

Liberia

School

Formal state education begins at age four to five. Generally, students graduate at age 18, but in post war Liberia it has been extended to age 25. In rural areas, boys are likely to attend a more informal 'poro society' school that teaches essential community skills such as typical farming methods and local remedies. Similarly, many young women attend 'Sande Society' schools where they will be taught basic childcare, cooking and household duties. In many cases, knowledge is passed on informally by parents to their children. There are six universities in Liberia and several vocational training institutes. Candidates are required to pass the West African Examination Council Exam for secondary school and sit entrance exams for college admissions.

Language

English is the official state language, but most of Liberia speaks Liberian colloquial. Liberian colloquial is mixture of slangs and creole widely spoken in public places and school campuses. Liberians tend to merge words, for example, "I na know" is used instead of "I don't know," and most plurals are created by adding the word "them" to the key word for example, "children them," "people them," "student them." A Liberian high school student can more effectively communicate through written English than oral communication.

Family Life

The Liberian household consists of members of the immediate and extended family. The number of people living in a typical household varies according to the family's income. There is an average of four to five children per family and in some rural areas, where it is common for men to take on more than one wife, there will be significantly more. Children live with their parents until they are financially independent and move out when they get married. In rural areas, it is common for women to marry as young as 14 or 15, in urban areas it is illegal before the age of 18.

Family roles are quite traditional in Liberia. Men are expected to be the main financial providers and maintain primary authority over the household and family. Women are expected to handle all childcare and household duties. The kitchen is solely the domain of the women. In urban areas, it is becoming more common to have a woman work outside of the home. Rural women are often encouraged to engage in farming and become a housewife early on in life.

The community in Liberia is seen as an extension of family. It is considered normal for children to be disciplined by people from outside of the family group. Corporal punishment is an acceptable and common form of punishment. Elders are highly regarded and well respected in Liberian communities. Younger people are not allowed to offer a hand shake to their elders, rather they bow their head and slightly bend their knees as a sign of respect.

Personal Hygiene

People take baths regularly and brush their teeth daily. Deodorant use is normal. In rural areas, non-Muslims use leaves with deodorizing properties and Muslims tend to use water. Most Liberians may not be accustomed to western modern bathrooms. Clothes are washed by hand or by using a washboard. In villages, clothes are taken to the rivers and washed by hand. Young Liberians are very proud of their appearance. Clothes in good condition and that fit well are highly valued.

Diet

Rice is the staple food in Liberia. A typical is rice with fish or meat, and a sauce, often spicy. A typical Liberian is accustomed to one meal per day, specifically around the afternoon period (12-3pm). Most parents will provide a snack of bread for their children before the regular meal. In both rural and urban areas, food is often cooked on top of charcoal or firewood. Only a minority of people from urban areas may have experience using gas or electric cookers. Most fish and meat is smoked, as there are no refrigerators. Most Liberians do not have experience with modern domestic appliances such as microwaves, toasters, stoves, and fridges. The Muslim population generally does not drink alcohol, and Liberians, in general, drink little alcohol.

Religion

As Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions, Liberia celebrates holidays like Easter, Christmas, Ramadan and Eid. Many rural dwellers are Africanists who believe in nature and superstitions.



COUNTRY FACTS:

Capital: Monrovia

Population: 3,685,076

Area, sq. mi.: 43,000

Real GDP per capita: 500

Adult literacy rate: 73% (male); 42% (female)

Ethnic make-up: Kpelle 20.3%, Bassa 13.4%, Grebo 10%, Gio 8%, Mano 7.9%, Kru 6%, Lorma 5.1%, Kissi 4.8%, Gola 4.4%, other 20.1%

Religion: Muslim 59.7% (Shia, Sunni, DruzChristian 85.6%, Muslim 12.2%, Traditional 0.6%, other 0.2%, none 1.4%