gained informed verbal consent, including from the students, often using the local Liberian English dialect to ensure comprehension. Participants were aware that they could withdraw at any time.

The research was approved by the University of Sussex Ethical Approval Committee and also by the Liberian Institutional Review Board, with thanks to Alpha Simpson from Q&A, Inc. for his support and direction in gaining this.

1.9 Analysis
Data sent to Sussex by the Liberian team incorporated lesson observations, transcribed interviews and the informal reading comprehension assessment. Any data that remained unclear was clarified via telephone call or email. At each of the three in-country visits, the Liberian and Sussex team in person met to discuss emerging findings in an ongoing and iterative process drawing on their local knowledge and insights. The LF management were also involved in responding to a report and presentation on preliminary findings in May 2019 which supported a collaborative approach. The data were uploaded on NVivo 12 by Sussex, coded with the main research questions in mind by the Sussex team and the report drafted in June and July 2019.
Findings

1.10 Question 1: Structure, organisation and management of the SC program

How, and to what extent, does the structure, organisation and management of the Second Chance program enable it to achieve its objectives?

The LF rightly emphasises the importance of successful management systems and processes in enabling the Second Chance program to achieve its key interconnected objectives namely:

- Providing accelerated learning for out of school children
- Community mobilisation
- Capacity building

These objectives are understood to be achievable through an ecological approach, responsive to local context and diverse stakeholders. The program’s management and logistical challenges are considerable, given the conflict-affected context, weak local infrastructure, the spread of the program across 4 IPs, and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders. These include the Ministry of Education, Supervisors working for IPs, facilitators from local communities, teachers in transition schools and the core targeted groups of parents and children.

1.10.1 Leadership

Leadership of the program is distributed between the Liberian managers and a Luminos Fund US program manager who visits on a very regular basis. They collaborate on all aspects of the program, including curriculum revisions, staff management and roles and implementation processes. Their relationship at the core of the program’s leadership is a key strength, ensuring that local expertise, context awareness and insights are embedded into the structures of decision-making.

The two main LF managers based in Liberia are highly committed and provide inspiring leadership. Both are driven by a desire to contribute to Liberia’s post conflict social transformation. They complement each other in their areas of expertise and responsibilities with one having responsibility for the overall coordination of the program and the other leading on pedagogy and facilitator training. Their daily teamwork, classroom monitoring and ongoing reflection about how the Second Chance curriculum and broader interventions can be enhanced are a core strength of the program. Both managers articulate the program’s vision clearly, persuasively and with passion, and communicate it to all stakeholders. They lead by example in constantly modelling pedagogical practices and techniques, developing and nurturing positive relationships, and reminding everyone of the goals and approach of the program.

In particular they are conscious of very high levels of deprivation in rural communities targeted by the program, nationwide challenges of ensuring basic levels of literacy and reading and large numbers of children and parents with no experience of formal education. This has led them to prioritise the “basics” of reading in the Second Chance program through adoption of phonics as the entry point for literacy development, as one explained:
We can’t expect that our kids will come in with a little bit of knowledge. We expect that they are coming with nothing at all.. they are completely blank.. so we have to start from a level and give them the foundation .. and that is why phonics is so important.

1.10.2 Clear channels of communication
The leadership have established multiple lines of communication between all stakeholders in the program which provide a social infrastructure scaffolding the program’s operations. These include supervisors from the 4 IPs, facilitators, their families and communities. This has been achieved through strategic scheduling of meetings e.g. between supervisors and leaders, supervisors and facilitators, and all stakeholders at community level in the PEGs. These have created diverse information feedback loops that contribute to the effectiveness of the program’s management. They enable, for instance, the LF leaders to be aware of the views and experiences of parents or of the insights of supervisors managing the performance of facilitators in classrooms, and who respond quickly to day to day operational challenges.

1.10.3 Management of teaching and learning: the key role of supervisors
Supervisors from each of the IPs play a pivotal and mediatory role in the management of the program, ensuring the accountability and monitoring of teaching and learning through their work with facilitators and ensuring community involvement through their organisation of the PEGs. This group is particularly well qualified and brings a range of relevant professional insights and experiences with some having been teachers, managed interventions to support children as NGO workers, or worked with the Ministry of Education in similar programs e.g. play-based pedagogies. They are, however, not primarily pedagogic experts.

A key strength of the program’s management of the processes of teaching and learning within the Second Chance classes is the system of in-class facilitator observation and mentoring of around 1 hour undertaken on a weekly basis by supervisors. This involves monitoring/discussing strengths and weaknesses and suggesting practical ways to improve teaching and to ensure that the facilitators are following the written curriculum. This process aims to understand the challenges of teaching from the facilitator’s perspective; as one supervisor explained: “We try to hear some of his challenges and some of what he is going through”. Good relationships with facilitators have been established, enabling this to be a productive and useful exchange within a non-threatening approach.

1.10.4 Commitment to staff capacity development
Leadership is conscious and rightly committed to developing the skills and capacities of staff, in particular of facilitators, as detailed below. Supervisors also receive training in the curriculum itself and are supported in monitoring and supervision processes. This concern to develop existing staff, even those who are under-performing, is an important part of the professional culture that management have established and a strength of the program, eliciting the loyalty in particular of facilitators.

1.10.5 Reporting systems and data management
Leadership has developed useful systems of record keeping that support effective management and co-ordination, in particular:

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1 Italics are used to denote direct quotations from participants.
• Supervisors keep records of observations using a shared template that ensures consistency and builds up data collection on individual facilitators, reporting to management every two weeks. This quickly identifies weaker facilitators, with action taken to support and improve their practice.

• Weekly meetings and conference calls between the supervisors working for the separate IPs provide a regular forum for reflection and strategising in which supervisors discuss the findings of their monitoring of classes and facilitators and come together on ways of addressing them.

1.10.6 For consideration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For consideration:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enhance supervisors’ role in monitoring and enhancing pedagogical processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consider bringing supervisors to share the overall coordination role to support and augment LF leadership, reducing the considerable burden of visiting classes every week by the LF management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integrate supervisors as leaders in facilitator training e.g. on Activity Based Learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improve documentation so that accurate records by facilitators of student attendance, drop out and achievement (as identified in the Endline Evaluation) are maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervisors could monitor and cross check on accuracy of records.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.11 Question 2: Facilitators’ contributions, challenges and training

How do facilitators contribute to the goals of the program, what challenges do they face and how and to what extent does their training support them?

Directly responsible for teaching and learning in the Second Chance classes as well as community outreach and pastoral care for children and their families, the facilitators are rightly described by management as the “key” to the whole program, whose role and responsibilities are “really really intense”. They are appreciated by parents who refer to them sometimes as “brothers”.

Facilitators are recruited from the massive numbers of rural unemployed youth. Most have just graduated from high school and received low passes (a mark of D7/8 in West African Examination Council Examinations) in English and Maths. Some bring relevant experience such as teaching experience as volunteers in primary schools, work for NGOs such as Street Child, involvement in catch-up programs as well as informal ‘study class’ teaching in the their community. However, none have a background in pedagogical practices or education. They are mostly men, a factor reflecting the difficulties of recruiting women into teaching and the broader gender inequities in the education system (Stromquist, 2013). Recruitment of the group, according to the leadership, focused on their personal qualities such as patience, their ability to work with children and possession of the necessary stamina and resilience to do a challenging job.

Many are frustrated at not being able to go on to higher education because of poverty; many do not see teaching as their career of choice in the long term and have opted to become a facilitator given the paucity of alternative employment. However, many have now been with the program for 2-3 years, evidence of their commitment and the ability of the program to engage this group.

1.11.1 Motivation and Vision

- Facilitators show creativity, humour and patience when working in small classrooms or in fairly remote areas. Many demonstrate their commitment by putting in extra time to visit families to check on absenteeism or to maintain contact with SC students when they have transitioned to the link school or making resources for their classrooms.
- All expressed a belief in the program’s vision and priorities as articulated by leadership, in particular their priority to build reading skills, the perception that reading is the key national challenge in Liberia and the usefulness of phonics as a basic starting point, particularly through its ability to quickstart the process of learning to read through encouraging learner confidence in pronunciation and enunciation.
- They take pride in an intervention which they believe will contribute to giving the children a future: “the children are the future leaders for tomorrow. You don’t know who that child will be. Sometimes that child will be doctor, president, nurse, teacher”. – “most of our relatives and friends are on the street there doing nothing”. They take satisfaction from their contribution to addressing needs and show faith in the benefits of accelerated learning.
- Many take satisfaction from seeing progress made by children in reading and writing. One facilitator summarised her sense of the transformational nature of the program by commenting that “it is like taking the child from illiteracy to literacy, from nowhere to somewhere”.

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Many bring a strong sense of service to community and nation and take pride in the opportunity which their involvement in the program gives them to contribute to national healing and social restoration after the country’s civil conflicts. There was also a commitment to ensure that the new generation of children would enjoy a better experience than they and their parents “to help these children find a way out”... “I have passion for the youth and that of the country. So I decided to impart knowledge in them”.

They also believed that their involvement in the program was contributing to their own learning and personal growth and in particular they appreciated the opportunity to learn phonics.

1.11.2 Pedagogical approach and practices

Most facilitators are able to articulate the program’s vision of SC teachers being “facilitators” and “student centred” - rather than teachers in the “conventional” sense associated with being didactic and authoritarian. Thus, one explained that “I see a slight difference between being a facilitator and a teacher. A teacher just teaches but a facilitator helps students to learn to discover.. we guide them in the process for them to learn”.

They have a strongly relational understanding of their pedagogy, talking about their conviction of “loving” their students and the importance of building good relationships with the children and their parents: “A facilitator is someone who helps and someone who cares”. This caring and humane approach is exemplified in one example which indicates how some facilitators, aware that some children will not have eaten anything before school, help to ensure that they don’t go hungry, as one boy said:

If I na [don’t/] bring money and I go ask him he can give me it. If I na [don’t/] pay I say brother Abraham I [am/] hungry...he can take out thirty dollar he say go buy kala [friend flower mixture/]

Many expressed an awareness of the need to build confidence in learning in the children – a factor which will help them in transition. This is linked to encouraging “the students to speak out” as well as challenging local cultural norms that tend to produce “fear” in children and reticence.

Many expressed a belief that phonics helped pupils to enjoy learning and develop a positive self-identity as learners. One pointed out that phonics helps them to “grab the concept of learning... you see children dancing with it”.

1.11.3 Community roles

In line with the vision of the program, facilitators observed took seriously their broader pastoral role as community actors engaging with the families of SC students and promoting learning and the benefits of education to families.

Most, though not all, are teaching in their own communities or close by them and expressed a personal satisfaction in helping to rebuild communities whose needs and challenges in relation to access to education they were aware of intimately.

Some parents complained that facilitators were not from their town whose youth they believed had been neglected in the recruitment process. They noted how important recruitment from their communities was to enable children to have a local role model: “We
wanted for somebody from here where learn too at least they can be example you be part of it so our children can see”.

1.11.4 Facilitator Professional Development

- Training is carefully planned to focus on practical issues revealed through analysis of their performance in the SC classes and perception by supervisors of particular gaps in knowledge and practices. Content is carefully tailored to ongoing curriculum revisions, giving it meaning and purpose. Hence recent training focused on integration of play-based activities, activity-based learning and the teaching of Rise and Shine (Life Skills), while initial training was concerned with helping them navigate an unfamiliar curriculum.

- The identification of outstanding facilitators who can share and model good practices and who are given small rewards is effective in motivating their peers. This forms one component of a generally affirming ethos underpinning relationships between LF leaders and the facilitators.

- A particular strength is that activities during training model the participatory techniques expected of facilitators in class. Leaders exemplify good practice throughout, listening carefully and encouraging facilitator contributions, gently correcting mistakes.

- Training is much appreciated by the facilitators themselves as relevant and useful, building confidence and developing skills. One commented: “what I believe that make me to be a good facilitator is number one the training .. everything that you know they taught us. I go directly by our training”.

- Knowledge gained during training is also a source of pride for facilitators who see their involvement in SC as an opportunity to learn themselves as well as to teach others.

1.11.5 Challenges and opportunities

- Behaviour Management Strategies

LF leaders are aware that facilitators have experienced very different forms of behaviour management themselves and training is used to raise awareness of alternatives to corporal punishment. As one LF leader explained: “it was a problem because of our rules like no beating, no hitting, no yelling, no trying to work with our child protection policies, so teachers were confused.. because they grew up and the only thing they know is discipline to beat a child.. to yell at him.. so they are sitting and thinking if this child is disturbing my class and is disrupting everything and I am not allowed to hit him what do I do.. they don’t have the answer to that. Training gave them some help”.

However, while many are aware of SC policy on corporal punishment and model caring and compassionate relationships, one or two use violence or the threat of violence to keep control: ‘these are African children’; ‘He tells a boy to stand for a while [as punishment] and then allows him to sit. Turns a child’s head around to attend – like trying to hit him (Observation notes).

- Facilitator Health and Well being

Facilitators expressed considerable anxiety in particular over low salaries, long days, lack of assistance for medical needs, voice exhaustion and the difficulties of serving communities in which they did not reside. Eking out a living from day to day was a huge challenge and worry, not least wondering when they were next going to eat. They appear to have little time to prepare for the next
day, to work with learners who did not grasp that day’s concepts, to visit parents or to look after themselves domestically, for example, buying and cooking food. Many explained how challenging they found it to maintain the high levels of energy required to do their work, both in and outside of their classrooms given ongoing additional worries about day to day survival. Many, in the face of such struggles which were “not encouraging” were nevertheless determined to be resilient. Hence some complained of feeling sick and working despite this: “I’m forcing myself”. These factors may also contribute to the uneven ratio between female and male facilitators.

1.11.6 For consideration:

| • Consider raising pay levels (a commendable increase was made prior to this report’s release) and support/allowances for food and medical needs |
| • Consider facilitator suggestions to employ substitutes to cover for facilitators when they are sick or unable to get to class. |
| • Consider giving more frequent breaks to learners and facilitators, e.g. a short morning break, to ease the constant pace of the instruction. |
| • It might be helpful to cut the day short at 2.30pm, for example, giving facilitators time and space to plan ABL activities for the next day, to work with less able learners and contact parents. |
| • Build on facilitators’ relational understanding of their pedagogical practice to consolidate relevance of context-responsive strategies for learning. |
1.12 Question 3: SC curriculum

What is the nature and content of the curriculum for the Second Chance program?

The curriculum is designed to take students from very beginning of the basics, what is called ‘ABC’ in government schools, to the end of grade 3 or ‘phase 3’ over ten months. Students learn reading, writing and numeracy in Phase 1, with Rise and Shine (Life Skills) added in Phase 2 and Social Studies and Science added in Phase 3 as part of Rise and Shine to mirror subject areas taught in the government Link School. The curriculum for each grade 1-3 is highly structured with each day’s timetable and contents laid out over several pages against precise timings. Helpful guidelines, a glossary and ideas for teaching reading and numeracy (the latter highly visual and useful) and Activity Based Learning, with its links to teaching ‘with the world’ are provided at the front. Facilitators refer to each day and each segment closely, ensuring that content is systematically covered without leaving any gaps, as one facilitator said: ‘It’s helpful because it’s guiding you, all what you have to do for the day is in the manual.’ Facilitators lead the learning, but classes are participatory with much active learning from children. Of note is the evolving nature of the curriculum to fit with how facilitators teach and students receive and learn, with adaptations made every few months.

1.12.1 Challenges in the delivery of the curriculum

- Diversity of practice and ability

There is considerable variation of facilitator knowledge, pedagogical approaches and practices and approach to implementing the curriculum and in particular in their ability to meet the diverse needs of SC students. LF, drawing on supervisor mentoring, has developed speedy and effective ways of intervening to support individual facilitators.

- Persistence of a transmission model of pedagogy despite rhetoric of child-centredness

There is a tension between the prescription of the curriculum with its direct instruction and the child-centredness and ABL as promoted by LF in the training and curricular guidelines. While facilitators all espouse play and child-centredness, what is also clear is that this co-exists with a transmission model of teaching as passing on information and the internalisation of a given body of knowledge. This is not surprising as many have only recently left school where they experienced didactic teaching methods. For instance one commented that “being a facilitator you are getting the children to respond and to get the concept of whatever lesson you bring.. I will give them the right information”. This conceptualisation reveals facilitators’ attachment to a traditional instructional model despite LF training.

- Time aware obedience to the SC curriculum guide sometimes limits ability and confidence to exercise independent professional judgements

Facilitators are reluctant to draw on their own professional judgements in relation to making content contextually meaningful to their students, locating word meanings beyond dictionary definitions, intervening with low achievers and meeting the diverse needs of learners.
1.12.2 For consideration:

- Build on evident enthusiasm and engagement as well as thoughtfulness about SC participatory pedagogy to encourage less dependence on manual coverage and more confidence in their ability to draw on their own knowledge of the students contexts to make learning relevant especially in relation to ABL activities
- The sense of urgency, prompted by LF framing of intervention, can be tempered by greater space for slowing down and exploring possibilities.

1.12.3 Phonics in the Curriculum

The systematic synthetic phonics approach brought in this year to enhance reading has been adapted from Liberia Reads with direct synergies to Read Liberia used in government schools in grades 1 and 2. Students learn the routines of the different exercises and repeat the facilitator’s instructions verbatim as they ‘play the teacher’ and have developed a technical vocabulary around reading:

*The first sound I hear is Mmmm represented by the letter M, the second sound I hear is Ooo represented by the letter O, the third sound I hear is Mmmm represented by the letter M. Class, the word is Mom* (Student).

The approach is multimodal with chanting, use of gestures and arm movements to sound out each word, drilling, whispering and writing a word many times to get learners to internalise the new words. Significantly, low achievers show real determination to read even an unfamiliar text using phonics. When asked if it will be hard for a SC student at the government school, one replied: ‘No. Because I already know the sound. And I know how to pronounce’. The Endline Evaluation shows the greatest leap in recognition of phonemes, reflecting the phonics approach.

The development of learners who can read fluently is central to the creation of confident and resilient learners. Notably, positive learner identity and independence is closely linked to the articulation of letter names and words, with active, even joyful, involvement signifying progression and identity as someone who is capable of learning and who can demonstrate their learning to friends, families and community.

Using phonics is thus a ‘fail-safe’ approach to learning to read, the de facto ‘learning how to learn’ part as students lead or teach from the front themselves. This articulation also encourages students to find their own voices in other contexts such as the PEG and in articulating their hopes for their future: ‘they know it, they are going to get it out... to their voice’ (LF management). Phonics provides order, routine and a safe place in an unsafe world.

1.12.4 Challenges of using the phonics approach

- The dissonance between Liberian English and Standard English can cause difficulties e.g. two low achievers wrote down ‘siy’ instead of ‘say’. A word may be one not often heard or used by students, for example, the teacher read out the word ‘bill’ but pronounced this as ‘bail’ without spelling it or writing on board and said ‘my mother paid the bill’ but one girl wrote down ‘bail’ in her book and then got a X from the facilitator for incorrect wrong spelling.
• As pointed out in the Endline Evaluation, phonics encourages an accurate but slow pronunciation of words, which may prevent the fluency and automaticity required for comprehension.
• The technical terminology used can be difficult for young children just starting school to grasp with meaning sometimes lost amidst the technicality.
• An exclusive emphasis on phonics can encourage a decontextualised approach and a focus on pronunciation rather than as a way of conveying meaning.
• Phonics can be lengthy and repetitive, even with the change of the second blended ladder to later in the day with an overreliance on phonics as the only way to decode text. Low achieving groups were seen to be off task more often during phonics work.

1.12.5 For consideration in the teaching of phonics in the curriculum

- Greater contextualisation of words both oral and written that reflect students’ backgrounds and daily life will support word meaning. Many facilitators are doing this already: ‘in the community they should hear something about that and they will all bring out their ideas.’
- Groups could do one of the Blended Ladders or an Elkonin Box together after 2 or 3 have modelled this on the board. This will pick up the pace and ensure all are active and not just passively watching a peer.
- Facilitators are already using different approaches to ensure meaning e.g. compound words ‘fisherman’, analogy and rhyme, and the syllabic approach and this could be further diversified to include analytic phonics (starting with the whole word including visualising it). Using more sentences and short stories will support semantic, syntactic and contextual approaches.

1.12.6 Guided Reading in the Curriculum

Students have 1.5 hours of Guided Reading (GR) a day after lunch where a story containing the week’s green words is read through choral and echo reading aloud, with individuals and groups tracking words with their fingers. For a new story on a Monday, the facilitator does a ‘Picture Walk’ to test predictive inferential skills, followed by a reading, and uses the ‘Summary Hands’ to get students to consider character, setting, problem, solution and ‘lesson learnt’. The curriculum text has some excellent creative reading strategies for facilitators to employ at the front such as ‘Be the Book’. By repeating the story aloud students practise reading whole connected text with familiar words in, and learn that ‘reading’ encompasses more than letters and sounds. Students take great pleasure in the reading and part of their learner identity is as someone who ‘knows a story’. Endline results indicated that reading comprehension at Grade 2 pass leapt from 0.12 to 3.13 (out of a maximum score of 5) showing ‘stupendous’ progression over the year (Q&A, 2019, p.7).

1.12.7 Challenges of Guided Reading

- Shortage of books means that three students often share one book, with the middle one only tracking with their finger.
- Within the repeated choral reads, some students can go off task, especially the LA groups who can disguise their inability to read by pretending to read or by memorising chunks of verbal text.
• Some facilitators show weaker understanding of the comprehension process, assuming that adhering to punctuation marks equated to comprehension
• Observations rarely recorded comprehension activities apart from overly facilitator-directed ‘Be the Book’.
• The Endline Evaluation noted that ‘with simple recall questions, the comprehension scores for the first and second grade reading passages are still lower than desired’.

1.12.8 For consideration for Guided Reading

- Encourage facilitators to use the GR strategies at the front of the curriculum to ensure learners read actual text rather than memorise it and to observe students as they read to ensure ‘eyes on text’ and accurate finger-tracking.
- Encourage learners to self-monitor and self-correct when they read to become truly independent readers.
- Facilitators need to move students from simple literal or recall closed questions such as ‘Who does Hawa go to the market with?’ or ‘What is Granny doing?’ to harder inferential and more open questions such as ‘Why do the boys sit in the box?’ ‘How do they get home?’ and ‘Do you think they had fun at the party? ‘Why do you think that?’
- Comprehension questions and activities should be a part of every GR session and are now carried out at least twice a week.
- Consider shortening the time for Guided Reading to 45 minutes or one hour only so that the day could end earlier as suggested earlier.

1.12.9 Numeracy in the Curriculum
The curriculum guidelines on numeracy use attractive visuals and images to support facilitators to teach well, including the use of word problems which reflect the local context. The teaching of numeracy lends itself well to greater contextualisation and use of ABL with a range of manipulatives that learners of all abilities appreciate, frequent use of the play bank and supermarket and appears to offer cognitive challenge and greater interaction. Reviews of previous learning are more evident in numeracy also. The Endline Evaluation indicated real progression, although with the limited time given to numeracy, this was not as remarkable as the reading results, while the good results in solving word problems can be seen in the qualitative data where facilitators use ready examples and encourage elaborated responses in students: ‘Weight is something that is heavy. How heavy an object is. Get two things that are heavy outside of the classroom’.

1.12.10 Activity Based Learning in the Curriculum
Observers noted that students were very engaged in the ABL, disrupting as they did the usual learnt routines. Students went outside to find heavy objects or competed in two teams to spell words from pieces of paper with letters on or used dictionaries or took part in a spelling game. Facilitators have to plan for this in advance, and as such, not all observed classes had ABL in them. Some activities needed to be more integrated as meaningful activities.

1.12.11 Rise and Shine in the Curriculum
Student responses at interview echoed much of this new addition, with students discussing how they bathe and brush their teeth before coming to school under ‘Health’, citing aspirational professions from the list given in the curriculum and indicating their engagement and knowledge in
the Solar System. The addition of Social Science and Science in phase 3 is imaginatively presented in the curriculum and offers facilitators greater opportunities to improvise, to take learners outside and relate what they learn to their own experience. Facilitators were most concerned about teaching this part as it was new and less scripted than other parts. Where facilitators engaged students in dialogue and referred closely to their communities or backgrounds or drew maps on the board, Rise and Shine worked well. However, often it became an interrogation of closed questions which shut down dialogue. Nevertheless, topics become more substantial in Phase 3 e.g. around illegal drug use with more elaborated student input.

1.12.12 Assessment of the Curriculum
Facilitators are expected to review and monitor student progress on a daily basis by observing students and looking in their copybooks, with Fridays dedicated to doing individual running records of student reading of Words Per Minute, as well as spelling and numeracy tests. These tests are undertaken in semi-formal test conditions, with students doing peer-marking as the teacher discusses the test and gets the right answers from students. Observers noted that some facilitators take considerable care to find books of the same level as the student to be sure of his students’ actual reading abilities. There is a review of the curriculum before EGRA/EGMA tests and for the placement exam in June, and which reflects learning across Grades 1, 2 and 3 as devised in collaboration with District and County Education Officers with thresholds to support students are placed in the correct Grade at the Link School (personal communication).

1.12.13 Challenges
- Copybooks are not always looked at or written in by facilitators too busy to have time for continuous assessment.
- The running record is time consuming even when just half of students are assessed and does not include any assessment of the child’s comprehension of the story.
- The Endline Evaluation brought up the possibility that facilitators, keen to show their best students and as they are incentivised if their classes progress, misunderstand the nature and purpose of assessments, including the final EGRA and EGMA tests. In the worst case scenario, if achievement is inflated, particularly for low achieving groups, and girls in particular, they could fall behind, and become more likely to drop out either at the SC class or once in the Link School.

1.12.14 For consideration
- Encourage facilitators to integrate ABL still further into the teaching of concepts.
- Encourage facilitators to make the most of the opportunities presented by Rise and Shine and the Social Studies and Science sections to create their own pedagogic practices that make use of visual aids, taking students outside etc.
- Supervisors to check individual students for their reading and maths and attendance where possible, and to cross-check this with facilitator records.
- The running record could just record the first minute of reading rather than three, with time spent monitoring and simply recording comprehension of what was read.
1.13 Question 4: how are different groups of learners learning?
How are different groups of learners in the Second Chance program in Liberia learning?

SC fosters motivation for learning for all abilities and students were unanimous in claiming ‘My teacher teaches us good’. Students show progression across the phases, including Low and High achieving girls, particularly in the final phase as evidenced both by the Endline Evaluation and by researcher observations noting that identified students made visible progression between February and May. However, the Endline Evaluation shows that boys do better in both reading and numeracy and that there is a retention problem. Three reasons were identified for those most at risk of drop out in the SC program and Link School: finances, family relocation and age appropriateness. The qualitative data here add further to these reasons for drop out, some being pedagogical in nature, with Low Achieving Girls being more disadvantaged than others and at risk of dropping out. (See also Appendices 2 and 3 for Key characteristics and Similarities and Differences between groups).

1.13.1 High achieving boys (HAB)

**Learner identity:** Slightly older at 10 and 11, none of the HABs researched had previously attended school. Two ‘hauled’ water before class, one had to ‘water my garden, I sweep, I haul water’ after school but the other two were spared chores because of the long SC day and played football after school. The community around them, especially female relatives, helped, although one boy also said his father had noticed his progression: ‘my father was so surprised that day, he saw me, I carried the book to the house, and I was reading’. One studied at home, another said he did spelling competitions with other children from different schools. HABs said they could not speak their local language but like learning English.

**Engagement in class:** HABs were mostly active, engaged, excited and often smiled: ‘When I taking part in the lesson I feel so happy’. They were confident in going to the board, responded positively to the facilitator, completed activities and were visibly keen to learn: ‘Because I want to grab all the lesson. I don’t want to miss any lesson behind’. They said they found everything easy. Some were quiet, and thought carefully before responding. Many displayed some competitiveness, considering they would know more than those in grade 9 at the Link school: ‘They can teach us some of the thing where 9th grader not know’. They were keeping up with the content and pace of the curriculum, with few if any gaps and so were at an advantage at SC and to maintain this at the Link school.

Some, however, could be off task and distracted, especially after break, ‘playing and disturbing their friends’ outside during ABL, and one said ‘I do not like the long staying in school’ and got so tired they could not speak: ‘I na [/I am not/] able and my tongue too [/is/] heavy’.

**Relationships with teachers and peers:** HAB thought their facilitator ‘is teaching us good, acquiring knowledge in us’, and felt that they could easily ask the teacher to explain things. They were however more likely to be paid attention by the facilitator as they worked at the pace of the daily curriculum, and the teachers encouraged them overtly: ‘I enjoy the way the teacher can appreciate us, to put us in the zico [/put us in the spirit/ encourage us/]’. 


They had made new friends at the SC and often led group work or singing and cared for others, ‘I like working with my friends. We can share idea’ although they could be competitive with their peers: ‘me and my brother put all the answer for our group. Our group na [did not] fail in nothing, their group them fail in one, one’.

**Learning gains**: HAB could read a paragraph and explain a story, complete their given work accurately, pronounce difficult words such as ‘wheat’, put words into sentences to show meaning. They reflected on what they still had to learn: ‘I can write, I can spell now...only I can read but in the reading that one, one words can give me hard time’. They were mostly fluent accurate readers reading 80-72 words out of 85, and could comprehend. However two of those selected did not comprehend the story or answer the harder ‘why’ questions such as ‘Why do you think the lid came off?’

1.13.2 High achieving girls (HAG)

**Learner identity**: Two of the HAGs were also older, at 11 and 12, and all had been to school before, reaching first grade, had enjoyed it, but left because of lack of money. Two did chores before class, one a considerable amount: ‘Wash dishes, and I sweep, I clean in my mother room and I bring water for her, I take my bath, eat my food before coming’. All had to do a similar amount of chores after school, including cooking and looking after younger siblings - a sharp contrast to HABs. Mothers were considered a great support, and encouraged one to study at home with her book. One spoke Gola, and another Bassa: one would like to learn this at school, another not.

**Engagement in learning activities**: HAGs were mostly active, engaged, confident, energetic, often smiled, were excited, and liked everything. They often led class activities, remain focused and responded correctly: ‘She writes clearly and exactly what she sees on the board’. Some worked more quietly, and independently. They were all actively involved in numeracy: ‘Pupil asks if a chalk is heavy? And asks if a log is heavier than an airplane’. They reflected on areas they found difficult: ‘I like almost everything but da [it is] math [that is] giving me hard time’. Some showed less interest in the Elkonin boxes and when the pace slowed down.

Some were distracted with lost books, talked to others and were tired in the afternoon. Researchers noted a great change in one girl who had shown fatigue and sadness in January, but by May was much more active, confident and smiling. The facilitator thought the new curriculum was more engaging and others like her also showed improvement, for example, in pronunciation where she ‘cheered the words using her hands help upward’.

**Relationship with teacher and peers**: These girls liked their teachers’ sense of humour and care: ‘because she likes to joke with us and because she is good to me’. They have made ‘plenty’ of friends and liked working collaboratively in groups: ‘all of us we put idea together and we do it and we passed’ but also like to work independently: ‘if no one around me I like to work by myself’. They helped others near them to track words when reading, correct them and to pronounce words.

**Learning gains**: HAGs had full pages of writing, could sing whole songs to the interviewer and read the many sentences in their copybooks: ‘Rain, the rain where can fall. Boat, we can cross with it. Paint, we can paint our house. Pond, the place where the boat can pack, that the place they call pond.’ But one couldn’t pronounce the word ‘wheat’ unlike her male classmate. They understood the concepts of character, setting, problem, solution, and lesson learnt. They read fluently and
accurately, were able to read more words than HABs, from 83 to 75 words out of 85 and were quick to pick up and pronounce new words e.g. ‘Jen’. They had good literal and inferential comprehension and gave full answers although two slightly misunderstood the storyline.

1.13.3 Low achieving girls (LAG)

Learner identity: LAGs are younger at eight years old, at greater risk, as the Endline Evaluation found, of drop out. Three had not been to school before while two others had been but had left due to lack of funds. They had chores to do before and after class such as washing dishes, clothes, and hauling water. Mothers were seen as most supportive: ‘Da [/it is/] my mother [/that/] put me in this school here. She can say I must go take my copy book in the night. One said she reads a ‘Jesus’ text at home. They wanted to stay with English, as the teacher didn’t know Kpelle and they thought ‘my friends will laugh at me’ if they spoke in local language. Two had been sick and absent for the last two weeks, another had a streaming cold all day. Some were very short, or small and had difficulty reaching the board to write.

Engagement in learning activities: LAGs were attentive, active, excited and focused in certain activities, especially ABL and GR when they smiled, participated and completed the task. They took part in going to the board and some were presenters in group work. One girl was tracking well in GR and said ‘I love to read loud’. When encouraged by facilitator and peers for example by ‘thumbs up’, these LAGs did well. One said: ‘I na [/do not/] like to play. I na [/don’t/] like to cause noise.

Some, however, were lost, confused, and did not follow the activity, did not put their hand up nor contributed to group work. Some pretended to read and sat quietly. Several thought that others laughed at them.

Relationship with teacher and peers: LAGs liked their teachers, felt they could joke with them, and agreed that ‘my teacher can teach me good.’ Some got good extra support from facilitators: ‘When I am writing my teacher can come teach me. If anything on the board when I don’t understand it he can make me to understand it.’ One girl who in January had been absent through illness had spent over an hour writing down the title on the board, and was completely silent. By May, however, she was much more confident, at ease and keen to show how she was now trying much more with the help of her facilitator: ‘Now I am trying small than before I never knew anything. If I am writing and when it is not good he [facilitator] can erase it so that I can write it back’. Another observation showed the facilitator continuously guiding a LAG in GR, with researchers noting ‘she can now read excellently’. However, if LAGs were not given encouragement or got something wrong, they were easily put off:

chanting the red words really brought S, alive, she seems involved and smiley. She made a sentence from her red word - ‘if’ ‘if we will be there’ she answered, but it was not accepted by the facilitator and her face turned sad.

One researcher noted that a facilitator demanded that the girl write faster, another that ‘a LAG is not given that extra attention and support.’ More ominously, one LAG suggested that some students were asleep and that there was an element of fear in contributing to lesson: ‘our teacher can take the rattan [/cane/] and beat them before them [/they/] talk’. Some peers laughed at them but they liked working in groups. One girl said that as a result of her progression ‘now that I can write they [her peers] can’t laugh at me again’
Learning gains: Some could write in whole sentences and read lines from her book although these were not always accurate: ‘I feel the school. I book is red. I, I wet the house. float, I float is you the play’. One girl who had been absent identified her progression: ‘My writing alone can tell me I am learning new thing’. In numeracy she got some answers correct and wrote out ‘755’ in words.

Some could not write a sentence and had nothing written down in their books. They did not track well with fingers and only read chorally while others read from the text. When GR went on too long they were lost. They could not recall anything about the story Momo read in class. Three LAGs could read 62 to 69 words out of 85 and three had good or partial comprehension, but two LAGs could not read any of the words or answer any comprehension questions.

1.13.4 Low achieving boys (LAB)

Learner identity: LABs tended to be younger, also, from 8-11 years of age, with three of the # sampled having attended school before, to K1, leaving through lack of money. Half had not eaten before going to class. Some washed, swept and threw dirt out before class, others cooked, shopped, hauled water afterwards. Female relatives were seen supportive and they wanted to graduate as ‘then your mother, them will be happy’. Those speaking Bassa were keen to learn in their own language.

Engagement in learning activities: Some showed interest, were attentive and engaged, smiled, and did all the sounding out and actions at the board. They liked to read along in GR, could make a sentence such as ‘Blessing please get out,’ and liked getting thumbs up. LABs were engaged in numeracy, responding well to questions: ‘we use money to buy plenty to eat’.

However, some were very quiet, shy, ‘absent-minded, their backs turned away from the board, and unconfident, looking at friends rather than participating and looked sad. Some pretended to echo and choral-read green words but did not track with their finger. One boy said ‘I only like test and quizzing. Another could not make a word from a letter, or write a sentence and did not complete activities. Some were described as playful, tired, one had been absent, and they were sleepy in the afternoon.

Relationship with teacher and peers: LABs liked their teachers because ‘he can teach us good’, but one suggested that if they made noise, facilitators beat them: ‘if you shut up they will not beat you, when you cause noise then he will be beating you’. LABs had made new friends, and liked sharing in groups and having fun: ‘we put idea together, we make it. We play fun with it’.

Learning gains: One used ‘that’ in a sentence - ‘that boy is my friend’ and ‘John is here to play’ but could not read the new words of that week: ‘pray, way, stay’. Two repeated the story read in class verbatim without prompting by the researcher. Three LABs could read only 46 to 49 words out of 85, reading high frequency words only. One could read a few words from the first line of the story, another could not read any words out or track properly, but three indicated good comprehension once they had repeated the story three times after the researcher had read it out.

1.13.5 Key characteristics of high and low achieving girls and boys

All groups come from marginalised communities, have made new friends and support one another, engaging in lessons but tired after lunch, show impressive levels of learning and progression and consider transition to be ‘easy’. Children in low achieving groups are more likely to be younger, have
more chores at home, have less to eat, are more frequently absent, off task and distracted in lessons, have less in their copybooks, pretend to read, are playful and a few fear their facilitator.

Of note is the continuum of achievement with no real divide between them with only 2-4 in each class who are really struggling. This demonstrates the positive impact of the program, especially as prior school attendance is not that significant.

Also of significance is that some do not eat before school, especially LABs, the amount of chores before and after school undertaken by all apart from HABs, the frequency of latecomers and importance of one family member, usually a female to their progress and retention. The relatively high prevalence of sickness makes students absent and therefore they fall behind in the fast-paced curriculum, or when parents/care-givers are ill and they are needed at home:

*The facilitator said, now that the year is heading towards the end, he has to go to many students’ homes before they can come to school. This is becoming very hard for him. These are the kids who are normally struggling. [often not in on Mondays so facilitator repeats on Tuesdays] (LF management notes)*

There is a sense of urgency for facilitators to get through the given curriculum for each day, and the adaptations are made in response to student outcomes. HABs go at the pace of curriculum and are rewarded for this by more attention from mostly male facilitators which becomes a virtuous circle for them.

LAGs are more likely to be ill, and so absent, and find it hard to keep up with the curriculum on their return to the classroom. There is little time within each day for the facilitator to pay extra attention or slow the pace down, so LAG are paid less attention, they hide their inability or confusion, so they do and learn less and so lag behind. With this in mind, low achievers now have an hour two days a week in which they receive remedial support.

1.13.6 Implications for facilitator pedagogy
The aim of the program is that all children can learn, but some are not learning as well or as fast as others, and facilitators do not always pay attention or expect that all can learn: ‘So if *I am teaching a topic I make sure at least 60% to 75%, to 80% should be able to you know answer to any question from that topic’ (Facilitator). As noted in section 3.2.2, facilitators are aware that students have a range of abilities in their room, mostly do their best to monitor that students are paying attention, or tracking, or participating, checking notebooks ‘one by one’, recognise that students often learn most from one another so practise peer support by seating higher and lower achievers together, get one student to ‘spearhead’ an activity, repeat lesson content to lower achievers or those who have been absent at lunchtime or after school, or pay the lower achievers more attention during each day’s segment – ‘coming down to the level of the students’. More attention was noted as being given by facilitators ‘to those students struggling to pick up and comprehend or understand the lesson been taught in class”. Facilitators also visit parents’ homes if a student is not doing well to find out if home circumstances are having an effect and to encourage parents to support their child.
1.13.7 For consideration
Over and above the extra hours now provided for specific remedial support for struggling students, facilitators can:

- Encourage equity by getting all learners to work publicly at the blackboard, not just the more able (observed occasionally).
- Be trained to check for individual understanding and to intervene appropriately at the point of need to clear up their confusion or get them to catch up
- Write in large letters on the board and on charts of red and green words and whole short stories to ensure all learners, including those at the back, can easily read letters and words. Ask facilitators to encourage learners to also write in larger letters when up at the board. Purchasing blackboards at child height could also help.
- Act as scribes for the very slow writers to ensure they do the learning and not just copy down titles etc. and so ensure all students have text in their copybooks to show parents.
- Extend high achievers by giving extension work, to do another 5 or 10 sums, or read another book, or write a creative story, or read independently from charts.
1.14  Question 5: Transition to the Link government primary school

How does the Second Chance program support graduates in making a transition to Link Schools?

1.14.1  Transition to the Link government primary school

Diverse contexts for transition exist, with many SC classes already co-existing within a Link school compound, easing two-way communication between teachers and students, with teachers informally observing classes and children naturally mixing at points e.g. at recess. Some induction for teachers is offered by Link Schools, and there are plans for this to be further developed. Those housed in stand-alone classes may find transition harder. Transition also affects multiple actors, both graduates, their peers (especially those who remain out of school), parents/carers, and community. Many graduates think that LF will pay fees, which they do, and for the uniform, but only for the first year. Attendance by SC graduates at one school was said to be 85% of other learners, explained by lack of fees but also illness and endemic poverty.

All students expect to transition, indicating that one of the main aims of the SC program is met, and they feel well prepared for the learning, most thinking it will be ‘easy’ as ‘I have already learnt what is in the government school’ and their ‘seriousness’ will help them to ‘grab’ the learning. Several are aware of the differences in pedagogy at Link schools, saying ‘the government school they can’t teach good’ and one LAG was worried about maths and taking down unfamiliar words from the board.

1.14.2  What Second Chance graduates remember liking about the SC

All the SC graduates liked the phonics, reading aloud, maths, classroom displays, food and free copybooks; they appreciated the teachers who were kind, did not beat them, explained notes well and checked their nails and faces for hygiene. They liked the different approaches to learning: ‘We get ABL, CBL, Community base learning—GBL, Game base learning. If you take phonics, it can make you to spell and read’ (LAB). They recalled singing songs, telling stories, looking at pictures, nature-based learning, the teacher going over notes really well ‘for a week’, drawing posters and pictures, sharing in groups, having fun and laughing while learning: ‘They playing with you at the same time teaching you it. It can make your knowledge enter into your head’ (LAG). They recalled going outside: ‘we go we pick some of the things them, they say we must draw the plants and name the parts on it, I used to enjoy it. So in this [Link] school, they not teaching us it’ (HAG).

Graduates recognised the great progression they made over time from a poor baseline: ‘Because first I was not know how to read it but since I get in the catch up class, I know how to read it well’ (HAG). Some found the testing and filling in the blank activities hard, and one LAG recalled not learning but ‘Drawing and sleeping in the SC, I was doing nothing, but [I am now] learning plenty in government school’.

1.14.3  What graduates in the Link Schools take from the Second Chance program

Ability to adapt

- Link school teachers said that graduates, especially girls, were shy – ‘speechless’ in front of peers – or playful to begin with and have an idiosyncratic approach to learning: ‘their way of doing things. However, they pick up quickly, are disciplined and know how to greet visitors and teachers politely.
- They come early to school, before the others, and sit in class waiting for lesson to begin. They make friends with others easily, play at recess and ‘mingle’ well.
Attitudes to learning

- Graduates have a positive motivation for learning and confidence and pride in themselves as learners, from SC: ‘I learnt lots at the Second Chance class, I learnt to read; this helped with transition’ (HAG Bamboo). They have imbibed the routine of attending class every day and for a long time.
- They take friendship groups to Link school – around 5-8 of them in each class – and know how to share learning, help one another if absent to copy down notes and to learn them, and can explain the unfamiliar test paper rubric. They do their homework independently at home and do not copy from a friend in the morning as peers do.
- They recognise learning as worthwhile and relevant for a better healthier economic future where they can help their families:

  School can help. If I [am not] going en to school when I get big I will not get the type of man I want and he will pull me back into a low life [i.e. farming] .... We be burning coal [and] through that burning coal, sickness can come from there. Then I die. But when I go to school I will learn and then I can get a better job... Then when I go somewhere someone will recognize me to be working. When I be working then thing will be fine for me. Even when my people sick I can get money to support them (LAG).

Learning skills & progression

- They have confidence in reading skills in particular, especially phonics from SC school.
- They recognise good teaching, and think mostly their Link school teachers mostly ‘teach good’ and they are learning ‘plenty’, ‘I am doing great in my lessons’ (HAB Bamboo).
- They have learnt how to be a learner, to focus, and know they have to work hard: ‘Because the other people when the teacher teaching they playing, and when the teacher teaching us from the catch up class we can be paying attention’ (HAB Bamboo); ‘We are trying more than the others’ (HAB Klay). Consequently, SC graduates are seen to be keeping up with their peers, and are usually the brightest of the learners according to Link school teachers.
- SC graduates are active in the lessons, follow along, are keen to learn and help others. They track continuous text with finger, have the confidence to attack unfamiliar words and willingness to persevere with articulating them. However, they are not always attentive – especially when learning content already covered.
- Some study independently at home from copybooks and reflect on their own learning:

  ‘When I go home when I finish doing all my small, small work. I sit down. I study it. Maybe some will enter in my brain. Then the next day when I come I go back on top that same note. Then it will enter in my head’ (LAG Gertrude Yancy)

- Teachers are looking forward to new graduates (Bamboo/Klay) because they know they will be resilient: ‘For this particular group that there now they are performing better than the last because there is a big gap between they and the group that came first’ (Teacher Klay).
Self-belief and aspirations

- There is a sense of superiority above other students, including those from other Catch-Up classes and they show off their learning. Some/all HABs are competitive, saying they will ‘dux’ the class there.
- Employing social skills of politeness, respect for others, elders, peers.
- All articulated high aspirations, to graduate, to join professions such as teaching, medicine, the police, army, the church, driver – even President - and to help their families. One LAB said he wants his mother to ‘buy my car then I make money then I gave it to her, she be buying small, small thing them. Then she be eating’ and another when adult ‘I can turn big I go in America then I be sending food to them’.

1.14.4 Challenges for the Second Chance graduates in the Link schools

1. Financial constraints

Lack of money for ‘PTA’ fees and school uniform present major problems, with the LF only paying for the first year. One instance of the IP not paying fees resulted in facilitators advocating the Link school to admit SC graduates, albeit two weeks late. This set them apart from the others immediately. SC graduates are often identifiable by their lack of uniform and can be absent when they have no money to buy soap to wash it.

SC graduates have chores to do before and after school. One Link school teacher said girls had more chores to do at home, and ‘so for the female aspect it is very, very much challenging’. Doing chores before school can make them late, for which they are punished: ‘we pick the papers around the building, that’s hard’ (HAG) and there is some evidence that graduates are not in school because they are hungry, even while school feeding programs should mitigate this.

Family or child illness contributes to long term absenteeism of 2-3 weeks when it is hard to catch up, with punishment from school: ‘we give you [a] few latches [beatings] to put you on track that you are not to stay away from school without the concern of the teachers’ (Link school teacher, Bamboo). This can lead to drop out, or the family moves away and child has to go with them.

There are overall challenges for parents who are sole carers, particularly when unable to work through illness or lack of opportunity and who do not have others to support them in providing for children. There is also some peer pressure not to go to school that creates tension between family and community expectations for school attendance and peers.

2. Didactic teaching in the Link schools

Instruction in the Link schools is very often didactic, formalistic and authoritarian, involving learners sitting on their own in wooden ‘arm chairs’ to write as the teacher gives a lecture, demonstration and some question and answer. The change of teacher per subject every 55 minutes with subjects such as Social Studies new to them, is disruptive for SC graduates. Teachers write notes from their textbook onto the board, expect students to read, copy it down and learn it, ‘What is hard?: The writing...when sometime they can put Science on the board, they put Social Study on the board, they put Math on the board’ (LAG Bamboo). This is ‘very very challenging’ for many of the graduates, as one Link school teacher explained:
'because you have to be up to task in order to read your own notes, some of them if the notes is being placed on the board. You will read the notes three, four, five times before they can even come out to pronounce one or two words’.

Consequently, several graduates said: ‘I do no enjoy anything in the Link School’.

However, this method works well when the teacher is willing to explain the notes and several SC graduates said they felt they could ask the teacher if they did not understand something: ‘Like when that they notes they gave me it, [if] I ain’t able to read it, I can ask the teacher to please read it for me’(HAB Gertrude Yancy), and graduates said ‘I enjoying some here’ (HAB Klay) and they liked it when teachers encouraged them by doing ‘thumbs up’ when students get it right.

Link school teachers said they have altered their pedagogy slightly to accommodate SC, with one teacher saying she uses group work occasionally, takes time to explain new concepts and reviews what was learnt in the previous lesson. Conversely, when graduates are put in the wrong grade, learning is too easy and repetitious of that covered in SC. The testing regime and format is unfamiliar to SC graduates and ‘confuses’ them.

3. Learning Environment in the Link Schools

The inflexibility of admissions procedures to government schools marginalises SC graduates who cannot pay fees on time. Graduates found the short school day of 8-12pm frustrating, and to be taught through English-medium only; evidence showed that families would welcome teaching in Gola or Bassa.

The learning environment is often uncaring and unconducive to learning. Graduates noted that there were no displays on classroom walls, confirmed by observations, with chairs often broken and unusable. Classrooms are small, sometimes dark, and ‘dirty’ with classes of 44. Schools have learners from three years old in the Kindergarten ‘ABC’ to those in Grade 12 who can be 17 or 18, all of them lining up as children at ‘devotional’ time or assembly in the hot compound before school, again, new to SC graduates.

Teachers are often absent or, if in school, outside the classroom elsewhere: ‘The teachers stay outside and do not come in to teach’ (HAG Klay): ‘Our teacher when she go, when she come today she will not tomorrow. And the children will just be causing noise in the class’ (LAB Bamboo). The noise is blamed on the students, not absent teachers, and in one school they are then beaten: ‘Here pa [really/] they can beat us...but in the Second Chance they never use to beat us there’ (LAB). Other students are beaten when they can’t read as well as the SC graduates: ‘And the teacher can beat them, and the teacher can say when we read they must read after us too’ (HAG). One HAB did not attend because he was fearful of beatings.

Teachers ‘don’t run behind students’ (Link school teacher) to find out why they are absent and intervene in families, as facilitators do. There is little sense of a school community, or study classes, with teachers unwilling to do more than they are paid for and parents unsure of what to do:

[We] have teachers who come here and spent the whole week here and go back to Monrovia and after school they are not doing nothing. Where we talk about study class we
had meeting here we talk about study class. Some parents embrace it but no one to start the ball rolling (Link School teacher)

1.14.5 External factors that support Second Chance graduates to transition:

1. Family support

All have supportive parents/carers, usually female relatives, who get them to school on time and encourage them to study at night. Some parents alter their income source e.g. step up with selling of maize or switch to selling air fresheners to accommodate students attending SC or Link school to be at home when they return from school. Parents felt their children were doing well, better than others who had not attended SC, and felt they were being promoted, even while they thought the quality was lower in the Link School. Some wanted to send their children to private school instead but were reliant on family connections to do so.

Some were sole providers so that if they are sick there is a reliance on friends or family to pay for school fees with a broken health care system. Some graduates drop out of school for family reasons such as moving away, going to the ‘interior’ or family sickness. Transition affects therefore the family, and not just the individual student.

2. Financial support from LF

The fees paid by the LF for the first year helped to soften the financial blow, and the expectations set up in the PEGs that parents will have to pay fees and buy uniform for the rest of the school years appear to have encouraged parents to save or earn more money.

However, when the support drops off from the second year, parents face real issues in keeping children in school, with variance in how well parents were prepared from savings, some showing a blasé approach, and a difference in what schools charge e.g. those nearer the city seem to charge more than those in rural areas. PEGs observed were very concerned with getting parents to save. Hopes that the LF will pay PTA fees at Link school will need to be managed.

3. Kind Link School teachers

Kind, friendly teachers who joke with them, who explain things, who are aware of their background, and who make them feel part of the school.

1.14.6 For consideration

- Transition needs to be understood as a long-term process with on-going planning to prepare for next year’s fees, continuing for parents with graduates already in the Link school and engagement via the PEGs into next year or two.
- The planned induction/pedagogic program needs development to orient Link teachers towards both the graduates and the pedagogy and curriculum used, building on the existing informal relationships and willingness: we can revamp our support for the Speed School (Link School teacher Gertrude Yancy)
- Stronger monitoring of the retention of SC graduates over two or more years could be developed, recording reasons for drop out.
- A discussion of why corporal punishment cannot be used against children should be included.
1.15 Question 6: contribution of the Parental Engagement Groups

How and to what extent do the PEGs contribute to the program’s objectives?

PEGs or parental engagement groups have been described as connecting all aspects of the program. One LF leader said “I think these groups pull the classes together”. This is true in the sense that they are key to the program’s stated goals to ensure that the SC intervention is meaningfully embedded within communities and responsive to grassroots needs and viewpoints. In particular they are perceived by LF leaders as ways of engaging the support and interest of parents who are illiterate and have had little previous contact with schools or teachers. As another LF leader pointed out, ‘so what these meetings are intended for….to make people understand though you can’t read and you can’t help with the lessons you can support by making sure that he is in school’. PEGs are therefore key to LF commitment to ensuring a bottom up and ecological approach in which consultation with key stakeholders such as parents is paramount.

LF leaders and supervisors invest energy in engaging communities about the goals and aims of PEG meetings. One LF leader noted that ‘we kind of gave them a road map.. if you are in a PEG group this is what is expected of you’. Within the agenda framed by LF, PEGs provide a forum in which parents can meet with the Supervisor and Facilitator to discuss any challenges or concerns they might have about sending their children to school; issues linked to transition to government schools; behaviour management of children; and child protection. Perhaps most importantly, they also provide an opportunity for parents to observe their children participating in learning activities. Management have recently shifted responsibility from Facilitators to Supervisors to organise and lead the meetings.

1.15.1 Galvanising parental support for their children’s learning

A major goal of the PEGs according to leaders is to showcase children’s learning for parents; in the words of one LF leader “to show the parents that the children are learning”. At PEG meetings the facilitator and children from the SC class demonstrate learning activities involving phonics awareness, and sometimes reading and comprehension for parents. When asked why they appreciated the PEGs, all parents explained that they welcomed the opportunity to observe their children’s learning. Their comments below capture the enormous impact of watching their children learn:

| "the importance for this meeting is for us to see what the children doing and how and how practical they are and for them to stand in front of us and do the one they learn in class we tell God thank you for them." |
| "It is a big pride to the community and tears want to run down my eyes" |
| "we thought children were just having fun but now we see in the PEG how much they are learning....‘my child will pick up in the government school because they are doing well in SC’" |
| "I make a little garden so that when I get money to buy the uniform and whatsoever needed for the next year. I will not let my children to sit down because I am happy today for the level of improvement.” |

These comments attest to parents’ pride and delight at seeing learning as an activity which was having a palpable effect on their children; their recognition of resulting progress and knowledge gains; their collective sense that whole community, not only individual children, benefited; their motivation to make extra sacrifices to get money to support their children’s learning; and their appreciation for the facilitators who made the learning in the SC classes happen.
Furthermore, they demonstrate the power of the PEGs in rendering learning a social event, worthy of collective, community celebration and pride. In this sense the LF leaders’ characterisation of these meetings as a connector between different parts of the SC program is true. Through generating a community “buzz” around the SC class activities, they connect children’s learning in a tangible way with the lives, aspirations and well-being of their families and communities.

1.15.2 Providing democratic, inclusive spaces of discussion
The PEGs were remarkably open, democratic and purposeful meetings, with active participation by many. It was evident from observations that supervisors went out of their way to ensure that everyone’s voice was heard and respected. This evidently built parental trust and confidence. Indeed many parents noted how PEGs were appreciated as a special forum for collective discussion within their community. One mother explained:

what I saw here today, I was very very excited because sometimes in our community here they don’t just call meeting eh you know we respond to it fast. But because of this program, we were able to be willing and bear patient.

Moreover, the PEG was recognised as a forum in which women’s participation was actively respected and encouraged. One mother noted that ‘women can talk more’. Another recognised that ‘sometime when we come to the meeting, the people can make us to express ourselves.

1.15.3 Embedding Child Protection as a community responsibility
During PEG meetings, supervisors reminded parents of the importance of child protection and the procedures of the LF Child Protection Policy. This is integral to the program, emphasised during facilitator training and promoted at every level of the intervention. However, the PEG meetings enabled the policy to be owned and rooted within communities. As one parents noted, ‘everybody’s watching out for each other’s children’. During one PEG, the supervisor spoke in detail during the meeting about child protection policies and processes and had given his phone number for parents to contact him in case they had concerns about the management of children in their communities. This apparently triggered several immediate responses. This LF grassroots approach to implementing child protection contrasts with some interventions by aid agencies which tend to be top down and fail to consult communities in which policies take root, undermining their effectiveness and impact (US Aid, 2011).

Parents also recognised that the PEGs provided an opportunity to discuss and agree upon contested issues of child behaviour management, given a tradition of using corporal punishment and violent beating as a form of discipline. Within such contexts, they were important in providing an opportunity to establish a consensus around which families and the whole community could mobilise to give effect to Child Protection policy aspirations. For instance, one mother observed that through PEG meetings ‘we can make law they say don’t beat on your child’. Moreover, the conducive learning environment of SC classes was also celebrated, one recognised as achieved through the absence of corporal punishment. For instance, one mother pointed out; They (the children) are learning because... they are not afraid and they are breathing’.

1.15.4 Shifting attitudes to girls’ learning and educational opportunities
PEG meetings also provide opportunities to promote girls’ learning and to challenge unhelpful gender norms and stereotypes that continue to constrain girls and women in Liberia (US Aid, 2017).
This is particularly significant given recent Endline reading results for the LF program that suggest that girls are underachieving and in need of support, both in and out of school. One mother commented that ‘they are saying that in our setting Liberia here we can say I ain’t want send woman to school because they will not learning’. By contrast, many mothers celebrated their daughters’ commitment to and enjoyment of SC learning opportunities. The opportunity presented by PEGs to see and to celebrate girls’ shining and confidence during learning activities catalysed enthusiasm and support for their learning from mothers and fathers. One mother, for instance, commented that:

‘I think the girls them confidence because myself tell me right here. When they called the first person to say a word it make me proud, because I feel fine because it good to send your daughter to school... So I feel that the girls them they are confident because no man speak for me to hear it but that the women speak I hear their voice. So I feel to myself the girl is confident’.

It is also significant that the PEGs themselves were recognised as a gender-inclusive social environment, thus implicitly modelling the norms promoted in SC classes.

1.15.5 Canvassing views of parents on challenges they face and offering practical support

What the PEGs reveal above all is that, contrary to frequent framings of illiterate parents in rural impoverished communities as uninterested in their children’s education, these parents generally demonstrate agency, enthusiasm and concern. This is in spite of facing daily structural conditions of precarity that limit their space of initiative and power to address systemic issues of poverty, hunger, and ill health.

- Lack of food, experiences of hunger and impact on learning

Parental and child hunger was a repeated topic of discussion, reflecting statistics which indicate that Liberia has one of the lowest rates of food security in the world, accompanied by high levels of child malnourishment (World Food Program, 2019). Many mothers talked about the difficulties of feeding their children prior to school, with some families experiencing days of not eating anything. They appreciated LF attention to feeding children, in particular the employment of a class parent whose job is to cook a daily lunch for the students, with PEGs contributing fuel, plates and vegetables where possible. One mother noted that ‘they helping the children because food is life. If you are not live you will not learn’. Such comments draw attention to the daily precarity faced by many SC parents for whom eating could not be taken for granted and was rightly recognised as a precondition of learning.

Another related issue mentioned by SC Class parents was their difficulty in cooking for the classes, given limited resources to get fuel. One mother commented “there’s little money and we have to provide a lot of food for the classes”. Another said: “we got rice, we got oil we got beans.. but we don’t prepare the food wood. There are a lot of hard times it gives me.. I am straining. So sometimes I have to run around parents because we say we have to pay little money for us to buy those things them”.

Many parents wanted to grow vegetables but were aware of limited land availability and their dependence on the good will of community elders or town chiefs who controlled access to land. For instance, one mother pointed out “We don’t have land here”. This highlights the structural
constraints which severely limited parents’ space of initiative, despite pressing problems of food production and consumption impacting on their lives and their children’s learning.

- Meeting the financial costs of transitioning to government schools

Most parents expressed a sense of desperation, frustration and powerlessness about the expected financial challenges of transition, in particular meeting the costs of uniforms, shoes and other expenses such as PTA fees. One mother commented; “small small we just managing it just to keep the children in school.. It’s very hard”. The extent to which parents struggle varies according to local context.

However, PEG meetings provided opportunities for LF to advise and support parents with practical strategies to make money and encourage saving. As one supervisor noted; “the meeting will help you to learn and to give you a heads up on savings and how to sustain your child for the following year”. At one meeting, the experience of one community who were investing in soap making was shared with another. Some parents appear to have benefited from PEGs to start small scale businesses e.g. selling air fresheners. Others wanted further support to help them start interior decoration or catering projects as ways of raising funds. Some, supported by LF, were participating in village saving schemes.

While there is evidence of individual and group saving for the transition to Link schools, many parents – and their children – wanted LF to fund a larger transitional package and to pay PTA fees while parents pay the rest.

1.15.6 For consideration

- There is a need to manage the high and unrealistic expectations of the program e.g. paying fees, investing in school buildings, adult literacy classes, extending the program’s age range.
- PEGs are evidently an important forum for the communication of information. This could include reference to government policies and initiatives related to girls’ education such as the 2005 National Policy on Girls Education (US Aid, 2017).
- There is scope to use the social space of the PEG to encourage parents to get their children to practise reading and doing maths at home. Reading from learners’ exercise books, the Bible or Koran, calendars, posters etc is very possible.
1.16 Question 7: Intersections with drivers of peace and conflict
How does the program intersect with drivers of peace and conflict in Liberia?

As noted at the start of this report, the intervention takes place in a conflict-affected environment, 16 years after the Comprehensive Peace Accord Agreement was signed. This section highlights the ways in which its aims and implementation processes intersect with both drivers of conflict and peace in Liberia currently. These have been noted by recent commentators (US Aid, 2016) and are referred to in key policy documents including the Peacebuilding Plan for Liberia drawn up by the UN (UN Peacebuilding Plan, 2017 and the TRC report, 2009). Consideration of these intersections are also particularly important given the adaptation by LF of the Ethiopian model to the distinctive Liberian context and the limitations of direct South to South transfer.

1.16.1 Rural community experience of structural violence and disaffection from the State
Parents’ expressions of frustration about the financial challenges of daily survival, youth unemployment, ill health, hunger, lack of access to health and educational provision all attest to the experiences of suffering and precarity they face. The paralysing impact on rural poverty on their lives and aspirations is apparent in the cry of one man: “Once you are not working as the father, you want to do the job, you want send your children to school but you not get the money”. Moreover, parents also expressed a sense of neglect by the State and believed that there was a lack of political will to address their poverty and hardship.

Their views confirm the findings of recent studies of drivers of grievance and conflict in rural communities in Liberia. These point to the continuation of structural causes of conflict, in particular the failure of the state to deliver social services such as education and health as well as to undertake land reform to address rural poverty and improve agricultural livelihoods (Beever, 2015; Kieh, 2015; US Aid, 2016). Many parents saw improved education and health provision as well as poverty alleviation as peace dividends which had not materialised. These experiences influenced how the LF program was understood and appreciated by parents. In particular it was perceived as an example of NGO provision compensating for the failure of the Liberian state and as therefore redemptive in many ways.

1.16.2 Harnessing grassroots commitment to social restoration and peace promotion
Recent conflict analysis of Liberia has demonstrated that despite continuing grievances, most Liberians, especially young people, are committed to avoiding a return to violence and are committed to social restoration and healing (US Aid, 2016). The sense of responsibility for social restoration and rebuilding expressed by facilitators, recruited as noted above, from large numbers of rural unemployed youth, is symptomatic of this reservoir of good will and optimism. Liberian youth’s commitment to promoting social change is similar to that of youth in other conflict-affected contexts where educational interventions seek to capitalise upon this huge national resource (Lopes-Cardozo et al, 2015). Indeed, a key strength of the LF program, from a peacebuilding perspective, is its harnessing of their energy and motivation.

1.16.3 SC schools as sites of peace
Parents perceived SC schools as sites of peace in part because the very activity of going to school was a palpable sign of the return of peace after the decimation of educational infrastructure during
the civil conflicts and latterly the closure of schools during the Ebola outbreak. Hence one mother pointed out “they are going to school, they are moving, that’s peace”.

Parents also valued the nature of the relationships which they believed were encouraged by facilitators in SC classes. They saw these as modelling and promoting peaceful inter-personal behaviours in the children. For instance, one mother explained that

“because of the way the boy [facilitator] takes care of the children. The way he talks to the children the way he teach them.. yeah.. its very peaceful. Yes because he teach them how to talk to their friends”.

Another mother pointed out: “that child will take it in so that the peace that the children are building in between there, because they are going to school peacefully they come home they meet their parents they are peacefully, so ... they are taking the role of peace around them”.

Furthermore, facilitators perceived their pedagogical roles and practices as directly overlapping with peace promotion. Hence one pointed out that “yes if I am teaching those children I am building peace.. because you are teaching them how to have good morals.. how to become good service for the nation”. Another noted that “it will help them in the future and it will make them to understand that they will have to love each other and live in peace to move this nation forward”.

Perceptions of SC classes as spaces of peaceful relating were significant in the context of parents’ awareness of the pervasive threat of violence within their communities. One LAB who had previously been mostly monosyllabic in his interview was aware of the dangers of peer pressure and parental concerns and suddenly blurted out:

For you to not...for you to jump there you tell them say y’all mun na [/must not/] fight. .... Yes, they say when anybody call us...when anybody call you don’t go there. When anybody drop money on the ground, don’t take it. When anybody drop key on the ground...when you take it you will turn out of [/turn into a/] motor bike.... It na [/it is not/] good to curse [/insult/] big people, it na [/it is not/] good to curse [/insult/] your ma [/Mother/] and your pa [/Father/] and your Grandma [/Grand Mother/] and your brother. When you curse [/insult/] them they will beat you, if you curse [/insult/] your brother them they will beat you. If you curse [/insult/] your sister them they will beat you.

1.16.4 LF educational provision as source of hope and recognition
For many parents the LF intervention was appreciated not only as immediately enabling their children to transition to government schools but significant in the longer term because of their belief in the value of education to confer recognition, status, economic opportunities and the capital to enable children to look after their parents in old age. Many expressed the belief that through education their children would “be someone tomorrow” and had high, even utopian, aspirations that their children could become doctors, lawyers, and even the President. The intervention thus activated hope and optimism associated by parents with educational opportunity, and in particular the prospect that their children might escape the material suffering which they were experiencing.
1.16.5 LF intervention as promoting inclusive spaces for peace promotion within local communities

Commentary on post-conflict national reconciliation processes post conflict emphasises the need for locally owned, inclusive spaces of discussion and decision making to address social divisions and tensions resulting from exclusionary political and social systems in which women and youth were marginalised (Richmond, 2011). As noted above the PEGs provide one such opportunity. While focused on the educational needs of their children, many parents also recognised their wider significance in pulling the community together around an issue, education, which mattered for social cohesion and peace. Hence one mother looked forward to the PEG meetings as spaces where...

“we can put our differences. We can’t talk about that other fightin’ now, we can talk about how the children they knowing book now.”

Such comments draw out the peacebuilding significance of the community commitment to collective responsibility for their children. This was expressed in the words of the song that starts each PEG meeting which reminds everyone present that “my child is your child”.

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1.17 Question 8: Implications for policy and programming priorities and key messages

What are the implications of findings for policy and programming priorities?

The SC program undoubtedly meets its goals of accelerated learning, community mobilisation and capacity building. It has become a beacon of good practice and hope within the communities it works in, and its pedagogic innovations have produced resilient learners who have gained solid skills in reading, writing, numeracy, Social Science and Science, and whose levels of learning easily match those of their peers in the Link School. The program also strongly advocates for the girl child, as seen in the classroom and in the communities, in tandem with its work on Child Protection, a theme represented at all levels. The community cohesion brought about by the PEGs and the work of the facilitators and supervisors directly contributes to student retention and to local peacebuilding. In insisting on alternatives to corporal punishment, the program exemplifies a kinder and more humane approach to learning, entirely appropriate in the post-conflict affected context of Liberia.

With the success of the program, management need to be clear about managing expectations from parents and communities about provision of fees in the Link Schools, about whether and how long the program is to continue within one county or village and the oft expressed wish that the SC class took in older learners, and covered from Grade 4-6 as well.

However, in acknowledgement of the contingencies that this report highlights of food scarcity, poverty, often causing family instability and mobility, the program may be the only educational provision that some students may receive. While this is not the aim by any means of the program, the curriculum and its enactment by facilitators will ensure that students get a good foundational education, providing an end in itself. In the context of Liberia, this is only good, for these students are indeed the most marginalised and the Link Schools do not provide the kind of support and learning that they thrive on.

The program may wish to consider how the Second Chance intervention fits in to the broader field of post-conflict education provision in Liberia, in terms of relations with other accelerated programs and the work of other international aid agencies and the state. Developments in this regard are ongoing, it is recognised.

The writers are aware that LF has already responded to the emergent insights of this research and introduced some important changes to the curriculum and teaching day. These include: building in one hour every Monday and Tuesday to address the needs of children who are struggling to cope in class; including comprehension activities on day 3 and 4 of the week and building in language arts; and also allocating a specific time during the day during which children can practice writing. These are all welcome and appropriate interventions which promise to enhance the learning and understanding of SC pupils. In addition, the monthly allowance to facilitators is to be increased from $85 to $100. This is also timely and appropriate, given the very high demands made of them.

However, there are further implications for LF policy and programming we would like to suggest. These are noted in the chart below. They include short term issues for immediate action, as well as medium and longer term issues which can more appropriately be addressed over time.
### Short term

- **Address gender and achievement**
  
The program could further develop awareness and strategies to ensure that girls, both high and low achieving, benefit more from the program, and in particular low achieving girls. Research indicated that facilitators were made increasingly aware of those who were struggling and this bodes well for the future. This could be a focus of trainings and supervisor follow up.

- **Identify and meet the needs of disabled learners**
  
  Consider extending the spirit of inclusion of the most marginalised learners to children with disabilities. The activity-based learning using multimodal resources and the space in each classroom supports children with disabilities to learn, even without specialist teachers or assistive technology. This could also be a focus of trainings and supervisor follow up.

- **Enhance facilitators’ pedagogical vision and practices**
  
  Support facilitators in relating SC student learning to their contexts and lived experiences as well as in their ability to ensure that SC students read continuous text for meaning rather than for decoding.

- **Consolidate the role of supervisors**
  
  Ensure that supervisors go beyond checking whether facilitators are covering the curriculum to monitor their pedagogical strategies carefully for context- responsiveness, student understanding, differentiated activities, meaningful and integrated activity based learning and individualised student support. Give supervisors a greater role in trainings and give them opportunities to share responsibilities currently undertaken by LF leaders, Alpha and Alphonso. Ensure that they check records of facilitators.

- **Teach and actively promote sustainability and environmental care**
  
  The excellent Rise and Shine morning lessons provide great opportunity for students to learn about sustainability, climate change and the environment, so reflecting the SDGs directly. Students can consider best ways for garbage disposal at school and within their local community, could grow seeds as part of Science and even grow their own food around the compound of the class.

- **Strengthen transition arrangements**
  
  Build on current liaison with Link School Teachers especially in relation to training to ensure they are aware of particular needs of SC students, as well as issues of Child Protection. In particular they need to be made aware that corporal punishment is a major factor in making SC students reluctant to attend government schools along with overly didactic teaching approaches. Manage expectations of financial support from LF during the transition. Monitor students who make the transition for 2 years to follow up on the sustainable impact of SC programme in successfully integrating students into the government system.

### Medium term

- **Take an intersectoral approach to food, income and education**
  
  Findings indicate how central food is to student access, learning and retention, both at the SC program and at the Link School. Forging an intersectoral approach with the communities and authorities in terms of agricultural land use around classes and schools can support the growing of vegetables for consumption by SC classes as envisaged by the LF, as well as provide income for parents and the community. Household finances are highly contingent and present the greatest barrier to retention in the Link Schools.

- **Introduce learning through local languages**
  
  All parents spoken with have a local language as their mother tongue. Although they do not feel their children struggle learning in English, when asked if they would like them to learn to read and write in the local language they all said yes – “because it’s my dialect”. The program could reflect on the possibility of using two languages in the classroom.

### Long term

**Engagement in poverty alleviation strategies**


Extending the multi-sectoral approach noted above, LF could support parents in their efforts to acquire land to grow food and develop micro-business activities, in particular through networking with elders in their communities.

**Engagement with the Ministry of Education**

Promote the SC programme and emergent insights into meeting the particular needs of out of school children in rural communities. In particular, disseminate its achievements in equipping them for transition into government schools by developing their reading, speaking and numeracy skills and in modelling a kind, humane, student friendly approach that encourages a positive approach to schooling and learning. Promote the broader peacebuilding significance of the program.
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US Aid, 2017 Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children Gender Analysis 2017

World Food Program 2019 WFP Country Brief May 2019
Appendix 1 Informal reading fluency and comprehension assessment

Reading Assessment  Individual Child Report

Researcher’s full name: .......................................................................................... Date: .......

Second Class: ..............................................  Child’s name : ..............................................

a) Give a copy of the story to the pupil.
b) Ask them to read it aloud to you. Smile at them. Tell them you want to hear how well they read. They can read it more than once if that helps.
c) If they can’t get a word right, tell them what it is so that they can continue on.
d) Instructions for the Running Record:

You need to have a copy of the same story. Make a ‘running record’ of how the child reads aloud, marking their progress on your copy of the story:

- Tick every correct word
- Put an ‘O’ over any word they miss out
- Put a ‘T’ next to any word that they needed to be told what it was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jen and the jam – Mark this text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jen is my sister. Her job is to make food to sell in the market. I help her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day Jen had some bad luck. She made some jam out of fruit to sell and put it in a pot and closed the lid but the wind blew the lid off the pot. Three mice came and licked all the jam out of the pot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After that Jen always let me put the lid back on very hard her jam pot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oral Comprehension Questions

1. Who is Jen? [The narrator’s sister] Yes/No

2. What is her job?[She makes food to sell in the market/she makes jam/she makes jam to sell in the market]

   Pupil’s response here ........................................................................................................

3. What bad luck happened to her? [wind blew the lid off the pot and three mice took all the jam]

   Pupil’s response here ........................................................................................................

4. Why do you think the lid came off the pot? [It wasn’t put on the pot securely/hard enough/the wind was very strong]

   Pupil’s response here ........................................................................................................

5. How do you think Jen felt when all her jam was gone? [Sad, angry]

   Pupil’s response here ........................................................................................................
6. Do you think the mice will take the jam from the pot again? [No, because the narrator closed the lid hard on the pot after that]

Pupil’s response here ……………………………………………………………………………………………

---

**Jen and the jam**

Jen is my sister. Her job is to make food to sell in the market. I help her.

One day Jen had some bad luck. She made some jam out of fruit to sell and put it in a pot and closed the lid, but the wind blew the lid off the pot. Three mice came and licked all the jam out of the pot.

After that Jen always let me put the lid back on very hard her jam pot.
# Appendix 2. Key characteristics of high and low achieving girls and boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learner Identity</th>
<th>Engagement in lessons</th>
<th>Relationship with facilitators</th>
<th>Relationship with peers</th>
<th>Learning gains made on Second Chance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High achieving girls</strong></td>
<td>Older, been to school before; More chores before &amp; after class Mothers support Study at home 1 wants to learn Bassa at SC</td>
<td>Confident, engaged, smiling, lead class, focused, elaborative responses, Some quieter, less engaged in Elkonin boxes, distracted, talking to others, tired after lunch</td>
<td>Like humour &amp; care shown by teachers</td>
<td>‘Plenty’ new friends, like group work, share ideas, Help peers a great deal Also like working alone</td>
<td>Complete tasks accurately, , cover curriculum, few gaps, take this advantage to Link school Full sentences in copybooks Good at formal explanation Fluent, accurate readers, 2-10 words only missed out Strong literal &amp; inferential comprehension Gains seen over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High achieving boys</strong></td>
<td>Not been to school before Fewer chores to do before or after school. Female relatives &amp; a father supportive Older peer as role model; Study at home</td>
<td>Confident, active, engaged, happy, excited, some quieter, think carefully before responding, display competitiveness, Some off task, distracted, playing with others, disturbing them, tired after lunch</td>
<td>‘Teach me good’ Pay more attention to HAB Encourage them, get them in the ‘zone’</td>
<td>Lead, like group work, share ideas, competitive, help peers</td>
<td>Complete tasks accurately, cover curriculum, few gaps, take this advantage to Link school Full sentences in copybooks Good at formal explanation Fluent, accurate readers Literal &amp; inferential questions challenging for some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low achieving girls</strong></td>
<td>Most young, have not been to school. Short stature, More often sick &amp; absent. Mothers supportive. One studies at home</td>
<td>Attentive, active, engaged,. Go to board to present. Respond well to encouragement Difficulty reaching board. Some confused, lost, not following, incompleted tasks, downcast if get something wrong, sleeping, pretending to read, not putting hand up. Tired after lunch</td>
<td>Teach me good, jokes, More dependent on the facilitator encouragement &amp; direct intervention Some LAG overlooked by facilitators nor any assessment in copybooks</td>
<td>Like working in groups Peers laugh at them for low achievement, creating anxiety.</td>
<td>Some sentences, numbers written correctly; Some phonemic confusion; Some cannot write sentences or read words. One showed no gains over time, 2 showed solid learning gains Some missed out 16-23 words, but with good comprehension Two read no words at all nor comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low achieving boys</strong></td>
<td>Younger, 3 had been to school, half not eaten before class, chores before &amp; after class. Supportive female relatives. Bassa speaking keen to learn dialect at school</td>
<td>Attentive, active, doing actions, read along, smiling, engaged in numeracy. Some shy, quiet, absent-minded, distracted, unconfident, not participating, pretend to do activities, do not complete activities. Playful. Tired after lunch.</td>
<td>‘Teach us good’ ‘Cannot beat us’ Like getting thumbs up from facilitator</td>
<td>Likes group work, having fun.</td>
<td>Can write sentences Some cannot read or write a word Some can write a sentence, and understand a problem in a story. Three cannot read 36-38 words, and good comprehension, two some only a few, two could not read any words,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3. Key similarities and differences between student groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities between groups</th>
<th>Differences between groups</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner identity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learner identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income similar in all 4 groups – charcoal burning, selling cassava, maize, palm wine.</td>
<td>HAG have attended school before while HAB have not. Half of those in the LA had not eaten anything before going to SC, while all those in HA had eaten something. HA students are older than LA students. HAG and LAG and LAB have more chores to do than HAB before &amp; after school. HA groups have one or two books to study from at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern over fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family support often from female relatives and students from all groups said they studied at night.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power of being seen to read in the community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships with peers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Relationships with peers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All have made new friends by attending the SC, not always from the same community.</td>
<td>HA students are more likely to lead class &amp; group activities than LA students. HAB show more competitiveness amongst themselves at SC and to carry this through to the Link school. LAG feel that their peers laugh at them &amp; demonstrate anxiety over this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA girls and boys readily support their immediate table peers to track with their finger, pronounce words, and correct them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Engagement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning Engagement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All show both engagement, enjoyment in phonics, GR &amp; numeracy, are active, like doing actions, singing, as well as some off-task talking, distracting others, disengagement, especially after lunch, when many are tired and sleepy.</td>
<td>HAB seem to get more attention and direct encouragement from facilitators. LAG do not get as much attention from facilitators as other groups, and need extra help, attention and encouragement from facilitator and peers to keep them on task. LAB students refer more often to a sense of fear &amp; beating from facilitators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All enjoy phonics, especially the blended ladder, ABL, Guided Reading and Numeracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower achievers’ engagement with learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lower achievers’ engagement with learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAG &amp; LAB tend to be younger, mostly have not been to school before, are more likely to appear lost, confused, unable to follow instructions, or pretend to read or write, need more attention from facilitators, demonstrate more anxiety, peer pressure. Both groups show phonemic confusion.</td>
<td>LAB tend to be more ‘playful’ and distract peers, while LAG do not contribute to group work, and avoid attention, LAG more likely to be ill, absent, sleep in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower achievers’ learning gains</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning gains</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within LA groups, only two in each group were unable to read anything or unable to answer comprehension questions; those labelled ‘less-able’ also encompasses those who read fairly well and who can comprehend a story. There appear to be around 2-4 in each class who really struggle to read any words.</td>
<td>HA girls and boys have full lists of red and green words in copybooks and full sentences they have written themselves. LA girls and boys have very little in copybooks, shorter sentences. HAG slightly more fluent and accurate readers than HAB and stronger at literal &amp; inferential comprehension questions than HAB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition is ‘easy’ because of solid foundation in SC</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High aspirations to be professions – doctors, teachers,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lawyers, to graduate, to support their families