Youth to Youth:

Measuring Youth Engagement

Liberia, 2012

Search for Common Ground

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIDS — Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU — African Union
CSDF — County Social Development Funds
DAC — Development Assistance Committee
DDR — Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration
ECOWAS — Economic Community of West African States
EIU — Economist Intelligence Unit
ERU — Emergency Response Unit
FGM — Female Genital Mutilation
FLY- Federation of Liberian Youth
GoL — the Government of Liberia
HIV — Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMF — International Monetary Fund
IRB — Institutional Review Board
LIGIS — Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services
LINSU — Liberia National Student Union
LURD — Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL — Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NEET — Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NGO — Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL — National Patriotic Front of Liberia
ODA — Official Development Assistance
OECD — Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR — Participatory Action Research
PRS — Poverty Reduction Strategy
PTA — Parent Teacher Association
PWD — Persons with Disabilities
SDC — the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDI — Sustainable Development Institute
SFCG — Search for Common Ground
SGBV — Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SIDA — the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STI — Sexually Transmitted Infection
TDS — Talking Drum Studios
ULIMO — United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy
UN — United Nations
UNDP — United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA — United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF — United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL — United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNV — United Nations Volunteers
USAID — United States Agency for International Development
VT — Vocational Training
WAEC — West African Examinations Council
WHO — World Health Organization
YEM — Youth Engagement Matrix

Liberia Map with Research Zones

Preface

This project is motivated by the concern that donors and youth may have different priorities for how to invest in youth policy and programming in post-conflict Liberia. The project is also motivated by a firm belief in the capabilities of youth to address their own issues if given the chance.

Meaningful youth engagement in post-conflict and transitions settings involves a long-term commitment to youth-led, adult-supported processes that encourages young people to express themselves, be involved in decisions that affect them and their communities, and be recognized as active social actors in the communities in which they live. This requires commitment to inclusive and participatory processes that are grounded in principles of protection and participation.

This project brought together twenty four Liberian youth and six young people from American University to travel to every county in Liberia and discuss with youth the issues affecting them, how they feel they can be involved and engaged, and the extent to which the priorities of international donors are aligned with those of youth. In addition to a quantitative analysis that documents donors' funding priorities since the end of the war, the analysis seeks to explain the multitude of ways young people want to be involved in rebuilding Liberia's political, cultural, educational, economic, health, and infrastructure networks, as all of these sectors affect young people's lives throughout the country.

The result is a youth-led, adult-supported, and technically-advised comprehensive *Situation Analysis on Youth in Liberia.* We hope this work is useful to a range of Liberian and international actors, and that it may be a model for future research and advocacy work other post-conflict settings.

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Executive Summary

This study — a collaborative effort between Search for Common Ground, American University, the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), the Ministry of Youth and Sport in Liberia, and Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services (LIGIS) — aims to assess youth engagement in Liberia and examine the extent to which the priorities of international donors are aligned with those of youth. This multi-faceted report adopts a holistic approach to cover various aspects of a complex pilot process. Working outside the traditional bounds of academic and practical research, this effort is adult-supported but entirely youth-led. As such, this project endorses the very principles and practices it espouses, showcasing youth's ability to assume leadership roles and affect positive change in their society when offered an appropriate platform.

The research team (composed of 24 Liberian youth, six American University graduate researchers, and one Search for Common Ground intern) spoke with over 1000 youth in more than 600 conversations throughout all 15 counties in Liberia. The team also interviewed more than 20 representatives from donor agencies. This report is an outlet for amplifying youth voices as they were heard by the research team. The emphasis of this report is to provide an accurate representation of Liberian youth's feelings, perceptions, and priorities on youth engagement, frequently in their own words, without disregarding the perceptions of Liberian adults and the international community.

Youth are increasingly at the forefront of the global development agenda. In Liberia, young people under age 35 constitute over 70 percent of the population. Within this cohort, youth aged 15-35 have not only been drastically affected by the civil war, but are also disproportionately disempowered by factors such as high unemployment, low access to quality education and training, and limited family planning a decade after the war's end. Liberian youth continue to be excluded from both formal and informal decision-making processes. Such marginalization limits their avenues for expression and is a factor that deserves considerable concern in the delicate post-conflict setting. Yet, youth are actively strategizing to solve their problems. To fully realize this opportunity, Liberia must enable its youth — its contemporary and future leaders — by formally engaging with them.

The following broad themes emerged as imperative elements of youth engagement:

1. **Education:** Youth reported a large unmet demand for education in Liberia. This issue was perceived to primarily affect young people and was attributed to several factors. While physical obstacles, such as the lack of schools, dilapidated buildings, and distance were cited most frequently, youth were also concerned about social barriers to education. These include insufficient funds, family discouragement, teenage pregnancy, and corruption in the education system. Youth often feel that vocational training will provide them with the skills necessary to obtain a job. Although youth go to great lengths to overcome obstacles to acquire traditional and vocational education, it does not necessarily guarantee a brighter future.

2. **Health:** Youth discussed how insufficient healthcare infrastructure (e.g., hospitals, roads, ambulances) compromises their health and that of others in their communities. Trust in health care providers is low as health workers are considered both corrupt and lacking in

interpersonal skills. Limited access to improved water and sanitation were also frequently cited as major barriers to healthy community life, especially for young people.

3. **Livelihood:** Many youth are self-employed and depend on income from activities such as petty trade and agriculture. Youth often expressed feeling overwhelmed by the conflicting, yet unavoidable, demands of work, school, and other activities in their lives. They also conveyed frustration with the labor practices of foreign companies. Youth stressed the need to better align education and skills training with market needs.

4. **Politics and Governance**: Liberian youth hold varying opinions of existing leadership. While some expressed trust and enthusiasm for government, others sharply criticized corruption, the provision of basic services, and a focus on Monrovia. Though the majority of youth vote, they are often frustrated by a lack of available opportunities through which they can meaningfully participate in decision-making. Civil society, which could provide improved opportunities, continually struggles to achieve its full potential.

5. **Infrastructure**: Youth are overwhelmingly concerned about the condition of roads and bridges connecting remote communities and resources. This connection is vital to young people, not only in terms of meeting their physical and economic needs, but also in supporting their socio-political and emotional well-being. With limited infrastructure to deliver basic services (including energy, water, sanitation, technology, and communication), many youth discussed their inevitable reliance on costly and ineffective alternatives. Issues stemming from poor infrastructure were frequently included in the discussion of other themes, rendering this theme the most interconnected of the eight.

6. **Peace and Security**: Youth highly value the purported peace that has existed in their country for just under a decade. However, despite the significant funding allocated to improving formal security and law enforcement, government institutions for peace and security are not yet independently stable. Youth expressed frustration at how conflict or crime is often attributed to their age cohort without sufficient attention to underlying, contributing factors.

7. **Community and Culture**: Tensions arise as youth try to reconcile religious and traditional practices with modern values. For example, while many youth want to take advantage of the public services and opportunities for employment and education offered in Monrovia, they also expressed a desire to contribute to their home communities. In addition, youth discussed how the success or failure of their community projects can depend on support from elders.

8. **Family and Gender:** Family power dynamics are reinforced by community norms and greatly influence the extent and nature of youth engagement. While older women are increasingly holding positions of power, young women are often the least engaged in their communities and therefore easily overlooked by policymakers. As a result young women continue to be much more hesitant to engage in politics than their male counterparts. They also carry the additional burden of child rearing and suffer the brunt of sexual- and gender- based violence. Finally, women are frequently forced to depend on men for economic support; however, men, finding it difficult to live up to these expectations, also feel pressured.

While many of the issues described by youth (and acknowledged by some donors) are felt by the Liberian population at large, youth as a subset of that population are affected in unique, complex, and interconnected ways. Evidence indicates that although the international donor community is addressing youth priorities, this attention was primarily limited to areas of overlap with the greater population. And this represents a missed opportunity to harness the potential of young people as one of Liberia's most precious resources for reconstruction and development.

Liberia must enable its youth — its contemporary and future leaders — by intentionally receiving and addressing their concerns. However, this report documents that despite limited formal means to change their situation, youth are creating the necessary space to address their priorities through striking innovation and tremendous sacrifice. The life experiences recounted to the research team provide a testament to the resilience and determination of Liberian youth. Yet, this exercise is only a first step — in order to effectively address youth issues, young Liberians stated that it is imperative for them to be engaged in decision-making bodies, processes, and programs across all sectors.

Introduction

Today, roughly 1.5 billion people in the world are youth aged 12–24. Of these, an overwhelming 1.3 billion live in developing countries.[1] In Africa, young people aged 15–24 make up about 20 percent of the population, while young people under 25 constitute over 60 percent. It is the youngest region in the world.[2] As such, beyond constituting a numerical majority, young people comprise a disproportionately large part of the world's most poor and vulnerable population.[3]

The susceptibility of African youth to hardships such as poverty and disease, coupled with their exclusion from participation and decision-making in wider economic, social, and political spheres, make them particularly vulnerable. Such marginalization is often seen as a factor that instigates violence and poses serious threats to security and stability. However, there is a growing awareness that youth are not solely "a problem to be rectified or a set of beneficiaries of government interventions."[4] Rather, young people are increasingly being recognized as key stakeholders and agents of positive change, and are gradually being incorporated as "contributors to developing sound policies and implementing effective programmes."[5] The characteristics they embody, such as their energy, passion, and ability to innovate,[6] are increasingly considered integral to the reconstruction and development of their countries.

With youth issues quickly making their way onto the global agenda, in any national context, it is imperative to gauge young people's concerns, the extent to which they are incorporated into decision-making processes, and their ideas on how to move forward.[7] Therefore, this multi-faceted report aims to amplify the voice of young Liberians.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's administration has taken an important step by emphasizing youth empowerment as a key priority, as evidenced by her mention of the topic in her inaugural address.[8] Still, especially in light of the fact that over 70 percent of Liberia's population is under the age of 35,[9] it is imperative that influential actors such as the Liberian government, civil society, and the international community work to ensure that such rhetoric is translated into concrete change. Despite Liberia's relatively small size, it receives a large amount of international aid.[10] With this assistance the country has achieved significant improvements

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[1] World Bank, *World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation*, 2007, 4.

[2] UNECA, *African Youth Report*, 2009, 7.

[3] USAID, "Education and Universities,"
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/education_and_universities/youth_dev/index.html, accessed April 17, 2012.

[4] UNECA, 7

[5] UNECA, vii

[6] Dabesaki Mac-Ikemenjima, *"Youth development, reintegration, reconciliation and rehabilitation in post-conflict West Africa: A framework for Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire," International NGO Journal,* 2008, 1.

[7] In response, the international community has begun to increasingly recognize the centrality of, and the need to seriously address, youth issues. Global recognition is reflected in important publications that focus on youth such as the *UN Programme on Youth*, the *UN World Youth Report*, and the *2007 World Bank's World Development Report*.[7] Similarly, African governments have begun to integrate youth issues into their development agendas, as reflected by the African Union's adoption of the African Youth Charter in July of 2006.

[8] Inaugural Address Of H.E. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF, January 16, 2006.

[9] United States Census Bureau, "Liberia,"
http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php, accessed January 2012.

[10] Christof Kurtz, *Cumulative Impact Case Study: The Cumulative Impacts of Peacebuilding in Liberia Cumulative*, 2010, 7.

towards development and stability. Yet post-war efforts, both domestic and international, have not sufficiently differentiated youth as a vulnerable cohort or effectively integrated them into political, economic, or social life.

Liberian youth — defined by the Liberian government in its national youth policy as pertaining to individuals aged 15-35 — face hurdles accessing quality education, attaining a voice in government, and maintaining good health. They suffer most in areas such as unemployment, teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality, and HIV/AIDS.[11] Despite these vulnerabilities, youth voices are all-too-often excluded from community, county, and national level decision and policymaking structures, and processes that shape young people's daily lives.[12]

In light of these challenges, this study aims to**:**
- Gauge the nature of youth engagement in Liberia;
- Understand which elements are perceived as beneficial for, or as barriers to, youth engagement;
- Examine the extent to which the priorities of international donors are aligned with those of youth;
- Propose further action that can be taken to more effectively address youth concerns; and
- Provide tools to enable youth to transform the way they interact with policy makers and donors.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows: A concise country profile contextualizes the situation of youth in Liberia today. Subsequently, the authors discuss the unique elements of this project and outline the formation of concepts used in the study. A detailed discussion of all eight themes, regional differences, and underlying connections follow. The report then lists practical recommendations formed from the various findings. The conclusion of this report summarizes the findings and brings closure to the report. The appendix includes an explanation of the Youth Engagement Matrix and the Matrix itself.

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[11] UNECA , vii

[12] Ismail Wale, et al. Conflict, Security & Development Group, "Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (YOVEX) in West Africa: Synthesis Report." Accessed May 20, 2012.

Country Profile

> *"Liberia is now at peace. Gone are the scenes from the Taylor years of bizarrely dressed teenage soldiers in wigs wildly shooting AK-47s and launching random mortar attacks on civilians huddled in Monrovia."[13]*

Liberia is made up of 15 counties with the city of Monrovia as its capital. Located on the west coast of Africa, this small Anglophone country is home to 4.1 million people. The current President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, elected in 2005 and re-elected in 2011, is the first female president in Africa.[14]

In 1980, encouraged by protests surrounding sharp increases in the price of rice, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe led a *coup d'etat* in which he overthrew the government of then President William Tolbert.[15] Following the coup, social stratification, erratic political rule, economic collapse, and the desire to benefit from natural resources, all set the stage for Charles Taylor's 1989 raid and the rise of his rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Taylor's invasion marked the beginning of the first period of civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 1997. War began again in 1999 when Taylor's adversaries formed the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).[16]

During these 14 years of civil war, murderous warlords fought Liberian government forces and each other.[17] By the end of the conflict, 250,000 Liberians had been killed[18] and approximately 800,000 people were either internally displaced or lived as refugees in neighboring Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.[19]

National incomes fell nearly nine-fold, so that by the end of the war three-fourths of Liberians were living on less than one dollar a day.[20] The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord ended the conflict, however by this time the infrastructure of Liberia was destroyed. Roads, clean water, electric power, and solid waste disposal were virtually non-existent. Institutions, social capital, and managerial and technical capacity were broken, and external debt reached $3.7 billion (current US dollars).[21]

Liberian youth were particularly affected by the war. Of the 102,193 combatants who registered during the formal disarmament process, the mean age was 25.3.[22] Moreover, 11,353 children, who now — almost a decade after the war's end — are youth, were also deeply affected by the

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[13] Robert Lloyd, "Rebuilding the Liberian State," *Current History*, May 2006, 105, 691, 229.

[14] "Liberia Profile," *BBC*, 26 April, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13729504, accessed May 2, 2012.

[15] Lloyd, 229.

[16] Rincon, 10

[17] Ruthie Akerman, "Rebuilding Liberia, One Brick at a Time." *World Policy Journal 2009* 26: 83 accessed online July 18, 2011, http://wpj.sagepub.com/content/26/2/83.citation

[18] *BBC,* "Liberia Profile"

[19] "ARC Liberia," *American Refugee Committee*, www.arcrelief.org, accessed February 2012.

[20] Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, "The Socioeconomic Achievements of the Government of Liberia," 2006-2011

[21] IMF, "Liberia: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper," 2007, x

[22] Christropher Maclay and Alpaslan Ozerdem, "'Use' Them Or 'Lose' Them: Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth Through Socio-Political Integration," Coventry University, 5.

conflict.[23] Child fighters were recruited by all fighting factions, including President Charles Taylor's "Small Boys Unit," and constituted as much as 37 percent of some armies.[24] Their roles extended beyond fighting, as young people were used as porters, "bush-wives," and recruiters. This traumatic past of extreme violence characterized by combat, kidnapping, and widespread rape in place of a conventional childhood, has left a dire need to re-establish basic community foundations, build a more stable and healthy environment, and strengthen social security institutions.

A common assertion as to the cause of the civil war is that the conflict was instigated by political opposition, which was fueled by youth resentment. According to scholar Mats Utas, "Young people saw it as a youth revolution, a chance to get rid of an elitist urban leadership of autocrats that showed little concern for the young of Liberia."[25] Additionally, there was a competition to control natural resources. Proponents of this theory believe that military leaders and rebel groups were not motivated by a political agenda, but rather by "gain[ing] control over areas rich in resources, especially those with gold and diamonds, but also timber and rubber, coffee and cocoa."[26] Whether or not youth grievances *fueled* the conflict, it is indisputable that children and youth were greatly involved in the war.

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[23] Ibid.., 5.
[24] Ibid.., 3-5.
[25] Mats Utas, "Fluid Research Fields: Studying Excombatant Youth in the Aftermath of the Liberian Civil War," *Children and Youth on the Frontline*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, 214
[26] Ibid.. 213

Unique Project Elements

At times, well-meaning practitioners perpetuate the very power structures they aim to dismantle. Even when participatory methods are endorsed, practitioners can fail to address the reality-shifting power they bring with them. This study is distinct in that it seeks to transform the existent power asymmetries between researcher and respondent as well as between youth and their adult counterparts, not only as an end objective but also as a means of research. This project provides a platform for youth voices and includes mechanisms that can help youth hold powerful actors accountable. Moreover, the project aspires to incorporate the very principles it aims to espouse as part of its implementation process.

The researchers utilized a "Listening and Learning" method, which shifted the act of gathering information from a one-sided interview where only subjects share intimate and private information,[27] to an exchange of experiences where the researchers themselves participate in the sharing of personal views, experiences, and emotions. Such two-sided participatory dialogue alters power dynamics by allowing vulnerability to be mutual, inducing a more sincere and fruitful discussion. Moreover, the Liberian and American researchers could relate to respondents on the basis of similar age, experience, and status, as well as increasing the willingness of respondents to speak honestly. As a result, tensions that often arise from power asymmetries between youth and older adults, as well as between international and local actors, were mitigated.

This study adopted a youth-to-youth approach. Every step of the process, from the design and implementation to the writing of the report, while supported by older adults, was led by youth with the intention of benefitting youth. The research team for this project was composed of Liberian youth researchers and American University graduate researchers. Thus, in pushing for greater youth engagement and decision-making power, the project itself is a testament to the agency and capacity of youth.

It is commonly accepted that researchers gather information from communities solely to inform policymakers. Internalizing their role as beneficiaries has led youth to see themselves as dependent on those in power. This becomes particularly problematic when the expected benefits are not seen. As one girl asserted, *"[most] people come, take information from us, and do not come back…they will come, take care, they will carry it and will not do anything about it!"* This study argues that participatory research processes can actually increase local ownership, and in this case empower youth to become agents of change.[28] The very execution of the study provided an opportunity for the Liberian researchers to gain skills, confidence, and access to power. Moreover, through this process youth have helped create tools through which they can begin to hold powerful institutions accountable.

In addition, local consultants commonly get paid less than their international counterparts, even though their familiarity with the local context is often imperative to the success of the project. Differentiation in pay is paradoxical; even when international actors claim to be "working to end

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[27] Cooke, Bill, *Rules of thumb for participatory change agents. From Participation to Emancipation?*, London: Zed Books, 2004, 51

[28] Browne, David J., *Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: Democracy Strengthened or Democracy undermined?*, *Participation: The new Tyranny?*, Edited by Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari. London: Zed Books, 2001.

poverty, [their] weekly per-diem expenses, never mind their fees, often amount to more than the average annual per capita income."[29] Instead of empowering locals, such patterns perpetuate the idea that the local worker is literally "less valuable," an identity that is internalized as a justified norm. This project aimed to establish a more equal relationship between local and international consultants, as all researchers received equal compensation.

Finally, unlike many projects that tend to focus on easily accessible locations (thus marginalizing the already-excluded populations), this study took place in all 15 counties of Liberia.[30]

A Conversation with Fishtown Youth

"You wanna hear about my life? Why?"

"Well, because I want to know about Liberia from your point of view… I want to know what it is like to be Wanda." I said with a big smile.

She wasn't buying it. 'Oh man, what am I gonna do?' I thought.

Another girl came onto the porch. "You are here to see my husband." Oh God… was it a question or an accusation? I honestly didn't know.

"No, no…" I stammered, "I, uh, I'm here to talk to you! I don't even know your husband."

A knowing glance and smirk was shared between the three teenage girls gathered on the porch.

"You can ask me anything, you know…," I was desperately trying to show her that I was in this, that I was invested… "Really, anything… I'm open… I want to be your friend."

A huge smile spread across her friend's face as yet another teenage girl — who appeared pregnant — came out of the house holding a baby.

"See, that's my husband." She smiled as her joke became realized and I smiled out of a huge sense of relief! I had completely forgotten that in this part of the world it is common to humorously assign grown men/women to babies as 'wives/husbands'.

As the girls and I sat on the porch just looking at each other, the one with the smirk said, "Really? Anything?"

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[29] Cooke, Bill, *Rules of thumb for participatory change agents. From Participation to Emancipation?*, London: Zed Books, 2004, 50

[30] Attempts to shift power asymmetries during research were limited for multiple reasons: 1) Though the study aimed to reach stakeholders that are often excluded from public discourse, the Liberian research partners were either handpicked or individually invited by the Federation of Liberian Youth. 2) While conversations between Americans and Liberians were mutual, American University students could share their intimate stories with a greater sense of privacy. 3) The people with whom conversations were held, were not included in the analysis, so their voices are primarily presented through the interpretation of the researchers. These practices enforce a dependency on the part of the subject to be depicted justly and accurately. 4) While the report attempts to shine light on the varied, multifaceted, and interconnected dynamics on the ground, it cannot do justice to the complexities found there.

"Yeah — what do you want to know about my life?"

"Do you have a husband?... Or children?"

"No"

Giggling and looks of astonishment filled the air… "But, but why no?"…

"How old are you?"

"27 years old… and you?" 18, 18, 19, and 20 were the responses respectively.

"What about man and woman business?" the brave friend giggled and asked me… intending to ask if I have sexual relations with men. Now, to many this might be an off-putting extremely personal question, but in that moment I KNEW. I knew that we were on our way to a meaningful conversation about the priorities of these girls living in the capital city of the newest county in Liberia — Fishtown, River Gee.

The bottom line: I had gained their trust and our conversation, my "listening and learning" was about to begin.

Concept Formation

> "If the distinction between child and adult is difficult, the designation of who is a youth is thornier still."[31]

Youth

This study aimed to consider youth in a contextually relevant and inclusive manner. Consequently, it adopted the following definitions of youth:

- Ages 15-24, the United Nations definition of youth[32]
- Ages 15-35, the African Youth Charter and official Liberian definition of youth[33]
- A person in transition between childhood and adulthood. Someone who is capable of performing the duties of an adult but has not yet reached the status of an adult in his/her community.

This multipart working definition simultaneously takes into consideration the internationally accepted numerical depiction of youth without dismissing a social understanding of youth as a culturally and contextually-specific stage assigned varying degrees of esteem, privilege, access, power, responsibility and expectation. In the field, researchers tested this preliminary working definition by asking respondents for more information about how they define youth and what implications are embedded in identifying oneself with this cohort of society. Accordingly, the team anticipated and accepted changes in the definition throughout the project based on responses gathered in the field. This shift in interpretation served to reinforce the mercurial nature of the concept that emerged during initial background research.

Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is a multidimensional concept that is embedded in many aspects of life. The nuanced complexities of the concept are well represented in the definition provided by the *Better Together Network* when it describes the concept as "affiliation, community, solidarity, respect, success, and opportunity." The report continues, youth are a "community of choice, rather than circumstance…. Young people ideally learn to share, cooperate, and contribute to a common good."[34] A report produced by the City of Calgary adds additional depth to the concept by pointing out that "youth want to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. They want their voices to be recognized and heard… Accepting this definition of youth engagement we should view youth not as recipients of services, but as citizens becoming more actively engaged and involved in the processes that affect them."[35]

Drawing inspiration from these various sources, the American University researchers defined youth engagement as:

- A state in which young people are meaningfully integrated in their society such that they contribute to civic, political, economic, and/or social life in their community and/or nation.

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[31] Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, *Troublemakers or Peacemakers? Youth and Post-Accord Peace Building,* 2006, 4.

[32] UNESCO, "Acting with and for Youth," www.unesco.org, accessed January 8, 2012.

[33] African Development Forum, *Liberia Country Brief,* 2006, 10.

[34] Better Together Network, *Youth and Social Capital*, 1-2.

[35] The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, *Calgary Guide to Youth Friendly Practices*, 3.

The research team provided parameters to this broad understanding of the term by structuring the project around eight themes. The process of selecting these themes is detailed in the methodology.

Methodology

Youth to Youth: Measuring Youth Engagement is a two-phase collaborative project. When used alone, both quantitative and qualitative methods are prone to "methods-induced bias."[36] In order to produce more comprehensive coverage and more valid findings than either one of these approaches offers on its own, a mixed-method analysis was pursued.[37] The following section will outline and explain the underlying rationale for the methods employed in the study.

Phase I

Literature Review
Phase I began with a thorough review of existing literature across relevant disciplines. It aimed to:
  a. Examine Liberia as a case study pre-, during, and post-conflict, with appropriate consideration given to the role of youth in each of those stages;
  b. Explore relevant theories and methodologies from the fields of children and youth, peace-building and conflict resolution, and international development; and
  c. Survey existing indices and supporting statistical data pertaining to youth wellbeing and engagement

The review incorporated government documents, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), and inter-governmental organization reports, scholarly journal articles, news stories, documentaries, speeches, and lectures. Critical gaps in the existent literature were identified. For example, there is still a limited understanding of the trends, patterns, and interconnected factors that lead to, and exacerbate youth vulnerability in the Liberian context. In this way, the literature review not only added direction to, but also highlighted the need for, the proposed study. The findings gleaned from this research and the perspectives represented therein have been integrated throughout the report as applicable.

Selection of Youth Engagement Indicators
For the purposes of this study, an indicator is defined as "a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to reflect the changes connected to an intervention… where the intended change is more abstract, indicators can help approximate the change."[38] An indicator is not the desired change itself, but rather a sign of that change. Indicators are imperfect and vary in validity and reliability.[39]

To implement the first phase of the project, the American University researchers aggregated and considered a list of over 500 indicators relevant to issues surrounding youth engagement in the context of Liberia. Each indicator was carefully scanned for an exact description, method of calculation, and level of data collection. The most relevant indicators, as determined by the

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[36] Michael J. Bamberger, et al., *Real World Evaluation: Working Under Budget, Time, Data, and Political Constraints,* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006, 303.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Search for Common Ground, *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict, Transformation Programs*, 2006, 44.
[39] Ibid.

American University researchers, are utilized throughout the report, and are also included as variables in the Youth Engagement Matrix.

Mapping Official Development Assistance Distributed to Liberia

During Phase I, the American University researchers analyzed the post-war flow of international assistance to Liberia. By definition, international aid consists of monies granted or loaned to developing countries, and must be:

1. Undertaken by the official sector to promote economic development and welfare (excluding military assistance);
2. Disbursed at concessional financial terms; and,
3. Managed individually (bilaterally) by a country, or united and managed by an intermediary agency (multilaterally).[40]

The majority of statistics on international aid are self-reported by the 22 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD terms this international aid Official Development Assistance (ODA). Using the data provided by the OECD[41] from the years 2002-2010, the American University researchers conducted this analysis. [42]

In determining the relevancy of donor disbursements, the American University researchers acknowledged that tracking 100 percent of the international aid to Liberia would necessitate an analysis beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, the optimal benefit from the analysis could be attained with information from donors whose contributions cumulatively comprised 90 percent of ODA that was reported to the OECD as disbursed to Liberia from 2002-2010. The primary justification for this decision was the fact that the reduction of aid from 100 to 91 percent dramatically reduced the number of donors involved without sacrificing significant amounts of aid examined. It allowed the researchers to answer the research question more thoroughly and within the project's timeframe.

The American University researchers used these parameters to identify which donors' funding patterns would be tracked. To do this, the researchers first determined the total ODA disbursed to Liberia during the designated time period (2002-2010). Next, each donor's contribution was calculated as a percentage of total ODA to Liberia. It was then listed in order, (i.e., the donor that contributed the highest amount, followed by the donor that contributed the second highest amount), until the cumulative sum of ODA as a percentage of total ODA from 2002-2010 passed 90 percent. In descending order, the resulting 12 donor countries and institutions consisted of the United States (26 percent); Germany (14 percent); the World Bank (14 percent); the International Monetary Fund (11 percent); EU Institutions (8 percent); Norway (3 percent); the UN — comprising UNAIDS, UNDP, UNECE, UNFPA, and UNICEF (3 percent); the United Kingdom (3 percent); Sweden (3 percent); Italy (2 percent); Japan (2 percent); and the Netherlands (2 percent) See figure 1 below for full details. Using data provided by the OECD[43] on the 12

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[40] OECD, http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=6043

[41] Ibid.

[42] At the time of the analysis, the latest available year for which OECD data on ODA was available was 2010. It was decided to begin tracking aid in 2002 rather than 2003 when the Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed in order to gauge if there were obvious changes in funding patterns and levels associated with the end of the war.

[43] http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=6043

selected donors from the years 2002-2010, the researchers then mapped ODA disbursements to Liberia according to year, donor, implementer, sector, subsector, and project title.

**Figure 1: Cumulative ODA to Liberia by Largest Donors**
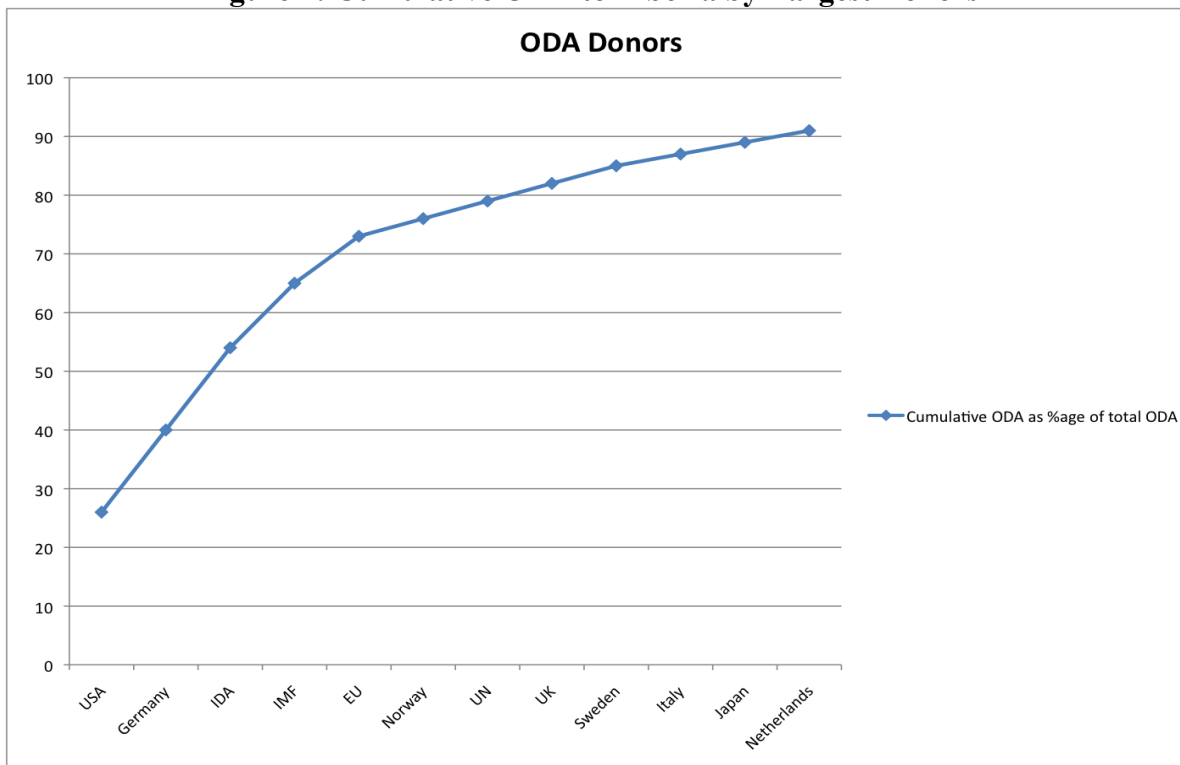
The American University researchers assessed whether, and to what extent, ODA funding from the 12 selected donors went to the sectors critical for youth engagement. Because donor-funding sectors were categorized differently than those themes determined to be most important to youth engagement, donor classifications were grouped together as they pertained to the themes. For example, while "Conflict, Peace & Security" and "Reconstruction Relief & Rehabilitation" are separate OECD categories for reporting ODA, both categories were grouped together by the American University researchers under the pre-determined category of "Peace and Security."[44] The objective of this exercise was to determine the amount of funding directed to each of the pre-determined sectors in order to infer donor priorities both currently and over time (see figure 2 to see how funding designations were aggregated).[45]

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[44] For full details on which OECD categories were included in each sector, please see the Youth Engagement Matrix Appendix 1.
[45] Calculations are based on amounts recorded in million current USD.

Figure 2: Total ODA 2002-2010
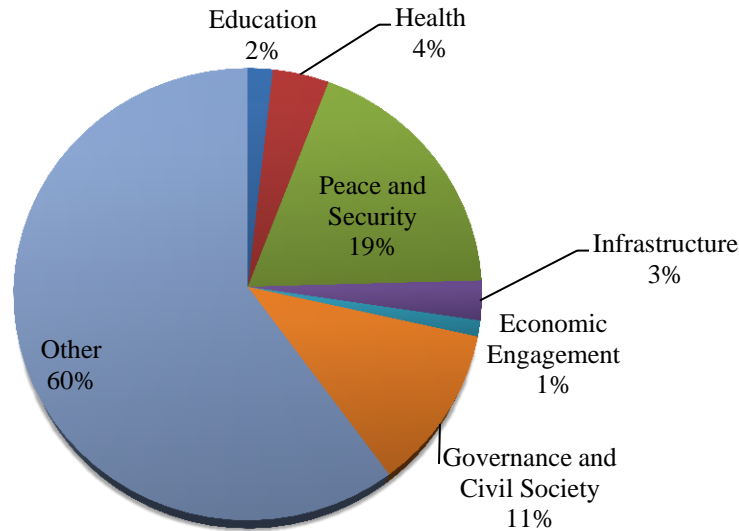
Source: OECD, 2012

Phase II

The Phase II data collection portion of the project took place in Liberia in collaboration with 24 Liberian researchers.[46] In this stage, which was comprised of three steps — orientation, fieldwork, and analysis — researchers primarily aimed to converse with youth respondents across all 15 counties in Liberia to assess their priorities. Additionally, interviews with high-level stakeholders such as the donors identified in Phase I, and other international and national organizations, aimed to examine whether these actors' priorities align with those of youth, as well as to gauge their understanding of, and commitment to youth issues.

Throughout the report, names of both youth respondents and stakeholder interviewees have either been removed or changed to maintain anonymity with the purpose of protecting participants' privacy and encouraging more honest exchanges.

Orientation

The American University research team planned a five day orientation for the Liberian partners that took place from March 10-14, 2012; it included training in qualitative research methods, techniques for conducting conversations, instructions for ethical handling of data and proper use of electronic equipment, as well as teambuilding exercises.

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[46] The US researchers created a "Terms of Reference" document for the selection of the Liberian partners, which was used by the *Federation of Liberian Youth* and SFCG's *Talking Drum Studio* in Liberia to recruit local researchers. As part of the recruitment process, the need to create balance across gender and locality was prioritized. The final group of local researchers consisted of 12 men and 12 women, with 10 partners originating from Monrovia, and the remaining 14 coming from the counties.

During this time, the team worked together to divide Liberia's 15 counties into four zones for the purpose of field research.[47] Each zonal team comprised of at least one American University researcher and 5-6 Liberian researchers. Local researchers worked among themselves to select the zonal teams. The goal was to promote ownership among the local partners by encouraging their contributions to project design and implementation.

Fieldwork

The "Listening and Learning" took place from March 14-29, 2012. During this stage, data in the form of oral testimonies was collected primarily from Liberian respondents aged 18-35[48] in order to understand the extent and nature of their engagement, as well as the elements that affect their engagement. The researchers aimed to speak to a heterogeneous group of youth whose perceptions and priorities varied according to their respective characteristics such as location, gender, employment, socioeconomic status, and age. Thus, discussions were held in various youth meeting sites such as their homes, places of work, cooking tents, markets, beaches, schools, and on the street.

Rather than administer predetermined surveys or employ a structured interview method, researchers engaged in open conversations with respondents. Instead of viewing young people as "subjects" from whom data were to be extracted, these conversations, which were made as natural as possible, allowed respondent and researcher to mutually engage. Because there were no predetermined questions, discussions were almost exclusively guided by the participants, and could therefore "touch on an unpredictable range of issues, just like an everyday conversation."[49] It was planned that during the "Listening and Learning" process, two researchers would speak with each participant, with one member focusing on the conversation and audio recording,[50] while the other assumed the role of note-taker. Over 600 conversations were held over this 16-day period.

Each of the four zonal teams conducted nightly debriefings and engaged in continuous conversation about observations, conclusions, and interesting findings from the field. These sessions were intentionally designed with some degree of malleability. Processes employed by zonal teams included:
- Small group analytical discussions about findings
- Re-listening to recorded conversations while taking notes with time stamps to mark important points and quotes;
- Transcribing selected portions of the recorded conversations;
- Writing narrative summaries; and
- Categorizing conversations by topic and youth respondent characteristics

For many local partners, typing notes or transcribing conversations during the debriefings was their first encounter with a computer, which added to the capacity-building aspect of the project.

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[47] For a detailed list of the breakdown of counties by Zone, see Map

[48] As noted above, youth is defined in Liberian society as someone who falls between the ages of 15 and 35. Due to legal and ethical constraints, the research team made the decision to only conduct conversations with individuals who were age 18 and above.

[49] *A Lost Generation: Young People And Conflict in Africa*, 2007, 10.

[50] Researchers asked respondents for permission to record conversations. On the rare occasion when permission was not granted, note-taking was the primary form of recording the conversations.

Respondents were viewed as "co-producers of knowledge,"[51] the aim was for Liberian researchers to share ownership with other local youth.

Analysis

The entire 31-person team re-gathered in Monrovia from March 30-April 2, 2012 for a period of intense group analysis. During these four days researchers shared lessons learned from each zone. This was accomplished through various activities such the communication of outstanding stories, participation in interactive role-plays of experiences from the field, and categorization of information according to themes, regions, and youth characteristics.

Orientation → Data Collection → Data Analysis

Stakeholder Interviews

In a separate but parallel process, a fifth team conducted interviews with various stakeholders in Monrovia from March 9-23, 2012, continuing in Washington, DC over the following few weeks. During this time, 20 formal in-depth interviews were held with donor, civil society, and government representatives and employees. Formal interviews were also supplemented by informal conversations. The main goal of this exercise was to gather information from the donor governments and intergovernmental organizations that make up the 91 percent of funding outlined in Phase I. In addition, it was intended to gauge the respondents' views on the process of determining funding, programming, and policy priorities on the national as well as the local level; their understanding of the realities of implementing such priorities in practice; and the extent to which they consider youth engagement a priority.[52]

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[51] Caitlin Cahill, et al. *"Dreaming of…" Reflections on Participatory Action Research as a Feminist Praxis of Critical Hope*, 2010

[52] The Monrovia research team was not able to speak to representatives of all 12 institutions making up 91 percent of ODA funding to Liberia, and was limited in their ability to get appointments with higher-ranking government officials, civil society actors, and NGOs. This is attributable to several factors: time constraints; some donors did not have offices in Liberia; certain actors were unavailable to meet for this study. Another restriction was that despite the decision to keep identifying information anonymous with the hope of getting honest views from participating interviewees, the research team felt that some of the participants were reluctant to speak openly due to political limitations.

Themes and Subthemes

The following section outlines the primary findings of the project, contextualized and supported by statistical analysis and the stories of research participants from the field. The thematic organization of this section incorporates the American University researchers' preliminary understanding of engagement with impressions and feedback from their Liberian counterparts. In Phase One, the American University researchers developed seven themes, which were revisited by the Liberian researchers after conducting the field research. Together, the group categorized the priority issues they heard throughout their conversations into eight themes. The eight themes can be further categorized in two groups: Group A which includes the issues discussed most frequently and explicitly by Liberian youth, and Group B with issues less regularly mentioned (though no less significantly). The following sections will lead the reader on a guided tour of project findings peppered with illustrative accounts[53] relevant for the full spectrum of intended audiences.

The Eight Themes for Youth Engagement

Group A
Education
Health
Livelihood

Group B
Politics and Governance
Infrastructure
Peace and Security
Community and Culture
Family and Gender

[53] Testimony from the field is represented throughout the report and designated with a lavender box

Education

Education

"There is a big difference between educated and uneducated person — if you do not learn, you will either become criminal or prostitute."

-University Student, Maryland County

Out of the eight themes selected as critical to youth engagement, Liberian youth mentioned education the most. Education related issues were perceived as one of the most significant for youth across the country. This trend is mirrored in other report findings, such as USAID's *Youth Fragility Assessment*, which shows that young people frequently prefer to continue their education rather than pursue other professional options.[54] In contrast, not all organizations discussed education in interviews, though the ones that did often saw education as the best window to access the youth population. As opposed to many of the other themes, education is unique in that it primarily focuses on children and youth. Young people discussed several different aspects of education such as issues with school buildings, cost, teacher training and payment, as well as student desire and motivation.
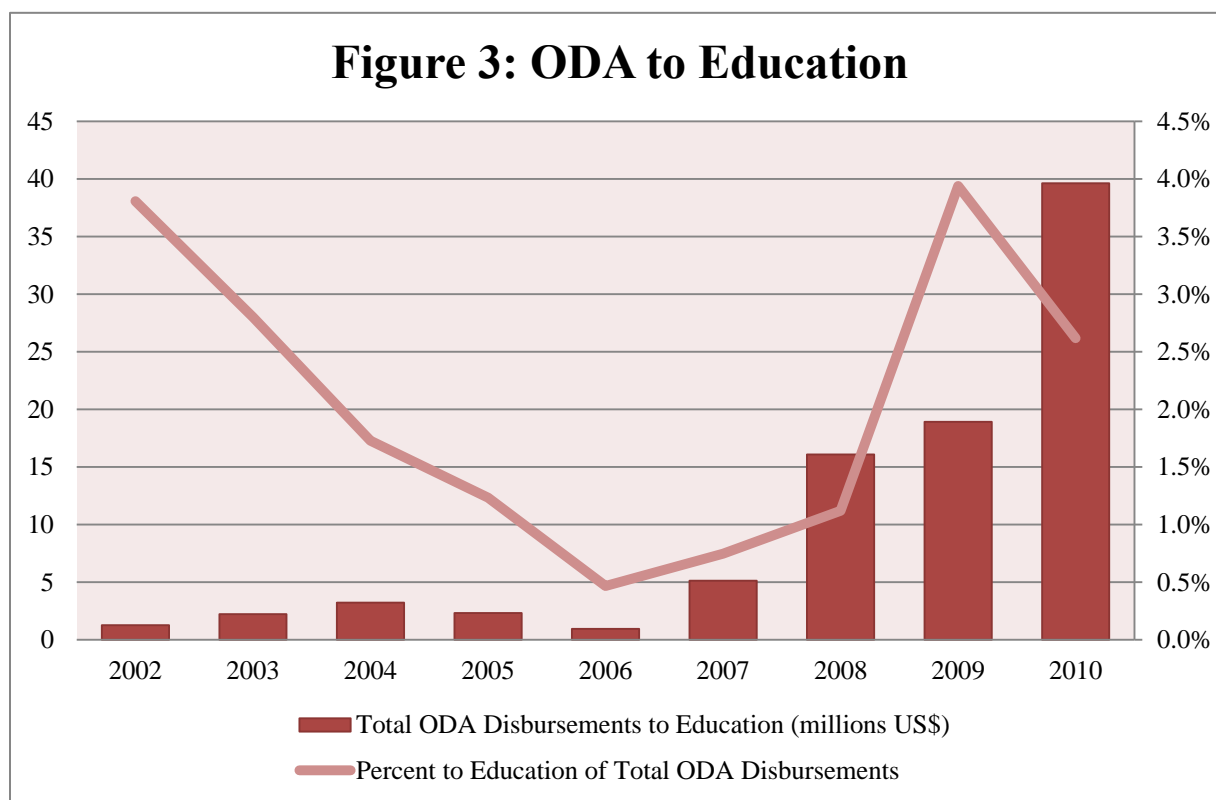
Source: OECD, 2012

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[54] Walker, Gary, et al., "Liberia Youth Fragility Assessment," *USAID*, Washington: April, 2009.
The survey asked urban youth that if granted one wish, what would the respondent choose between continuing/returning to school, getting a job, getting training, or leaving Liberia. The majority (53.8 percent) chose school. The next closest was to learn a trade at 17.3 percent.

Only 1.87 percent of ODA was specifically classified as education funding since 2002, which is less than what is designated to many other sectors that were not as high a priority to youth. Funding for education has increased considerably since 2007, however, which shows a burgeoning commitment to supporting the Liberian education system.

Table 1: ODA Disbursements to Education Subsectors (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Education, Level Unspecified	0.31	0.24	0.4	0.28	0.14	0.38	2.72	0.88	11.68	17.03
Basic Education	0.65	1.75	2.51	1.74	0.42	2.08	12.71	17.63	26.08	65.57
Secondary Education	0.3	0.19	0.25	0.19	0.28	2.64	0.44	0.32	0.83	5.44
Post-Secondary Education	0	0.04	0.06	0.11	0.1	0.02	0.21	0.08	1.04	1.66
Total ODA Disbursements to Education	*1.26*	*2.22*	*3.22*	*2.32*	*0.94*	*5.12*	*16.08*	*18.91*	*39.63*	*89.7*

Source: OECD, 2012

Motivation

Across Liberia, youth hold education in high regard and make personal sacrifices in order to further their education. From the 30-year-old taxi driver in Monrovia, who gave up his income to fulfill his lifelong dream of attending university, to the young woman in River Cess County, who walks hours to her high school every day, Liberian youth hope and dream for better education. Motivation is rarely the problem, rather access and quality are the strongest reasons cited for low enrollment and school attendance rates. As a 21-year-old motorbike rider in Fishtown, River Gee County said, *"This money I'm making if I don't have something in my head I can't do nothin' good for myself tomorrow — somebody can come blindfold me and take my money from me and then what do I have?… so this is why I want to go to school."* A young man in Henry Town, Gbarpolu County spoke of the way that he has put that motivation into action, saying,

> *I came here with nothing. I want to use this opportunity to appeal to other young people to get on their knees to also make it. If that guy can make it today, they can make it too because we all came here. Actually I came here with nothing…For you will see I was here, I make popcorn for older brother, I tie water, fix juice, [and] all the things you see in there I did all. I even tie charcoals.*

Access

Liberian youth overwhelmingly consider education a critical factor for youth engagement. And conversations with participants that delved into the topic highlighted a variety of intersecting sub-themes which are either encouraging or discouraging students from pursuing education. Preliminary statistical evaluations suggested marked improvements in Liberia's education sector since the end of the conflict in 2003. For example, pupil-teacher ratios decreased and youth (15-24) literacy rates increased significantly from 71.1 percent in 2004 to 75.6 percent in 2009.[55] Yet, as indicated in Table 2, while the proportion of people attending school has increased over time, there are significant disparities in attendance rates

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[55] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Custom Tables," accessed January, 12, 2012, http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF_Language=eng&BR_Topic=0.

across the population. Specifically, male youth living in urban areas appear to be attending school more than females and youth in rural areas, respectively.[56]

TABLE 2: Percentage of people who have never attended school, by sex, age, and locality

Age Group	Urban			Rural		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
15-24	4.9	12.7	9	16.8	36.2	27
25-34	10.1	30.8	22	32.7	66.3	51.6
35-54	20.5	46.3	33.8	38.2	74.9	57.4
55-64	31	63.2	46.5	58.2	90	73.7
65+	47.2	82.6	64.3	75.2	88.3	81.2

Source: Liberia Labor Force Survey, 2010

Infrastructure

The process to make primary education available to all Liberian children and youth began with the enactment of a new law in 2002.[57] As recently as 2011 President Sirleaf signed the Education Reform Act intended to further enforce the Free and Compulsory Education law.[58] Unfortunately, the development of education infrastructure is insufficient to fully realize this mandate.

Youth participants were adamant about the need and importance of attending school; however, they also consistently shared difficult and frustrating experiences regarding lack of access to educational opportunities. From youth in River Cess County who pointed to the existence of only one high school, to students in Gbarmu, Bong County, who spoke about the fact that their town's dilapidated school only offers a sixth grade education and is in dire need of reconstruction, Liberian youth listed physical barriers to education as the most challenging hurdle to continuing or attaining an education.

According to youth testimony, lack of infrastructure for higher education — such as senior high schools, vocational schools, and universities — regularly prevents young people from realizing their full academic potential. Primary education has been prioritized in Liberia and consequently, the construction of primary schools has far outpaced the construction of institutions of higher learning. Figure 4 details the imbalance of primary to secondary schools.

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[56] Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010, 16-17

[57] UNESCO, "The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education(ALE)," www.unesco.org, accessed January 18, 2012

[58] House Press Bureau, "House Votes to Pass New Education Law," http://legislature.gov.lr/content/house-votes-pass-new-education-law, accessed April 13, 2012.

Figure 4:

Number Of Public Schools by County and Level

County	Public Primary	Public Junior High	Public Senior High
Bomi	70	6	3
Bong	237	47	7
Grand Bassa	183	13	2
Grand Cape Mount	122	16	4
Grand Gedeh	106	23	6
Grand Kru	123	29	3
Lofa	235	42	7
Margibi	82	24	5
Maryland	116	26	6
Montserrado	184	67	24
Nimba	368	108	15
River Cess	98	5	1
Sinoe	158	36	2
River Gee	98	16	2
Gharpolu	109	14	3
National	**2289**	**472**	**91**

Source: 2008/09 Liberia National School Census Report

Additionally, the research team observed that schools were not evenly distributed throughout the communities or counties. For example, Pleebo and Harper cities in Maryland County have more high schools than the rest of the three counties in their zone altogether. This has led to a sense of injustice among young people and a rift between those who have easy access and those who do not.

Overcrowding
Recent data states that there is one teacher for every 24.26 students.[59] While this may be true on average, many youth reported that they constantly face overcrowded classrooms. In Ganta, Nimba County, for example, students reported as many as 120 students registered per class. In

[59] UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, 2008

Foyah, Lofa County, those numbers range from 105 to 150 — even when the students who are unable to complete the term are subtracted.

Distance

According to the 2010 Liberian Labor Force Survey, only 6 percent of youth aged 15-24 cited distance from school as a reason for not attending.[60] However, conversations with youth pointed to a very different reality. Students told researchers that they often walk long distances to get to school, especially if they do not have the option of boarding with a relative. These students may arrive to class late or with great difficulty, a factor affecting both attendance and attention. As a 20-year-old male stated, *"I live in a village far from here (2.5 hour walking distance); because I want to learn book, I make this sacrifice to achieve my goal."*

 Indeed, many students must walk for miles to reach the nearest school, and walk that distance again to return home. In one rural community in Nimba County, youth do not start attending primary school until they are strong enough to walk the three-hour round-trip journey each day, even if they are old enough to enroll. Distance as a barrier to education is a problem that stretches across county and zone lines.

Charles' Story

Charles is a 12th grade student. He goes to high school in Kanweaken, River Gee, a town far from his home. He only knows one person in town, but luckily for him he has a place to stay. Charles lives with his four brothers — all together in one room. Sometimes when they come home from school there is no food to eat. Often they share just one cup of rice and then sleep. A lot of the time they do not start the day ready to learn because, "you cannot study without food in your stomach, ya know?"

Of all the schools visited by the zonal team in Sackie and Beafini towns in Bomi County, none offered classes above a junior high level. Students are required to move to the county's capital city of Tubmanburg to attend senior high school. If further education is desired, post-secondary education is only available in Monrovia. For those who cannot afford the move, the alternative is to drop out and seek an income generating activity to support themselves and their families. Despite these challenges, most youth remain highly motivated to attend school. This sentiment was uniquely captured by the words of a research participant in Marry Camp, Bomi County:
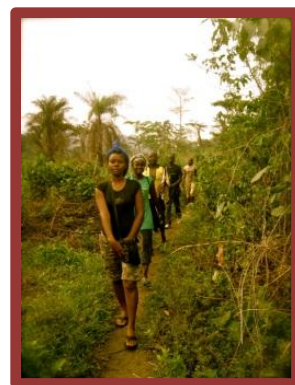
> *The moment students get inside the school buses to move from here right to that toilet house it can break down. You will get down from inside and walk; then when you walk to go to school and you are late, the teacher wants to punish you. That is*

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[60] Liberia Labor Force Survey Report, 2010

why you see some of the students are just deciding to quit except the ones that get strong mind they are forcing it and going. As for me, I am still attending yet…

Disabilities

Distance from school poses particular challenges for youth who are disabled. The 2008-09 National School Census Report of Liberia states that only 0.2 percent of high school students enrolled were reported as disabled or "differently abled" in response to the census questionnaire. Approximately 51 percent of the disabled demographic attended a public school, as opposed to a community, a private, or a mission school. A breakdown of reported senior high school disabilities by county is shown below in Table 3.[61]

Table 3: Number of Disabled Students in School by County

County	Visually Impaired	Hearing Impaired	Physically Handicappped	Mental/Psy chological	Total	% Female
Bomi	0	1	3	0	4	25%
Bong	2	2	14	0	18	39%
Grand Bassa	0	1	1	0	2	50%
Grand Cape Mount	1	0	1	0	2	50%
Grand Gedeh	0	0	0	0	0	-
Grand Kru	0	0	1	0	1	0%
Lofa	7	3	15	1	26	23%
Margibi	2	1	6	0	9	11%
Maryland	1	0	4	0	5	40%
Montserrado	14	6	24	3	47	38%
Nimba	4	3	12	1	20	30%
River Cess	0	0	0	0	0	-
Sinoe	1	0	2	0	3	0%
River Gee	1	1	6	0	8	38%
Gharpolu	0	1	0	0	1	0%
National	33	19	89	5	146	32%
% Share of Disabilities	23%	13%	61%	3%	100%	

Source: 2008/2009 Liberia School Census Report

> *Talking about Disabilities*
>
> *We entered Cestos High School and sat down with the group of four students. After learning that there is only one high school in River Cess County and many students walk for hours to get to school, a Liberian research partner asked, "Okay, say there is a person with disabilities, how they can go to school?"*

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[61] 2008/2009 National School Census Report, 60-62

The students stopped and thought for a moment. They said that most youth with disabilities find it hard to come to Cestos High School.

A tenth grade male responded, "Oh I remember my friend. In 2010, we have one of our brothers, and before the person reaching the campus find somebody pushing the wheel, and maybe they reach right after the first class time." He went on to explain that his friend who uses a wheelchair usually came to school late, and did not always have someone to help push his wheelchair.

The tenth grader felt bad for his friend's situation and started to wait in front of his house to help him get to school. But in general, "most of the children that are living with disabilities, they think not to come to the school because of the distance."

Resources

Liberian youth who attend school face the additional barrier of insufficient materials and resources. Due to a lack of textbooks, students are frequently forced to share books, or all must borrow the teacher's textbook in order to learn the curriculum. Insufficient access to textbooks was repeatedly cited as a reason for not completing assignments. Students perceive an abundance of resources in the capital. For example, some students in River Cess commented, *"this place is not like Monrovia; you can't find books here."* Indeed, there are wide disparities in the number of textbooks available across counties. Contrary to popular perception, while Montserrado County, where Monrovia is located, has a relatively low pupil-to-textbook ratio, it is higher than the pupil-to-textbook ratio in Grand Bassa, Lofa, Margibi, and Maryland counties.[62]

Nationally, the number of "core" (English Language, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) textbooks available in senior high schools increased by 45 percent from the 2007-08 school year to the 2008-09 school year. However, the impact of this was not uniform across the counties. While Bomi County saw a 388 percent increase in the number of textbooks available in their senior high schools, Bong County saw a 31 percent decrease. Table 4 shows the number of core textbooks declared available in senior high schools during the 2008-09 school year in terms of pupil-to-textbook ratios, as well as the percent change in textbook availability for the 2007-08 school year.

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[62] 2008/09 Liberia School Census Report, xxi

Table 4: Textbooks available at the Senior High School level during the 2008/2009 school year by county

County	Pupil to textbook ratio	% Change in number of textbooks between 2007/2008 and 2008/2009
Bomi	16	388%
Bong	18	-31%
Grand Bassa	7	17%
Grand Cape Mount	13	-27%
Grand Gedeh	15	264%
Grand Kru	249	-
Lofa	4	842%
Margibi	3	15%
Maryland	5	-24%
Montserrado	8	53%
Nimba	5	57%
River Cess	24	0%
Sinoe	18	150%
River Gee	-	-
Gharpolu	10	-
National	*7*	*45%*

Source: 2008/2009 Liberia National School Census Report

Affordability

The Sirleaf administration instituted a Free and Compulsory Primary Education Policy in Liberia, which has helped to increase enrollment by reducing public school fees.[63] Indeed, great strides have been taken by the government to improve access to education in the country and since the end of the war nearly $90 million (current USD) in ODA disbursements has been allocated to education. Still, government-sponsored schools appear to be insufficient and youth consistently stated cost as a hindrance to their enrollment and attendance. The Free and Compulsory Education Law does not apply to the approximately 21 percent of all schools and 34 percent of senior high schools[64] that are privately run. On the other hand, many of those who do attend public schools also referred to the cost.

Students enrolled in public and private school mentioned having to pay for uniforms, registration fees, exam fees, teacher fees, or even do work (such as cutting palm) on the teacher's plot during school hours. These excess fees charged in order to support non-payroll teachers (and sometimes just to raise more funds in schools) undermine the government's commendable declaration of free and compulsory primary education. A common phrase heard from students and out-of-school youth alike was, *"free is not free."*

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[63] Development Practitioners Forum: Impact of Liberia's Free and Compulsory Primary Education, http://www.devprac.org/2010/09/impact-of-the-liberias-free-and-compulsory-primary-education/, Accessed April 20, 2012

[64] 2008/2009 Liberia National School Census Report, xix-xx

The 2010 Liberian Labor Force Survey noted that one-third of youth 15-24 said that they have never attended school because they cannot afford schooling.[65] Liberian youth also discussed existing socioeconomic barriers such as the inability to pay school fees and the need to support their family financially. Many youth reported that they are forced to prioritize employment over education. As a young man in Barclayville, Grand Kru County put it, having only one functioning senior high school in the area and no employment opportunities causes many young people to *"drop out in the school going age… mainly causing the boys to languish in mining (gold) fields across the county while others can do farming."* All of these factors contribute to low enrollment in general, and support the logical correlation between regions with high rates of poverty and low enrollment rates.[66]

> ### *The Rubber Farmer*
>
> *"It is better to be in business than educated," said a rubber farmer, in Tappita, Nimba County.*
>
> *For his family, it's better for him to work as a rubber farmer. This contrasts with the benefit his wife will receive from her education because she can use school to improve her employment opportunities. For the farmer, to pursue further education would cost the family on multiple levels. It would require he forgo his current pay without the promise of an improved financial situation.*

Many youth engage in activities such as motorbike riding, fishing, carpentry, prostitution, or working in gold mines so that they can afford to attend school. These youth are self-supported; many work to pay their school fees, and view these jobs simply as a means to reach that goal. In Cotton Tree, Margibi County, young motorbike riders spoke about women in their town who engage in prostitution at night so that they can afford to go to school. Clearly, young people place such a high enough value on education that they are willing to put their bodies at risk.

In Kakata, Margibi County, the zonal team spoke to a group of young men in the market who were grinding cassava leaves. They sell the leaves and use the money to send their children to school. Some of them are still high school students themselves and say that they go to school at night. They express a fear of not being able to find another job that will allow them to support their family, while also continuing to pay their school fees. One of the men put it matter-of-factly: *"Wondering if I go looking for different job I will get a money making job to support me and my family and do other things for me. I can get my school fees from here so I am."* Many young men share the deep-seated obligation to support one's family.
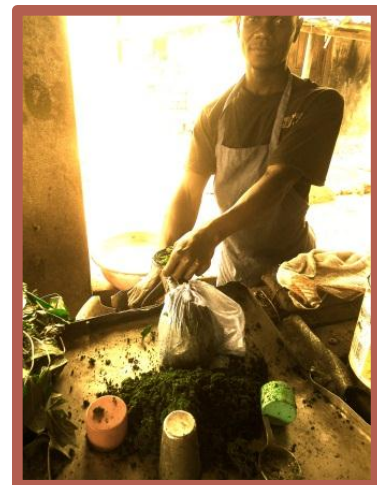
Likewise, youth are conflicted between a desire to attend school and responsibilities on family farms. When youth engage in farming, it takes all day and they do not feel that they have time to study. Additionally, when teachers are in school for the day they are unable to take care of their

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[65] Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010, 16-17
[66] The World Bank/ The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Liberia Education Country Status Report: Out of the Ashes — Learning Lessons from the Past to Guide Education Recovery in Liberia*, December 2010, 143

farms either and in a few cases even require students to help. Students also realize that if options for work after they graduate from high school are severely limited or nonexistent, then there is no need to complete their studies. In particular, a youth in Grand Kru County stated, *"I am a high school graduate... but now I am brushing. For why I went to school? And now my little brother he see me and he want to drop school to go mine gold with his friends."*

Scholarships

Although the government has started to take steps to improve student assistance, youth frequently mentioned a lack of available scholarships. In addition, scholarships that are available usually go to someone who has contacts or hails from a specific tribe or group, further keeping poor youth in rural areas from pursuing their education. A 23-year-old male in Weala, Margibi County, who dropped out of school because he did not earn enough money from his part-time job, explains:

> *My brother, I can beat blocks [make concrete blocks for a construction company] before I get my school fees. Now, I out of school. Now they are doing fifth period test and I am out. We ask for scholarship from the representative of the district, and sometimes we write our application but sometimes they do it like who know you.*

The research team also spoke with young people on the other side of the spectrum. Students who receive scholarships expressed their gratitude for the opportunities that they enjoy; however, they also showed concern for their classmates who have not had the same opportunity. A student received a scholarship to attend Cestos High School in River Cess County and will have all of her university fees paid for, because of a scholarship *"from the president and Vision 2030."* However, her classmates without the same "upper hand" expressed anxiety for their educational futures.

Additionally, singling out students to receive scholarships and leaving others out, creates friction between youth. Students who receive scholarships are sometimes envied and looked at with disdain by their classmates who do not receive the same financial assistance. In Tienii, Grand Cape Mount, a scholarship recipient was publicized throughout town for her achievement. However, ultimately the young girl decided to drop out of school because she could no longer handle the harassment and embarrassment.

Social Barriers

In addition to the aforementioned obstacles preventing Liberian youth from accessing education, social and cultural barriers can also play a role. As the Liberia Labor Force survey reveals, family can also pose a major barrier to education with two-thirds of adults aged 55-64 stating that they never attended school because their family did not allow them to pursue an education. Although still alarmingly high, this number has significantly decreased with approximately only one third of young people aged 15-24 who have never attended school citing family as a barrier to education.[67]

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[67] 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey Report 18

Furthermore, across Liberia, there is an ongoing problem of female youth dropping out of school due to the social stigma related to teenage pregnancy. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy inhibit teenage girls from continuing or returning to their education. Although it is not illegal for pregnant girls to continue pursuing their education in Liberia it is against the rules at many private schools. Expectant mothers are often encouraged to leave by school administrators or they drop out because they are embarrassed to go to school for fear of being teased by their peers and teachers. It is worth emphasizing that a few schools, most notably in River Gee and Nimba counties, have recently begun to encourage young pregnant women and mothers to continue their education.

Quality

Many young people expressed a desire to attend school, but even those with access to school were not always adequately served. Even if a school is fully equipped with modern amenities, if the information is not disseminated well, then the learning outcomes will be limited. Some communities complimented their teachers by saying, *"they are teaching"* or *"they are trying."* However, many more young people throughout the country discussed experiences at school where poor quality of education was evident.

> *Tina's Story*
>
> *Tina graduated high school in 2007 and her ambition is to become a nurse. Unfortunately, her parents cannot help her, which is why she stays home although she wants to go to Monrovia for school. She wants to apply for a scholarship but says they only go to people from the city.*
>
> *Her friends describe the town's school. The community built the structure but there are no chairs, no cement, and the floor is not covered. Perhaps more importantly, there are no teachers so when the children go to school they end up just playing soccer.*
>
> *"There are billboards in town and on the road telling people that they should go to school... but there's nothing! There is a school building, but there IS no school!"*
>
> *"Tell me, how I can become nurse?"*
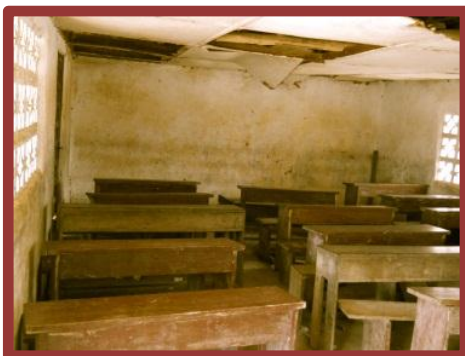
Young people identified insufficient contact time between teachers and students as one of the major barriers to quality education in Liberia. Many schools in the communities visited by the research team did not have enough teachers to meet the demand of the students. This shortfall is two-fold in that it both increases the pressure on the teachers who are at school while limiting the number of young citizens who are learning. A contributing issue in some cases is that teachers from Monrovia assigned to a rural school, for example in Gbarpolu County, do not have organized accommodation. If the recipient community cannot or does not want to house the teacher, it leads them to return to Monrovia. Meanwhile students in Salayea, Lofa County, wondered if their teacher would be in the class or if the room would be so overcrowded that there was nowhere to sit. Couple this uncertainty with long walks to school, and the sustained motivation to attend class is even more remarkable.

Many teachers are not properly equipped to deliver the needed information because they have received little or no training in appropriate pedagogy. Youth complained about the lack of qualification of the teachers, considering it one of the factors why students drop out. As seen in figure 5 below, 61 percent of public senior high school teachers have been trained but not necessarily at the appropriate level. As few as 27 percent of trained teachers at the senior high school level hold a "B" certificate, which is intended to train teachers at the junior high school level. Likewise, only 21 percent hold a "C" certificate, which is meant to train teachers at the primary level. This means that only about half of the 61 percent of "trained" public senior high school teachers have actually gone through programs that could qualify them to teach at that level.[68]

Figure 5: Level of training of „trained" teachers teaching at the Senior High School Level
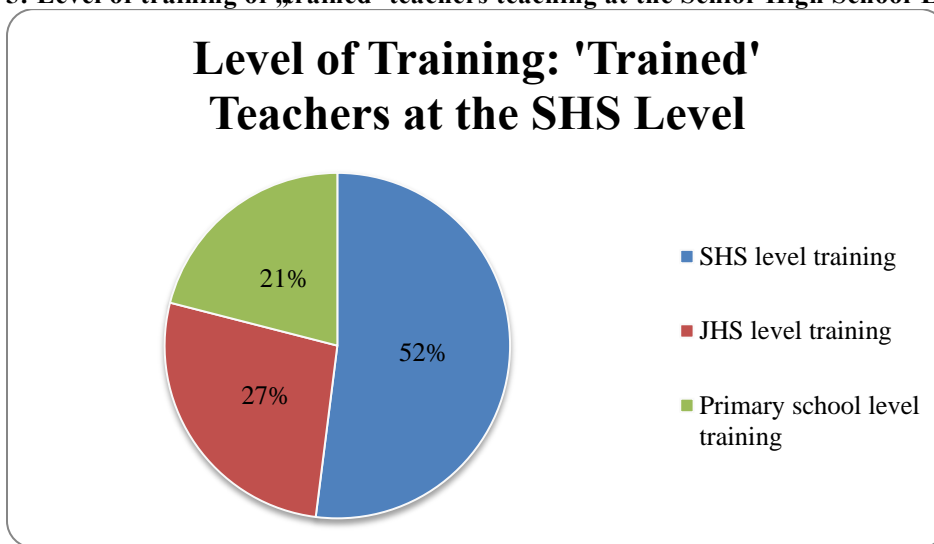
Source: 2008/2009 Liberia National School Census Report

Teaching is a challenging profession in any context. This challenge is exacerbated in many parts of Liberia, where a single class contains a wide range of ages and abilities, and students may have very little parental or economic support. Teachers' skills are particularly lacking in the advanced subjects. While students in a community might want to learn a certain subject at a higher level, there might not be a competent person to teach them. Additionally, in some border towns like Foyah, Lofa County, students commented on language barriers in the classroom. French-speaking teachers were hired specifically to address the qualification gap in advanced subjects. They did not speak fluent English, however, so were unable to make themselves understood by the students. Inability to effectively communicate with students in the classroom — an unquestionably integral part of teaching — results in unmistakable frustration among the young people in these communities.

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[68] 2008/2009 National School Census Report, xviii

Throughout the country, young and old alike bemoaned the fact that students are passing through each year of school, but are still functionally illiterate after completing secondary school. This exemplifies that the needs in education are not purely structural. When young people are able to get to school, they are thirsty for productive knowledge. Unfortunately, as one respondent stated, there are *"No positive outcomes in the learning process*." This problem is not new and has not been ignored. Teachers are increasingly undergoing training. In fact, young people spoke of friends taking advantage of training opportunities in Picnicess, Grand Kru, (*"three to four teachers are in Webo, River Gee County undergoing training"*) and in Zorzor, Lofa at the teacher training college. While this is a step in the right direction, it only begins to address one aspect of a complex issue.

Education access and quality are also critically linked to teacher compensation. Local leaders and students in Lofa County expressed frustration at the lack of teachers on payroll in their community. It is admirable that community members dedicate their time to teach young people in schools where there are no teachers, but this stop-gap effort poses its own complications. While this can be problematic due to lack of proper training, it also fosters an environment where volunteer teachers are required to raise funds for their own survival.

Teacher payment issues are not limited to those not on the payroll. Even for those officially registered as teachers, there are additional challenges. Young people in the counties talked about teachers missing class for many days because they have to go to Monrovia to receive their salary. This process takes time in the commute and delays in the delivery of payment at the Monrovia office. Likewise, one young woman relayed a common complaint saying, *"government teachers are not taking their job seriously when they are not paid on time*." The lack of banks and a smooth payment system ultimately interrupts contact time with students, impeding their learning and frustrating teachers.

The government should be commended for increasing educator salaries, but improved respect for the teaching profession will take dedicated time and effort. No youth said that they wanted to be teachers despite offering a wide variety of professions that they hoped to pursue. And youth participants and research partners both described how teachers have traditionally held a low position in Liberian society, which is still reflected in perceptions today. Increasing teacher pay will help change this view by making compensation more in line with the significance of the work. The vast majority of young people did not know that teachers' pay was set to increase.

While students value education, they do not necessarily see the desired results of that process exemplified through their peers. For one, students discussed being deterred from attending school by large failure rates in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exam, a standardized test given to all graduating 12th graders. This was especially true for those wanting to pursue scientific subjects. Similarly, students in many of the counties discussed their perception that the education they receive is inferior to that obtained in Monrovia and neighboring West African countries. This reduces student motivation by shattering the hope that successful students will be able to compete for work. Many youth, especially in rural areas, mentioned that they do not see education as a path to more productive employment, but rather a means to learn a few basic skills.

School-Family Relations

Parent Teacher Associations

There is a general lack of communication between schools and parents as well as the school and youth. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) system aligned with schools has the potential to contribute to the education system, but was also a source of frustration for many youth. The PTA is occasionally responsible for charging fees, which is important in order to fill the gap left by lack of government capacity. The power held by parents to charge fees and make decisions is problematic for self-supporting students who then do not have a voice. Some students told of staying away from school because they felt a social obligation to pay the PTA fees, which they could not afford.

> *A Conversation about the PTA*
>
> **Young man:** *Sometimes we can be 105-115 a class…at registration…but certain conditions come and you see some students drop back…Because of money.*
> **American Researcher:** *But government school — is it expensive?*
> **Liberian Researcher:** *How much y'all pay money, no?*
> **Young man:** *We have something called the PTA. That is compulsory to do so. Because there are some teachers they not all of them on government pay. They just volunteer themselves to be helping us as they young brothers and sisters so they are not on government pay. So the PTA will collect the pay and give it to the administration.*
> **American Researcher:** *But the PTA, that's for parent teacher association?*
> **Young man:** *Ok, that is good.*
> **American Researcher:** *So the parents are paying or you are paying?*
> **Young man:** *Our parents pay.*
> **American Researcher:** *I see, and if the parents cannot pay the PTA, then they do not come to school?*
> **Young man:** *They will not allow you to go to class. You will be embarrassed. Some of us are self-support and we have to cut palm clean you see to pay for it...*

The PTA should serve as a support organization, and therefore it needs more student influence to represent those who are supporting themselves. For example, in a conversation with community leaders in rural Bong County, the youth leader was not acknowledged or asked to speak during a 45-minute conversation regarding youth. Instead the PTA Chairman was identified as the resident expert.

Parents are occasionally frustrated with schools and what they are teaching their children. For example, some parents have criticized lessons on child rights. While educating young people on their rights and responsibilities is a critical part of the curriculum, children are using what they learn about human rights against their parents. Some parents in the counties echoed what one donor representatives characterized as students "*abusing the human rights campaign*." This is symptomatic of the poor implementation of the curriculum and limited interaction between schools and families. It is possible that teachers are passing on specific parts of the curriculum that NGOs have prioritized, and not getting to other material for any number of reasons. When a subject such as rights is not balanced with responsibilities, let alone other material, then the community can come to resent the school. Without proper communication between families and school officials, schools cannot have their full impact.

> ### *Jimmy's Story*
>
> *Jimmy is a 35-year-old man. He has never been married. He has no children. His biggest regret is falling behind on his education which, by his own admission, was "interrupted by the war."*
>
> *When he was presented with the opportunity to begin working with a radio program at the end of the war, he opted to make money to support his family rather than return to school. Not having a university degree is a sore spot for Jimmy — "I feel as though I will never catch my colleagues."*
>
> *He is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree and appears to be extremely motivated to complete it.*

The disparate ages of students are a visible consequence of the 14-year civil war. Many young people missed years of schooling, and now they struggle to assimilate into the classroom. The older students often do not want to go through the system, year by year, because they are more developed socially and have already acquired other skills. Younger students are daunted by the older students. If they are using an overcrowded classroom, then it is often the younger students who are intimidated into not attending. According to the most recent National School Census Report, during the 2008-09 school year, 59 percent of students in primary school were older than the official primary school age.[69] At the high school level, 92 percent of students in Grade 10 were above the official school age, 90 percent of students in Grade 11 were above the official school age, and 88 percent of students in Grade 12 were above the official school age.[70]

Older students are more likely to seek non-formal education in order to gain skills that they can use to support themselves and their families, which include apprenticeships offered by local small businesses. Stakeholders and donors also expressed a desire to access non-formal education as they see it as a necessary intervention at the nexus between education and post-war reintegration.

> ### *Three Brothers*
>
> *I was standing on the side of the road waiting for my research partner to run an errand. The road was busy. It was the main drag in the town and the only dusty channel to go to, or from, the market on market day. I stood there, thinking to myself, 'how can I possibly capture someone's attention to have a conversation in this busy and charged atmosphere?' I quickly found out that the answer is simple: just be you!*
> *"Hey white woman! What are you doin?" came a nervous, giggly inquiry from a couple of teenage boys in soccer uniforms.*
>
> *"Waiting!" I said exasperatedly. Then I thought ... "Actually I'm here in Liberia talking to young people about their lives. Do you wanna talk to me?"*
>
> *A Hesitation. A side glance thrown between the boys.*

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[69] 2008/2009 Liberia National School Census Report, 22
[70] 2008/2009 Liberia National School Census Report, 56

Then…"Ok, yeah. But it is loud here. We be much better behind the house. Come with us, yeah?"

As we began walking, I began talking. With each sentence that came out of their mouths, I was quickly realizing that this was a story I would never forget.

It turned out that they are brothers, raised by their mother. They have not seen, or heard from, their father since the war — twelve years ago, they think… they can't seem to come to a consensus between them. As they continue to discuss, it comes out that their father was injured during the war and they think he went to Monrovia to be treated, but… "He never came home."

There is no school in their village, so to pursue their education, they moved here to Foyah. They have no family here. 'I know what that's like,' I think to myself. But then the next part of their story catches me off guard…

"We approached a woman in the market. People told us that she takes on student boarders."

They explained their story to her. She offered to take them in free of charge and give them a space to sleep and study. "She is kind, if she has extra food, she can give to us sometime, but she has her own children and other things."

"One day we went with some guys in town to a barber shop…"
As they continued to explain how they had taken a traditional offering of oil, kola nuts, and a chicken so that the barber might agree for them to learn how to cut hair in his shop… I was amazed by the tenacity of the young men standing before me.

So now the older brother cuts hair and takes on agricultural contracts as they pop up just to sustain their school fees and to eat. And as if that wasn't impressive enough, he and his brothers walk eight hours to their village every weekend to deliver food and money to their house (their mother).

I was lost in the eyes of a boy who had become a man without the presence of a father, dependent on the kindness of a stranger and his own ingenuity. I found myself overcome with inspiration as he continued to speak very eloquently about "the generational divide," and the importance of "taking care of the future."

'Man, do I have something to learn from these boys!' I thought, as we said our goodbyes and went on our separate paths; them to theirs… and me to mine.

Vocational Training

Conversations with youth clearly indicated a desire for vocational schools, and training to teach and test marketable skills. Youth argued that these types of technical opportunities are currently inadequate outside Monrovia. Youth who do not finish high school and want to pursue technical school may or may not find alternative education. One young girl expressed her disillusionment saying, "*I am plaiting hair only. There is no vocational school for us to develop ourselves [more].*" Youth referenced computer skills, mechanics, and electronics as valid and important

technical skills that they would like to develop. When there is a computer school available, students take a particularly keen interest and take advantage of the opportunity. A 25-year-old male in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, a senior student at Bassa High School, wants to supplement his education with what he views as marketable skills for his future. In his opinion, there are some young people who graduate from college, but do not have skills that are needed by employers, so it is hard for them to get jobs. He desperately wants to enroll in computer classes.

Overall, only 14.2 percent of all persons 15 and older have received any sort of vocational training (VT), with more males (18.7 percent) than females (10.2 percent) completing VT. The largest amount of VT training has been in computers (12.8 percent), followed by tailoring (11.1 percent).[71]

Student conversations indicated a nuanced understanding of the importance of gaining new skills. They feel empowered by new opportunities that come from training, however it can also lead to frustration if there are no jobs available. In Cestos City, River Cess County, the group encountered an abundance of unemployed male youth. The primary concern was the availability of a women's-only vocational school that offers sewing, baking, and hairdressing courses. Although the women at the school are happy to have this opportunity, the young males in town wish they had a school that they could attend. A woman currently enrolled at the vocational school said:

I'm much happy for it because it can help me in future. Before I came to school here, I was at home doing nothing, just having children. [The school is for girls only] Because the boys can help themselves, but we do not do to help ourselves. [Researcher asked if they feel that boys should be allowed to learn in the school] The boys can learn, but on the side.

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[71] 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey Report, 21

Figure 6: Percentage distribution of vocational subjects studied
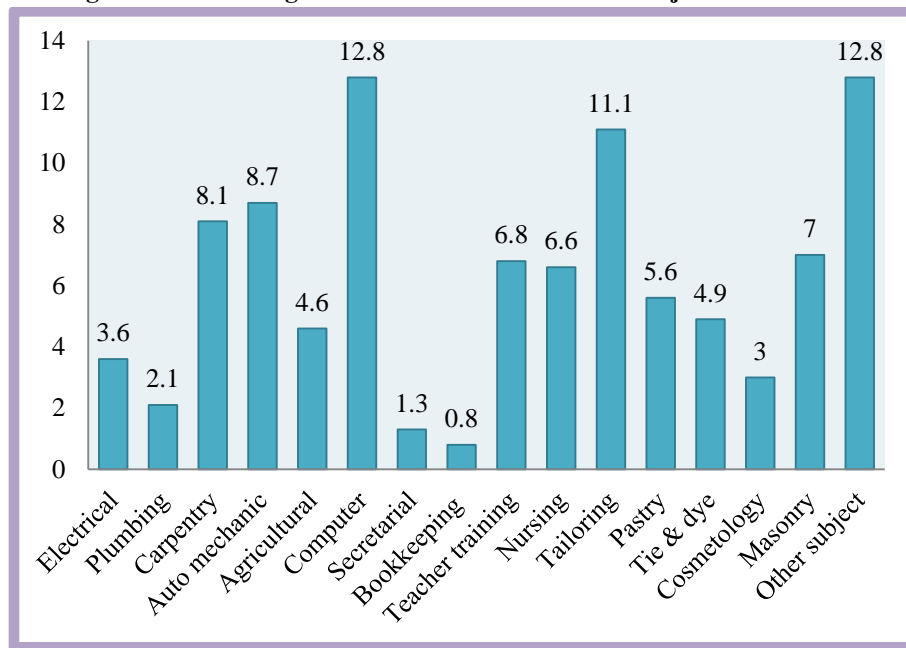
Source: 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey Report

Youth understand the value and importance of vocational schools, especially in counties where there is a lack of high schools. However there needs to be a balance in providing a safe space for young women to gain skills, along with providing opportunities for males. This balance is important in order to keep one gender from feeling marginalized, as well as offering technical training to both genders in vocations that are sustainable and marketable.

A 28-year-old female in Wakas Town, Grand Bassa County, pointed to the need for technical schools to not only provide training for youth who want marketable skills, but also to address older youth who did not attain their education due to the war and feel that they are too old to start their education. She stated: "*We no got no junior no senior high school here, for our small small sisters and children to go there. We don't even have school to learn trade here, because some of us are big big now to go to elementary school."*

Youth Engagement & Education

- Youth want to be in school
- Access to education is limited by insufficient school infrastructure and financial barriers
- The quality of education must be improved to continue youth engagement in education
- Relevant vocational schooling is a way to support youth engagement in education and employment
- Donor funding for education is increasing but remains relatively low

Education Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various aspects of education critical to their engagement in this sector and the rest of society. While many of these issues are already well known by Liberians, policy-makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- More teachers with at least a "B" level Certificate
- Better access to quality teacher training facilities
- Improved incentives for teachers (salaries, benefits, accommodations)
- Improved gender parity of students and educators, especially at the secondary school level
- Teaching of critical thinking and problem solving skills in the classroom
- Localized teacher payment systems
- Channels through which teachers and students can give each other feedback
- Increased access to secondary education as well as vocational training with special consideration for marginalized youth such as people with disabilities
- Properly equipped schools with necessary supplies such as desks, chalk boards, books, etc.

A short-term approach to engage more youth in improving the education system is to establish a feedback mechanism for students to communicate their needs and ideas to teachers. Improved channels of communication enhance education quality by encouraging community participation and support. However, it is important to note that such feedback would not impact educator's pay or professional standing.

A longer-term approach to engaging youth would be to attract more young high school and college graduates to the teaching profession. This would necessitate a multi-tiered approach. Economic incentives in the form of scholarships for study could be offered to enable more youth to enter the field. To retain teachers and improve their standing in society, respectable salaries, benefits, and housing (if applicable) should be provided. Additionally, public awareness campaigns could be used to improve social perceptions of educators.

Health

Health

Josiah's Story

One day Josiah was walking down a rural path leading back to his village from a faraway town when he saw a motorbike stopped up ahead.

Coming closer, he realized it was being used as an ambulance to transport a pregnant woman to the nearest clinic. The woman was crying. The motorbike had broken down trying to ride up the steep hill.

Josiah helped the driver push the motorbike because it was too heavy a task for one man on his own. Between the two of them, they managed to restart the bike.

As we walked away, he wondered, 'what could have happened if I hadn't been there right then?'

Since the end of the conflict, Liberia has seen health indicators steadily improve.[72] Life expectancy, for example, increased from 45.96 years in 2000 to 55.48 years in 2009. Similarly, maternal mortality has gone down, and access to sanitation and water has improved. While such progress reflects great strides in health care,[73] progress in many other health-related sectors is very slow and overall, the condition of health remains extremely poor.[74] Common themes youth discussed include barriers to accessing quality health care, multiple causes of sickness in their communities, and a need for improved health care for pregnant women.

While the Government of Liberia (GoL) spends 17.2 percent of its governmental expenditure on health, 47 percent of the total health expenditure is derived from external sources. In terms of health care services, the government covers approximately 40 percent of the cost. In 2009 the per-capita government expenditure on health was about US$12 per person (calculated at the average exchange rate). While this is a considerable increase since 2003, it is about a quarter of the average spent in the rest of Africa.[75]

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[72] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Liberia"
http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBR.html accessed January 25, 2012
[73] Ibid..
[74] World Health Organization (WHO) "Liberia" http://www.who.int/gho/countries/lbr/en/, accessed February 26, 2012
[75] WHO "Global Health Expenditure Database,",
http://apps.who.int/nha/database/StandardReport.aspx?ID=REP_WEB_MINI_TEMPLATE_WEB_VERSION&COUNTRYKEY=84609, accessed February 26, 2012

Figure 7: ODA to Health

Legend:
Total ODA Disbursements to Health (millions US$)
Percent to Health of Total ODA Disbursements
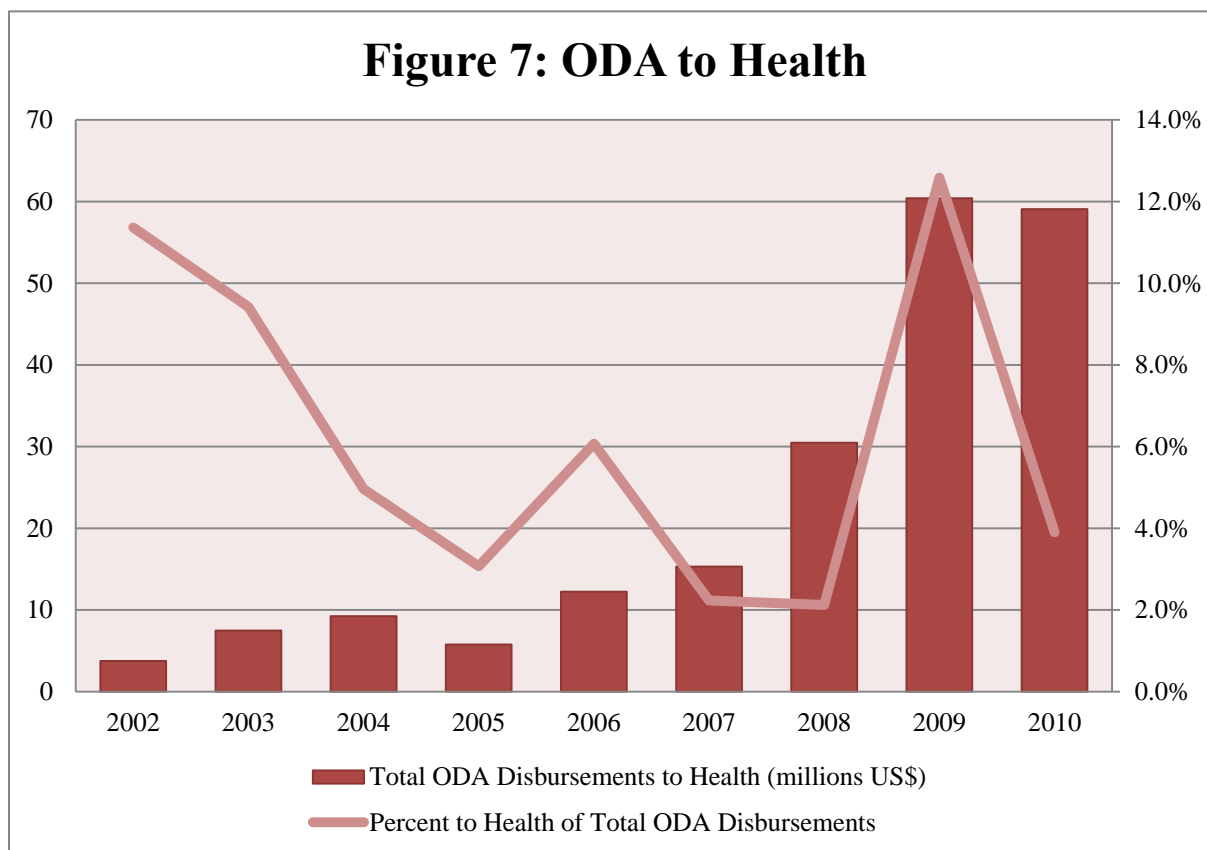
Source: OECD, 2012

Only 4.24% of ODA funding since 2002 was specifically designated for health, but health funding did double in consecutive years after 2007. Health funding accounted for only 3.9 percent of major donor assistance in 2010 however, which did not reach the values represented in many other sectors.

Table 5: ODA Disbursements to Health Subsectors (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Health, General	0	0	0.72	1.15	2.64	3.14	10.3	15.76	12.8	46.51
Basic Health	2.95	6.07	6.5	2.63	5.69	3.57	8.7	28.21	21.74	86.06
Population Pol./Prog. & Reproductive Health	0.81	1.4	2.03	2	3.9	8.61	11.47	16.45	24.54	71.21
Total ODA Disbursements to Health	3.76	7.47	9.25	5.78	12.23	15.31	30.48	60.41	59.08	203.77

Source: OECD, 2012

Access

Youth across Liberia pointed to the difficulty of accessing healthcare services. They consistently bemoaned the lack of basic healthcare facilities such as hospitals and clinics, as well as a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. Many youth felt that poor health posed a barrier to

other critical elements of engagement such as employment and education. Indeed, "If youth are frequently ill, they are often absent from school or work. As a result, they risk repeating grades or dropping out of school altogether. For those who work, illness means loss of income."[76] For many youth, this was not simply a matter of their individual health. Young Liberians also actively care for, or share the responsibility of caring for elderly relatives, neighbors, and children. In that capacity, poor access to health care and health facilities is not a single dimensional barrier.

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The Caretaker

He sat on the cement blocks piled under the tree, staring into the night sky, and confided in me that he is the sole caretaker of his elderly mother who suffers from the after effects of a stroke she had 3 years before.

He shared with me that he came home one day to find feces covering the floor of his living room… "What to do? She's my mother…"

</div>

Healthcare Facilities

Youth across all fifteen counties recognize the scarcity of clinics and hospitals as a barrier to good health and therefore full engagement. In Barclayville, Grand Kru County, young people explained that there were no hospitals or clinics in the town or surrounding areas. Medical referrals are made to either Harper or River Cess by means of canoes or cars, with the process of transportation so tedious that the patient often dies. In Neegbah Town in River Cess County, where there is no easily accessible hospital or clinic, people must travel across the Cestos River in canoes in order to access the clinic in Cestos City. This poses an even bigger problem in Neegbah given that many residents do not swim as many of them fear the water.

When healthcare facilities are far away, patients all too often have few options to reach them. In Gbarnga, Bong County, when there is an emergency, calling for an ambulance is often very difficult given the instability of cell phone networks in rural areas. In Konia, Lofa County, ambulances must always be paid before taking a sick person to the hospital. As one youth in Gbarpolu, Bong County put it, *"[M]otorbike ambulance is not an ambulance; if we have ambulance in this district lot of patient will survive in this district!"*

In Big Swen, Grand Kru County, residents often do not even have access to a motorbike, and similar to residents of River Cess County, are forced to use hammocks to carry people to the nearest clinic. Given that this process frequently takes hours, patients often die along the way. However, even communities in central areas are often far from a hospital. In a small village, a young woman explains that although the town is on a main road and many NGOs and government officials pass through, there is no hospital. If somebody is sick, they have to walk

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[76] USAID "Liberia Youth Fragility Assessment," 20

for 90 minutes to the government hospital. She pondered, *"Why would a town that all the international NGOs know about suffer from this kind of situation? [...] it's like the government has completely forgotten about [us]…"*

Because healthcare facilities are scarce, available clinics are often overcrowded, posing a further barrier to healthcare. A group of youth in a rural area of Nimba County pointed to an impressive clinic, operated by a well-known and respected NGO. While they are happy to have the facility, they explain that due to the availability of healthcare, people come from all over Nimba to get services, thus making access to nurses, treatment, and medication difficult.

Youth in Tappita, Nimba County pointed to a successful public-private partnership, which allows children to be treated free of charge at a hospital that was built by a foreign embassy. While this leads some youth to hold positive perceptions, many across the country are frustrated with the health system. Youth said medicine scarcity and high costs combined with the effects of corruption reduces their access to treatment. Many believe that hospital and clinic workers resell drugs provided by the government or NGOs in their personal stores. In Johnsonville, Montserrado County, a respondent stated, *"Health centers are present in communities but health workers are not paid regularly so they have started taking money from patients [20 LD] for services rendered."* Similarly, at a university in Maryland County, another respondent discussed how poorer youth are unable to receive care because they are unable to offer bribes for medical services.

> *Attention is only given to few people in the hospital. Although in Liberia people say things are free, but nothing is actually free in this country…they usually take bribes at the hospital. This is affecting youth in this community because not all the youth have money to bribe for medical service.*

In one village, as evidenced in the account given below, women were fined for giving birth in the village rather than delivering at the government clinic. Furthermore, until the family paid the fine, the children could not receive treatment of any kind at the clinic. It is unclear whether this is a policy that attempts to improve maternal and infant health or whether this is a corruption scheme.

Birth on the Road

When you leave Voinjama, Lofa County and drive down a long dirt road, past a clinic, over a makeshift bridge, and under a fallen tree, you will arrive in a small village where you will be greeted by many smiling faces. People will proudly show off their primary school, but will explain that they are a long distance from many government services, including a two-hour walk along the road to the nearest clinic.

One young man recounted to two Liberian researchers (Mohammed and George) the big news from the night before, calmly at first, but with increasing frustration: "A woman gave birth on the road last night." She had gone into labor in the middle of the night, so per usual, her

husband put her in a hammock and with the help of three other family members had begun to carry her to the clinic… but they only made it as far as the fallen tree before she gave birth.

"But the baby was fine? And the mother is okay?" they asked nervously.

"Yes, yes, but… she did not born the baby at the clinic, so now her husband has to pay fine."

'Wait. Did he just say they have to pay a fine, I must have misunderstood'
George thought.

Another man, a young man, jumped into the conversation to explain further: "They [the clinic] will fine you — 1,500 dollars! My own wife delivered on the road… It always happens — we are suffering"

"Who are you paying it to?" Mohammed asked in disbelief.

"We don't know…we not agree to it."

"What happens if you don't pay?"

"We are scared… If you don't pay that money… you can't get vaccine there. If you go there for medicine, you can't get medicine; til you pay that fine… you force yourself to pay it."

On the ride out of the village, our entire team (Liberians and Americans), sat in complete shock. Could this be true? Could a woman, a family, be charged money by a government clinic for having a baby in an emergency situation? As if it had somehow been in her control? L$1500 … that is the equivalent of US$20! More than some Liberians earn in an entire year!

"This too is Liberia," said one of the Liberian researchers with a solemn tone, while shaking his head.

Trained Professionals

Exacerbating the shortage of medical facilities and medicine is the dearth of trained health professionals. Indeed, with one doctor and 27 nurses per 100,000 people, Liberia's health-professionals-to-person ratio lies well below the regional average.[77] Youth respondents consistently mentioned failure to receive proper bedside care from nurses and lack of trust in health staff. In Tappita, Nimba County, one respondent reported, *"Nurses are very rude"* relaying an incident in which a nurse had forced a severely ill patient to clean up his own vomit before receiving treatment. Youth responded that since they do not trust the health staff, they are less likely to seek medical attention. Youth also spoke about nurses asking pregnant women for bribes, discrimination against prisoners, and patients being required to cut grass in front of hospitals in order to get appointments.

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[77] World Health Organization, "Liberia: health profile", April 2011, accessed February 16, 2012

Water and Sanitation

Youth consistently pointed to poor water and sanitation quality as barriers to health. Overall,

access to improved water has increased slowly since the war years (from 65 percent in 2000 to 68 percent in 2008).[78] Some bemoaned having to go to a nearby creek for water, which they know leads to diarrhea and other diseases. And many pointed to a lack of water pumps or wells in their towns. One young woman in a rural community in Nimba pointed to how having only one pump in the town affected the population. Starting around two o'clock, women get in line and wait. *"[By] five o'clock conflict will erupt among them, the women. So these are some of the major major concerns."* In Wakas Town, Grand Bassa County, youth respondents pointed to a water pump that an NGO built years ago, but had recently broken down. When the youth respondents were probed about why the town did not work together to fix the pump, they did not know. Those with water pumps were thankful and recognized the improvement in health. But all too often there were broken pumps with no one to fix them, rendering them useless.

Many youth also complained about a lack of proper toilets. The proportion of the total population that is served with an improved sanitation facility has improved only slightly from 14 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008.[79] Many rural youth despaired at the diseases that come from using the "bush" as a toilet, and were ashamed that their community was not clean. Observing toilets in communities was rare. Meanwhile one village in Bong County, had a new community toilet, which was almost never used because residents were not comfortable with it.

HIV/AIDS

Disease prevalence in Liberia is about the same as the rest of the West African region. The HIV/AIDS rate, however, has decreased from 3.3 percent in 2000 to 1.5 percent in 2009. The HIV/AIDS rate for youth 15-24 is currently reported as 0.5 percent.[80] While HIV/AIDS was not a frequent topic of conversation in all counties, there are some concerning warning signs. Some youth participants do not understand how HIV/AIDS is contracted, transferred, or treated. For instance, a 19-year-old male in Big Swen, Grand Kru County, stated, *"When you play and do not wash your hands, you contract AIDS."* The 2007 Demographic Health Survey states that knowledge about HIV is higher among men than women. Half of all women surveyed and 71 percent of men reported knowing that using condoms is an HIV-prevention method; 58 percent of women and 77

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[78] World Health Organization, "Liberia," http://www.who.int/gho/countries/lbr/en/, accessed February 2012
[79] Ibid..
[80] World Bank, World Development Indicators. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator, accessed January 15, 2012

percent of men expressed awareness that limiting sexual intercourse to one uninfected partner reduces the risk of HIV infection; and 47 percent of women and 61 percent of men knew about abstinence as an effective method of preventing HIV infection.[81]

Participants along the Ivorian border generally reported knowing more people who were affected by HIV/AIDS. However, when asked about condoms, some did not make the connection between usage and disease transmission. For example, one young man said, *"I don't know about HIV/AIDS... I know the use of condoms but I've never used it."* The Liberian Demographic and Health Survey in 2007 showed that knowledge about HIV/AIDS increases with educational status and wealth, and is higher for those living in urban areas as opposed to rural areas.[82] Risky behavior however — especially intercourse with multiple partners — was common across ethnicity, status, and levels of wealth among Liberian young people. Some young people discussed having multiple partners but many more (both men and women) denounced the opposite sex for having multiple girlfriends or boyfriends.

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Youth Engagement & Health

- Proper access to health care facilities allows youth to be more engaged in all other areas of society
- There is a need for more quality health care professionals
- Improved water and sanitation infrastructure in communities is urgent
- Sexual health issues disproportionately pertain to youth
- Donor funding for health is increasing but not as well funded as many other sectors

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[81] Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report 2007, 160-161
[82] Ibid.. 159-161

Health Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various aspects of health critical to their engagement in this sector and the rest of society. While many of these issues are already well known by Liberians, policy-makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- Increased access to modern clinics
- Greater supply of medicine at public health care facilities
- Better patient service at clinics from properly trained and certified staff
- More outpatient support for marginalized populations such as the elderly, persons with disabilities and pregnant women
- Greater access to improved water and sanitation facilities
- More information about and access to family planning methods
- Increased awareness regarding HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI)
- Lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse

There are several immediate ways that youth could be engaged to improve the aforementioned needs. Transparency in the health system must increase to improve the supply of medicine at public health care facilities as well as patient services. And youth could play a monitoring role in

health facilities to help make this happen.

Including youth in partnerships with local leaders to build and maintain water pumps and sanitation facilities could also serve to increase access to such services. Enlisting local youth could expedite the construction process, and will build ownership and the capacity to maintain and manage new and already existent pumps and wells.

Youth awareness of how they and their peers can participate (both as counselors and participants) in programs disseminating health information, possibly through youth-led information campaigns, should be increased. Engaging youth to teach peers is a particularly effective way to address issues such as drugs and alcohol, as well as male and female responsibilities regarding teenage pregnancy.
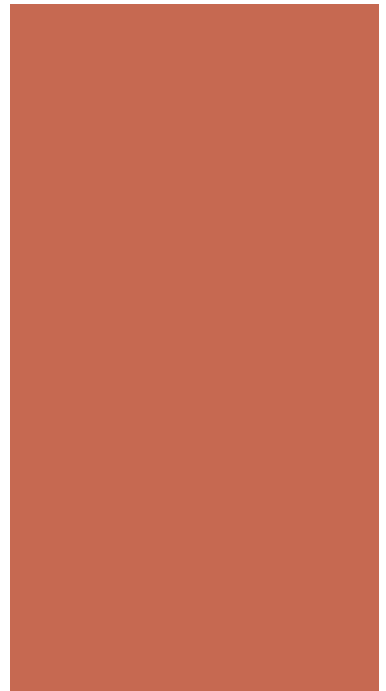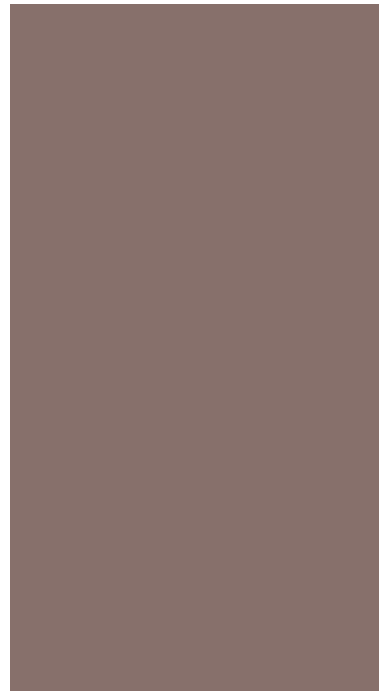
Livelihood

Livelihood

Pain on Top of Pain

We were driving down a narrow dirt path when some young men sitting on the side of the road caught our attention. They looked "rough around the edges," had their shirts off, appeared dirty, and did not seem too excited when our jeep pulled over.

What turned into over an hour of conversation revealed that the young men had been taking a short break from their daily activity of crushing rocks. They had been contracted by a local construction company to crush rocks for the building of a rural bridge.

Once back in the car, a team member exclaimed, "You know what he told me? He asked me if I had ever heard of the saying "pain on top of pain." Then he explained, rock crushing work does not like pain tablets. When you take them you will not be able to get up the next day, so what we do is when you have pain in your body, you can add another pain there — pain on top of pain — the body can get used to the condition after small time. Can you imagine?"

Youth are very cognizant of their employment needs and the importance of business. Respondents were primarily concerned about income opportunities for themselves and their families. While youth defined themselves as either employed or unemployed, there was often no clear distinction between unemployment and informal employment. The most recent 2008 Afrobarometer raw data, defined "work" as a "job for which you receive cash income." Fifty seven percent of youth who were unemployed by this definition were looking for work. While this figure remains relatively constant between youth cohorts, it is 10 percent higher than the adult population.[83] Of those receiving cash income, only 5.62 percent of 18-24 year old youth were fully employed, which was less than half the rate of the older cohorts.[84] Young Liberians participate in a variety of income-generating activities, such as small trading, services, agriculture, and industry. Employment status often fluctuates due to location, access to livelihood, educational opportunities, familial obligations, and social networks.

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[83] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.
[84] Ibid

Figure 8: ODA to Livelihood
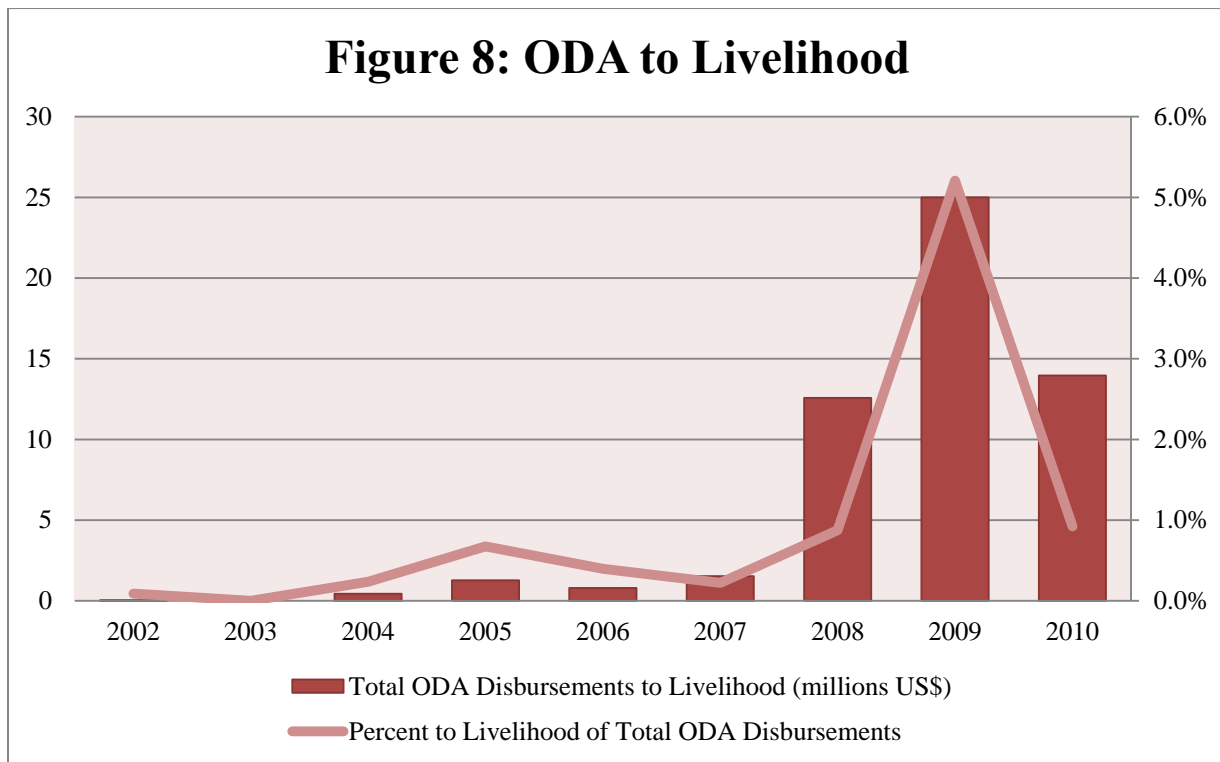
Source: OECD, 2012

Donor funds towards livelihood increased in recent years, spiking in 2009. Still, in most years since 2002, less than one percent of ODA was specifically disbursed towards livelihood. This is despite livelihood being one of the major priorities for young people.

Table 6: ODA to Livelihood Subsectors (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Agriculture	0	0	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.9	8.14	19.15	8.37	36.72
Business and Other Services	0	0	0	0	0	0.26	2.87	4.64	3.57	11.34
Forestry	0.03	0	0.4	1.22	0.73	0	1.05	1.12	0.25	4.8
Fishing	0	0	0	0	0	0.02	0.15	0	1.29	1.46
Industry	0	0	0	0	0	0.35	0.36	0.09	0.37	1.17
Mineral Resources & Mining	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.11	0.11

Source: OECD, 2012

Self-Employment

Many youth are self-employed, drawing their income from petty trade, business and services that they operate personally, such as selling food, riding motorbikes, and cutting hair. Others describe gaining marketable skills from technical schools and NGOs in order to be self-employed as carpenters, tailors, and mechanics. A 28-year-old man relayed his experience as a beneficiary of a 2007 NGO-sponsored program in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, which trained young men to become tailors and gave them sewing machines and a shop. *"Well, business is a bit fine, but actually, this we just doing it — you know, to take care of our daily bread but not something ... we base on through our lives, because this you just get little or nothing."* Although these trades do not provide substantial income for youth, they often supplement other sources of income and help youth with financial obligations. The young tailor said that without the training program, *"I don't know how we would have been surviving."*

Often, youth who are engaged in self-employment see it as a means to an end or simply as an opportunity to engage in a constructive activity. The meager wages earned from learned trades, such as carpentry, also produces a conundrum for many young Liberians, as they have to choose between furthering their educations and supporting their families. In contrast, many of the high-level decision makers interviewed see that many youth are focused on long term goals such as attaining better paying jobs to raise their living standards; however, they feel forced to focus on short-term goals in order to meet their immediate basic needs.

The 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey reports on vulnerable employment,[85] which is calculated by summing up the percentages of workers who are self-employed (but without employees) and/or contributing family workers (i.e. subsistence farming). [86] The results are displayed below in table 7.

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[85] "Employment in the Informal Sector" *excludes* person employed in agriculture, persons producing goods or services for the household's own use, persons coded as professionals, persons working in establishments registered with the Ministry of Commerce or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and persons working in establishments with five or more persons. "Informal Employment" *includes* persons producing goods or services for the household's own use and *excludes* any person who benefits from the employer's contribution to pension or retirement fund or paid leave or where the employer deducts income tax from the salary or wage. (2010 *Liberia Labor Force Survey*).

[86] 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey Report, 37

Table 7: Percent of workers in Vulnerable Employment by Sector of Economic Activity

Sector of economic activity	Males	Females
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	91.9	96.2
Mining and quarrying	65.5	81.8
Manufacturing	49.4	83.7
Electricity, gas, steam & air-conditioning	5.2	-
Construction	46.2	55.6
Wholesale/retail trade; motor repairs	83.4	95.7
Transportation & storage	35	72.9
Accommodation & food service	66.2	87.7
Information & communication	34.5	36
Finance & insurance	10.6	16.3
Professional, scientific, technical	26.4	7.4
Administrative & support services	1.2	5
Public administration and defense	1.6	-
Education	2.5	4.4
Human health & social work	23.3	13.6
Arts, entertainment, recreation	62.6	41.9
Other service activities	56.6	60.8
Households as employers	20.1	13.3
Total	**68.8**	**88.8**

Source: Liberia Labor Force Survey, 2010

Participants frequently discussed their desire for increased business activity in order to increase their job prospects. Often the jobs they had in mind were the manual labor positions that are inextricably linked to large industry. However, one young man in Ganta described his desire to open his own Internet café. Specifically, he resented not having the capital to start because he could not get a loan.

Since 2007, procedures to start a business have been reduced from ten to four, and take six days rather than three months to complete. Moreover, costs to start a business have gone down significantly. While in 2007, one needed over 500 percent of the income per capita to start a business; now (in 2012) only 70 percent of income per capita is needed.[87] Still, a lot remains to be done. Starting a business is still impossible for much of the public and only 0.6 percent of the population is publicly registered for credit.[88] As one business leader in Monrovia expressed, "*Lack of infrastructure limits entrepreneurship. There are no economies of scale so starting a business is very expensive, even*
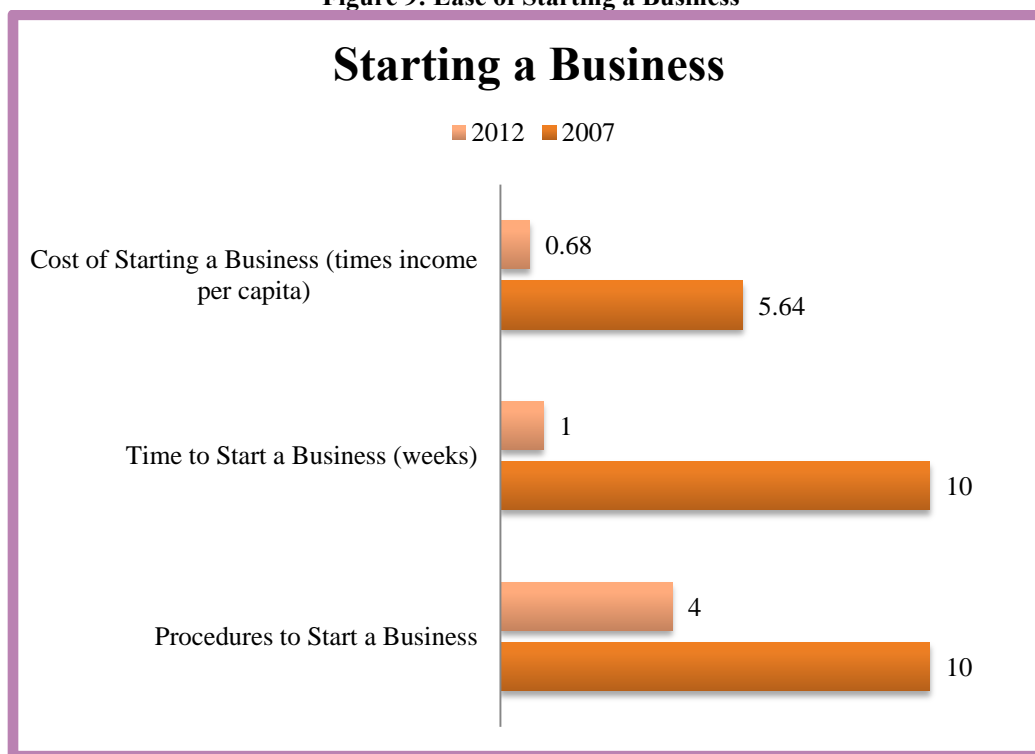
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[87] International Finance Corporation and The World Bank, Ease of Doing Business Index
http://www.doingbusiness.org/Custom-Query/liberia, accessed February 2012
[88] Ibid.

to get basic things." Furthermore, he described how half of the expenses of running a business could be spent on providing electricity.

Figure 9: Ease of Starting a Business

Starting a Business

■ 2012 ■ 2007

Cost of Starting a Business (times income per capita)	0.68 (2012) / 5.64 (2007)
Time to Start a Business (weeks)	1 (2012) / 10 (2007)
Procedures to Start a Business	4 (2012) / 10 (2007)

Source: Ease of Doing Business Index, World Bank, 2012

## Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing

Agriculture is a major form of employment in Liberia, particularly in rural areas. In 2010, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries accounted for 62.7 percent of the country's GDP. In that same year, an overwhelming 72.5 percent of rural persons employed over the age of 15 worked in these sectors, as compared to 15.4 percent of their urban counterparts.[89] Index scores for national investment in the rural sector improved in 2010, in categories such as access to land and water, agricultural research, agricultural input, and policy for rural organizations. The Ibrahim Index scored Liberia's rural sector 9.9 out of 100 in 2000-2004, increasing to 17.8 in 2009 and then doubling to 34.6 in 2010.[90]

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[89] Liberia Labor Force Survey Report, 34

[90] Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *The Ibrahim Index*, http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index, accessed February 2012,

Figure 10: Percent employed persons (15 plus) working in agriculture, forestry, & fishing by sex and locality
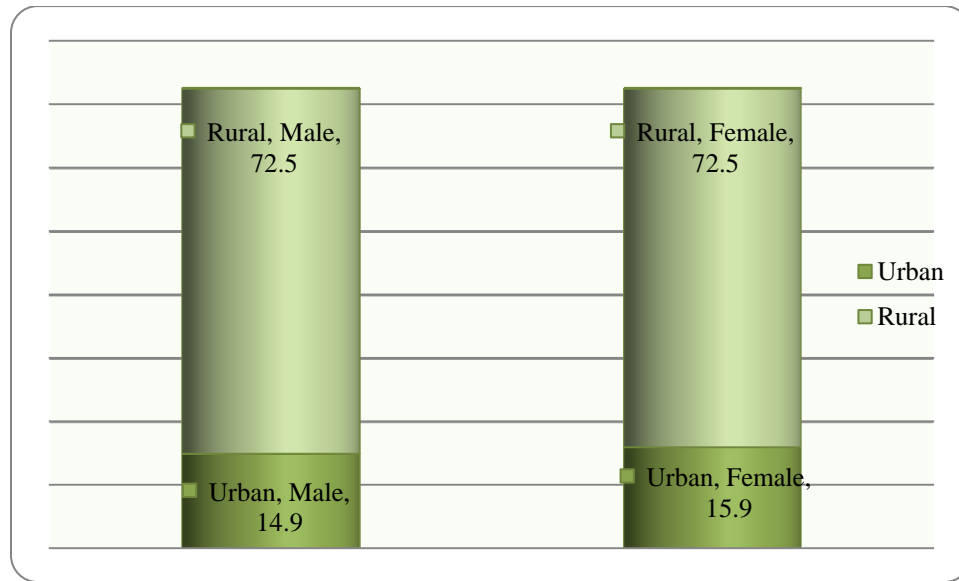
Source: 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey

As noted, agriculture is a significant — and for many, the only — way of life for young people in rural Liberia. For example, when one walks through some villages in rural Bong County in the middle of the day, only elders and children are seen because all the able-bodied people are out farming. Whether cutting palm or tapping rubber, the strenuous and time-consuming labor that farm work demands, makes typical school schedules challenging for rural youth.

Rarely do young people report having their own agriculture business; rather, many youth farm for subsistence or work as day laborers on company farms. One exception was a young man from Monrovia working in Salayea, Lofa County, who had started a business finding and exporting wood, and now employs 15 people. He credits his own creativity and determination as reasons for getting ahead, but also stated that if he had been born anywhere else, he would not be doing anything.

The Fisherman's Story

Joseph stands proudly on "his" beach. As my research team and I stand among the palm trees and look out onto the pristine, seemingly untouched beach with blue-grey waves fiercely lapping at the shore, we can't help but notice him. The other teenage boys are running around, playing, giggling, and wrestling in the water. Strewn about the beach are large canoes, hand-carved from tree trunks, their insides resembling notched fish scales, each one a piece of art in itself.

As we set foot on the sand, Joseph comes running up to introduce himself and shake our hands in welcome. Our first conversation participant has just identified himself.

As we walk along the shoreline, the conversation flowing, Joseph begins to share his story with my partner, John, and I. "My father and grandfather taught me how to make canoes like this," he says motioning toward the beautiful wooden creation gliding through the water. "My father,

he taught me to read the water."

"Oh, so your father is a fisherman too?" John asks.

"Ya he was. He and my grandfather. In this very water here. But he was killed."

"Sorry ya."

Silence.

"They killed my father too." John speaks up.

I have to keep the surprise from registering on my face. 'I didn't even know that!' I think.

"In the war?"

"Yeah."

Some time passes as we all process this shared experience for a moment.

"So you like fishing, or you gonna change work soon?"

"Ya, I like it. It's what I know."

"You can make enough financially just fishing?"

"Enough, yes. I can cater to my family."

It has been so rare, in our experience talking to young people making a living through fishing, to meet a young man who is excited, passionate, and happy with his livelihood. Joseph's story is a refreshing one. He has so obviously faced hardship, but seems to know who he is, where he comes from, and finds joy in his everyday life.

Labor Conditions

The perception among many youth participants is that foreign companies hold a strong bias against local workers, as expressed by harsh labor conditions as well as the tendency to employ them solely as day laborers while favoring foreign workers for full-time and permanent positions.

In particular, youth in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, were extremely vocal about the difficulties of working for a local mining company. Many participants working with the company as daily hires, considered themselves to be effectively "unemployed." Due to the lack of contracts, health benefits were also withheld. These workers reported feeling insecure in their jobs, and also cited problems such as not receiving pay in a timely

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manner due to their temporary status.

As one male in his mid-twenties at the company stated:

> *The process we passing through here is not easy, we just here working like we working free. We can work for whole month and the people can give us small money without water and food just like that. Whole day they say we should be healthy but whole day this rain buzz on our foot.*

This young man had applied for full-time, permanent employment several times, but was rejected, even though he had worked for the company as a daily hire for over a year. He stated that the company employs foreigners who are paid more than Liberian workers though they are doing the same job. Other youth in rural areas commonly mentioned a parallel tension between Liberians from villages and those from the capital or surrounding urban centers.

In Yekepah, Nimba County, an area once known for its industry, the zonal team spoke with two young men who explained that the only full-time employment opportunities with the current company comprised of menial positions such as a security officer or janitor. Although these jobs rank higher than day laborers, they are considered undesirable positions because they do not offer individuals the status of "employee" required to receive full benefits from the company. Furthermore, company policy requires that significant portions of workers' salaries be dedicated to mandatory expenses such as transportation, uniforms, and meals. Still, challenges such as competition, job scarcity, and harsh working conditions have not discouraged youth from moving to towns known to be industrial centers.
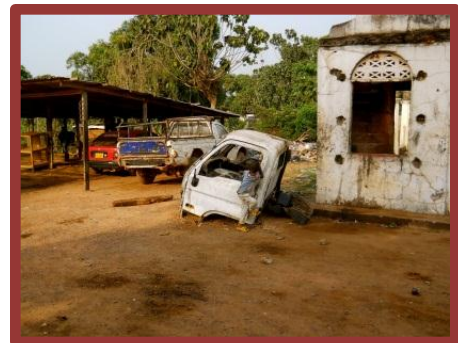
Moses' Story

Moses, a 24-year-old, gained his mechanics skills while working in a garage shop. A few years back, he fixed a white man's car at the shop and in return the man got him a job with the local branch of a major industrial company.

According to Moses, the company has had a presence in the community for 25 years but has done nothing for the community's development. There are no hospitals, no water, and no good roads. They also don't treat their workers well. "They promise you that if you are three months there, you will be employed … but there are people who have been there for six months [as contractors] and are not employed."

Workers are paid US$75, a sum that does not last for the month after paying school fees or a hospital visit. The white man who helped Moses get the job, used to supplement his income by giving him an additional US$50 each month. He used that money to send his kids to the Salvation Army School, which is very expensive. Ever since the white man left Liberia, he no longer sends Moses money.

Moses explains that the administrators give no free time, for example to eat lunch. They get irritated and are sometimes violent, "He slap you or he push you about!"

No matter what the administrators do, workers can't speak out. Because they are daily hires, they are afraid the boss will just fire them and replace them with another worker. Frustrations are also directed at the national leadership, "When the president was campaigning she told that she would make everybody get more money per day but since she got in power, she don't care about [us]. The only person who [comes] is the superintendent who gets money from the company." Moreover, they complained, "Officials want pay [bribes] so they don't do anything if you can't pay."

The Liberian research partners are visibly moved. One comments, "People in Liberia are still living like this?…Wow." Another remarks, "In recent years all we have heard about young people in Liberia is that they are rebels, violent, dangerous, carnivores… just all kinds of names — yet they have chosen, despite all these names, peaceful demonstration — despite everything! And I feel happy about it!"

A third is more skeptical as he observes, "Youth have all left from war with different different intentions, so [...] if the superintendent and people speak against the young people and make them to feel bad when they have peaceful demonstration. It will turn into different different thing — a riot. It happened in Bassa!"

In an attempt to measure inadequate work situations, the 2010 Liberia Labor Force Survey asked those with employment if they would like to get an additional job or change jobs (for any reason other than that they would like to increase the number of hours that they work). If the participant answered yes, which 28 percent of employed people responded, then he/she was asked to share the reason why. The responses are shown below in figure 11.

Figure 11: Reason for employed persons wanting to change jobs or get an additional one by location
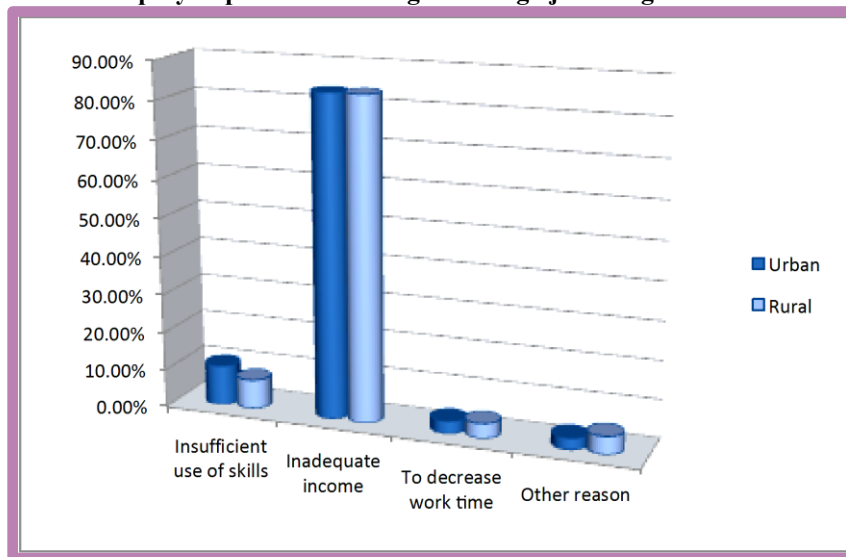
Source: Liberia Labor Force Survey, 2010

Some youth blame the government for allowing companies to deny them long-term contracts. While having any job provides youth with some relief, they continue to live in fear due to a lack of job security. Young people are aware that companies have social responsibility clauses in their contracts, and recognize when they are not being fulfilled. In Gbah and Married Plantation in Bomi County, a young man said that most of the concession agreements that were signed between the government and the multinational palm oil and rubber company operating in the town had not been approved by the local community. He claimed that the company had failed to fulfill the promises made to the community such as making the hospital and clinic facilities free of charge. Similarly, a group of males aged 21-35 years old, in Zammie Town, River Cess County emphasized:

> *The government is violating our labor laws. The violation of our labor law is getting too worse. Because even if you are working with a company, according to the labor law, probation period is three months. The company or institution should be able to contract or employ you. All of the companies working now in our setting each time we have talking about our labor laws, or probation for three months and what I feel they say go to the government. How will the country or the nation be built if the companies is underpaying their workers? If I'm getting paid $75 and I have to go to school and to do other things to be content for my family and build a good structure for my family...*

A complicating factor for Liberian youth hoping to achieve stable employment in the industrial sector is the need for contacts to find and sustain employment with international companies. Youth participants consistently pointed out the benefits of maintaining and utilizing professional and personal networks. As one young man said, *"If you no know the big men, the power people, if the chief don't know you, you don't find work. Like me, I ain't got no help, so I just been sitting here since I graduated twelfth grade."*

Individuals who see themselves as having obtained the requisite skills and knowledge to compete with international applicants report being passed over for candidates with more experience. For instance, in the case of the Liberian government, applicants are currently required to have five years of experience in order to qualify for full-time employment. According to various testimonies, Liberian youth perceive this requirement to be a barrier that is distinct for young people. For example, one young person told a story about his former college classmate interviewing for a job that he was highly qualified for, and yet did not get the job. The man who got the job had inferior computer skills, but was older and knew the "right" people.

The Connection: Education and Employment
The impact of the war, lack of access to education, and poor education quality has left the Liberian workforce insufficiently prepared to compete with the skillset of outsiders. Multiple NGOs discussed how they want to hire more local workers and more youth but do not because they have to take whoever they can find that can do the job.

There is a disconnection between attaining an education and finding employment. One youth program implementer explained that there is a lack of clear expectations about the returns from acquiring an education, describing how many youth who finish their studies *"assume that because they got a high level of education, they will get a nice and cushy job"* and are disappointed when their expectations are not met. He continued, *"If a lot of graduates can't read well, what does a certificate mean?"* While a diploma may be evidence of acquiring an education, it does not reflect the quality of that education.

Moreover, employers pay employees based on their skills — their ability to retain and apply the knowledge they have acquired. Yet, often school curricula do not prepare students for Liberia's market needs. A leader in the business community observed:

> *Curricula are not aligned with the demands of the economy. [Many institutions teach] management but they don't specialize….There's no management of water, of industries, hotels, restaurants… transportation — it's just management, you know? They should be focusing now on internships and aligning the courses with the demands of the society so that when you leave, you hit the ground running.*

He described how many companies are coming to Liberia and if they conclude that young people do not have the skills required, companies bring in outsiders — thus producing disaffection and frustration heard among the youth**.**

Conversations with government and donor representatives reflected an increasing trend toward thinking holistically about programming and recognizing the importance of matching education and skills training with employment opportunities. For example, they are currently attempting to anticipate what human resource requirements will be needed in the coming four to five years, in order to design skills-training accordingly. Such programs can decrease the frustration felt both by youth who want to be employed, and people in need of services. For instance business leaders lamented that while there is currently great focus on reconstruction and an increase in the import of construction materials, there are "few good bricklayers." An education program manager said that developing a database that outlined the skills needed for different jobs would be useful for programs trying to teach skills. Conversations with young people, especially those who were educated and unemployed, suggest that they would take advantage of such a database, as they are willing and determined to do the necessary training.

There is also an urgent need for educational counseling. Multiple donors and program implementers interviewed noted that young people often do not have a vision of what it takes to achieve their goals. They explained that while older people make decisions based on experience, youth make decisions based on inquiry. All too often these are spheres of inquiry and therefore the options and opportunities youth perceive are limited. For example, a program manager working with youth stated, *"Everyone wants to be a tailor because that is what they see around them. And because [there is higher supply than demand] they don't get a job after they study the skill…youth become very frustrated."* He insisted that it is crucial to provide youth with social support networks and to educate them about their realm of options. Indeed, some youth described

their desire for more vocational training, but when pressed to name specific fields, would say "anything" and list standard training programs. This phenomenon led one program to pursue a group model. Implementers identified the need to provide groups of youth with a range of livelihood opportunities and ideas before providing more individualized guidance. One interviewee also suggested a model in which successful youth serve as mentors for other young people.

In addition to unrealistic expectations of the availability of jobs, some discussed that youth are also often unprepared for the amount of work it takes to rise to senior positions. One UN agency representative stated that youth want *"to have a big life with no sweat — they focus on short rather than long-term goals."* One international agency program manager maintained that one way to prepare youth to acquire the needed skills and experience necessary to get a job was to encourage a culture of volunteerism. It could cultivate the understanding that *"one must sacrifice in the short term (i.e. experience on a CV and a strong recommendation) to gain in the long term."* He went on to explain that by allowing youth to practice and polish their skills, volunteerism would help deal with the paradox where *"you cannot work unless you have experience, and cannot have experience until you have a job."* Finally, he believed that sending volunteers to work in communities would increase a personal work ethic — such as coming to work on time — while simultaneously bolstering the community's local capacity.

While these solutions aim to foster work preparedness, Liberian youth insist that volunteerism is not respected enough for it to be valuable while finding employment. Indeed, those youth who had spent considerable time working with NGOs without pay claimed that potential employers solely considered salaried jobs, not volunteer work, as "experience." Rather, those who volunteer, do so because they believe in the work and hope it will lead to contacts and the proverbial "foot-in-the-door."

Youth Engagement & Livelihood

- Youth are commonly involved in the economy through petty business
- Fostering entrepreneurship is critical to increasing engagement
- Agriculture and industry are currently the most commonly referenced sectors of employment
- Employment is directly and inextricably connected to education
- Donor funding for livelihood is lower than most other sectors despite being a high priority for youth

Livelihood Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various aspects of livelihood critical to their engagement in this sector and the rest of society. While many of these issues are already well known by Liberians, policy-makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- Increased youth employment opportunities
- Increased access to relevant vocational training
- Empowerment of youth to establish and successfully manage their own businesses
- Improved job-preparedness functions of education
- More volunteer opportunities and facilitated workforce transition
- Greater protection and enforcement of workers' rights
- Increased opportunity and support for youth agricultural undertakings

In order to engage youth in addressing livelihood needs, special attention needs to be paid to skills development and communication between employers and youth. The National Youth Service Program provides a positive model for volunteerism and should be expanded with information on the program disseminated throughout the country. Private sector employers should be encouraged to hire youth with experience outside the formal sector. Youth can serve as mentors, detailing the various benefits of volunteerism to other youth. Another way to begin the volunteer process would be in working with the private sector, government, and educators in building a skills database. The database, which would outline the skills required to hold different jobs in multiple fields, would give youth a stronger notion of the skills they need to attain to be marketable and productive.

It is also essential for policymakers and practitioners to engage young entrepreneurs to increase youth employment and establish a sustainable, robust economy. Such entrepreneurship will be encouraged through multiple approaches such as targeted reduction in start-up costs, improved access to banking services (microloans, savings), provisions to advertise youth businesses (radio time, billboard access), and training on skills, rights, and responsibilities necessary for a successful enterprise.
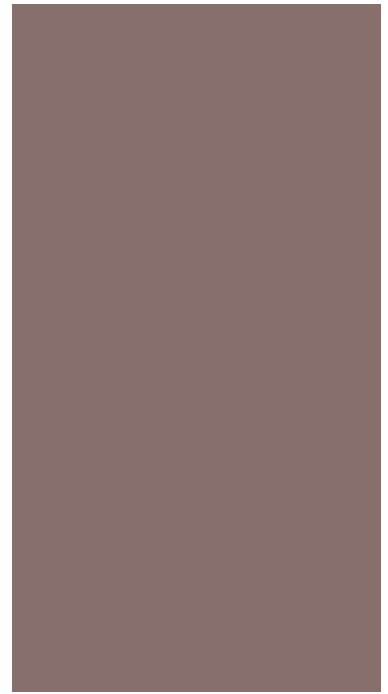
Politics and Governance

Politics and Governance

> *"Youth and elders get on well. Before it was the old folks who were in power –*
> *but now it is the young people who are in the forefront"*
>
> -Young woman in River Gee County

Youth involvement in the political arena, whether at the community, county, or national level, is often a visible expression of their engagement in society. Many young Liberians have a positive view of their government's efforts, and they recognize the monumental task at hand. As a young man in Grand Kru County stated, *"Really, the government is trying its best."* A respondent in River Gee County echoed, *"Madam Sirleaf is good. She open our eyes to many many things. No war going on. Nobody harming us. We driving motorbike to get our own money for ourselves. Can't see any guns shooting. That's why I enjoy the government."* While some youth praised President Sirleaf's agenda on youth development, many feel that adults frequently speak at them, but rarely listen to what they have to say.
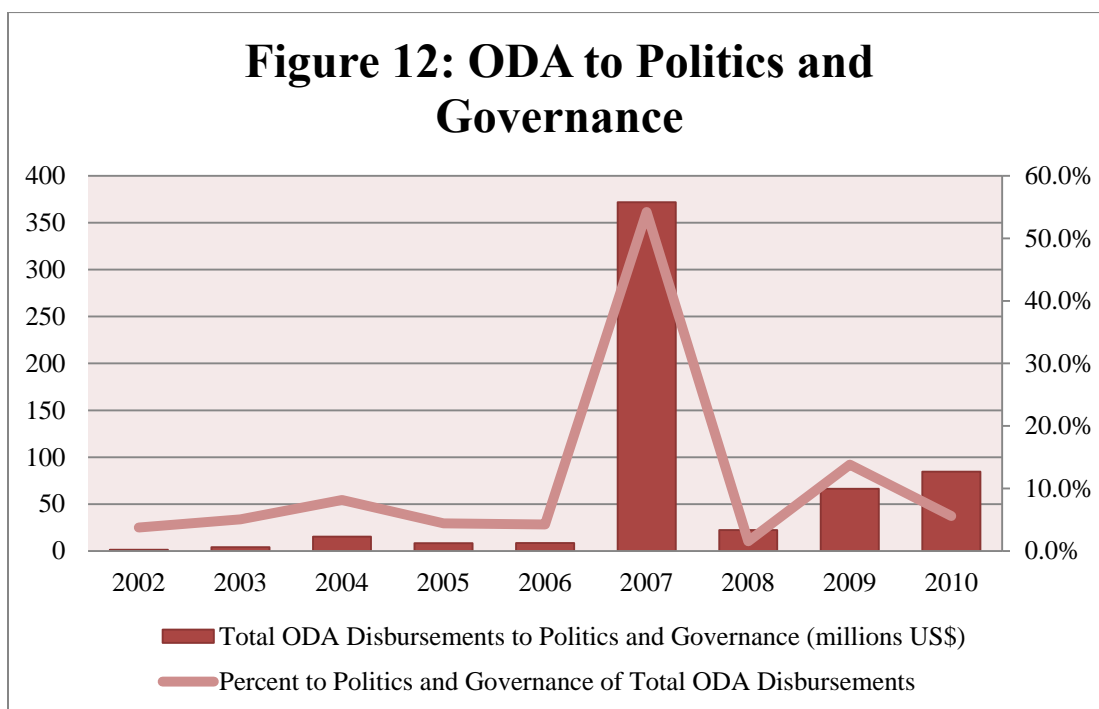

Granting youth a platform in political decision-making is particularly critical due to a history of significant youth involvement in the civil conflict, and their continued vulnerability in Liberian society. Without a realistic avenue through which to express grievances, the fear is that violence could become a more attractive route for negotiating power. And much to their frustration, youth are often viewed by adults as easily angered and as perpetrators of violence. However this perception is not supported by statistics, which show that the vast majority of Liberians would never use violence for a political cause, and that less than 5 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds had used violence in the last year — a figure that was lower than that of older age groups.[91]

Donor funding for politics and governance since 2002 was 12.12 percent of total ODA. This is significantly more than each of the three themes youth discussed the most (education, health, and livelihood). Donors put a substantial amount of money (over US$370 million) towards politics and governance in 2007, which decreased considerably the following year.

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[91] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Figure 12: ODA to Politics and Governance

Total ODA Disbursements to Politics and Governance (millions US$)

Percent to Politics and Governance of Total ODA Disbursements

Source: OECD, 2012

While national governance indicators have improved over the past few years, they remain low on an absolute scale. Various indices such as the Democracy Index, The Ibrahim Index, and the Global Peace Index show an overall improvement in democracy participation and civil liberties. The GoL still suffers from a lack of capacity stemming from 14 years of societal disruption. While governance scores are generally increasing, the score for "functioning of government" from the Democracy Index has decreased from 2.14 (out of 10) in 2007, to 0.79 in 2011.[92] Critically, corruption remains an omnipresent theme, as reflected by the lack of trust in officials that arose frequently during discussions. Similarly, youth share the perception that decisions made in Monrovia do not always take the rest of the country into consideration.

Political Participation

Primarily, conversations with participants throughout the country indicated a gap between the desire to participate and access to decision-making. In general, Afrobarometer data shows that while Liberian youth are interested in politics and public issues, they do not participate, vote, or hold leadership positions as much as adults over 35, despite a desire to be more involved.[93] Along these lines, data show that while adults and youth are both expressive about their problems, they tend to communicate in different ways. Youth tend to contact government officials much less than their older counterparts, but are much more likely to contact a newspaper or radio station with their grievances.[94]

It is important to note however, that lack of participation does not mean lack of desire to participate. Data imply that if youth were taken more seriously, they would participate more. For

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[92] Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2011,
http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_Final_Dec_2011.pdf&mode=wp,
accessed January 2012
[93] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.
[94] Ibid..

example, despite the fact that youth attend community meetings less than older people, 28.51 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 20.57 percent of 25 to 35-year-olds report that they would attend a meeting "if they had the chance," as compared to only 10.69 percent of over 35 year olds.[95]

Figure 13: Have attended a community meeting one or more times by age
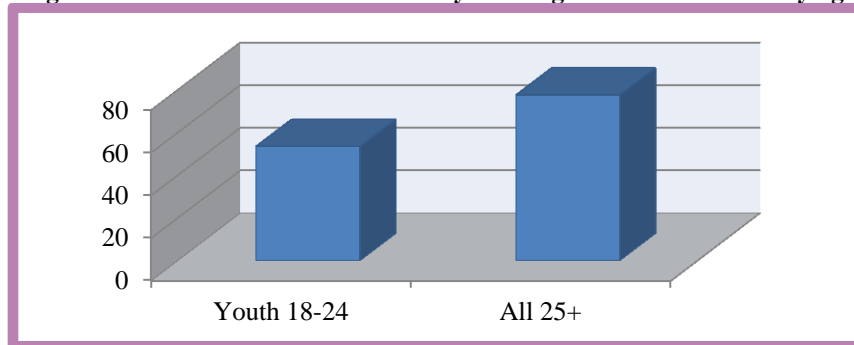
Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

Figure 14: Would attend a community meeting if had the chance by age
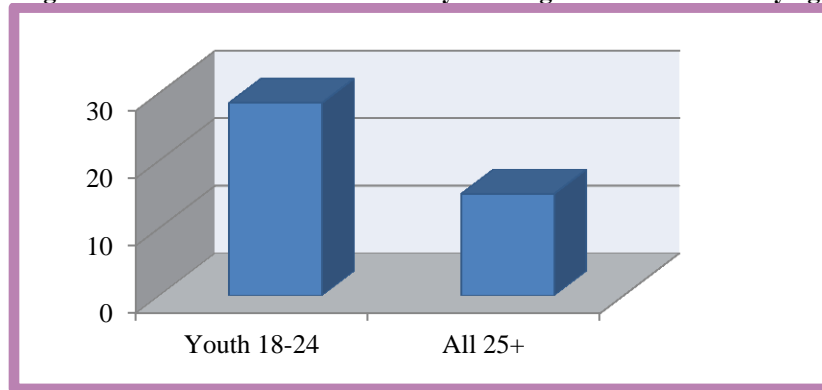
Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

Similarly, Afrobarometer youth respondents aged 18-24 reported joining others to raise political issues less than adults age 25 and over (48.2 percent and 68.24 percent, respectively). However, the percent of youth respondents who said that they would join others to raise a political issue "if they had the chance" was much greater than the number of adults reporting the same things (25.7 percent and 16.19 percent, respectively).

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[95] Ibid..

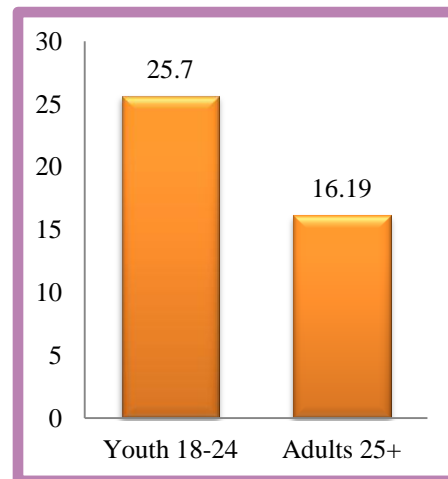**Figure 15:** Percentage of Afrobarometer respondents that have joined others to raise a political issue by age
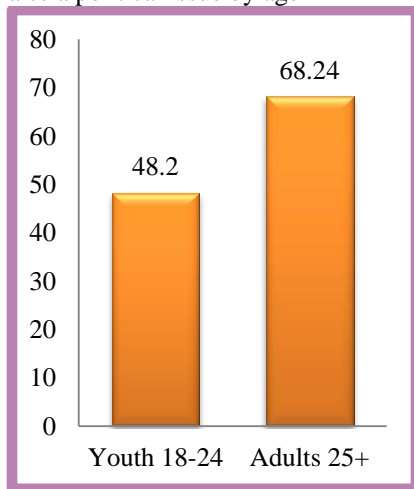
Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

Figure 16: Percentage of Afrobarometer respondents that would join others to raise a political issue if they had the chance by age

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

<div style="background:purple">

A Lost Decision

In one small town the young people are frustrated, angry, and fed up. Not from the paucity of jobs or dangerous drinking water, but from being ignored. They have an active youth structure, which contributes to the community by maintaining the single road that leads to their village.

When the government gave youth money to spend on a project of their choice, they held a meeting and decided to build a community center. They felt involved, comfortable, and proud. Then the elders invited the youth leader to a meeting and convinced him to spend the money on a new school building instead. The decision was finalized. All of the youth, with the exception of the youth leader, were left out and felt frustrated. They were not unhappy with the decision to build a much-needed school building, but with their efforts and opinions being disregarded without consultation.

When the building was completed, it paled in comparison to what they believed the sum of money could have achieved. But no information was shared as to how the money had been spent. They were angry and insulted, but also felt fearful and helpless. How could they reverse this process? How could they hold the elders accountable? They would only make their own lives worse by challenging it. Their opinions of government, their leaders, and community members were greatly lowered.

Now, when they walk through their community, instead of sensing pride, or knowing they are benefitting from the new school, they feel regret and frustration.

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Liberian youth have a holistic understanding of participation. According to youth in Grand Cape Mount County, a significant aspect of youth participation is *"skills acquisition, knowledge, and information sharing."* There is however, a belief among some of the older generation that youth are not as politically knowledgeable and motivated as their elders, a concept not unique to Liberia. While youth are less likely to know their representative's name, they identify with a

party just as much as the older generation.[96] Additionally, interest in public affairs for youth 18-24 and youth 25-35 is only slightly less frequent than among adults.

Table 8. Indicators of political engagement by age

	Age 18-24	Age 25-35	Age 36+
Know representative"s name	40%	43%	45.5%
Identify with a political party	43%	45.7%	44.7%
Interest in public affairs	44.7%	46.7%	49.2%

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

Moreover, youth are more likely than adults to discuss public affairs with others (over 51 percent and 48 percent, respectively). Indeed, while there are many youth who are not impassioned by political issues, groups of young people can be seen discussing political issues in most town centers, university campuses, or restaurants. Opinionated and often heated discussions about local (e.g., schools, health care), national (e.g., the president, economy, Taylor time) and international (e.g., Mali coup) issues were often heard. For example, in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, the zonal team spoke with a youth forum, a group that met nightly in a dimly lit alcove located nearby the central market. They were well organized and spoke eloquently about local and national political issues. Since the election of President Sirleaf young women have increasingly entered the political arena, though political conversations in the public sphere continue to be dominated by males.[97]

Despite frequently being excluded from voicing their opinions and ideas in community and government settings, many youth stated the importance of voting. Many described elections as an indispensable way to get their voice heard and to make changes in the government. This sentiment is reflected in high voting rates. Raw Afrobarometer data show that 78.89 percent of youth 21-35[98] and 86.49 percent of Liberians age 36 and over, self-reported voting in the 2005 Presidential elections.[99]

Figure 17: Percentage of people that self-reported voting in the 2005 Presidential elections by age
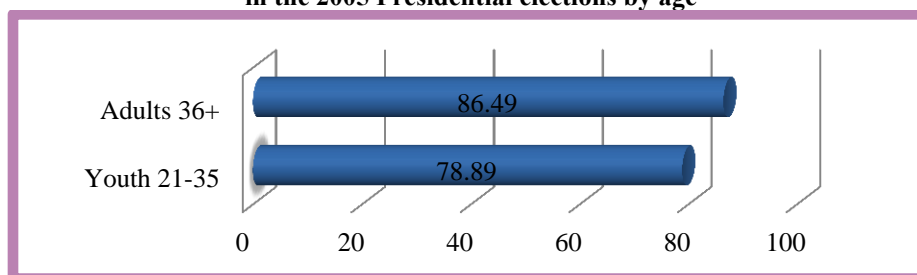
Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

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[96] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.
[97] Discussed in detail below in the "Family and Gender" section
[98] Youth aged 18-20 were not included in this calculation as they were too young to vote in the 2005 presidential election to which this data refers.
[99] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

There seems to be dissonance between the voting process and expected change. While many participants claim to have voted in the last election and state they will vote in the next, they have yet to see great improvements in their communities. They expressed frustration at being mobilized during elections but later ignored in legislation. One respondent in Kanweaken, River Gee County, said, *"Youth only pull together when electoral activities are taking place…which is only done to get the daily bread from politicians… at the end of which other youthful activities are suspended."* In Harper, Maryland County, a young woman claimed, *"Our representatives and senators are not doing anything for we the youth."* The 2011 Liberian elections were judged to be free and fair by the African Union.[100] And Liberia's political participation scores on *The Ibrahim Index* show great improvement since the war. However scores have recently plateaued.[101] If young people do not start perceiving the results of the elections to be more accurate, they may lose faith in the democratic process.

Decentralization of Government

Many young people decry the government's focus on Monrovia. The more rural the area, the more youth feel ignored, which lowers their expectations of government and sense of national pride. Participants' accounts throughout the counties described politicians touring their communities during election season and then retreating to the capitol. People in such far-flung areas struggle to be engaged in politics. In the rare case that these young people are able to travel to Monrovia, they know the right people, and can affect change. Most youth however, cannot travel to Monrovia to have their voice heard. Thus, young people in the counties primarily talked about their decision-making powers in local or traditional government.

Many felt they would be better served if greater power was delegated to the counties and bureaucratic services were diffused. However, decentralization would be a challenging process. Furthermore, corruption already permeates the process of diffusing money through government channels. In River Gee County, youth respondents noted that the problems are so numerous that their representatives are shying away from them. In addition, leaders cannot be trusted. Money given to the county for development never reaches the intended targets. *"The so-called new machines that were bought by the county development fund are now spoiled."*

A young person from Grand Gedeh County discussed the way in which county representatives anticipated the money coming from Monrovia and created ways to personally receive the funds. In one instance, a young man described how someone in his community went so far as to create the façade of a youth group in order to receive youth-designated funds from Monrovia. He was able to successfully implement his plan due to the lack of accountability structures.

Corruption
While Liberia's Corruption Perception Index score improved from 2.2 (out of 10) in 2005 to 3.2 in 2011,[102] corruption remains a major concern, one that deeply frustrates youth across the

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[100] All Africa, http://allafrica.com/stories/201110140555.html, retrieved February 27, 2012

[101] Mo Ibrahim Foundation, The Ibrahim Index, http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index, accessed February 2012

[102] Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index*, http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/, accessed January 2011

country. In the education sector, school administrators often request excessive fees; in the employment arena, jobs are given to those with the right political connections; under rule of law, police demand bribes at checkpoints. Such corruption extends to nearly every aspect of day-to-day life. In Lofa County, for example, young people reported hospitals spending two-thirds of their budget on two new cars. A young man in Maryland County asserted that an NGO was granted funding to build over 100 pumps but was only able to complete 17 before their budget was mysteriously depleted.

Figure 18: Corruption Perception Index
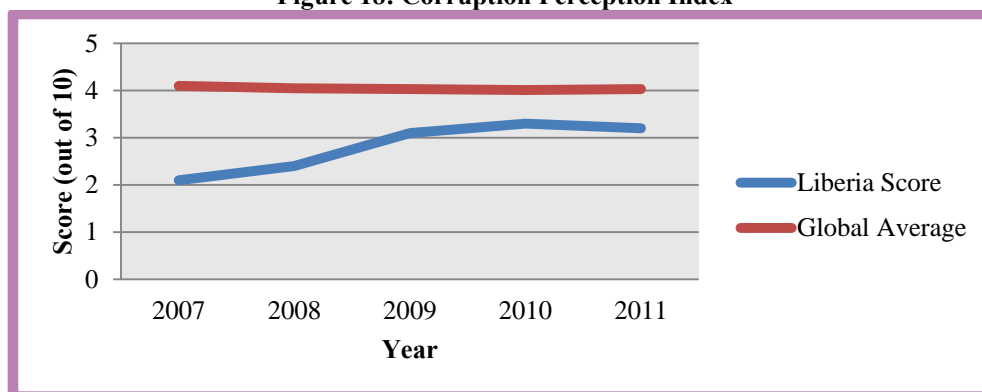
These stories reflect how money designated for community projects is often misappropriated or disappears. Reflecting on these issues, communities praise government members who live in their communities and deem those who take on high-class lifestyles, (e.g., seen driving nice cars with excessive fuel allowances), as quintessentially corrupt. Although youth discuss these abuses frequently, they rarely have an avenue to challenge such practices. This leads to a sense of powerlessness which results in disengagement from the political sphere.

Paul's Story

Paul is from a rural town and is now attending the University of Liberia. He only goes to school twice a week because he has to travel very far to get there and the roads are bad. His job assigned him a motorcycle, which he sometimes uses to get to class. He feels bad because he used to be a representative for the youth in his town. But now that he holds a government job that pays him L$11,000 every month, he no longer speaks out on their behalf, because he doesn't want to lose these valuable assets.

He explains that when a young man speaks out against political leaders in his community, members of the administration give other young men money to go against him, because they are afraid to lose their jobs if information about them leaks out to the public. Also, youth aren't able to voice concerns because they depend on favors from the authorities in the community and on "workshops to make a living… you know, our Liberian way."

Paul explains why dependency on authorities is bad. Once the town elders took money that the district had allocated for youth to build a youth center and divided it, giving half to the youth and keeping half for themselves for their own personal expenses. "This is not supposed to be so — the money has been given to the youth to build the youth center!"

In another incident, Paul describes how the local government assigned instructors to the high school to teach biology, chemistry, physics, economics, and mathematics. They spent three to

four months teaching and in the end, the government didn't pay them. Consequently, the instructors left and the students had no choice but to take the WAEC without any teachers. The students did what they could to raise money and go to another town to finish their education but those who couldn't leave, "they not learn nothing."

He repeats that youth need to speak up — to do something. But Paul himself keeps quiet in order to keep his government job… working with the very people he believes youth should speak out against!

Youth in Policy and Programming

Youth Policy

For a long time government youth programs were ad hoc and often determined in reaction to events. With the 2005 Kakata Declaration, a national youth policy[103] was adopted at the National Youth Consultative Conference attended by over 150 youth delegates from the country's 15 counties. The policy, along with a three-year plan developed by a consultant, helped guide President Sirleaf on youth issues such as limited education and training opportunities, unemployment, the HIV/AIDS crisis, war and deprivation, etc.[104]

Many youth in national leadership positions are interested in turning youth policy into law, primarily because they believe such a move would make youth issues a priority. Changing leadership priorities, interests, and personalities would be minimized, and it is believed would also serve to mitigate varying interpretations of policy. Despite attempts to legislate this policy, the bill recently failed to pass due to demands for universal education and the abolition of Female Genital Mutilation. Given that the policy has since become obsolete, a new policy document, youth bill, and action plan are now being drafted and will be submitted to the legislature to be enacted.

Data on Youth

After almost 24 years without conducting a census, the 2008 census was a significant breakthrough and serves as an important information base upon which programs can be designed. Indeed, according to one donor agency, it served as the bedrock for the new push for youth. While this is a great achievement, interviewees urged a need for continual institutionalized collection of data by local agencies, such as the police. Program administrators also claimed population data is not detailed enough to make strategic programmatic decisions. More in-depth information is needed on youth-specific data in areas such as employment in the informal sectors and the quality of education, to help inform best practices.

Prioritization

According to donors in Liberia, their work is aligned with the government's priorities. They use national strategic documents such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy for guidance in determining

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[103] This grew out of the National Youth Policy Process — a multi-partner initiative, championed by *the Ministry of Youth and Sports* which included *the Federation of Liberian Youth, UNDP, UNMIL, Action Aid Liberia, UNICEF, USAID* and the *YMCA*.

[104] UNDP Liberia. *Press Release: 'Kakata Declaration' heralds new Youth Policy for Liberia*. September 2005.

funding and making program decisions. One donor highlighted the general mentality thusly, *"One needs national buy-in…we are here to support Liberians, not to push them."*

While donor's adherence to national priorities is important, this dynamic remains problematic. While international institutions may aim to conduct a needs assessment for example, they often simultaneously consider the government their primary partner. This can be an extremely beneficial partnership, but it also subjects decisions to bureaucrats' personalities, priorities, and political interests.

Coordination

Coordination of youth programs is a challenge as programs are often compartmentalized with little crosscutting communication between sectors or implementing agencies, so that processes and information sharing are constantly in conflation with one another. *"We have all kinds of structure. We have structures on top of structures and structures on top of that. We have substructures, we have committees, we have working groups. We have so much structure, that it's insane."* As one interviewee explained, similar issues also present themselves within the GoL, where turf battles undermine effective coordination. However, on both the donor and government level, there has been a big push to create better coordination mechanisms, and to harmonize efforts.

Civil Society

Youth civil society structures exist in most communities and have varying degrees of activity and effectiveness. Generally, the towns closer to Monrovia and the county capitals have the most lively youth civil society presence, whether registered or not. Likewise, specific stakeholder groups, such as motorbike unions, hold some power in impacting policy decisions, especially at the local level.

Overall, however, local civil society structures are limited, and many youth feel they have no avenues to address concerns. Some rural communities have no youth structures. One young woman stated, *"No youth organization in all of the places except Tubmanburg center, but even in Tubmanburg City, the youth are not well connected and informed about happenings in the county."* The most common reason given for an inactive youth organization was lack of unity. Indeed, some youth in River Gee refused to participate *"because they are not together,"* and in Greenville, Sinoe County, respondents said that youth are *"not united."* For this reason, even when civil society organizations exist, they are often ineffective. For example, a young woman may want to train as a nurse, and want to petition her local representative to allocate more money for scholarships, but says she has no option other than to *"pray*."

Young people were much more pessimistic when Afrobarometer asked young people the following question: "When there are problems with how local government is run in your community, how much can an ordinary person do to improve the situation?" Only 26.1 percent of youth 18-24 think an ordinary person can do a great deal to change their situation compared

with 32.27 percent of adults over 35.[105] If young people do not feel that they can affect change in their own lives, then they are less likely to engage in civil society.

Table 9: Views on How Much an Ordinary Person Can Solve Ordinary Problems by Age

	Ordinary People Can Do *Nothing*	Ordinary People Can Do *A Great Deal*
18-24	24.10%	26.10%
25-35	21.29%	29.67%
36+	20.26%	32.27%

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

Scores in categories such as civil liberties and freedom of the press have generally improved over the last 10 years, and the government and citizens should be applauded for these improvements.[106] Youth feel quite free to vote (80.06 percent), but less so to speak their mind (62.82 percent), with adults feeling freer than youth to do both. [107] This is significant because the democratic process is not being inculcated down to the community level. The zonal team heard people in Bong County say that they could not talk about problems or challenge the elders because, *"This is Liberia,"* the implication being there would be physical repercussions for speaking out. Moreover, youth perceive that their elders actively sabotage their involvement and ability to voice concerns in order to minimize criticism against the older generation. For example, youth in Grand Cape Mount County stated:

> *Political leaders do whatever possible to divide the youth. Mainly they sponsor some young people to advocate for them and counter attack any allegation others might make against them, and which might prevent them from obtaining the position they are seeking. That situation prevents the youth to fully engage their political leaders on issues affecting youth.*

Nationally, there is little room for youth to voice concerns to the government, donors or agencies. Except for a few civil society youth organizations that are well connected to power structures, most youth feel they have no means of providing input in national processes and policies, such as those outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy II and Vision 2030. Government and donor entities often resort to handpicking the civil society representatives they know, a practice that inherently perpetuates the existent power structures. Marginalization often stems from exclusion from multiple and often interrelated spheres. Youth need to be connected to social networks that are both horizontally integrated across county districts and also vertically aligned at the national level. This can help strengthen social capital and lend youth the basic solidarity, voice, and power they need to take an alternative agenda to government.

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[105] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.
[106] Economist Intelligence *Unit Democracy Index 2011*,
http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_Final_Dec_2011.pdf&mode=wp, accessed January 2012
[107] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Youth Engagement & Politics and Governance

- Political participation is essential to vertically integrate youth in Liberian society
- Corruption is an ever-present deterrent for young people to engage in the political sphere
- An effective national youth policy would address youth specific needs more accurately
- Liberian youth are currently relatively inactive in civil society
- Donor funding to governance has increased in recent years and this sector receives more funding than the other themes represented in this report

Politics and Governance Recommendations:

Liberian youth discussed various areas surrounding governance issues that they would like to see addressed to better improve their engagement in politics and the rest of society. While many of these issues are well known by Liberians, policy-makers, and practitioners, it is critical to state the issues imperative to youth.

As a result of the research, with particular attention given to the opinions of young Liberians, the following needs were identified:

- Increased youth participation in governance bodies at the community and national levels
- Augmented mechanisms to increase transparency and hold those in power accountable to society at large
- Additional opportunities for civil society to participate in the political process
- Youth organizations independent of government structures (at all levels)
- Decentralized government decision-making and distribution of funds
- Inclusion of marginalized groups (women, people with disabilities) in decision-making processes

Youth can bring about positive change if policy makers actively make space for them in the political sphere. One way that government and other organizations can create more opportunities for dialogue between their representatives and youth is by empowering youth teams to systematically and thoroughly evaluate government programs and services.

Youth organizations should consider the opportunities gained from decentralization. While many urban youth participate in youth structures at the national level, youth in the counties who could contribute to the success of these organizations frequently lack access.

Furthermore, current youth organization could better serve their members by reducing their reliance on government funding. This financial separation would not limit the possibilities for public-private partnership with government authorities, but could offer the chance to develop new partnerships across the larger international community. Additionally, this newfound autonomy could pave the way for youth organizations to assume a more critical advocacy role.

There are divisions among youth that often reflect education, wealth, and gender. Those in power must not ignore the diverse opinions of youth because all perspectives are valuable and necessary. Organizations should create a checklist that requires input from all youth including marginalized groups such as females, those with disabilities, and single parents. Training on the process of establishing a community organization would enhance the abilities of youth who do not have the proper connections to establish civil society organizations.
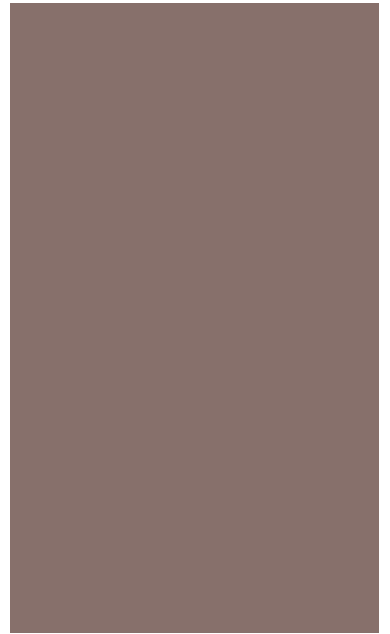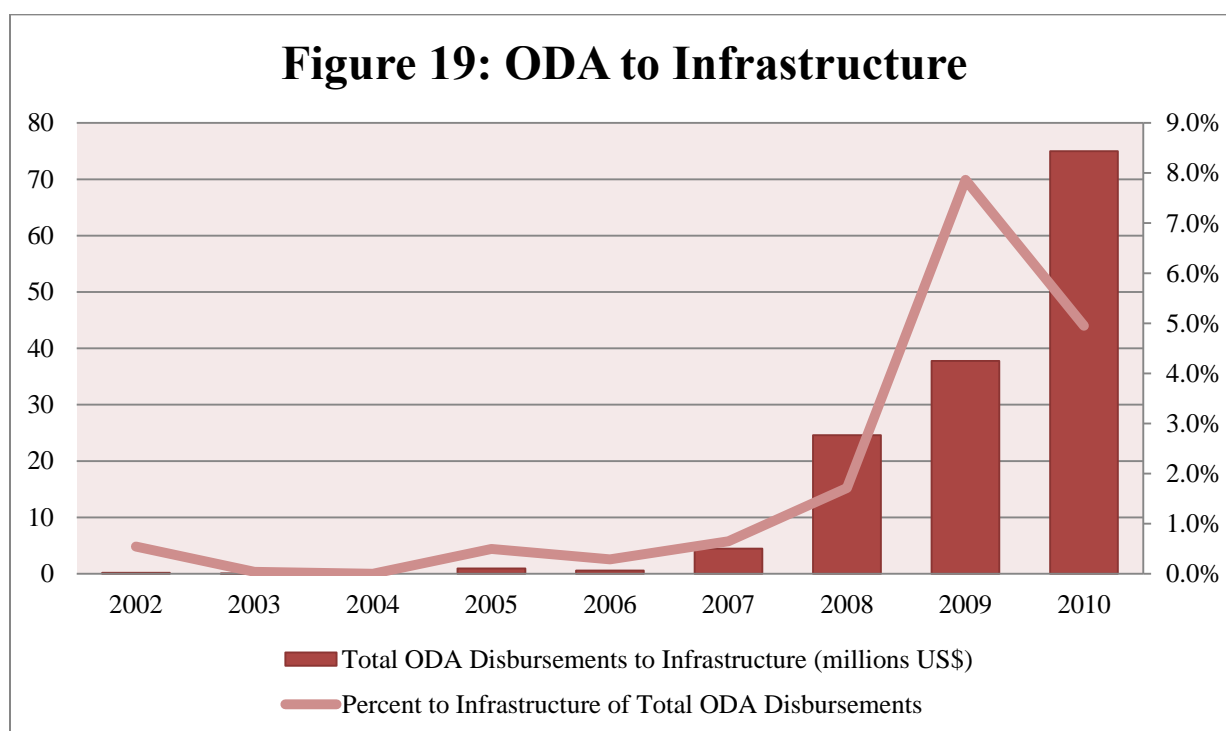
Infrastructure

Infrastructure

When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2003, the limited infrastructure that pre-existed the conflict was virtually decimated. The basic elements of a functional country, such as roads, clean water, solid waste disposal, and electric power were effectively nonexistent. The Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy Report acknowledges that poor infrastructure negatively impacts income-earning opportunities, purchasing parity, access to health and education facilities, and food security. It also states that women and children as well as persons with disabilities are disproportionately burdened by poor infrastructure.[108] A representative of a bilateral donor stated that the first issue that NGOs should be addressing is that of infrastructure because poor infrastructure is a root cause of poverty.

Figure 19: ODA to Infrastructure

Legend:
- Total ODA Disbursements to Infrastructure (millions US$)
- Percent to Infrastructure of Total ODA Disbursements

Source: OECD, 2012

Donor funding to infrastructure has increased steadily since 2006. About three percent of ODA funding since 2002 has gone towards infrastructure. In 2010, US$75 million, (4.95 percent of ODA funding) was committed to this sector.

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[108] Government of Liberia, *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, 29

Table 10: Infrastructure ODA Subsectors (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Water Supply & Sanitation	0.16	0	0	0.86	0.33	0.69	3.79	6.65	6.53	19.01
Transport & Storage	0	0.03	0	0	0.23	3.72	20.8	30.85	68.44	124.07
Communications	0.02	0	0	0.07	0.02	0.04	0	0.26	0	0.41
Total ODA Disbursements to Infrastructure	0.18	0.03	0	0.93	0.58	4.45	24.59	37.76	74.97	143.49

Source: OECD, 2012

Since 2003, many facets of the infrastructure sector have not improved dramatically, or statistics are not available. The one clear exception is mobile phone subscriptions — which have increased from 2 per 100 people in 2003, to 39 per 100 people in 2010, an increase of nearly 2,000 percent.[109] Youth participants discussed infrastructure in terms of many of the other themes.

Roads

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Report identifies roads as the most critical infrastructure issue in Liberia. Improvement of roads has been linked to poverty reduction for several reasons: Improved roads are thought to increase farm-to-market access and thus income-earning opportunities; to reduce transportation costs and thus reduce commodity prices and increase purchasing parity; and to improve access to health and education services.[110] The most recent year for which statistics on the state of roads have been estimated is 2001. In that year, merely 6.2 percent of total roads in Liberia were paved,[111] primarily in and around Monrovia. Regardless of whether they were paved or simply made of packed clay, lack of maintenance has left the majority of roads in Liberia today in a state of critical disrepair. Large potholes and deep ruts, exacerbated annually by heavy rains and the weight of industrial trucks, impede vehicular travel.

According to the 2011 *Liberia Budget Framework Paper*, the GoL intends to not only repair and build roads, but also to develop local capacity, so that public works projects can be maintained.[112] In January of 2012 it was announced that Liberia and a Chinese construction company signed a US$166 million, 10-year agreement to pave the 180.36 km Monrovia-Gbarnga-Ganta highway. The plan is for some Liberian owned construction companies to work with the Chinese company to build the road, and the Ministry of Public Works to be involved in a supervisory role.[113] This project has the potential to generate employment and build capacity for youth and other interested parties in Liberia. In order for contracts — such as the one outlined

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[109] World Bank, *World Development Indicator*, accessed February 2012
[110] Poverty Reduction Strategy, 29
[111] Index Mundi, "Liberia Roads," http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/liberia/roads, accessed June 1, 2012
[112] Ministry of Finance,
http://www.mof.gov.lr/doc/Abridged%20FINAL%20BUDGET%20FRAMEWORK%20PAPER.pdf\
[113] E. J. Nathaniel Dagbora, Liberia: "Govt Signs Contract to Pave Major Highway" *The New Dawn*
http://allafrica.com/stories/201201260501.html,

to empower the citizens of Liberia through employment and capacity building opportunities however — the GoL, perhaps through the Ministry of Public Works, will need to strengthen its capacity to regulate the industry, to ensure that workers' rights are being protected.

As noted in the account below, young people are willing to work on the roads, but the perception that they need the government to assist them is strong and persistent.

The Motorbike Riders

In Yekepah, Nimba County, two 18-year-old men discussed their community over breakfast:
"The condition of the road is bad."
"Bad!"

"Very Bad"

"We the motorcycle people, the road bad … our tire is caused to damage because the rock is sharp … even if he a good rider he can fall down."

He goes on to say how it takes a long time to reach the hospital if there is an accident. "The road condition is not correct. People have to pave the road. Anytime they talk about it they don't do so."

"I don't think everything should be the government. Should work hand-in-hand. The government do some. We do some."

"We can brush the road"

"I'd be happy to [prepare the road for free]. The only time I feel bad about it when they allow me to brush and then they don't do what they say they would do."

They go on to recount the time they were promised a pump, so the community prepared the land, and then no pump was ever delivered. After finishing the conversation, they got back on their motorbikes, and rode off looking for fares.

There are some examples, however, where civil society has already stepped in to maintain or restore roads. A 28-year-old man in Picnicess, Grand Kru County said, *"The road condition is not bad, but the only problem is that we the citizens at times have to fill in some of these potholes that is on the road."*

The decrepit state of roads in Liberia has lent itself to a substantial rise in the existence of the motorbike taxi. As previously mentioned, thousands of young men in Liberia have turned to motorbike riding to earn money. In some cases, it is the motorists themselves who, in the pursuit of profit, are now creating roads:

> Sometimes we, the motorbike riders, use our own cutlasses to bust the roads to force the motorbike to go there. Only because other people there they want to

carry their load and other things. We just volunteer to do that, because it's the only way of us getting something from them (making money).

The poor condition of the roads allows for them to be more easily navigated by motorbikes, however these conditions also magnify the safety risks inherent in motorbike riding. Many youth have turned to motor biking as a last resort, despite the perception among many Liberians that young men prefer this way of life.

Bridges
Key programmatic interventions for the 2011-2012 fiscal year that pertain to bridges include the intention of the government to formulate a five-year strategic plan for the roads and bridges; installation of 17 bailey bridges; and providing scholarships for study in relevant roads and bridges disciplines in local and international universities.[114] Often dilapidated or nonexistent bridges keep small towns and villages isolated and do not allow for their development. A prime example can be seen in rural Teajiliken, River Gee County, where residents are working together with the GoL to construct the community's very first bridge. Ultimately this bridge will connect their town to the rest of the county and provide for innumerable economic and social opportunities. Throughout the 15 counties, there are also multiple newly built bridges that residents are very proud of and excited about. Indeed, these bridges will prove especially helpful during Liberia's infamous rainy season.

Water and Sanitation

All residents of rural communities spoken with during the "Listening and Learning" process expressed concerns over the state of basic services. Many youth reported that people in their villages lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. In a small village in River Cess County a young man reported that villagers use the forest to defecate, they drink from the river, and furthermore they do not have easy access to a clinic. He passionately uttered that as a result of this three-fold lack of access to basic services they have repeatedly had to *"bury their children."*

The percentage of rural households with access to an improved water source[115] has increased from just less than 56 percent in 2007 to just over 58 percent in 2009.[116] Many have not seen any improvement in water infrastructure. As one young woman reported:

The town is very large. It is bigger than many of the towns that have a city mayor but they have only one hand pump and it is spoiled so they drink well water or buy water and drink it. What is shocking most about it, is that the town is not far away

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[114]Ministry of Finance, "Abridged Budget Framework Paper," 2011, 8.
http://www.mof.gov.lr/doc/Abridged%20FINAL%20BUDGET%20FRAMEWORK%20PAPER.pdf, accessed February 12, 2012
[115] In 2007 bottled water was not considered to be an improved water source due to ambiguity over the quality of such water. However in the 2009 survey, bottled water was considered as an improved water source. This statistical increase could merely be a reflection of the decision to included bottled water as an improved water source in the 2009 survey, and whether or not the quality of bottled water actually improved over that period has not been established.
[116] 2007 statistic: Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report 2007, p. 22; 2009 statistic; Liberia Demographic and Health Survey MIS Report 2009, p. 14

from the city! You tend to ask yourself — to experience the situation in [a village] is kind of different, but having it right there where road system is very good and the communications system is okay!

Those with piped water are considered to have access to improved water sources. However, a youth pointed out that most of the pipes in Liberia are old, rusty, not clean, and still made of a contaminant linked to cancer. Nationally, the percentage of Liberians with piped water has decreased from 7 percent in 2000 to 2 percent in 2008.[117] Many youth reported that there was a hand pump in their community, but that it was not a source of improved water for them because it was broken or because it was dry. If a pump did exist in a community, the community member reported that an NGO had built it. Improved sanitation facilities in Liberia are lacking even more so than improved water sources. Nationally, only 44 percent of Liberian households use improved sanitation facilities, and only 27 percent in rural areas. In Cestos Village, River Cess County, it was reported that while there is a latrine in the village it is locked, and those that do not have a key are denied access to the toilet.

Structures

Liberians expressed the opinion that the presence of health, education, and civic buildings in a community would be a positive step toward young people becoming more engaged. The existence of such structures across Liberia however is sparse, with little to no presence of such buildings in rural areas. Youth often join together to build structures for their communities. For example youth in a village in Lofa County were building a guesthouse using community funding. Youth can also successfully lobby for outside funds and assistance to construct the buildings that they place high value on, such as youth centers.

A private company has pledged to contribute US$3 million annually to the County Social Development Funds (CSDF) for development in the counties where it operates. A 2011 report by The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) states that, "the impact of the social development fund is limited because the overall governance and management have been poor."[118] The report goes on to state that without proper reform of the governance of development funds, more than US$ 3 billion could be lost.[119]

Youth with Disabilities

In a post-war setting, persons with disabilities (PWD) are a more visible part of the population, with many disabled youth performing impressive feats of strength and endurance to overcome their additional challenges to reach their goals. But PWD find that poor infrastructure creates often insurmountable obstructions. Youth PWDs described how many buildings are not accessible and how wheelchair riders cannot use the potholed sidewalks. PWDs in rural areas

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[117] Mo Ibrahim Foundation, "The Ibrahim Index," accessed February 2012, http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index.
[118] The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) *2011 Report Liberia*, 32
[119] The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) *2011 Report Liberia,* 32

especially find infrastructure provides the greatest barrier to their engagement because they cannot make it to school to receive the education they desire.

Electricity

Liberia lacks a national grid and electricity is primarily derived from diesel generators. The researchers in Zone 1 visited the old electrical power plant in Parker Corner Town, Montserrado County. According to the security guard on duty, he is there with the goal of protecting the remaining equipment and structure because the government is intending to rehabilitate it for electricity production again. However, since the plant was severely damaged during the war and has been completely looted since, it will take a huge investment on the part of the GoL in order to make that a reality.

Substantial electrical power is a rare and strange sight across the Liberian countryside. Massive generators at United Nations Mission In Liberia's (UNMIL) camps power barracks, large flood lights, and television rooms, while the surrounding communities sit in the dark. A short stretch of telephone wires along the main road in Grand Gedeh County catch the eye immediately. They were installed by one family that receives substantial remittances from the United States. Though not ideal, the access to electricity for residents in Monrovia stood in stark contrast to those in the counties. Rural conversation participants occasionally discussed the need for better access to electricity. But they frequently framed this in terms of needing improved cell phone charging capabilities or better lit, safer communities.

Technology

Infrastructure that enables people to access information is sparse in Liberia. Youth both own and use new technologies more than adults. For example, of youth aged 15-35, 13.35 percent receive news from television at least a few times a week and 17.09 percent get news from the newspaper at least a few times a week. This is greater than the percentage of those over the age of 35 who are getting their news from television and the newspaper, 8.45 percent and 10.50 percent, respectively. Additionally, 5.1 percent of youth aged 18-35 used a computer at least a few times a week, compared with 4.5 percent of those over 35. Radio continues to be the most common source of information for Liberians. Due to over 50 percent of youth owning radios, they commonly see it as a solution to addressing communication challenges, for example in advocating for youth participation. However, the number of adults over 35 receiving their news from the radio is even greater than that of youth, 70.92 percent and 67.92 percent, respectively.[120] See table 11 below.

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[120] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Table 11: Percentage Accessing Information Technology by Age

	Age 18-35	Age 36+
Use Cell Phone at least few times a week	49.62	41.08
Use a computer at least a few times a week	5.1	4.5
Use the internet at least a few times a week	3.75	3
Own a radio	55.17	57.22
Own a television	11.99	10.88
Get news from the radio at least a few times a week	67.92	70.92
Get news from the television at least a few times a week	13.35	8.45
Get news from the newspaper at least a few times a week	17.09	10.5

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

According to Afrobarometer data, in 2008, 10.84 percent of youth aged 18-24 used computers at least a once a month, and 9.64 percent of youth aged 18-24 occasionally used the Internet.[121] Computer and Internet use was observed to be much greater in Monrovia, while in the counties it was virtually non-existent. Computers are becoming increasingly more popular and young people are beginning to realize that computer literacy may soon be necessary to be competitive in the job market. Young people use computers and the Internet more than adults do, but it is still a small minority with access to computers.[122] Many youth in both urban and rural areas express strong desire and curiosity for computer training. For example, many of the Liberian research partners were enthusiastic about improving their computer skills during this project.

Youth Engagement & Infrastructure

- Roads are significant for youth engagement in various sectors
- Poor water and sanitation infrastructure dramatically affect youth's health
- Youth are engaged in building physical structures in their communities
- Cell phone and Internet use is becoming increasingly necessary
- Donor funding for infrastructure has increased in the last two years

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[121] Ibid
[122] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Infrastructure Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various areas surrounding infrastructure that they would like to see addressed to better improve their engagement in society. While many of these issues are well known by Liberians, policy makers, and practitioners, it is critical to state the issues imperative to youth.

As a result of the research, with particular attention given to the opinions of young Liberians, the following needs were identified:

- Improved and increased road network especially connecting health, education, and market facilities
- More bridges
- More water pumps in rural areas
- Increased electricity access throughout the country
- Increased cell phone network access
- Improved internet access in rural areas

Engaging youth in infrastructure development can be a way to improve their engagement with their communities. A work-for-grant program can be established where youth build roads or work on constructing and maintaining cell phone towers for a predetermined amount of time at a predetermined level of pay, and at completion of the program will be awarded a grant to cover school expenses.

Youth can use infrastructure projects to build unity as well as have their priorities actualized in their communities. Youth groups which have already been successful in this process should educate others via radio and a government sponsored tour. Their stories of success and pragmatic advice on overcoming challenges will help other youth groups achieve their goals and reduce the common perception that the government is solely responsible for the provision of services.
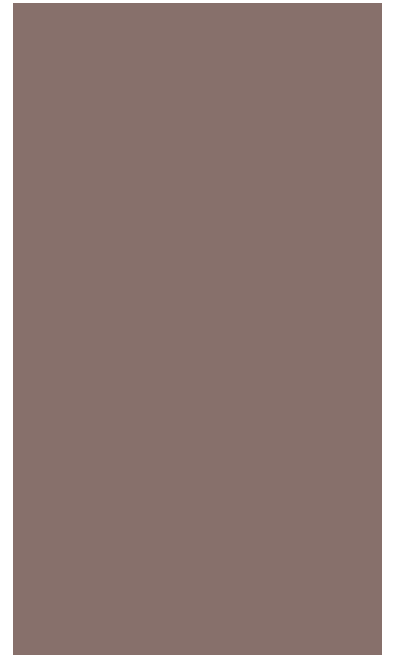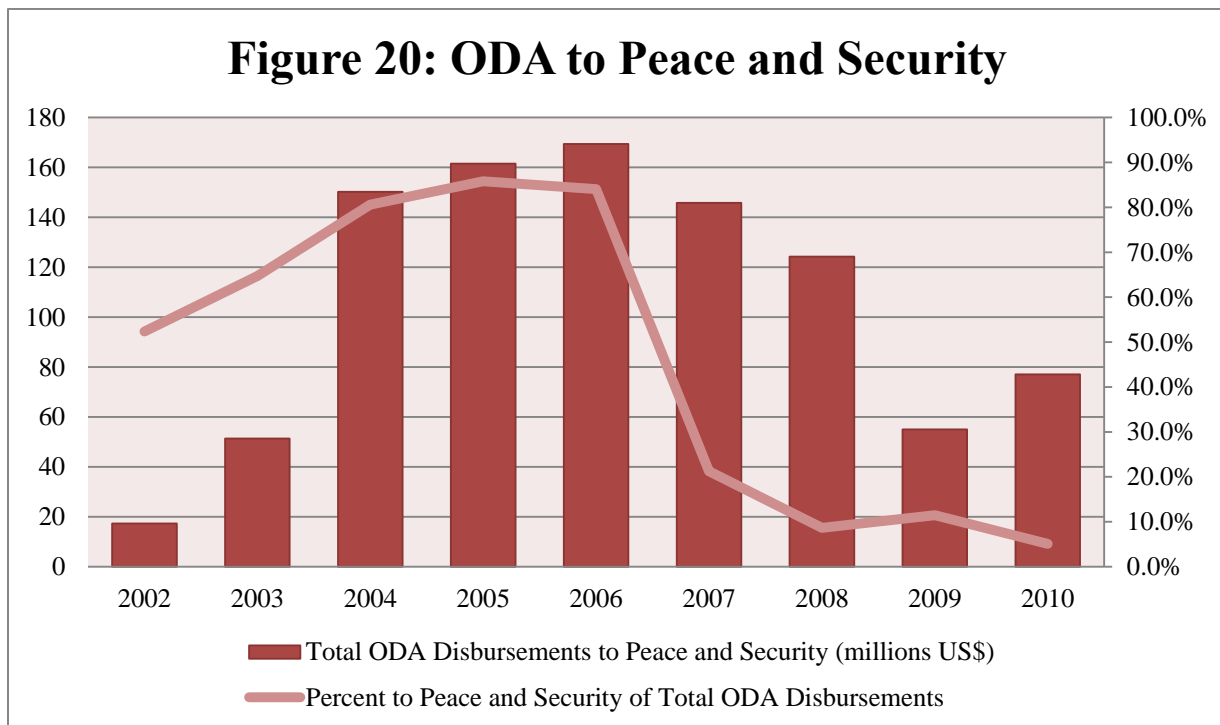
Peace and Security

Peace and Security

"I am proud of UNMIL, we really love them…at night they patrol and it makes the thieves go into hiding. With the help of UNMIL we got a lot of young people working…if they leave it would be really bad for us here!"

— University Student, Maryland County

Less than a decade after the end of a brutal 14-year war, Liberia remains in a fragile state. Naturally, peace and security concerns emerged as major themes. Liberia has made great strides since the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement towards reducing violence. Yet, remnants of buildings destroyed during the war, and UNMIL trucks that patrol the streets of many towns are a constant reminder of the past. In addition there is a great need to strengthen formal security institutions such as rule of law, police, and prisons. One must also consider a more holistic notion of peace, which encompasses a much broader set of ideals such as a true building of trust and reconciliation, and a shift towards dealing with conflict in a preventive rather than solely reactive manner.

Source: OECD, 2012

Donor funding towards peace and security commanded more ODA funding in the post-conflict era than the other seven themes identified, rising as high as 85.81 percent of all funding in 2005. In recent years funding to peace and security has decreased, but this sector still received US$77 million, 5.09% of all funding in 2010.

Table 12: Peace and Security ODA Subsectors (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Conflict, Peace & Security	0	4.64	6.62	57.93	66.32	59.22	56.21	22.32	49.04	322.3
Emergency Response	15.94	39.98	128.1	98.81	101.8	69.78	49.28	27.19	18.11	548.97
Reconstruction Relief & Rehabilitation	0.68	0.45	13.41	3.08	0.91	16.76	18.73	5.13	9.49	68.64
Disaster Prevention & Preparedness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.37	0.43	0.8
Refugees in Donor Countries	0.7	6.25	2.13	1.68	0.32	0	0	0	0	11.08
Total ODA Disbursements to Peace and Security	17.32	51.32	150.2	161.5	169.4	145.8	124.2	55.01	77.07	951.79

Source: OECD, 2012

Rule of Law

Liberia scores poorly in the *Rule of Law* Index,[123] which ranks countries according to nine factors.[124] With a score of 0.56 (0=lowest to 1=highest), Liberia ranked 60th out of 66 countries globally on "order and security" in 2011. Liberia was ranked poorest — 66th out of 66 — for "regulatory enforcement," and was ranked second worst — 65th out of 66 — for both "access to civil justice" and "effective criminal justice." However, for "fundamental rights", Liberia is in the middle range for all countries and is doing particularly well when compared to other low-income countries.[125]

Police

> ### *A Taxi Driver's Story*
>
> *A young taxi driver in Monrovia told me that he was once stopped by police in traffic and, the police officer requested he present his identity card for nationality verification. Once he pulled out the Liberian citizen ID card, the police officer said he didn't deserve to hold such ID as he wasn't Liberian because he couldn't express himself very well in English.*

Despite respect for, and attempts to improve formal security measures, conversations revealed that young people have a complex relationship with the police. In many areas, police were not perceived as legitimate agents of the state. Approximately 30 percent of Afrobarometer respondents aged 18-24 reported not trusting the police at all and another 36 percent said that

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[123] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, accessed February 2012, http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index-data.

[124] The nine factors include: limited government powers, absence of corruption, order and security, fundamental rights, open government, effective regulatory enforcement, access to civil justice, effective criminal justice, and informal justice.

[125] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, accessed February 2012, http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index-data.

they trusted the police just a little (all responses shown in figure 21 below). Some, such as a young motorbike rider in River Gee County, talked about police harassment:

> *They [the police] are not good because they not working on this side. They grab you [motorbike rider] on the road and flog you, the ERU (Emergency Response Unit). Nothing you can do because no government worker on this side.*
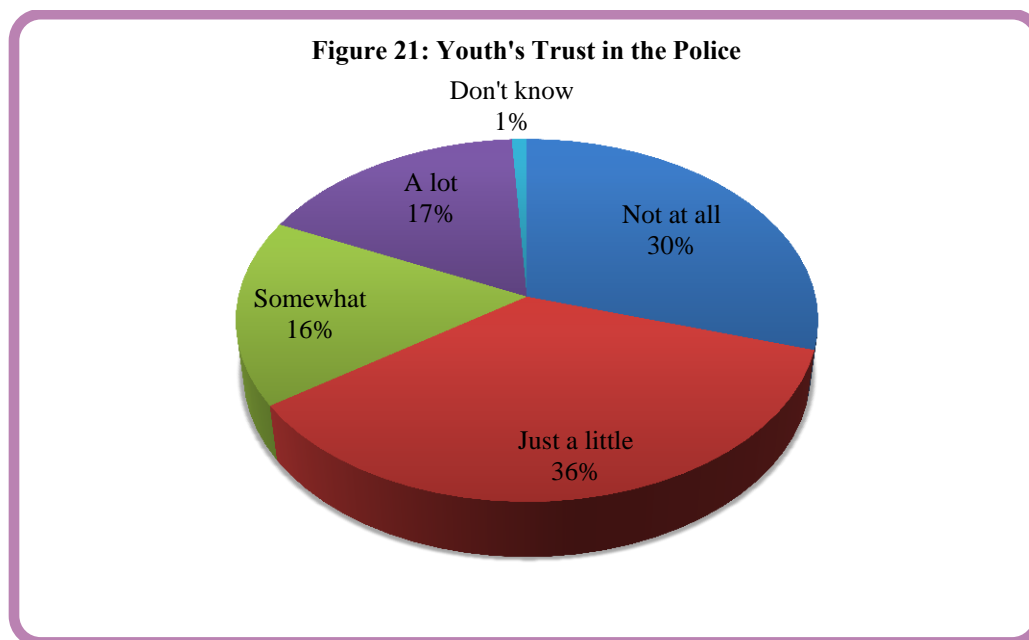
Source: Afrobarometer, 2012

Police corruption also came up as a common topic. The police force is perceived as the institution most affected by corruption according to Transparency International.[126] According to youth respondents, police corruption is one of the major peace and security issues. For example, motorbike riders complained that they were charged inconsistent fees at immigration check points.

Despite these factors, youth, for the most part, want to trust the police and recognize the importance of having a strong local security force. Youth overwhelmingly recognize the need for improvements in their own security forces. Once police are better trained, many youth believe that Liberians should run Liberia, and UNMIL forces should leave.

When describing why police were ineffective, many youth decried a lack of police in their communities. In central Bong County, a group of young men voiced their disapproval at having only three policemen in their district. They were dismissive of the idea that these policemen could help the community during an emergency, *"It is impossible! With only three policemen in the county? How?!"* Frustration and desire for a strong police presence was echoed in Monrovia. Youth described their security situation there:

> *Really we don't have good security in the area. People come in the night, bust doors on people and when the people are shouting you can't really come out.*

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[126] "Corruption by Country," *Transparency International*, accessed May 2012, http://www.transparency.org/country#LBR_PublicOpinion.

When you come out they chop/sharp you. You call on the government, even the police, you call 911 to come to your aid but the more you call them the phone will just ring ring. They can't answer. Even the police we get here, the ERU, they don't really patrol in the community in the night. They do their patrol right on the field so that when the armed robbers come on you you'll just call them, it will be for nothing, they won't pick up the call.

Others pointed to the fact that Liberian officers don't carry guns. For example, one youth reported that police did not come when called during a burglary. He explained that the reason for this failure to appear was that the officers felt outmatched by the thieves. However, when the option of arming the police was raised, youth frequently responded that the police should not be armed until they receive more training.

Instead of relying on formal security mechanisms, many conflicts and misunderstanding are settled within communities by residents themselves. Often, a peace council made up of elders, youth, and women listen and judge each case brought before the council. Only when the council cannot settle the case is the accused referred to a nearby police station. In addition, some communities have *"community police"* made up of local residents, who receive training from UNMIL to carry out their duties. However, most community members reported that despite having these trained community police they still experienced petty crime.

In other cases, perceived crime is thwarted through mob justice. In Sanniquellie, Nimba County, researchers witnessed a throng of people beating a startled man accused of stealing from the market. While one older community member pleaded from a distance for the violence to stop, the crowd continued to beat the man.

__Account from a Liberian Researcher__

"Momolu, go use your conflict mediation skills! Go! Now!" shouts Jennifer.

"I- I- I..." he stutters, "I don't think I can really do anything..."

"Come on, and go now... I'm begging you!" She is really insistent...

Two drunk men have been fighting in a small community in Maryland County and just as we were getting into our car to drive away, we hear all the commotion. From our vantage point we can see a man, bound up in rope being dragged through the dusty dirt. We can't see his face, but the way he is struggling and screaming ... it is enough to make anyone's skin crawl.

Jennifer is shouting at Momolu to get out of the car... to "DO SOMETHING!" Hassan is calmly saying, "It's not our problem — this is how they handle things here." Momolu has one foot nervously hanging out the back door, but keeps looking back as if he needed approval to go. I'm holding my breath.

Jennifer exclaims, "This is why I avoid coming to the rural areas — people are so backward and don't know how to act. Now this is how the Americans will remember Liberia — with crazy people! For me, that is so bad!"

I, too agree with Jennifer that someone should do something, but I sure am not going to get in the middle of this!

Whew, ok finally Momolu is going to see if he can calm the situation…

I don't want to watch — but I keep watching. Momolu isn't getting anywhere.
People are getting nervous and starting to ask us if we should call the police. We are NOT calling the police.

"Momolu! Let's go!" Jennifer shouts.

*He comes running back, jumps in the car, and slams the door. We take off.*

Our American team member asks, "So, what will happen to that guy?"

I don't want to tell her. So I don't.

I stay quiet.

Crime

As noted, rule of law and institutions are weak and do not effectively combat crime. Many youth expressed fears such as being attacked by robbers and other criminals. While approximately 80 percent of 2008 Afrobarometer survey respondents reported that they had not been attacked in the year prior to the survey, approximately 20 percent of respondents reported that they had been attacked, and 4 percent said that they had been attacked several times.[127] The number of times that respondents reported they were attacked in the year prior to the survey is depicted below in figure 22.
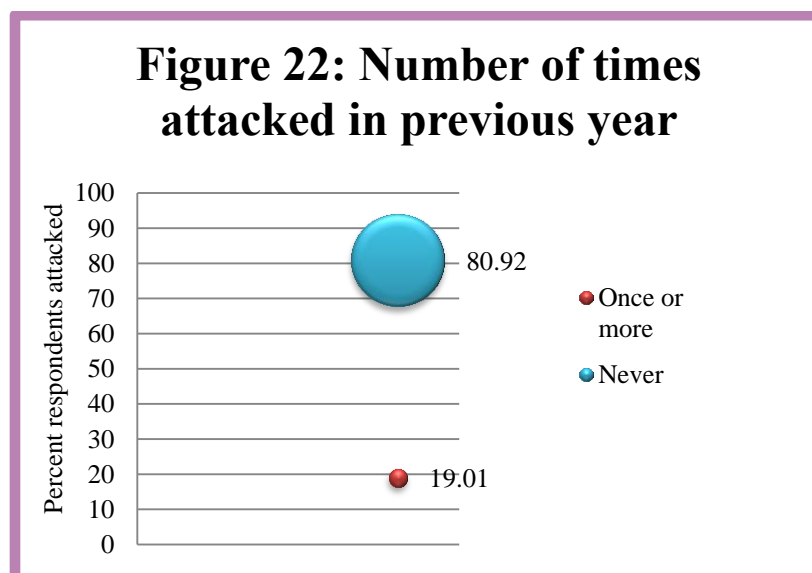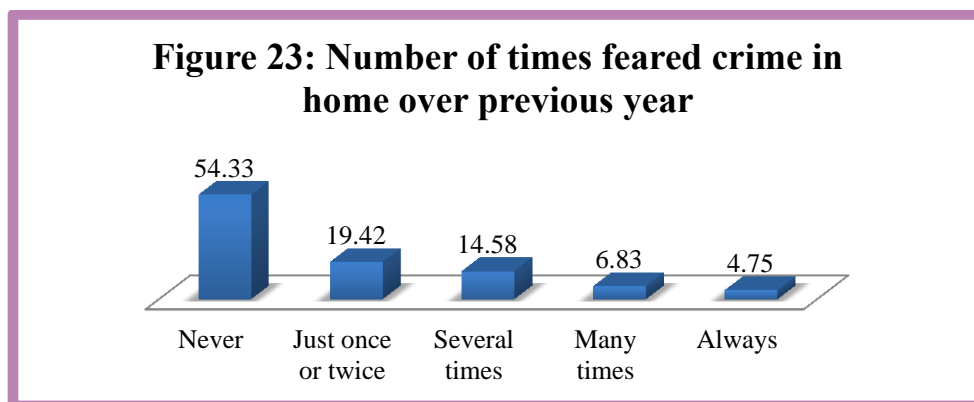

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

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[127] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Respondents reported that they fear for their safety especially at night, and they pointed to lack of electricity as an explanation for high crime rates. One young person described the situation as follows:

We are living in fear in this community because the police is based in upper Caldwell. They do not patrol at night on this side of the community. The community is very large and densely populated. Many nights we can feel scared because we can see strange car in the community at night with group of men.

Feelings of insecurity are not limited to public spaces, nearly half of the Afrobarometer respondents reported fearing crime in their own homes over the previous year.

Figure 23: Number of times feared crime in home over previous year

Never	Just once or twice	Several times	Many times	Always
54.33	19.42	14.58	6.83	4.75

Source: Afrobarometer, 2008

In at least one case, fear of murder was sufficient to keep students who had to work during the day from attending night classes. Such instances exemplify the manner in which elements — in this case, infrastructure, employment, education, and peace and security — are intricately intertwined and the way in which barriers to youth engagement require multi-level interventions.

Safety concerns extend beyond criminal acts. In rural areas, people cited death and injury from accidents as one of the greatest threats to livelihood and well-being. Another concern brought up by a young respondent was fear of wildfires. She mentioned that the largest disaster her community had faced was a cooking fire that had spread throughout the village. Lack of emergency response measures and the need to light fires in order to prepare food exacerbate such dangers.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

It is still very easy to access small arms and light weapons in Liberia.[128] Access to weapons is thought to increase the likelihood that conflict will break out.[129] Consequently, there is reason to believe that access to such weapons is a threat to sustained peace. However, Economist

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[128] Vision of Humanity, Global Peace Index, accessed January 2012, http://www.visionofhumanity.org/info-center/global-peace-index-2011/.

[129] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, 2000. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2355. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=630727

Intelligence Unit (EIU) analysts also state that Liberians have a low willingness to fight,[130] and some accounts in the field supported this finding. For example, an UNMIL soldier claimed that Liberians are sick of war. He said that if a child finds just one shell in the bush he will rush to deliver it to the UNMIL base rather than keep it.[131]

While it is no longer common to hoard weapons in order to use them in war, different communities recounted the use of arms to perform crimes such as robbery. Fear of armed crimes was not limited to guns. For example, one young person described being robbed in the middle of the night by three men carrying machetes.

Prisons

In addition to lack of police efficacy, prisons are in short supply in Liberia. And when they do exist, they are often inadequate. Dilapidated structures and lack of guards pose a threat to public safety, and substandard prison conditions compromise inmate's health.

Visiting a Prison

The central prison (for the country) in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh, would not allow the research team to tour the facility or to talk to any prisoners. Conversely, the prison compound in Fishtown, River Gee County, was extremely welcoming, perhaps because it had only 13 prisoners and one guard. It is located in an extremely small, dilapidated building right across the street from the guesthouse where the research team stayed. As one walks up to the prison along a dirt path from the main road, two wooden structures stand out and men sitting on makeshift benches start to come into focus.

"Are they playing checkers?" I asked my partner Ishmael incredulously.

"Yes."

We walked a few steps closer.

"Wait a minute... Ishmael! Are they not handcuffed or tied to anything?" I stopped dead in my tracks.

I'm all for taking risks and going where others don't go, but come on! A prison where the inmates roam around freely and hang out playing board games? I wasn't too sure I wanted to continue this little excursion anymore!

Ishmael, realizing my sudden need for reassurance, turned, looked me in the eye, smiled and said "Com'on, it's fine — they're people too, and we need to hear their stories!"

Walking past the inmates, all eyes on me, we entered the house and were greeted by a small man wearing a reflective vest. He excitedly introduced himself and began telling us a bit about the prison. There were 13 prisoners — 12 male and 1 female, and two rooms with well-worn

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[130] "Vision of Humanity, Global Peace Index, accessed January 2012, http://www.visionofhumanity.org/info-center/global-peace-index-2011/.

[131] Despite domestic unwillingness to fight, participants that lived close to the borders expressed suspicion of foreigners, and feared violence from the outside.

cushions used as mattresses on the ground. A few pieces of haphazardly placed wood nailed to the walls constituted a meager attempt to prevent escape. As he was speaking, men were coming in and out of the room, curious as to who we were and why we were there — and then, all of a sudden we heard, "Ishmael? Ishmael!...It is you!"

In a state of shock Ishmael stood and greeted his "big brother." The man sat on the bench next to us as Ishmael asked, with emotion straining his voice, "My man, what happened? How are you here?"

After Ishmael put some cash into his friend's hand, and assured him that he would make some calls on his behalf, we got up to leave. As we walked away an hour or so after our arrival, I was silent — processing the experience. Ishmael, on the other hand, just kept saying, "I grew up with him. He was my big brother, like a brother to me. I can't believe he is here."

That evening, during our team's debrief, to our surprise, we discovered another pair from our team had also stopped by the prison that day … it seemed we weren't the only ones for whom it had piqued curiosity.

"George, did you have a conversation with one of them?"

"Ya, a young guy — he even had finished his second test of grade 12!"

"Wow… we just talked to the guard. How was it talking to the prisoner?"

"It was fine, he was easy. It seemed like he was happy to have someone to listen to his story. He [was] just sentenced yesterday for 10 years."

"Whew! What did he do?"

"He accidentally killed his friend. They got in a fight and when he hit him he just fell off. They rushed him to the hospital, but however, he died though."

Sounds of shock and pity came from the whole team.

"It's because he was in Cote d'Ivoire during the war and got 'fighting medicine' on his hands (witchcraft) — he never had it removed and didn't realize it would still hold power."

The whole team seemed to understand this and completely accept it as a legitimate explanation — I was the only one left dumbfounded.

"So now he's concerned about his two-year-old daughter. He left her with his girlfriend, but he is the one who has been supporting them… through mining."

"Ahhh, ya. So he doesn't know what they're gonna do now, huh?"

"Ya. But he is still optimistic about the future."

"For true? Why doesn't he just escape?"

"I asked him that! Because he is big and healthy… he said he knew he had done something bad and he needed to stay. I think he feels guilty."

"Huh… ya. How did he say conditions are there?"

"That's the terrible part. The sanitation issues really bothered me. Twelve persons using one bath bucket, one bathing towel… it's just not sanitary!"

I jumped in, and questioned my team member George as to why he seemed so much more passionate discussing this conversation than he ever had before and he responded, "I'm just two years older than him. He's black in color, healthy in body — like me. I felt that I could have been in the same position as him."

"Wow, ok so you felt a connection to him, that you could see yourself in his shoes… if some things had gone differently in your life?"

"Yeah, there are many things you do in your life, that you don't know will haunt you tomorrow. For me, I felt that it was just a little mistake [that] dramatically changed his entire life…"

The whole room was silent.

"Do you think it's good that you heard his story?" I asked.

"Yes for sure. Seeing me as a young person and sharing his story I think was a means of getting hope."

Land Disputes

Tensions in Liberia commonly arise from two types of land disputes. The first is the sale of land to companies or the allocation of land for infrastructure purposes. On the way to Voinjama, Lofa County, large yellow crosses could be seen on most roadside buildings, demarcating the houses that were to be demolished for the expansion of the road. A young person in a town in Lofa County was asked about the compensation package offered to those losing their house or business. He confidently affirmed that although the government might promise something, nothing would actually be provided.

Secondly, disputes over pre- and post- conflict land ownership have been a major source of conflict in Liberia. In Lofa and Nimba counties predominantly, youth discussed being confronted by land disputes. Many spoke about their experiences leaving their counties to engage in combat or departing Liberia to flee the war, and returning home to find that others had claimed their land.

Lionel's Story

Lionel is a young man from a rural village. Like many Liberians, he fled to Côte d'Ivoire during the war and resided there as a refugee. With little means to continue his education, he dropped out of school in the seventh grade and pursued vocational training in general construction,

learning how to do plumbing and roofing. What kept him going was the dream that one day he would come back to his village and use the skills he was acquiring to build up his life again. He would always remind himself, "My father worked that land and so I am going to develop that land too."

When he came back from exile, he found out to his dismay that the land on which he had planned to restart his life had been taken over by community elders and sold to different people. Because he lost much of his family during the war, there was no one to help him get his land back. To make things worse, there are no jobs in construction in the area.

Now, with a wife and four children to support, Lionel cannot afford to go back to school — he prefers to use his limited resources to pay for his children's school fees. Lionel worries about his children because the government school that they attend does not go past the ninth grade. In addition, while his children can currently still qualify for free treatment at the hospital that the Chinese built (because they're still under the age cut-off), when his kids turn six they will have to pay money for medical care. Without their land, Lionel's family will continue to struggle.

Land disputes are not neatly divided along ethnic lines, but it was rare to encounter land disputes between members of the same tribe. While land disputes affect different age groups, they have a particularly negative effect on youth. This cohort of the population is especially vulnerable to loss of land and a home because it lowers their already-precarious status within their communities.

It is rare to find individuals with land deeds, so such disputes become very complex and often devolve into violence. Nearly 90 percent of Afrobarometer respondents stated that their experience with conflicts over land ownership and distribution in Liberia led to violent conflict at least sometimes.

Figure 24: Frequency of violent conflicts over land (as perceived by Afrobarometer respondents)
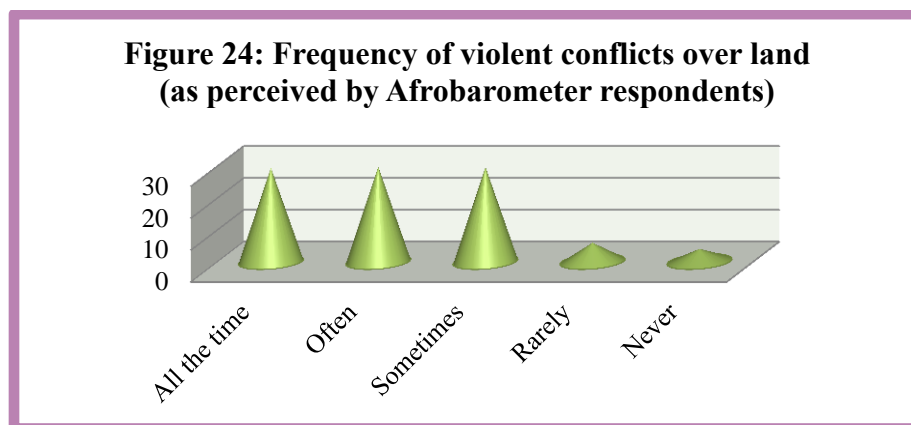
Source: Afrobarometer, 2012

Conflict Stemming from Traditional Practices

Traditional beliefs and customs are integral to Liberian culture and identity. Traditional practices provide many benefits to communities, yet they are often exclusive in nature, which leads to conflict. For instance, some young participants described feeling ostracized and fearful because they were not part of the *Sande society or "*secret society" in their village.[132] Since the society

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[132] A more detailed discussion of Sande societies appear on page 113.

strongly emphasizes secrecy and constancy, they would have to stay inside when the society conducted their ritual of *"putting the devil out."* While these youth did not mind not being part of the society, they did not like not knowing what was happening outside their walls. On occasion, when young people were asked why they did not challenge the status quo if it was causing them discomfort, they responded, *"This is Africa."* This response was a reference to the physical punishment they would receive for challenging traditional practices. In another conversation, a young person in a community near the Lofa-Bong border described how local leaders wanted to build a community center, but were prevented from doing so by the local *zoes* and the secret society who had rigid control over the forest. A leadership dispute followed and a government representative had to come in to mediate.

Oftentimes, traditional practices lead to more than intimidation. In Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties, young people described how ritualistic killings, linked to witchcraft, are on the rise. In Harper, Maryland County, however, the view was presented differently. People continue to discuss the occurrence of such *"bad things"* happening, but the sentiment is that it is not attributable to witchcraft or *Gboyu*.

National Security

There are national implications to personal and community level peace and security concerns expressed by participants. President Sirleaf's first term was dedicated to recovery and reconciliation and indeed the government has made strides towards national peace. Scores evaluating social unrest by The Ibrahim Index have improved significantly, rising from a score of 25 out of 100 in 2006, to 75 out of 100 today.[133]

Conversely, physical integrity rights reflect a concerning pattern. Such scores consider the extent of government-induced torture, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and disappearance. In 2000-03 scores were at their worst (0 on a scale of 0-8). While there was considerable improvement after the peace accord (a score of 7 in 2004), scores have since regressed (currently a 5).[134] One youth leader recounted that he was accused of inciting revolution when he encouraged youth to participate in the election. He described how the police pursued him to Monrovia and jailed him for three days before releasing him.

As evident, progress has been made towards ensuring national security. Nevertheless, such improvements are precarious and it is unclear whether the government of Liberia has the capacity to guarantee sustainable peace. In light of these concerns, many people fear that UNMIL's scheduled withdrawal will exacerbate already existent security challenges.

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[133] Mo Ibrahim Foundation, The Ibrahim Index, accessed February 2012, http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index.
Mo Ibrahim Foundation, The Ibrahim Index, accessed February 2012, http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index.

I am sitting under a "mud to mud" house with three young and enthusiastic Liberian men. Sweat is not dripping, but pouring, down my face, but I do not notice until later. Clutching my recorder, I find myself engaged in a conversation that seems so surreal at times that I am at a complete loss for words.

Their frustration is evident and very telling of the conversations we have had along the way: "I graduated high school and now I'm brushing. It's embarrassing. For why I went to school?"... "Ma Ellen don't care about Grand Kru — we have one high school in the entire county. If she cared she would come here and develop things."

But little prepares me for what I hear next.

"Yeah, if UNMIL leaves Liberia, we will have war again, oh! There are boys in the bush training small small now! Do you believe?" Another adamantly agrees, "If Charles Taylor is released and returns to Liberia, I would vote for Charles Taylor tomorrow."

The next morning during the two-hour journey in the hardtop (jeep) to the next community, I asked my Liberian partners for their input on what the men had told me.

"I'm not surprised," came the response... "I would vote for him too."

"Ya me too"

"Ya, they would have to let him come back first"

"Definitely, he would be elected president again!"

To my utter astonishment, half of my team had just proclaimed their continued willingness to support Charles Taylor.

"Wow, maybe I don't know young Liberians as well as I thought I did," I thought.

This conversation sparked a heated (and at times uncomfortable) political debate about the current political situation in Liberia for the remainder of the car ride that morning.

Moving Beyond Formal Security Measures

One multilateral donor representative stated that, especially with the UNMIL drawdown, government and international actors are focused on improving and expanding justice and security institutions. Yet, he expressed concern that prioritization of reactive structures, such as prisons, troops, barracks, and toilets are coming at the expense of preventive measures that deal with underlying sources of tensions that can become conflict factors, such as land disputes or the perception of corruption that undermines the legitimacy of government institutions. He further asserted that national priorities focused on state building rather than nation building were unsustainable because *"you can't extend security institutions [when] people*

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loathe and distrust [each other]."

Another multi-donor (fund) official elaborated that the precedents that have been set reward violence rather than positive leadership, and that on a national level such factors undermine the ability to build strong foundations. He went on to point out that it is former combatants rather than non-combatants who were often the recipients of rehabilitation services, training, and other benefits that came along with Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes. In addition, many corrupt government officials who once supported the war continue to hold high paying and ranking positions. Thus, the very supporters of peace and security have often become powerful by undermining the principles they preach. The interviewee continued by recommending that as a first step, rather than championing reconciliation that forces forgiveness on people, leaders should ask youth and the general public for forgiveness so that tensions are mitigated. In general, interviewees stressed that on a personal level there hasn't been enough focus on psychosocial services, and failure to thoroughly deal with the past has perpetuated mistrust. Moreover, while many young people in the communities discussed only their future, it was evident that many have not yet reconciled with their past.

Living in Sinkor

I was enjoying the sunshine and conversation as my research team and I walked down the main drag through Sinkor district in Monrovia. We were on our way to conduct our first trial interviews and as we turned left off Tubman Boulevard, we entered an open compound that looked like an abandoned construction site. To my surprise, among the piles of bricks and stones were people. They were sleeping, eating, combing each other's hair, and going about their daily business — living there.

We were quickly surrounded by eight young men. They began aggressively asking, "Are you going to give us money?" I swallowed hard, telling myself "we can do this, we need their story, don't be scared!"

An incredibly articulate youth stepped up and began describing his living situation. He said there were drug addicts, ex-combatants, and others living there and because they didn't have jobs they were taking stones from the walls, and cleaning and selling them to make "a little something." We also learned from him that our team was the first group of outsiders to enter the compound since the wreckage.

I hear commotion... people fighting... a bottle breaking... "Oh God... this can't be good! FOCUS I tell myself," because the young man is still talking — it's like he didn't even notice the disturbance.

He doesn't feel like they have opportunities to earn money or to make a living. After the war ended he was part of a DDR program, where he exchanged his guns for money, but as he said, "We just ate the money. We not received nothing. No skill, vocational school, no job... nothing."

He wants opportunities. He wants a job. But... he doesn't know where to go and who to talk to for help. He points to someone who is lying on the ground behind him — it would be an alarming sight in any other context. "He fought too; he was like me... and now look at him. He's addicted to drugs." He says it so nonchalantly that it sends chills down my spine.

As we walk back up Tubman Boulevard toward the hotel, this time in near silence, I was shaken... 'Was this the new Liberia?'

Youth Engagement & Peace and Security

- Police abuse, corruption, and lack of capacity as well as ease of access to small arms and light weapons, and inadequate prison facilities undermine formal security mechanisms
- Youth reported changing their behavior because they feared crime in their communities and in their homes
- Disputes over land and traditional practices are both sources of conflict in Liberia

Peace and Security Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various aspects of peace and security critical to their engagement in this sector and the rest of society. While many of these issues are already well known by Liberians, policy makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- More trained professional police and security personnel
- Reduced police corruption (actual and perceived)
- Standardized procedures at border check points
- Decreased access to small arms and light weapons
- Improved conditions of, and security within, prisons
- Resolution of land disputes

Many of these needs could be better addressed through increased engagement with youth. Young people should be recruited to build up Liberian security forces. Incentives such as scholarships for training could be used attract young people. To help decrease police corruption, youth could organize a forum for reporting and investigating police misconduct.

A reconciliation committee, with substantial youth representation, could be formed in every county. This committee would identify the top three factors in each district that have the potential to lead to conflict, and then organize and mediate long-term discussions between the relevant parties. While these would not have to be long-term gatherings, they should not be one-time sessions. The committee should include legal experts and a representative from the police.

Community and Culture

Community and Culture

The place for youth in the community is often a contentious topic of conversation in Liberia. While there is a strong pull from the older generation for young people to engage in their communities in the traditional manner, youth are also heavily influenced by their peers and an ever broadening worldview. As happens all around the world, Liberian culture is changing quickly and it is the young people who are at the forefront — attempting to maintain their traditional values while also being at the vanguard of their country's progress. Youth are finding various ways to engage in their communities, whether through religion, youth organizations, or traditional groups. Though community dynamics vary greatly across the 15 counties as well as between rural and urban settings, youth play an integral part in every Liberian community.

The OECD does not categorize funding for community or culture. While it is not a theme that is directly funded (unlike health, for example), there are visible internationally financed programs supporting community activities.

Youth Organizations

The level of engagement of the youth groups throughout Liberia varied by community. While many youth groups are formed for political purposes, some are youth initiated with the intent of community betterment. In a town in Lofa County, youth were frequently involved in meetings with stakeholders and not only took part in the decision-making processes of the town, but were even recognized as leaders by the elders. On the day that the zonal team visited the town, the youth were actively working to clear an area of the forest in preparation for a new junior high school. They proudly displayed their work, showcasing how they were creating a facility that would not only benefit them, but the community as well.

Youth in this town in Lofa Country spoke adamantly and passionately about the previous work that they had done and the projects they had successfully completed. They pointed out that their cohesion as a group was culturally cemented through their acceptance and adherence to traditional practices. Some youth attributed the ability of young people to come together in that way to the homogeneous nature of the community. In other cases, where homogeneity could not be credited for young people working together, youth successfully united across religious or ethnic lines. However, in some instances ethnic differences were blamed for keeping youth apart.

Many youth, whether unified or not, vocalized a "need" for youth centers within their towns and villages. These structures seemed to provide a sense of legitimacy and ownership that would otherwise be lacking. This idea was not equally represented throughout the country, but when mentioned, seemed to be a high priority. Youth centers not only symbolized recognition of youth as a part of society, but also the community's level of advancement. In the case when youth centers were present, youth and elders alike were quick to note the fact. However, those communities without youth centers often believed that centers would be a unifying force for the youth.

> ### *The Youth Center*
>
> *In 2007, youth in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, successfully collaborated with the Ministry of Youth to construct a youth center. Since then, they have discovered that constructing a building is merely the first step in the development process. Currently, the center is able to offer only one service to the community: sexual and reproductive health education to youth through funding from the United Nations Joint Program for Youth Empowerment and Employment.*
>
> *Initial expectations and goals quickly dissipated as youth have not been able to find the additional financial and human support to realize their dreams. They were hoping that among other things, the center would facilitate recreation activities, including youth sporting leagues; a resource center where curious individuals can access books, the Internet, and documents; and a playground so that children have a safe environment in which to play.*
>
> *A representative at the center discussed how a women's softball league had once been organized and run by the center coordinator, but because that person left hasn't been replaced yet, there is no one with the proper authority to run the league. He also mentioned how the center had been blessed with the gift of a generator that sits in the lobby unused because they do not have the funds to construct a generator house. Finally, he pointed to a half constructed and completely vacant playground. He said that the government had been helping them construct the playground and then one day that support simply stopped.*

Community sports teams, such as the softball team discussed above (but more commonly, soccer for boys and kickball for girls), are also seen as an important way to engage youth. One youth leader in Zorzor, Lofa County, suggested that organizing a soccer tournament was the best way for them to organize young people and build a gateway to discussing community issues, especially across tribal, ethnic, and religious differences. Though there are many ways to improve access to youth, a conversation with a young man in a palm wine hut suggested that sports might be the only way to make young people like him more active in community issues.

Religion

Religion permeates everyday life in Liberia — from references in language, to symbols, and commonly held beliefs. Youth consistently identified with being part of a spiritual faith. Religion plays an intrinsically important role in the lives of Liberians with 91.58 percent of Afrobarometer respondents stating that religion is important to them.[135] From youth who regularly or irregularly attend services, to those who participate in community spiritual organizations, youth are actively involved in religious activities. While youth have high membership in religious organizations (57.43 percent), they hold limited leadership positions (6.83 percent).[136] Youth have proportionally fewer positions of power within religious structures than they do in political structures.

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[135] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.
[136] Ibid

In some areas, fear of the other appeared to have more to do with religious association than tribal affiliation. In one rural village, for example, non-Christians did not want to send their children to the nearby town's private school that taught Christian values and traditions as part of the curriculum. Fear of religious influence motivated the young people in the village to work with the elders and a local NGO to build a non-religious institution for students in the community. As one Muslim youth said, *"People were afraid to send their children to school because they thought that they would become Christian. Now an NGO helped us to build a school in town."*

For many youth, religion acts as a source of guidance and inspiration. In many cases, young Liberians look to religious figures for guidance. Additionally, young people often claim that their futures are in the hands of God. It is not unusual for car journeys and meetings to begin with prayer, be it Christian or Muslim. They also placed a great deal of emphasis on "wickedness" and "blessings," seeing everyday situations through a moral or religious lens. One respondent in Gbarpolu County stated:

God could have it, we are where we are today, so it is by the grace of God, so my appeal to every young folks is not to give up on life because the downfall of a man is not the end of his life, not because things is very difficult and tell that you can make it in life there is more ways in life for you, so that is how common man like me, Joseph came up.

Secret Societies

Wanda's Daughter

In a village in Grand Bassa County, a researcher finishes his conversation with a group of young women. As he thanks them for their time, one of the women, Wanda, anxiously pulls him aside. She asks him to speak to her daughter.

Wanda's daughter is in the eighth grade and wants to leave school to enter a secret society in the bush. She explains that she went through the process, and she desperately does not want her daughter to experience the same thing.

The researcher agrees to speak with her daughter, although he is unsure of his ability to influence her.

After spending time speaking with the daughter, the researcher returns.

As we walk down the dirt path out of the village to the main road, he shakes his head and says that the young girl wants to join the secret society because her friends went last year. She is one of the only ones in her group of friends who has not gone.

I ask him what happens in the society that the mother is so afraid of, and he replies, "well for girls… female genital mutilation (FGM) as it's called."

I ask him if he has any personal experience with secret societies, and he says that he never joined, but his brother did.

He shares with me that while he agrees that FGM is not good, especially after hearing Madam Sirleaf denounce it, he is not sure that it is reason enough to completely get rid of secret societies in Liberia.

The tension Liberian youth feel as they sit at the cusp of traditional beliefs and modern life, is evidenced in their participation in secret societies. "Secret societies" or "*Sande* societies," are phrases heard to refer to traditional community groups which among other things, offer adolescents rites of passage into adulthood. Young people respect, and to an extent fear, the mysterious power that secret societies wield. However, the internal conflict lies with moving forward. Some youth see a need to carry on the tradition of secret societies, while others view them as archaic practices that should be abolished.

The *Liberia Demographic and Heath Survey Report 2007* reveals that 88.6 percent of women in Liberia have heard of the "Sande bush society," while 64.7 percent are members of them. Of those that are members, 45.2 percent think they should stop their involvement. The numbers are even higher among women who practice a traditional Liberian religion with a striking 98.1 percent who have heard of the "Sande bush society," and of those women 94.8 percent are members.

Table 13: Sande Bush Society

	All Women	Women practicing traditional religion	Women 15-19	Women 20-24
Percentage who have heard of a *Sande* society	88.6	98.1	81.5	87.6
Percentage who are members	58.2	93	35.9	51.2
Percentage who think *Sande* society should stop	26.3	81.6	15.2	22.9

Source: Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2007

Volunteerism

Another area deemed critical for youth engagement was youth volunteerism — which is increasingly becoming a national priority, as exemplified by the creation of the National Youth Volunteer Service. As one interviewee said, currently, **"***volunteerism is generally not something that comes naturally to them [youth]***"** in Liberia. According to him there is a lack of volunteerism for several reasons. First, "*after war people are in a state of survival. [so] volunteering to go and support somebody else's survival when yours is still hanging, is a bit…people are not too enthused about it.*" Moreover, heightened NGO presence following the war led people to get accustomed to payment for everything. Young people often assume that when money is not offered, it does not mean that it is not available but the perception is that it is being denied them. Additionally, according to a donor respondent, youth are not taught or

encouraged to volunteer as part of their education so it continues to be a foreign concept to most students. However, some youth are beginning to realize the potential of volunteering.

Dorley's Story

Dorley attended journalism school but was unable to continue university as he did not have the necessary financial support. At the suggestion of one of his peers, he moved to a town in Grand Cape Mount to help out at the local radio station. He sometimes sits and wonders whether in five or ten years his community will be transformed into a place with free education and opportunities to enable people like him to contribute to the community and nation.

With these thoughts in mind, Dorley has adopted a unique style — he has taken upon himself the role of volunteer, getting very involved with the community association, especially on youth issues. For example, the community used to have a lot of teenage pregnancy and STIs, "it was so worrisome to a point where girls who were in school were borning children." Today, almost all of the girls in the community can speak on family planning issues and most use condoms, so these problems have decreased.

When PIPA — an election awareness organization — came to town, he also began volunteering with them as a community organizer. The community has recognized his efforts and although he is not originally from that town, people are beginning to admire him. Dorley, in turn, is using those connections to tap into other opportunities such as attending workshops and trainings.

Dorley's spirit is inspiring. As one of our Liberian group members describes, "One thing that is charming about him is that he is a guy who is willing to change his situation!" Another adds, "What I like about him is that... he is always working with young people to make sure their lives are transformed." A third group member agrees, "He is not sitting in his place. He says 'I want to see something happening. I want to see something changing in the community' [and] he is worried about the future of his community, colleagues and country"

Perceptions

Rural vs. Urban

The factor that accounts for the greatest disparity between youth sentiments and concerns is the type of community in which they are located — urban, semi-urban, or rural. Monrovia is the political, economic, and demographic center (with about a quarter of the population[137]), and more often than not youth residing there expressed distinct concerns from the rest of the country. While participants also contrasted other urban towns with the rural counties, Monrovia is the clear outlier. The drastic contrast in resources and access was clear to the researchers and participants alike. In Monrovia, schools, hospitals, and other government services are more plentiful and accessible. Telephone networks, social venues, and sports clubs are easily available. When Liberian researchers saw the conditions of some of the rural counties, they automatically assumed that youth living there would take any chance to move "to town" (Monrovia).

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[137] GeoNames, Liberia, http://www.geonames.org/search.html?q=monrovia&country= accessed May 2, 2012.

Despite less access to services, many youth in the counties did not desire to go to Monrovia. Instead, they were resigned to the fact that if they wanted to improve their lot, then it would be necessary to access the education and jobs that Monrovia provides. For example, multiple participants claimed they desired to become doctors. They would have to go to school in Monrovia, but they would return to their community to serve there because it was home and they were needed.

While many young people may not desire to leave their community, they often do so anyway for a chance at a better life. The crowded shacks that press against the ocean's edge reflect a city struggling to contain its already overflowing population. Monrovia simply cannot deliver on jobs for all those who arrive with hopes of employment. While urbanization is a global phenomenon, the fact that many young people do not desire to leave their communities makes Liberia unique. This fact could be advantageous to the government if they want to implement policy to stem urbanization.

The urban-rural divide is not just about Monrovia, it also presented itself in the counties. Urban centers were more likely than the rural villages to have secondary schools, hospitals, video clubs (TV houses), or telephone networks. Young people in these towns compare their situation with that of Monrovia and continually feel isolated and ignored by the government. People in the rural communities were more likely to discuss the lack of basic services (water pump, phone network, secondary school), than those in urban areas. For example, in Pronoken, River Gee County, a participant said, *"I want this place to be like Fishtown because Fishtown is big has good homes."*

The plethora of development, seen in infrastructure and service in Monrovia, makes it easy for those who live there to forget about conditions in the rest of the country.

Positive or Negative Impact

Young people in Liberia are often seen as dangerous and violent by the older generation.[138] However, respondents emphasized their agency in creating positive change by engaging in their communities. Some youth assert that their generation wants peace: *"They thought of young people as violent, but now our mind is on peace. We are interested in education."* Another young person stated that youth should be able to take their future in their own hands: *"God gave us the bush to work. Don't expect the government to do everything."* This sentiment was echoed by youth who are willing to work on the road in Yekepah, Nimba County, and put into action by youth who are building their own youth center in Bahn, Nimba County, and those that are building a community center in Gorlu, Bong County.

Youth recognize that they were neither the sole perpetrators nor innocent victims of the crisis that overwhelmed Liberia. However, they also understand that the power to change Liberian society for the better lies directly with them. As one young man in Bong County expressed, "*We broke our country down and we need to build it. UNMIL cannot do it all or change me if I don't want to be changed.*" Youth see themselves as active participants in the building of Liberia and feel that they must be included in the process in order for the peace to be sustainable.

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[138] Al-Varney Rogers and Massa Kanneh, "Youths- Out of Control," *Frontpage* (print copy), Vol. 6, No. 146, April 4, 2012

Donors, NGOs, elders, and young people recognize the significant tensions that exist between generations in Liberia. Donor representatives discussed how the older generation often sees young people as violent, reckless, and unwilling to think about their future; while youth see the older generation as uncaring and corrupt. Shifting negative perceptions, looking for strengths rather than weaknesses, and recognizing the importance of working together are invaluable steps towards a better future.

During fieldwork, the exercise of demarcating between "youth" and "adult" revealed differences in generational perceptions. For example, many young people see themselves as a positive force, defining youth as *"young people coming together to help their town or society."* While elders often associate youth with negative characteristics such as being lazy, youth do not see themselves in the same light. Similarly though, youth are often quick to characterize the older generation as corrupt and uncaring. Pointing to this intergenerational tension, one government representative stressed the importance of shifting negative perceptions that lead to mutual distrust between generations, and of looking for strengths rather than weaknesses in one another. This includes adults seeing youth as able agents with positive leadership potential, and youth seeing adults as holders of valuable experience. The same representative also emphasized that replacing elders' negative associations is important to youth engagement as well as to greater goals, such as national reconciliation.

Youth Engagement & Community and Culture

- Youth have varying degrees of success organizing in their communities
- Youth engage in their community through religion and traditional practices
- There is a significant difference in the opportunities for engagement between rural and urban youth

## Community and Culture Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various issues on the community level that they would like to see addressed to improve their engagement in this sector and the rest of society. While many of these problems are already well known by Liberians, policy makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- Improved unity and trust among Liberian youth
- Improved trust between Liberian youth and the elder generation
- Increased participation for Liberian youth in community decision-making
- Increased communication and interaction between religious organizations
- Less control of major community and life decisions by secret societies

In order to engage youth more in their communities and culture, it is essential to include them in community processes. Youth are keen to maintain their cultural identities while finding their place in a rapidly changing world. For communities that are experiencing conflict, youth are well placed to facilitate communication across ethnic, religious, and national lines due to more open minds and many being more exposed to other cultures.

By training youth in peace building and conflict resolution, they can mitigate conflicts in the community and participate in projects that bring the community together. Similarly, the formation of a youth community exchange program, if properly designed and carefully implemented, could facilitate smoother inter-community interaction and increase understanding among youth and adults. Community, religious, traditional, and educational institutions can be leaders in establishing these programs.
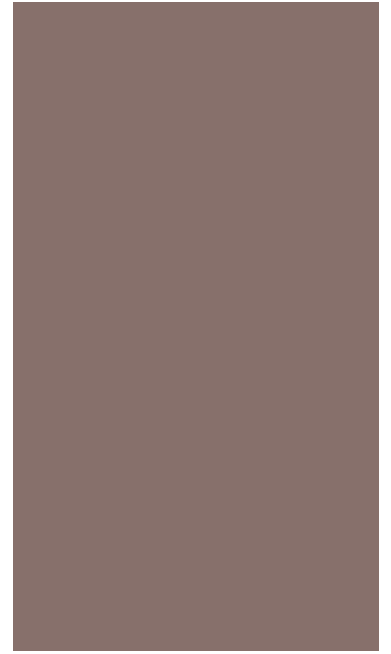
Family and Gender

Family and Gender

It is critical to examine the Liberian family unit, as it is a primary base through which social norms are shaped and enforced. Examining the differing roles and power attributed to family members due to age, gender, socioeconomic level, and other indicators of status, can shine a light not only on everyday life in the private sphere but on the way in which the family unit informs dynamics in the public arena.

Gender is represented in this section because Liberians tend to subscribe to traditional gender roles, thus making family the main social structure through which women's responsibilities, expectations, power, and status in relation to men is determined.[139] Additionally, women are less likely than their male counterparts to be educated, find formal employment, and are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation and STIs. For example, an interviewee in Monrovia cited that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate among females aged 14-25 (1.8 percent) is three times higher than that of their male counterparts (0.6 percent). For these reasons, women are often considered a vulnerable sector of society. However, gender roles extend beyond just women's position and also dictate norms and expectations from men; gender roles in families affect the lives of all young Liberians.

Family and gender are not OECD categories. While they are not funded directly, there are international programs which support family and gender issues.

Family Relationships

It is often perceived that youth engagement in multiple spheres, including at the personal, family, community, and even national level, stems from a rational choice, in which youth are reasoning actors who weigh the costs and benefits of involvement and whose choices are voluntary. Yet, this assumption often undermines the underlying micro-political foundations and power dynamics that exist within these familial institutions, which also often inform youth's choice, and the way in which they engage.[140]

Indeed, time and again, conversations during "Listening and Learning" indicated that many of the decisions youth make — where to work, what to study, how to volunteer their time — do not come from a purely voluntary place. Rather, their participation stems from a power-constrained set of choices,[141] where failure to engage in family affairs often means disfavor with more powerful family members on whom youth depend and with whom there is little ability to negotiate. Hierarchies within families differ based on factors such as age, gender, or socioeconomic differences, and dictate where youth do and do not engage.

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[139] USAID, *Gender Assessment Liberia*, May 2009

[140] Donald Green, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science,* Yale University Press (September 10, 1996).

[141] Terry Moe, "Power and Political Institutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 3.2 (2005): 215-233, 227

While such pressures stem from the family unit, they are reinforced by cultural and community norms. Youth respondents in Liberia consistently pointed to avoidance as the way in which conflicts between youth and adults are handled in their communities.

Gender Dynamics in the Home

Women leaders who were interviewed explained that within the household women are usually considered subordinate to their male counterparts. This phenomenon is manifested in multiple ways. Conversation themes and dynamics enforce gender roles frequently. For instance, discussions regarding employment are directed towards men, as they are seen as the head of the home, even when their female counterparts have the same, or higher, qualifications. Moreover, dialogue dynamics are significant, as women are expected to remain quiet and listen while men speak. Women who do not comply with these cultural standards are often branded as defiant and unsuitable for marriage because they compete with men. As can be seen in table 14 and figure 25 below, younger women are left out of household decision-making to a greater extent than their older counterparts.

Table 14: Percent of women who participate in decision-making by age

Age	Borrowing money	Making major household purchases	Making purchases for daily household needs and cooking	Visits to her family or relatives	Percentage who participate in all four decisions	Percentage who participate in none of the four decisions
15-19	53.5	68.1	83.2	68.8	37.4	8.4
20-24	55.3	70.4	90	76.4	42.8	5.9
25-29	54.4	73.2	91.1	79.8	42.8	3.4
30-34	58.2	75.4	92	82.8	48.5	2.8
35-39	62	77.4	90.1	78.1	50.6	4.7
40-44	61	76	92.2	79.5	48.9	3.9
45-49	63.2	80.9	92.2	80.2	52.3	4.5

Source: Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2007

Figure 25: Percent of women who participate in decisions to borrow money, make major household purchases, make purchases for daily household needs and cooking, or to visit family or relatives, by age.
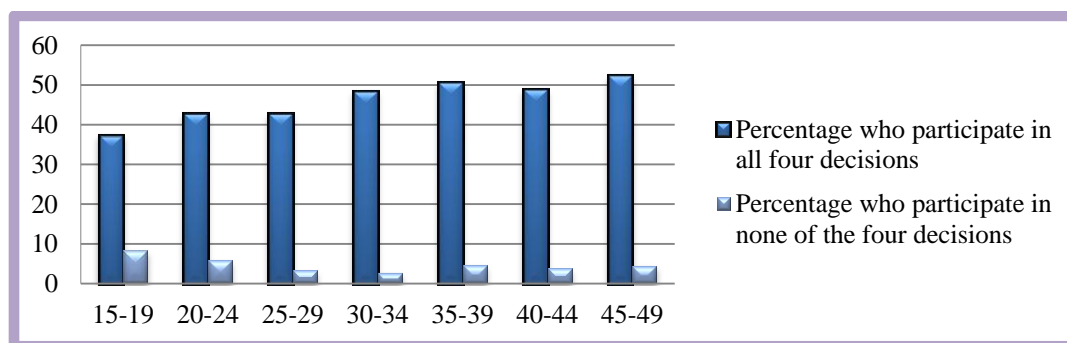
ource: Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2007

Patriarchal arrangements are often predictably stifling for women. However they can also frequently be a very stressful position for men as well. Young men in Liberia feel an overwhelming sense of obligation to ensure the well being of women in their families — particularly the responsibility to support them financially. The situation is compounded by the lack of formal employment opportunities and the number of children born outside of marriage. Feeling considerable pressure, men are often frustrated and resentful when opportunities are provided solely for women and exclude them as beneficiaries. This phenomenon was discussed, for example, in regards to the women-only vocational school in River Cess County. As evidenced in the story about Jerome and Samuel below, the inability to fulfill the traditional role of the man, can lead to hardships for the family and disillusionment on the part of the man.

In the northern region of Nimba County which borders Guinea, a man complained that women had begun seeking divorce when their husbands were not able to care for them financially. Such testimonies emphasize the economic nature underlying many relationships and the complexity and interconnectedness of social matters. It seems that if women were given more opportunities for employment, dependence would decrease, consequently reducing the value placed on socioeconomic status for marriage.

Female Leadership in the Public Sphere

Traditional gender roles have begun to change, in part due to the war, which opened women's eyes to realities beyond their community. Female leadership is progressively recognized as imperative both for addressing women-specific issues such as reproductive health and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as in areas critical to the development of the nation as a whole. One expression of this shift has been an increase in the number of women in leadership positions, as exemplified by the re-election of President Sirleaf.

Despite such advances, there are still many limitations that hinder women from attaining leadership roles. During interviews with women in leadership positions, they described how traditional roles enforced within households are internalized and affect women's engagement in

the public sphere. They relayed that women internalize gendered expectations and have little confidence in themselves. In turn, women rarely speak up in public — especially in mixed-gender groups — or engage in spheres such as politics, which are traditionally considered to be a male affair. For example, when speaking with young male leaders in the town of Sanniquellie, Nimba County, these men complained that they had few women participants. That day, a young woman admitted her lack of participation in the local youth leadership structures. When asked to elaborate, she explained that she was working as well as planning a wedding and that those

activities were taking up all of her time, and so she did not attend meetings. In this story the way in which the woman spends her limited time planning a wedding is very much gendered. These dynamics were evident during the research process, where both female researchers and field respondents were shyer and less willing to engage researchers in conversation than their male counterparts. Additionally, women in rural areas were less likely to speak or be comfortable speaking in English. When separated into gender groups for some activities and discussions, females became much more likely to express their opinions. Although in co-ed settings females were quieter, they were just as engaged, albeit in a different manner, than their male counterparts, such as by diligently listening and taking notes.

In discussing how such dynamics can be changed, Mariam, a prominent youth leader exclaimed, *"[Women must] follow the political process! It's not about fixing your hair or what is going on in the weekend."* Rather, she continued, *"[Women should] know the issues and know the role of government so [they] can advocate successfully."* Mariam's colleague Beverly pointed out the importance of women participating in group discussions and attending as many events as possible, even when they feel intimidated to be at the forefront of decision-making. Another woman described her experience differently, *"I can attend community meetings, but I can't take part because I can be ashamed, even though I can have some good things to say."*

Mariam and Beverly emphasized that participating in leadership structures is just a first step, and that acquiring a formal leadership position presents a whole new set of obstacles. For one, women contending for formal leadership positions inherently place themselves in the public realm, which is a traditionally male field, and resistance to their leadership is often formed as an attack on their personal lives, thus returning women to their traditional private sphere. They illustrate, *"[During] intense political processes, men try to intimidate women by leaving the political issues and attacking them personally. [For instance] men can have five girlfriends but will tell you are not qualified if you have a boyfriend."* Also, some people adamantly refuse to vote for women solely due to their gender, regardless of the ideas they bring forth. Even when women are seriously considered for leadership roles, there are gendered expectations. For instance, men will be considered for president positions, whereas women will be considered for the financial or treasury positions.

Mariam also reported a backlash to women's increasing power, where men make women the breadwinners as a means of proving they are not as capable as men.

> *What's happening is that since now at the top we have a female almost all the women are like standing up. It's like, this kind of jealousies and men want pay*

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*back. Some of them they even do it in their homes. They say "oh, since you guys
are the ones now on top, you will feed the home," and sometimes they know you
are not earning what they are earning but they leave it with you.*

Resistance to changing gender norms is most felt in more conservative rural areas where touting concepts such as gender empowerment is often regarded as *"poisoning [women's] minds."* In these settings, some techniques have been helpful. These include having women leaders talk to women to encourage them to take a more active stance, while simultaneously serving as a role model for such change as well as emphasizing to powerful community stakeholders the way in which women's empowerment can benefit the community as a whole, such as increasing productivity, thus promoting gradual shifts in mentality.

Women-specific Issues

Teenage Pregnancy

Liberia has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Sub-Saharan Africa, with over 20 percent of girls giving birth before the age of 18.[142] Pregnancy is often the result of social pressure, a means of gaining socioeconomic support, an idea that starting a family will encourage a transition from youth to adulthood, and at times a lack of knowledge about family planning. As one young woman in Fishtown, River Gee County, explained, *"many small girls get pregnant in our community. If we try to advise them, they insult us. I have an idea of family planning — I have even taken some in before. These drugs stop people from borning a lot of children."* Contraceptive use in Liberia in 2007 was 11 percent, which is well below the regional average of 24 percent.[143]

High teenage pregnancy rates pose serious health problems for adolescent girls because of poor health facilities, but especially in cases where, as explained by a physician's assistant at Buchannan Government Hospital, *"their female organs are not developed [requiring them] to undergo caesarian sections — some teenage mothers experience complications and even die during childbirth."*

Women bear the full burden of pregnancy and childbearing, with their male counterparts often taking no responsibility for the child. A young woman in River Gee County recounted the harsh reality of being a teenage mother, *"Most men are very wicked. They just have sex with you, don't use condom, and then see the belly and don't support it. If the man says it's not his…you lose."* Her friend was nodding and added, *"The ones [men] that are bad are plenty!… to find the good is very very hard!"* A young woman in Montserrado County recounted being promised money by the man who impregnated her and stated:

> *Because why, you want get things for yourself. And parents not get it. Our parent
> will go do hard labor all day long in the sun. You, you [a] child [in] the house. A
> big man will come…and exploit you. [He] fooled you with money, go look he*

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[142]PSI Liberia, "Reproductive Health," February 25, 2012, http://psiliberia.org/work/reproductive_health.html.
[143] Ibid

impregnate you, time came he say it's not me who get that pregnancy. Your parents take that kenja (burden) on their head.

Risks posed to young women overlapped and intersected with multiple other themes. One of the major crosscutting issues stemming from teenage pregnancy is that it puts young women at risk of dropping out of school. Multiple participants in varied locations, especially in rural areas, discussed the fact that young girls are discouraged from continuing their education while pregnant and after giving birth. President Sirleaf has directly addressed this issue saying, "It breaks my heart to see what are, virtually, babies having babies — teenage girls raising families when they should be in school."[144]

> ### *A Liberian Researcher's Account*
>
> *As we crossed the street in Pleebo, Maryland, my research partner and I noticed a young woman. She was sitting by the side of the road selling fried plantains with a child tied to her back. Henrieta and I made eye contact and with a slight nod of our heads, we agreed to approach the woman and see if she wanted to talk to us. She complied, so I asked her about school.*
>
> *"I had my first child when I was in the fourth grade, and second in the seventh grade... and when I was promoted to the ninth grade I got the third one — the only surviving child. My school is being delayed because of this child."*
>
> *"Ya, if I had a dollar for every time I heard a girl say she got pregnant so early..." I thought. She reminded me of my sister.*
>
> *She continued, "There are lots of girls in this town who are facing this problem I'm facing. No one to take care of the child so that I can go back to school. I really want to go back to school..."*
>
> *"Why did you start borning?" I asked her. I knew I shouldn't ask her that.*
>
> *Henrieta, my partner, shot me a sharp look.*
>
> *"It is because of conditions that we get pregnant. Because we do not have money to buy family planning (contraception) or do not know how to use the family planning..."*
>
> *Henrieta nodded in support. "Ahhh! Women are the same everywhere," I thought and decided to change the topic.*
>
> *"Do you like living in Pleebo?" I asked somewhat coldly.*
>
> *She didn't appreciate my change of subject; "What I do not like about Pleebo is that the young girls in this town — they chase after their friend's boyfriend. Like in my shoes — I am left with this innocent child while my boyfriend is living with another woman. It makes me to feel so bad about Pleebo."*
>
> *I was quiet. Her voice had changed... this was real. She was suffering. Wait...was that a tear?*

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[144] The Inquirer, "Gov't to prosecute vacation job rioters…Ellen makes four new appointments," February 5, 2012, http://theinquirer.com.lr/content1.php?main=news&news_id=172

Henrieta mouthed "Stop it!" to me. The young woman started to cry. I didn't mean to make her feel bad about her situation! I decided to try one more attempt at changing the mood. "Well, what do you like about Pleebo?"

"I like Pleebo because when you ask a boy for money, he will give you," she said, and paused. Then in a teary voice she added, "But, I want to recommend an awareness (workshop) be done to advise girls to stop chasing each other's men..."

She was sobbing.

Though this story represents a noteworthy trend, there are also exceptions. Some grant programs sponsor young women to go to school, seeing attendance as a tactic for pregnancy prevention. Furthermore, in some areas pregnant teenagers and young mothers are actively being encouraged to pursue school from K-12 and higher education. A young mother in Harper, Maryland County stated, "*I was in school, but I dropped because of pregnancy. Next year, in September I will be going back to school.*" High rates of teenage pregnancy stem from a complex web of problems. According to Frontpage Newspaper, they are "just symptoms of bigger issues … What the government really needs to address is issues of single and disabled parents, peer pressure amongst youth, and poverty-stricken homes that do not have the resources to properly care for the children…causing children… to rule their own world."[145]

Prostitution

In President Sirleaf's annual message in January 2012, she highlighted that "[L]arge numbers of young girls live on the streets, and resort to prostitution to make a living."[146] Across the counties, capitalizing on sex was regarded as a common means to support oneself or one's family, especially for poor women with little opportunity to find employment. As one zonal team reported, *"There is a common saying in one of the local dialects that says 'Gbalay Gartu,' which translated, means, 'you are not forced, but compelled.'"*

Boys' Perspective

When asked what kind of activities the young girls are involved with in the community, the boys in Grand Bassa County reply, "It's kinda terrible for them." The young girls in town "is highly engaged into prostitution, the prostitution rate is so bad… so so bad."

They explain that they believe that one of the reasons for this is that "they are self-supported, they taking care of themselves. When the girls reach a certain level (age), the parents expect them to bring home somethin'...they asking them, 'what you bringin?' so the girls go out to hustle in the night to do prostitution."

"They are doing prostitution, yes, but … most of them are going to school, so they do prostitution at night and go to school in the morning!"

"Many girls fend for themselves; no one tells them they have to do family planning."

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[145] Al-Varney Rogers and Massa Kanneh, "Youths-Out of Control," *Frontpage* , April 4 2012.

[146] Pres. Sirleaf's Annual Message to the First Session of the 53rd Legislature, "Reflecting the Past, Claiming the Future," *The Daily Observer,* January 21, 2012.

A young man in a small town asserted:

> *Prostitution is here...it is practiced by both old and young women. For me I think it is because most women are self-supported and not working...For me, the only solution in getting the women off the streets is to have them doing something to earn a livelihood. Most women have conscience; once they are doing something, they will at least say my life is better now so I'm going to leave the street.*

A similar statement was heard from youth in Pleebo, Maryland County, *"Yes, prostitution is happening here. If you want to see them... go to Diamond Light (a local club). Both young girls and old women are there. The reason is that no jobs. Even those that are educated can't find jobs. Besides, most of those girls are self-supported and have children."* In Grand Kru County, a couple of girls explained that young women who engage in prostitution do so out of economic necessity saying, *"The young girls are used as breadwinners for their families. In the evening hours, you will find them along the road well-dressed [and] waiting for strangers to engage them in sex in exchange for money."* A young woman explained that foreign workers feed prostitution too:

> *Prostitution is widely practiced here in Fishtown. Since I came I have been observing young girls here. They can have sex mainly with strangers [NGO workers] in return for money — almost the same system that is in Monrovia. Even the girls that are working in the restaurant across the road are in the habit of making constant contact with their customers for sexual activities.*

Furthermore, in Bong County, the student leadership recounted how some young women from within the community were "posing" as Cuttington University students while working as prostitutes. Student leaders suggested that these individuals were capitalizing on the status and reputation offered to them through affiliation with the University.

While prostitution — the act of engaging in sexual intercourse for money — was a common problem, the "sugar daddy" phenomenon — where young women develop a companionship and sexual relationship with men in a position to provide support — was even more prominent, and to a degree, was found to be socially legitimate.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has been acknowledged as a critical problem in Liberia. Repeatedly used as a weapon of war during Liberia's conflict, it continues to be "not only prevalent in Liberian society [but] accepted as an integral part of gender relations."[147] In 2008, 34 percent of over 10,000 reported protection incidents were SGBV related, with domestic violence comprising the most prevalent of these incidents at 26 percent of all reported cases.[148] While the GoL and the UN have implemented a joint program to prevent and respond to such violence in line with the security and protection component of the Government's PRS,[149] SGBV remains a serious problem. Table 15 below depicts the percentage of women in Liberia over the age of 15 that reported having ever experienced physical violence, as well as the percent of all

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[147] United Nations and Government of Liberia, "Combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Liberia" http://stoprapenow.org/uploads/features/SGBVemail.pdf
[148] Ibid..
[149] Ibid..

women that reported ever having experienced sexual violence, according to the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey.[150]

**Table 15: Percent women 15-49 ever having experienced physical violence
since age 15 or ever having experienced sexual violence**

Current age	Ever experienced Physical Violence since age 15	Ever experienced sexual violence
15-19	39.2	13.1
20-24	46.8	13
25-29	50.5	22.3
30-39	45.7	22
40-49	47.2	15.8
Total	**44**	**17.6**

Source: Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2007

Although some participants shared incidents of SGBV that occurred to other women in their communities, very few were willing to share personal stories; making it difficult to gauge whether people perceived a change in SGBV in recent years. As one woman said, *"My husband can beat me sometimes. No, it is not good for a man to beat a woman, [but] I cannot report him to the police because he is my husband. Even though, I told him that it is not good to beat your wife."*

Some see an increase in reporting as a negative development. During a gathering of young men in Lofa County, a traditional religious man listed SBGV reporting as one of the most troubling trends in his town. He felt the problem lay in the fact that many couples were moving away from traditional resolution means and looking to the courts to settle marital disputes. According to him, this has led to an increasing number of men being arrested and charged with SGBV. The young man saw this less as a reflection of increasing violence towards women and more as a result of women abusing the new power dynamic offered by the court system to assert themselves against their husbands and partners. Thus, although modern rights-based approaches to justice may empower women, men sometimes perceive such systems as threatening traditional means of justice.

Faith's Story

Nineteen year old Faith sells cold water on the side of the road. She used to work for a rubber company but recently left the job because it was hard labor and paid a very low salary.

Her mother is on her own because her father abandoned the family when she was a child. Faith started dating her boyfriend because "he said he would help me."

But as she continues her story, she states: "My boyfriend can beat on woman. It's not safe. I feel fine… but he make that problem for me." Although she admits it was not easy, she left him because of the abuse.

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[150] *Demographic and Health Survey Report* Liberia 2007

President Sirleaf's 2006 inaugural address brought the taboo subject of rape to the forefront, even going so far as to admit, "I know of the struggle because I have been a part of it [….] I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape."[151] Her 2012 annual message continued to highlight the fact that, *"Many girls, some very young, have their dignity and their future undermined by the viciousness of rape."[152]* Young Liberians are familiar with the term

"rape" but a common understanding of the word seemed to be different than that generally accepted by the international community and was restricted primarily to instances in which older men have sexual intercourse with young girls. For example, a respondent in Grand Kru County said, *"The kind of rape we have here is older men loving to smaller girls, which is resulting in an increase of teenage pregnancy."* A new law under Sirleaf's administration has "widened the definition of rape to cover penetration with any foreign object, and not just the penis; and states that when a victim is under the age of 18, she is automatically deemed not to have given consent."[153] UNMIL reported that, "rape [in Liberia] is a crime committed primarily against young…women between the ages of 10 and 19 years."[154] In 2007, "46 percent of reported rape cases to the Liberian National Police involved children under age 18."[155] It is possible that it is the disproportionately high percentage of young women raped in Liberia that accounts for the current misunderstanding of the word.

Researchers heard concurrent and conflicting testimony in regards to rape reporting. For example, a young woman in Maryland County explained, *"When someone is raped in this community we take to the police station."* Others denied entirely that rape was a problem, with statements such as *"I have not noticed anything like rape or HIV/AIDS in this community."* A 2008 UNMIL study assessing prevalence and attitudes toward rape in Liberia found that "an overwhelming percentage of respondents (83 percent) felt that women contribute to their victimization, particularly by the way they dress."[156] Awareness programs about SGBV and rape are being carried out through billboards, workshops, and word-of-mouth. However, the general misconceptions about rape cause young people to interact in a way that shows that they do not fully understand the implications of their actions.

Youth Engagement & Family and Gender

- Gender roles reinforced by the family often impact where and to what extent youth engage in society

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[151] BBC, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4632874.stm, accessed Jan. 20, 2006
[152] President Sirleaf, "Reflecting The Past, Claiming The Future" http://www.liberianobserver.com/index.php/news/item/252-pres-sirleafs-annual-message-to-the-first-session-of-the-53rd-legislature-reflecting-the-past-claiming-the-future
[153] BBC, 2006
[154] United Nations and Government of Liberia, "Combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Liberia" http://stoprapenow.org/uploads/features/SGBVemail.pdf
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

- High rates of teenage pregnancy are exacerbated by need to self-support through economic dependence on older male partners and prostitution
- Rape and SGBV disproportionately affect young female youth

Family and Gender Recommendations

Liberian youth discussed various aspects of family and gender critical to their engagement in society. While many of these issues are already well known by Liberians, policy makers, and practitioners, it remains pertinent to reiterate them here.

Giving particular attention to the opinions of young Liberians, this research identified the following needs:

- Elimination of prohibitive gender role boundaries
- More women in decision-making roles
- Reduced teenage pregnancy rates
- Decreased sexual and gender-based violence
- Decreased practice of forced female genital cutting

In tackling these sensitive issues, it is imperative to engage young men and women. The government should especially raise awareness about the importance of including women at every level of decision-making, and in every sphere of society.

Youth should make a concerted effort to discuss community and political issues in a constructive way. This will require youth leaders to establish a safe space for both men and women to participate, and will necessitate young men encouraging more female participation and young women pushing themselves to actively participate in community discussions. Furthermore, NGOs could actively support this effort by creating opportunities for individuals who have attended gender empowerment and training programs to showcase what they have learned.

Programs could be designed and implemented by youth in schools, community centers, and churches to educate young boys and girls on the impact that teenage pregnancy has on their futures. Information campaigns could be used to increase awareness regarding how youth can engage (both as counselors and participants) in such programs that disseminate family planning awareness information. Engaging youth to teach youth is a particularly effective way to address the male and female responsibilities regarding teenage pregnancy.

Regional Differences

The group encountered the aforementioned eight themes in all 15 counties. Despite these overarching thematic trends, some topics were specific to regions, counties, or towns. One acknowledged that the weakness of the qualitative method implemented in Phase II was the way individual oral testimony limited the researcher's ability to draw generalized conclusions based on personal experiences.[157] This limitation was not so severe as to prevent the identification and discussion of trends. Rather, the unique situations described by participants within individual zones revealed certain nuanced differences in young people's priorities across the country.

Ever conscious of the method's limitations, when isolating county and regional differences, the research team remained aware that the informal nature of the study also meant that the researchers' personal contributions to conversations may have affected participant feedback. Nevertheless, the following topics represent outstanding trends identified from conversations in each county and region.

Zone 1

The Zone One research team visited Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, and Montserrado counties. Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount are the more rural of these districts. While agriculture comprises one of the main sources of income, the gold and diamond mining zones (the largest outside of Nimba County) reportedly draw citizens from all over the country, especially student dropouts. Bomi and Montserrado counties are largely urban settings and offer more income-generating opportunities, such as working for foreign logging companies. Montserrado represents an exception among the 15 counties in that it contains the vast majority of country offices for donors, NGOs, and UNMIL.

Youth in Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount, counties dominated by traditional customs and practices, appear to be more organized and taking a more active role in the development of their communities. In Bomi and Montserrado, two areas experiencing demographic expansion due to urbanization, youth respondents are less united and seem less likely to be involved in their communities.

Armed robbery, petty crime, and drug use are a part of the daily life of many young people in Bomi. Crime rates in Montserrado are perceived to be extremely high. Contrastingly, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount were peaceful overall, and youth participated in the security enforcement of their area. While there is community police in place to enforce the law, most misunderstandings are settled within the communities by the citizens and the towns' traditional authorities.

In some rural areas, required participation in the "bush society" impede some students' ability to focus on their education. For instance, the principal of a junior high school in Bomi County

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[157] A Lost Generation: Young People And Conflict in Africa, 2007, 9

linked activities associated with the societies to poor school attendance. Moreover, he stated that parents do whatever possible to gather L$1,000 (US$14) to pay for their children's participation in the bush society while failing to pay the L$100 (less than US$2) fee to support the school-feeding program. Some student respondents feared sharing their preference to attend school over participation in the bush society because of the high value placed on bush activity and concern of punishment from parents and community members.

Another issue facing the majority of youth in Zone One is access to land. This was especially noticeable in Montserrado County, where the high value of land prevents young men from accessing a plot for farming or coal burning (the dominant activity in the county), and is especially limiting for home or business ownership.

Zone 2

The Zone Two team visited the northern counties of Lofa, Bong, and Nimba. These counties played a significant role in Liberia's civil conflict, resulting in a heavy presence of NGOs. Many of the major towns in this region are located near the borders of Guinea or Côte d'Ivoire, a factor that appeared to significantly shape community life in terms of language, culture, trust, and security concerns.

These three large counties represent a substantial portion of Liberia's land, and agriculture is a common source of livelihood. Land disputes were also a frequent subject of discussion in the region, particularly in Nimba and Lofa counties. Commercial towns were evidently developing in each county, with Voinjama (Lofa), Gbarnga (Bong), Ganta (Nimba), and Sanniquellie (Nimba) all displaying growing trade and opportunities.

In Nimba County, youth stressed issues of livelihood, especially in Yekepah, home to a large mining operation, as well as Ganta and Sanniquellie, two of the county's largest towns. The Zone Two team also observed a unique appreciation for health care among individuals with access to the hospital in Tappita. Many respondents complimented the free health care for children under the age of five and delayed payment plans available for older patients, yet complained about the availability of basic health services and some poor treatment provided in the hospital.

Bong County's location makes it an ideal center for trade and a hub for many NGOs. The increasingly developed capital city Gbarnga offers a sense of optimism, despite massive destruction during the conflict. Indeed, if the government decentralizes its operations, Gbarnga stands to profit.

Lofa County had the strongest agricultural base of the three counties in the region. Income-generating activities such as cutting palm, growing rice, tapping rubber, and mining for gold were common. Access to other businesses was limited in many communities. Historical animosity between different ethnic groups and associated land disputes that have developed since people returned home from exile helped to explain consistent reports of ethnic conflict in Lofa. Youth participants frequently raised issues pertaining to traditional practices, such as involvement in secret societies and belief in traditional family and gender roles. Teenage pregnancy was referenced more frequently in Lofa

than in other counties in the zone, with respondents emphasizing lack of sexual education and cultural aversion to discussing sex as reasons for high adolescent pregnancy rates.

Zone 3

Zone Three researchers spoke to youth in Sinoe, River Cess, Grand Bassa, and Margibi counties. This team identified a glaring difference between Sinoe and River Cess — the two less developed southeastern counties, and Grand Bassa and Margibi — the more developed counties in northern Liberia.

Youth in Sinoe, more than other counties, lamented the lack of high school and technical schools. Although youth in all counties hoped for increased and improved educational facilities, youth in Sinoe County distinctly asked for a vocational school over a high school. In River Cess County, youth stressed lack of livelihood options as reasons for turning to riding motorbikes, fishing or gold mining, even though they viewed the latter as a dangerous profession.

Grand Bassa County has a large population of foreign workers due to the presence of a steel and mining company. There was a marked difference in conversations with youth in this county, due to their negative experiences with the company and particularly with foreign workers.

Margibi was the most developed of the four counties visited by Zone three. A distinct difference in this region was youth's engagement in informal employment for the purpose of paying school fees. Students in Margibi spoke about corruption in the education sector. They detailed situations in which students bribe teachers or female students are having affairs with teachers in exchange for a higher grade. Additionally, they spoke about both the negative and positive effects of having a rubber company located in their county.

Zone 4

Zone Four consisted of Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh counties. The region's unique elements include that it is geographically the furthest area from the capital, that it includes Maryland, which was a separate republic until 1857; and that it shares an important border and relationship with Cote d'Ivoire.

Grand Kru County is commonly referred to as "the last county" in Liberia. With over 20 hours of travel between Monrovia and the county's capital Barclayville, it is far removed from national development processes, making inhabitants feel especially isolated. Rural communities are lined with untouched beaches, and people — many of whom are illiterate and do not speak English — survive on fishing and subsistence farming. UNMIL's absence is notable and there is virtually no NGO presence in the area (with the exception of Barclayville). Conversations with youth focused on the lack of attention provided to them (the only time they do not feel ignored is during political campaigns); the dearth of development (the new road built between Harper and Barclayville is the only promise that has been realized); the desire for more educational opportunities (there is one functioning high school in the entire county); and a general sense of

disillusionment (the young people feel like there is no point in graduating high school as they will end up "brushing"[158] regardless).

In Maryland County, and especially in Harper, the county's history as a separate republic influences the infrastructure and architecture such that it resembles a southern American colonial-style ghost town. The influence of the American education system is visible in the high number of schools. UNMIL and NGOs focus mainly on refugee and returnee issues in the county, due to the presence of Ivorian refugees. For example, there is a refugee camp just north of Harper supported by UNHCR and run by the Danish Refugee Council. Many conversations with youth in this area covered the high prevalence of prostitution, sexual exploitation, and HIV/AIDS awareness. The opening of Tubman University in 2009 was a positive step in decentralizing the country's educational opportunities.

River Gee broke away from Grand Gedeh to become an independent county in 2000. This break is apparent in the lack of formally developed infrastructure. In the county capital, Fishtown, there is little commercial activity; the majority of young people and their families practice agriculture, but most young people expressed a desire to leave River Gee for further educational and employment opportunities. With limited companies, most young men are involved in motorbike riding (taxis) and independent "gold digging." The common perception is that there are more females than males in school. This is both because young men are lured from classes to work and because some of the schools encourage pregnant girls and new mothers to continue their education, increasing the number of women in attendance. There is also currently a successful teacher training institute in Weebo district.

Grand Gedeh is a large county. While easier to access than others in Zone Four, Grand Gedeh is still a grueling nine to eleven hour drive from Monrovia. It shares a long border with Cote d'Ivoire and is also home to a larger number of Muslims than is common in other areas in Liberia. Zwedru, the county's capital, is a bustling commercial and NGO center, to which many people migrated since the end of the war in order to pursue educational or employment opportunities. Young people did not show any interest in farming — as some youth stated, that is for "country people." Due to the existence of a comparatively thriving economy, there is also lively nightlife along with a disproportionally high rate of prostitution and sexual exploitation. UNMIL maintains a noticeable presence in the area, but many young people did not have any idea what NGOs were actually doing — only that they exist and that the "strangers" they employ permeate the town.

Although the themes exist across regions, the pointed differences between the zones justify the additional funds and risk required to do this kind of in-country comparison spanning all fifteen counties. The research team learned the value of speaking with young people from diverse backgrounds. Also, youth across the counties appreciated having their voice heard equally in a national study.

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[158] Clearing land for agricultural or development purposes.

Underlying Connections

Positive Youth Development

The positive youth development perspective addresses youth as a productive sub-sector of the population. This perspective stands in contrast to the youth bulge theory that states that countries with a large proportion of unemployed youth are more "susceptible to political violence."[159] The youth bulge theory takes the approach that youth have and will resort to violence when necessary. However, positive youth development assumes a positivist approach: if given the chance, youth will constructively contribute to their society. This concept of positive youth development was actualized in the implementation of *Measuring Youth Engagement* through the use of Participatory Action Research techniques — ceding decision-making power to local youth research partners and valuing the ideas of youth respondents in the "Listening and Learning" process. Donor representatives generally recognize the potential for positive youth contributions as well, and are striving to find ways to encourage more active engagement of young people. Although the research team encountered many disengaged and disheartened youth, a considerable number demonstrated great desire to impact their society in a positive way.

The positive youth development paradigm was further explored during the project through discussion of how young people identify themselves. The broad conceptualization of "youth" that came from conversations showed that the population who identify as youth may exceed the 33 percent reflected in the demographic data.[160] By working with and talking to youth about issues that affect them directly, the research team was able to access better information on this demographic, how they see themselves, as well as the society surrounding them.
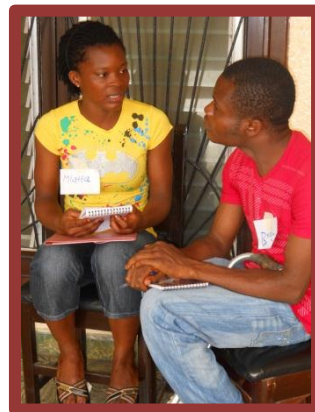
Youth to Youth

Working with local youth research partners gave the research team nearly unlimited access to young respondents throughout the course of the research. Due to the unique project design, it also provided eye-opening, and in some cases life-changing, experiences for those involved.

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[159]Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* no. 50, 2006, 607–629.
[160] US Census Bureau, 2012

The impact of the youth-to-youth aspect of this project emerged during nightly debriefs, a designated time for each zonal team to share and analyze their daily experiences. The reactions of the researchers in the field confirmed that, for the youth, the most effective way to learn about the true feelings of youth is through conversation. Many of the conditions that Liberian researchers witnessed were not entirely new to them because they saw or heard similar accounts through the media and word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, at times they were astonished about what they heard from their fellow youth. It became clear that it was no longer about just doing the exercise and getting it over with, the researchers had immersed themselves in the process and it became about compassionate story sharing. Every team member became so invested in the process, that even a car accident or death of a relative did not deter them from their determination to carry out the process to its end.

Youth in Development

Many young people were conscious of, concerned with, and invested in community development. While some were concerned with their own personal gains and achievements, it was common to hear a youth speak of the needs for development in their community and what he or she could do to help in the process. It may seem simple, but it is a key finding that young people both said and showed that they are willing to do what it takes to develop their community and nation. And as is evident, many young people are already contributing despite multiple barriers. They are putting their individual needs and short-term gains on hold to work towards bigger goals. Some youth are inactive, holding on to their frustration with the government's inaction. And still another portion of the population is disengaged because of exclusion from the development process. However, according to Afrobarometer data, youth are generally much more likely to vote for a candidate whose policies favor Liberia as a whole.[161] Young Liberians are dedicated and focused on contributing to the development of their country — they are optimistic and are working toward a Liberia of which they can be proud.

Civil Society

Civil society is an overriding concept in youth engagement. While some civil society organizations exist, both formal and informal, young people in Liberia reported limited capacity for addressing their grievances against their government. Many communities have youth leadership structures, which serve this role to varying degrees. Likewise, motorbike associations (taxi), church groups, sports teams, and microfinance clubs bring people together. While many young people have acted on their agency to change their own situations, the local research partners felt strongly that there were very few accountability structures to properly check government and civil society. A group of these research partners were motivated to start a monitoring and evaluation organization, run by youth. They are in the process of establishing the group now.

Leadership

The "missing link" many donor interviewees discussed was lack of leadership among youth. Young people are seen as having lost many of their traditional values, with one donor describing them as wanting "to have a big life with no sweat"; focusing on short- rather than long-term goals; and willing to follow a "benevolent dictator" rather than instigating change on their own. It is difficult to become a leader where there is poor social capital, as there is little trust that cooperation will lead to collective benefit. Rather, leadership is often perceived as self-serving. Some of the hypotheses for lack of youth motivation and engagement in leadership that donor

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[161] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

interviewees discussed included: lack of role models, lack of trust, and lack of realistic expectation setting for youth coming from education to employment.

Youth Structures

For the most part, communities did not lack youth structures and youth leaders. The majority of towns and villages we entered had an existent youth structure with not only a youth leader, but youth presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, etc. as well. Their existence was a crucial step to youth organization and activity. And the widespread notion that a community should have a youth group is a sign that youth are a distinct group in the national consciousness. The youth structure quality varied among communities. While some were active and engaged, other youth groups were divided and youth presidents were leaders in name only. Also, youth leaders occasionally have a drastically different view of the situation in their community than other youth, possibly reflecting a misunderstanding by elite youth of the challenges facing their compatriots.
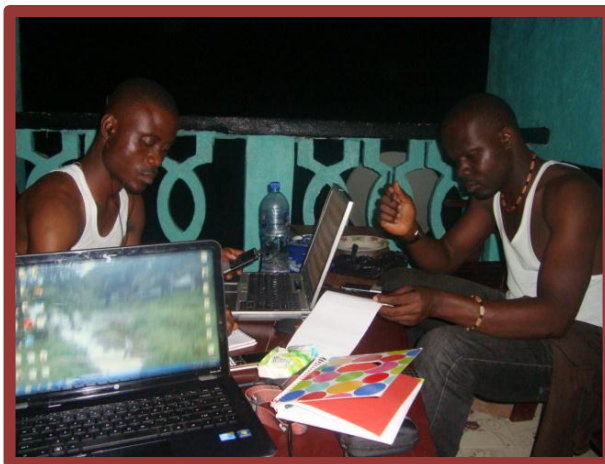
The division between elite youth and non-elite youth was evident throughout the country. For organizations such as FLY, there is a division between those in Monrovia and those in the counties. Multiple youth leaders had a very negative view of FLY because they felt they only worked for constituents in Monrovia and Buchanan.

In addition, many elite youth in leadership positions were male. Also, elite youth had occasional negative views of uneducated youth. Many of these educated youth's backgrounds contained certain advantages, even though they undoubtedly also had to overcome certain obstacles.

The leadership dilemma occurs at the gap between community leaders and national leaders. At the community level, leaders are frustrated by a lack of unity and barriers to making meaningful contributions. According to Afrobarometer data, a third of youth are members of a community group, which does not substantially differ from adults. Leadership, however, differs to a much greater extent as adults are about twice as likely as older youth (aged 25-35) to hold a leadership position and about four times as likely as younger youth (aged 15-25).[162] Donors' frustration at lack of youth leadership points to the recognized need to develop leadership skills and tackle unity issues amongst the youth. While unity is an ambitious task given the disparate nature of the national youth population, cooperation and established common ground can be sought. At the same time, young leaders need to be given more leadership opportunities outside of youth specific structures.

Trust

Young people lack trust in their government officials, but also in other community members. A surprisingly large number of youth described their goal in obtaining an education is so that, "people don't fool them." All Liberians trust their families considerably more than other Liberians (even ones they know). For example, about 70 percent of youth aged 18-24 trust their families. About 35 percent trust other Liberians they know and only 25 percent trust any other

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[162] Afrobarometer, "Liberia Round 4 Data," 2008.

Liberians.[163] Young people are much less trusting than the older generation. [164] This trust deficit is a barrier to youth engagement in all parts of society.

War's social scars are seen in some community members' suspicion of other ethnicities' motives. This has a great impact on starting a business or developing a community project. If people do not trust a neighbor, then they are less likely to involve him or her in a venture or pass on learned skills. However, examples of cooperation do exist. In Tappita, Nimba County, a movie house operator runs his business three days a week because two other movie houses operate in town, and they agreed to divide the week days between their businesses.

Corruption leads to lack of trust in government officials and less cooperation between community and government. Young people described how they would be willing to do their part for any community project but were increasingly skeptical that government would fulfill their promises.

> ### *Talking about Trust*
>
> *"It is true that we Liberians sometimes don't trust each other. The government believe if you give the native man plenty money, he will cause more noise (problems). Cut the money down so that the suffering will continue."*
>
> *I watched as Maurice, a Liberian research partner, nodded his head in agreement.*
>
> *The 30-year-old man continued: "It's not the government really, there are certain people in the government… They only want to educate their own children so they can continue to enjoy the power."*
>
> *"So what can make it better small small?" asked Maurice.*
>
> *"What we really need the government to do is equal opportunities… so that tomorrow things will be better."*

Youth Pillar

Indeed, youth-specific entities have increasingly recognized the need to see youth as a distinct group, and youth issues have increasingly been incorporated as crosscutting. This is reflected in strategic national documents such as the PRS I, as well as in the structural makeup of many international organizations, in which youth are often mainstreamed into thematic programming such as health and education. While these are important steps, it is critical to have a youth pillar stand alongside mainstreaming efforts to maximize the efficacy of youth engagement and empowerment efforts.

Insofar as youth comprise a large part of the Liberian population, the general peace- and state-building priorities of the government and international donors are largely aligned with youth priorities. However, while there is much overlap between the needs of the general population and the needs of youth, it is insufficient for the government to endorse a youth-blind lens toward young people. Similarly, overwhelming evidence for women's unique needs has led to gender becoming a pillar for policy and programming. In making a case for gender mainstreaming it was argued that there is "a failure to identify or acknowledge difference on the basis of gender where

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[163] Ibid
[164] Ibid

it is significant."[165] Likewise, donors and the government need to be aware of, and cater to youth as a specific subgroup with direct and distinct needs not only within each of these sectors, but also as a unique pillar.

Youth as a Cross Cutting Issue

The UN definition of gender mainstreaming reads,

> Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for gender of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making gender concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres.[166]

This argument can be similarly applied to youth. Indeed, in adopting a crosscutting youth framework, the government of Liberia, along with supportive donors, has taken a critical step to move beyond youth-blind procedures and routines[167] and acknowledge youth as a distinct subgroup which must be heeded special attention.

Advocates of integrating youth as a crosscutting issue under different programmatic and thematic areas must be wary of the fact that "[s]trategical framing is a rhetorical strategy, and one can easily get trapped in rhetoric."[168] Thus, it is important that implementers responsible for integrating youth as a specific target group under thematic (e.g., health, employment) programming maximize the benefits that such a strategy can bring. An example would be researching, analyzing, and publishing youth disaggregated data — such as this report — so that differences between youth and the wider population are identified, thus subverting common assumptions that there are no or few differences between youth and the general population.[169]

While mainstreaming is a critical first step in recognizing youth as a distinct subgroup with distinct needs in each field, most youth experts that were interviewed believe there is a dire need for youth to be considered as a separate pillar in order for their issues to be adequately addressed. However, there seems to be resistance from much of the Liberian government as exemplified by the fact that youth continue to be regarded as a crosscutting issue in PRS II. Similarly, while USAID is currently developing a youth policy, many international organizations also do not have youth-

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[165]Monash University, "Gender Blindness," http://www.med.monash.edu.au/gendermed/blindness.html, accessed April 6th, 2012
[166] "Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system," ECOSOC July 1997. Chapter IV
[167] Mieke Verloo, "Another Velvet Revolution?" IWM Publications, 2001, 3
[168] Verloo, 10
[169] Monash

specific departments or policy, thus agencies such as UNICEF, which have traditionally targeted children, have expanded their mandate and responsibilities to incorporate youth as a target population.

Youth as a Sector

There are multiple reasons for having youth stand as a separate pillar rather than solely as a crosscutting issue. For one, youth have unique needs that must be identified in order to be addressed. For example, youth share a collective trauma to some extent, what must be thoroughly addressed as a distinct issue that is expressed across multiple arenas such as health and peace and security and should be recognized as such in order to be effectively addressed. Similarly, there are issues that do not neatly fall into any one sector or department. For example, while the Ministry of Education oversees educational initiatives and the Ministry of Labor is responsible for dealing with issues of employment, neither entity is responsible for matching school curricula with market needs. Describing the problem with such issues within a crosscutting model, one interviewee said, "*When everybody has to feed the cat, the cat does not get fed.*" In other words, because so many entities are responsible for youth interventions, diffused responsibility results in youth priorities being ignored.

At the very least, the entity responsible for a separate youth pillar would add tremendous value as a coordinating and oversight body to enforce a "solid and more dynamic and comprehensive [youth] mainstreaming framework."[170] For example, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has led efforts to develop a working group that will create a comprehensive action plan for youth, coordinate youth activities, and establish a tracking mechanism to promote effective programming, avoid duplications, and ensure that each agency is pulling its weight according to its comparative advantage. Yet, according to some youth program implementers, few people with real clout are likely to sit at youth coordination meetings unless there is a directive from the president or vice president to do so.

Thus, to play this role effectively, the coordinating entity needs to be given significant power in order to hold entities accountable at multiple levels. These duties range from ensuring attendance at coordination meetings, to ensuring that evaluations take into account youth-specific indicators, and that youth issues are ultimately addressed. Given that agency "decision makers frequently change, and key actors may have shifting priorities;" that "donors have high expectations about project outcomes and expect implementers to demonstrate positive outcomes within a limited period of time;" and that "implementers often focus on the technical targets of a project;" it is important to have an agency specifically devoted to youth issues that can ensure a steady mission to adhere to youth needs, and can stress prioritizing youth needs — a target which may otherwise be considered only superficially.[171] It was argued in the context of gender that if agencies are not held accountable for their actions, they may simply "adopt the language and concepts of gender mainstreaming to demonstrate their 'commitment' to gender" without delivering meaningful change.[172]

Attempts to integrate gender into the established structure, "offers gender a place within an agenda that was designed along traditional lines."[173] In order to really address youth issues,

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[170] Verloo, 23

[171] Rima Das Pradhan, "Practical Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming in Governance Projects: Observations of a Consulting Practitioner," Development Bulletin, no. 64, 95

[172] Pradhan, 93

[173] Verloo, 8

youth must be integrated into decision-making structures. Given that youth function within societal hierarchies, which limit and often dictate their communication style, it is necessary to institutionalize a space where youth can be heard without being delegitimized by the social structures that exacerbate the very vulnerabilities they are trying to overcome.[174]

Expertise

Finally, because crosscutting agencies specialize in a variety of sectors, an entity responsible for seeing youth as a separate pillar is critical to bringing the expertise on youth needed to make programs effectively meet their unique needs. For instance, even if crosscutting entities seriously recognize and focus their work on youth as a specific at-risk group, they often do not have the expertise required to distinguish the heterogeneous needs and vulnerabilities that exist within youth, which stem from the relationship between youth and ethnicity, youth and gender, or youth and class,[175] and require distinct recognition and targeted responses. While there has been an improvement in this realm from previous administrations, with the designation of groups such as the NEET (not employed, educated or trained) population by the Liberian government, there is a need to continue to discern between subgroups, e.g., man or women, able bodied or disabled, rural or urban, younger or older youth and to break down such categories even further, such as 15-18-year-old disabled women.

Lack of acknowledgement of such differences often results in poorly designed and managed programs. "*They're lumping everyone together and not understanding that if you do that, you're gonna have tensions, contradictions, and programming problems,*" explains a youth expert at a donor agency. Rather, institutions should explicitly recognize heterogeneous needs and divide programming according to each institution's comparative advantage.

Failing to disaggregate categories of vulnerability among youth also means power relations remain constant. As a ministry representative stated: *"What we've been learning is that youth work over the past 20-30 years has been an attempt to reproduce ours completely on the wayside. So our reprogramming right now, it is about a shift in power relations right now. As a result, perhaps, people who are not in our socioeconomic status are left."* For instance, since groups in low socioeconomic status are not explicitly recognized, goods and services are often passed on through social networks to people in the same socioeconomic class as programmers. This phenomenon is manifested in multiple ways. For one, civil society is often handpicked and thus the voices heard and beneficiaries targeted are those already connected to the social structure. Secondly, many schemes are not targeted towards the populations who can most benefit from them. For example, scholarships often go to wealthy rather than poor children. Finally, failing to address the distinct needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations is likely to create instability because *"unless you massively intervene in them [NEET], they will not even survive, there will just be a huge group ready to spark at anything."*

It is important to stress that a separate youth pillar would add most value as a complement to the existing structure. Indeed, there are dangers to solely framing youth as a "stand alone" issue. For example, there is a limit to the contribution that youth-specific projects can have if they are small isolated initiatives that cast youth engagement into a "ghetto of 'youth projects.'"[176] Likewise, the collection of data on youth without a specific purpose or umbrella organization that will use

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[174] Pradhan, 94.

[175] Verloo, 20

[176] Verloo, 6

it, can likely result in what gender theorists stated, "gender analyses [being] located in a separate document that is usually only accessed and used by those who already have gender on the agenda."[177] Finally, constantly finding ways to integrate a separate youth pillar, agenda, and data can create "'gender fatigue', as it creates an opportunity for stakeholders to point to a perceived imbalance in the relative amount of resources being directed to gender." [178]

Thus, an ongoing dialogue on youth awareness needs to be built in as a crosscutting issue at all levels and across all stakeholder groups,[179] as well as being dealt with as a separate pillar. This can serve to add value by providing expertise, filling gaps not addressed by mainstreaming youth, and serving as a powerful coordinating and oversight body to ensure the effective implementation of mainstreaming endeavors.

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[177] Pradhan, 94
[178] Pradhan, 93
[179] Pradhan, 95

Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations that were detailed in the eight themes of this report are a direct result of collaboration between the Liberian and American University researchers. These recommendations fall into several crosscutting categories, which are listed below. Organizing the recommendations in this way showcases the interaction between the eight themes, while highlighting the underlying approaches for engaging youth to address societal needs. A description of the national implications of the recommendations follows the list.

These recommendations are not intended to be the only conclusions drawn from the research. Rather, they are meant to provide some direction, potential solutions, and thought-provoking concepts for young Liberians looking to lend their skills, energy, and numbers. Included in these recommendations are approaches already underway, which need to increase in scope or develop into a top priority to improve effectiveness, or the perception thereof, in Liberia. Actualizing these recommendations will require efforts from all stakeholders, especially youth themselves.

The recommendations focus on engaging youth to address the needs identified through the research process. A strong sense of community and nationality emerged during conversations with young people, demonstrated by youth's desire to see community-wide problems addressed. Improvements based on the recommendations of youth will impact the quality of life for all Liberians, as youth play an integral part in the Liberian community, economy, and psyche.

In order to best facilitate these improvements, it is critical that youth become a priority on the national agenda. This necessitates including demographically representative youth voices in national long-term planning projects such as Vision 2030. Also, youth's needs as a marginalized group must be addressed by establishing a youth pillar. To ensure the creation of a youth pillar, the national youth policy being developed must be effectively negotiated so that it can be enacted as law. Also, national data-collection initiatives need to better analyze and report according to youth cohorts. Including youth throughout the process is integral to the development of these initiatives.

Youth Engaging Youth	• Encourage youth-to-youth mentoring • Implement youth-to-youth programing to educate young boys and girls on the impact that teenage pregnancy has on their futures • Build a youth-to-youth model for health education awareness training
Developing Youth Skills	• Train youth on the process of establishing community organizations • Train youth in peace building and conflict resolution so they can lead community reconciliation and bonding efforts
Using Youth Skills	• Encourage more young people to be teachers through multi-tiered approach: economic and social incentives • Utilize youth partnerships for building and maintaining water and sanitation facilities • Encourage youth to volunteer • Encourage youth entrepreneurship • Offer a work-for-grant program • Create equal opportunities for women and men • Integrate young people into security structures
Incorporating Youth in Decision-Making	• Create a checklist for including marginalized youth in decision-making • Decentralize youth organizations • Reduce youth organizations' financial dependency on government support • Form a reconciliation committee spear-headed by youth • Raise awareness about the importance of equalizing gender participation in decision making
Youth in Accountability	• Make space for youth in the political sphere through youth evaluation teams • Improve transparency in the health system by empowering youth monitors • Enable youth to monitor security forces • Use the Youth Engagement Matrix to gauge progress
Information Sharing	• Establish a feedback mechanism for students to communicate their needs and ideas to their teachers • Build a job skills database (with special attention to skills development and communication between employers and youth) • Promote stories of youth success in community development • Establish a youth community exchange program • Promote information campaigns to improve social perceptions of the teaching profession

Conclusion

> *"[I care because] it could be me. This is Liberia and I don't want it to be that way."*

This project represents a multifaceted effort to understand a complex situation, therefore, it would be inconsistent to offer one simplistic conclusion. Like the project design, and Liberia itself, this report offers a multitude of conclusions covering many aspects of youth life and engagement in society. The report has acknowledged and accounted for societal variations across region, tribe, ethnicity, and generations. In considering these differences, there is one main idea that should be highlighted. Despite the numerous challenges, especially in light of the recent conflict, Liberian youth demonstrate the potential to engage on every level in order to foster positive change in their society.

Liberian youth today do not want to return to life before the civil war, or to lapse back into conflict after UNMIL exits. Rather, they have shown themselves ready to create, maximize opportunity, and build a better future for themselves, their communities, and their country.

The youth-to-youth research process brought the authors to the overall conclusion that youth must be defined and studied in a specific manner, particularly in a way that recognizes that youth are not just an age group. They are a specifically marginalized portion of the population that exists within particular constraints. As such they should be allotted due consideration within programming and policy-making. The research team came to this conclusion as it answered a multi-part question: Are Liberian youth engaged, and to what extent do their priorities align with those of the international community operating in post-peace accord Liberia?

At the end of an intensive mixed methods process, the qualified answer is, yes. Many youth are engaged, and there are overlapping priorities between large donors and youth.

Youth engagement can be understood based on eight themes: education, livelihood, health, politics and governance, infrastructure, peace and security, community and culture, and family and gender. Youth prioritize issues across these themes. Education, health, and livelihood are mentioned most frequently in conversations. Within each theme, subthemes highlight what young people prioritize in each sector. When youth were asked about their priorities they answered freely. They were willing and wanted to have conversations.

According to funding streams, youth priorities overlap but are not a perfect match to donor priorities. Donor agencies in Monrovia discussed similar issues as young people. Many of their representatives had an understanding of needs and constraints faced by Liberian youth. While donor funds are allotted to programs in all priority themes discussed by youth, funding data show that the priorities of the international community do not proportionally align with youth priorities. The available data show that in 2010 the high priority themes discussed by youth (education, health, and livelihood) were funded less than infrastructure, peace and security, and politics and governance. Also, large sums of aid go to other priorities, not directly addressed by youth. Donor agencies have constraints preventing them from delivering policy and programming that may target youth directly. Young Liberians have their own priorities, which rarely consider any international actors' activities. The more donors understand youth priorities and their constraints, the more relevant and sustainable they can make their programs and policies.

Figure 26: Total ODA Disbursements to Liberia by Theme
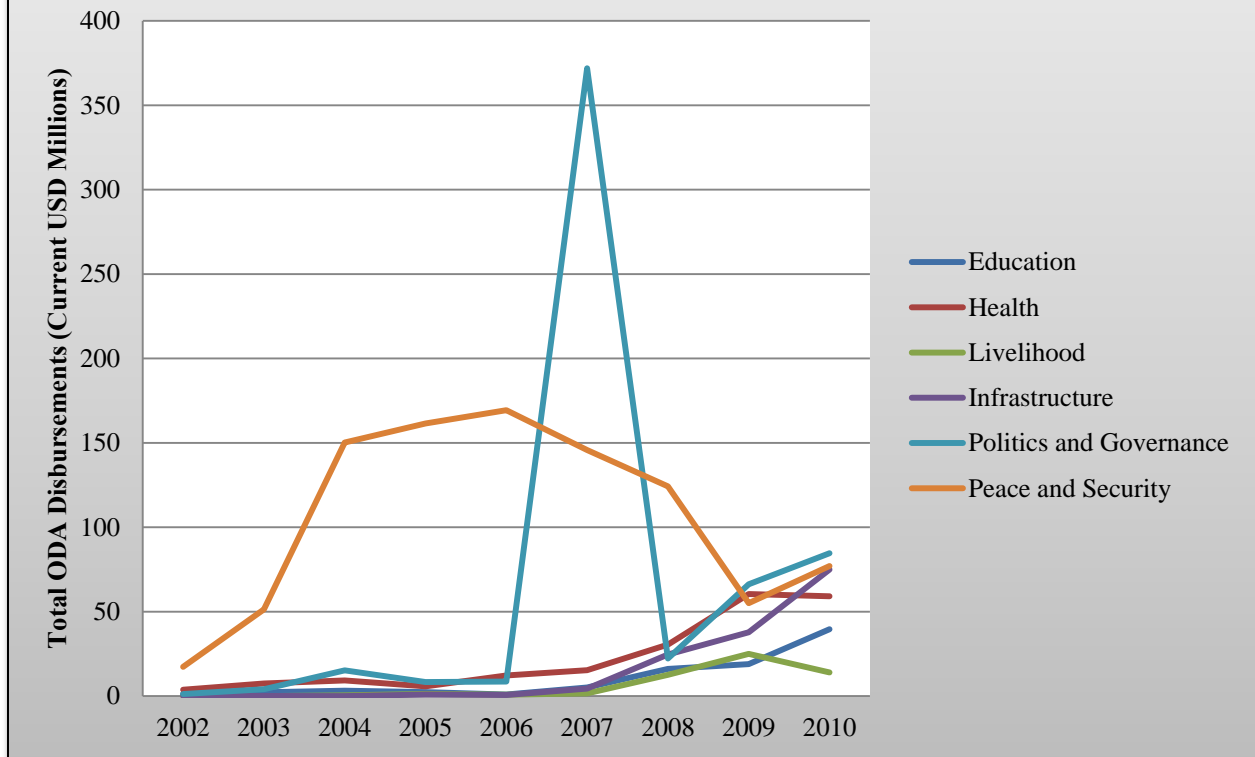
Source: OECD, 2012

Young people meaningfully contribute to Liberian society in a multitude of ways. Rural and urban, male and female, rich and poor — all are finding ways to engage with the state, markets, or community. Youth engagement not only takes many forms, but it is relative to each individual. While the research team witnessed many positive signs of youth engagement, barriers prevent an unacceptable number of young people from meaningful participation in society. These barriers are detailed throughout the report and affect youth differently depending on their specific circumstances.

Foreign aid is partially assisting youth in this process. However, this benefit is primarily due to overlap youth have with other cohorts of society. Youth are specifically marginalized as a group and need to be served in a way that explicitly answers those concerns. Accordingly, this project calls for separating youth into a separate pillar to maximize the particular needs and wants. This does not signify that youth should solely be addressed outside of the population as a whole, but more that youth should be addressed in a way that recognizes and answers their unique station within a population. Although sensible, and in some ways accurate, addressing youth as a crosscutting issue is simply insufficient. When youth forfeit a special place, they find themselves lost in the needs of the population as a whole. Selecting youth as a pillar for special attention will help to both reintegrate youth into the larger population and single out youth-specific interests. It will therefore better align aid and services to youth priorities, thereby supporting full and positive engagement. This engagement is, and will continue to be, critical for the future

development of the country as a whole. Arguably, it will also determine when and how Liberia defines itself in a regional and international context.

Work with youth in Liberia and possibly other post-conflict settings must recognize the positive potential of youth. This potential is accessed through meaningful engagement in society. Essential to access is the recognition of the complex issues that youth are experiencing. For example, improved healthcare is not enough if youth do not have the opportunity to go to school, earn a living for their families, or have a voice in their community. Therefore, youth need to be recognized. It is necessary to work directly with young people in a way that respects their agency and encourages their potential. It is the only way forward for Liberia.

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Appendix I: Tools

Youth Engagement Matrix

Rationale

The Youth Engagement Matrix (YEM) is intended as a straightforward tool to monitor relevant indicators alongside ODA data in the eight identified themes. The YEM chooses the four to six indicators that best address the important concepts that give insight into youth engagement. Each indictor provides the baseline datum that was the most recently available information from the last five years. This column is followed by spaces to add new data over the next eight years. This way the reader can see in what areas Liberia is improving, faltering, or staying the same. In the lower half of each theme's matrix is the ODA data for that theme. The data from the previous decade is available to show in comparison to adjusting indicators, and spaces to fill in new data points for the following years is also made available. The YEM's primary goal is for Liberian youth to use it when advocating for improved youth programming to government and donors.

The indicators were pulled from multiple sources. Over 500 indicators were identified and categorized during Phase 1 of the project. These were reduced to what the researchers determined to be the strongest based on their rigor, availability, frequency, and applicability to the context. The researchers developed an improved understanding of Liberian youth priorities and needs during the qualitative research in the field. Also during this time, more unpublished reports and previously inaccessible data sets were acquired. The matrix was developed with the intention to provide robust, relevant information that will be accessible and able to be maintained. While there are many more available indicators that could add to the matrix, they would ultimately render it unwieldy as a tool.

Applying the Matrix

The YEM can be used to show the national progress made in one sub-theme, one sector, or holistically. Some indicators are located in one theme but are relevant to multiple themes (i.e.: Contraceptive Prevalence is in "Family and Gender" but is relevant to "Health"). The YEM must be updated every year to be useful. Indicator descriptions and sources are listed in Appendix I.

ODA totals are included below each theme. The trends in ODA should be compared with the trends in indicators. Firstly, no one should expect a one-to-one increase or decrease being that there are many more factors than ODA going into each indicator, not least of which is government spending. Secondly, ODA comparisons should not be made with the same year, as there is a lag between funding and recognizable results. What will be most relevant is the trend in YEM indicators compared with the trend in percentage of ODA funding. Is the money going to where it is needed?

The YEM can be developed for other contexts. Due to the heavy influence that the "Listening and Learning" process in Liberia had on this YEM, the same indicators would not necessarily be used in other contexts. The structure and concept behind it, however, could be applied.

While general goals and objectives are used to organize the indicators in the themes, numerical goals were not applied by the authors. This task is for local stakeholders and can be arrived at using the YEM independently from the PRS or Vision 2030.

The YEM below is the primary version to be used to update data that is relevant to youth engagement. This blue matrix is also known as a "user matrix" because one must add data to it on a yearly basis.

The matrix in Appendix II is also known as a "reference matrix" because it contains the data for each indicator from the previous five years. This green matrix can be used to view trends and see the origin of baseline data.

EDUCATION

Goal: Improve youth knowledge and skills by increasing access to and quality of education.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Increase access to education									
National senior high school net enrollment ratio (NER) (%)	**6**								
% change national senior high school NER	-								
National senior high school Gender Parity Index (GPI)	**0.75**								
% change national senior high school GPI	-								
Strategic Objective 2: Increase the quality of education									
National senior high school pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)	**19**								
% change national senior high school PTR	-								
Percentage of senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates	**42**								
% change senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates	-								
Strategic Objective 3: Improve education outcomes									
Youth literacy rate (15-24) (%)	**76.0**								
% change youth literacy rate	-								

ODA Disbursements to Education (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Education	1.26	2.22	3.22	2.32	0.94	5.12	16.08	18.91	39.63
Percent to Education of Total ODA Disbursements	3.81%	2.80%	1.73%	1.23%	0.47%	0.75%	1.12%	3.94%	2.62%
Subsectors									
Education, Level Unspecified	0.31	0.24	0.4	0.28	0.14	0.38	2.72	0.88	11.68
Basic Education	0.65	1.75	2.51	1.74	0.42	2.08	12.71	17.63	26.08
Secondary Education	0.3	0.19	0.25	0.19	0.28	2.64	0.44	0.32	0.83
Post-Secondary Education	0	0.04	0.06	0.11	0.1	0.02	0.21	0.08	1.04

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Education										39.63
Percent to Education of Total ODA Disbursements										2.62%
Subsectors										
Education, Level Unspecified										11.68
Basic Education										26.08
Secondary Education										0.83
Post-Secondary Education										1.04

HEALTH

Goal: Create a healthier youth population by improving access to, and quality of health infrastructure and services.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Improve health infrastructure and increase access to health									
Access to improved water source (% of rural population with access)	**60**								
% change improved water source	-								
Access to improved sanitation (% of rural population with access)	**7**								
% change access to improved sanitation	-								
Problem with distance to health facility (females 20-34) (%)	**49.1**								
% change in problem with distance to health facility	-								
Strategic Objective 2: Improve quality of care									
Concerned no drugs available (females 20-34) (%)	**52.7**								
% change in no drugs	–								
Strategic Objective 3: Improve health outcomes									
Prevalence of HIV (15-49) (%)	**1.5**								
% change prevalence of HIV	**-6%**								
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1000)	**112**								
% change in under-5 mortality rate	-								

ODA Disbursements to Health (Current USD Millions)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Health	3.76	7.47	9.25	5.78	12.23	15.31	30.48	60.41	59.08
Percent to Health of Total ODA Disbursements	11.36%	9.42%	4.96%	3.07%	6.07%	2.23%	2.12%	12.59%	3.90%
Subsectors									
Health, General	0	0	0.72	1.15	2.64	3.14	10.3	15.76	12.8
Basic Health	2.95	6.07	6.5	2.63	5.69	3.57	8.7	28.21	21.74
Population Pol./Prog. & Reproductive Health	0.81	1.4	2.03	2	3.9	8.61	11.47	16.45	24.54

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Health								
Percent to Health of Total ODA Disbursements								
Subsectors								
Population Pol./Prog. & Reproductive Health								

LIVELIHOOD

Goal: Provide opportunities and skills so that youth can increase national productivity.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Increase ability to generate income									
Youth unemployment (15-24) (%)	**6.1**								
% change youth unemployment	**-**								
Cost of starting a business (% of income per capita)	**68.4**								
% change in cost of starting a business	**-22.65**								
Strategic Objective 2: Improve agricultural outcomes									
Agriculture, value added (millions of current USD)	**505.43**								
% change in agriculture	**27.42%**								
Strategic Objective 3: Improve job preparedness									
Persons (15+) who have done vocational training (%)	**14.2**								
% change in over age 15 with vocational training	**-**								
Working for wage or salary if have done vocational training (15+) (%)	**30.29**								
% Change in hirings after vocational training	**-**								

ODA Disbursements to Livelihood (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Livelihood	0.03	0	0.44	1.27	0.8	1.53	12.57	25	13.96
Percent to Livelihood of Total ODA Disbursements	0.09%	0.00%	0.24%	0.67%	0.40%	0.22%	0.87%	5.21%	0.92%
Subsectors									
Agriculture	0	0	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.9	8.14	19.15	8.37
Business and Other Services	0	0	0	0	0	0.26	2.87	4.64	3.57
Forestry	0.03	0	0.4	1.22	0.73	0	1.05	1.12	0.25
Fishing	0	0	0	0	0	0.02	0.15	0	1.29
Industry	0	0	0	0	0	0.35	0.36	0.09	0.37
Mineral Resources & Mining	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.11

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Livelihood									13.96
Percent to Livelihood of Total ODA Disbursements									0.92%
Subsectors									
Agriculture									8.37
Business and Other Services									3.57
Forestry									0.25
Fishing									1.29
Industry									0.37
Mineral Resources & Mining									0.11

INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal: Increase connectivity and the exchange of ideas through improved national access.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Improve road network									
Paved roads (as %age of total roads)	**6.2**								
% change paved roads as percentage of total roads	-								
Total roads (km)	**10,600**								
% change total roads per square km	-								
Strategic Objective 2: Increase access to communication and information									
Frequent internet users (18-35) (%)	**3.75**								
% change internet users	-								
Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)	**39.34**								
% change mobile cellular subscriptions	**39.06%**								

ODA Disbursements to Infrastructure (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Infrastructure	0.18	0.03	0	0.93	0.58	4.45	24.59	37.76	74.97
Percent to Infrastructure of Total ODA Disbursements	0.54%	0.04%	0.00%	0.49%	0.29%	0.65%	1.71%	7.87%	4.95%
Subsectors									
Water Supply & Sanitation	0.16	0	0	0.86	0.33	0.69	3.79	6.65	6.53
Transport & Storage	0	0.03	0	0	0.23	3.72	20.8	30.85	68.44
Communications	0.02	0	0	0.07	0.02	0.04	0	0.26	0

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Infrastructure									74.97
Percent to Infrastructure of Total ODA Disbursements									4.95%
Subsectors									
Water Supply & Sanitation									6.53
Transport & Storage									68.44
Communications									0

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Goal: Increase youth participation in local and national politics, and reduce corrupt governance practices.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Increase youth participation in political process									
Attend a community meeting (18-24) (%)	**53.41**								
% change in attend community meeting	-								
Voted in last election (18-24) (%)	**73.85**								
% change voted in last election (18-24)	-								
Strategic Objective 2: Improve governance									
Corruption Perception Index	**3.2**								
% change Corruption Perception Index	**-3.03%**								
Youth who say local official listens to them (%)	**39.36**								
% change local official listening	-								

ODA Disbursements to Politics and Governance (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Politics and Governance	1.24	4.02	15.21	8.31	8.54	371.94	22.24	66.26	84.62
Percent to Politics and Governance of Total ODA Disbursements	3.75%	5.07%	8.16%	4.42%	4.24%	54.24%	1.55%	13.80%	5.59%
Subsectors									
Government & Civil Society	1.24	4.02	15.21	8.31	8.54	371.94	22.24	66.26	84.62

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Politics and Governance	84.62								
Percent to Politics and Governance of Total ODA Disbursements	5.59%								
Subsectors									
Government & Civil Society	84.62								

PEACE AND SECURITY

Goal: Increase safety, engagement with police, and justice system effectiveness.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Increase ability protect the country									
Global Peace Index	2								
% change in Global Peace Index	-0.51%								
Strategic Objective 2: Increase trust in and access to domestic security									
Liberia National Police-citizen ratio	1:880								
% change in Liberia National Police-citizen ratio	-								
Trust of police (%)	32								
% change in trust of police	-								
Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen institutions for peace and security									
Rule of Law Index	28.6								
% change in Rule of Law Index	1.42%								

ODA Disbursements to Peace and Security (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Peace and Security	17.32	51.32	150.23	161.5	169.36	145.76	124.22	55.01	77.07
Percent to Peace and Security of Total ODA Disbursements	52.34%	64.72%	80.62%	85.81%	84.06%	21.25%	8.64%	11.46%	5.09%
Subsectors									
Conflict, Peace & Security	0	4.64	6.62	57.93	66.32	59.22	56.21	22.32	49.04
Emergency Response	15.94	39.98	128.07	98.81	101.81	69.78	49.28	27.19	18.11
Reconstruction Relief & Rehabilitation	0.68	0.45	13.41	3.08	0.91	16.76	18.73	5.13	9.49
Disaster Prevention & Preparedness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.37	0.43
Refugees in Donor Countries	0.7	6.25	2.13	1.68	0.32	0	0	0	0

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Peace and Security	77.07								
Percent to Peace and Security of Total ODA Disbursements	5.09%								
Subsectors									
Conflict, Peace & Security	49.04								
Emergency Response	18.11								
Reconstruction Relief & Rehabilitation	9.49								
Disaster Prevention & Preparedness	0.43								
Refugees in Donor Countries	0								

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Goal: Increase trust in the community and youth participation in community decision-making.

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen feelings of trust in society									
Trust of other Liberians	25.3								
Strategic Objective 2: Improve youth participation in community affairs									
% change in trust of other Liberians	-								
Local council allows youth participation (%)	34.94								
% change in local council allowing youth participation	-								
Traditional leaders who listens to youth (18-24) (%)	25.7								
Strategic Objective 3: Reduce social pressure for young women to join Sandee									
% change in traditional leaders who listens to youth	-								
Female membership in a Sandee society (15-19) (%)	35.9								
% change in membership in a Sandee society	-								

ODA Disbursements to Community and Culture (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Community and Culture	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Percent to Community and Culture of Total ODA Disbursements	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Subsectors									

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Community and Culture	0								
Percent to Community and Culture of Total ODA Disbursements	0.00%								
Subsectors									

FAMILY AND GENDER

Goal: Improve female agency in terms of both family structures and society at large

Indicator	Baseline	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic Objective 1: Improve family outcomes									
Females who used condom at last higher-risk sex (15-24) (%)	14								
% change females who used condom at last higher-risk sex	-								
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	135								
% change adolescent fertility rate	-2.9%								
Median age at first marriage (females 20-49)	19								
% change median age at first marriage females	-								
Strategic Objective 2: Equalize gender balance in politics and decision-making									
Female representation in Congress (%)	10.68								
% change female representation in Congress	-								

ODA Disbursements to Family and Gender (Current USD Millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Baseline
Total ODA Disbursements to Family and Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Percent to Family and Gender of Total ODA Disbursements	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Subsectors									

	Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2017	2018
Total ODA Disbursements to Family and Gender	0								
Percent to Family and Gender of Total ODA Disbursements	0.00%								
Subsectors									

Appendix II

EDUCATION	Goal: Improve youth knowledge and skills by increasing access to and quality of education.					
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Baseline
Strategic Objective 1: Increase access to education							
National senior high school net enrollment ratio (NER) (%)	-	-	6	-	-	-	**6**
% change national senior high school NER	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
National senior high school Gender Parity Index (GPI)	-	-	0.75	-	-	-	**0.75**
% change national senior high school GPI	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Increase the quality of education							
National senior high school pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)	-	-	19	-	-	-	**19**
% change national senior high school PTR	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Percentage of senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates	-	-	42	-	-	-	**42**
% change senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 3: Improve education outcomes							
Youth literacy rate (15-24) (%)	-	-	76.0	-	-	-	**76.0**
% change youth literacy rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

HEALTH	Goal: Create a healthier youth population by improving access to, and quality of health infrastructure and services.					
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Baseline
Strategic Objective 1: Improve health infrastructure and increase access to health services							
Access to improved water source (% of rural population with access)		-	-	60	-	-	**60**
% change improved water source	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Access to improved sanitation (% of rural population with access)		-	-	7	-	-	**7**
% change access to improved sanitation	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Problem with distance to health facility (females 20-34) (%)	49.1	-	-	-	-	-	**49.1**
% change in problem with distance to health facility							**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Improve quality of care							
Concerned no drugs available (females 20-34) (%)	52.7	-	-	-	-	-	**52.7**
% change in no drugs	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 3: Improve health outcomes							
Prevalence of HIV (15-49) (%)	1.8	1.6	1.5	-	-	-	**1.5**
% change prevalence of HIV	-	-11.11%	-6.25%	-	-	-	**-6.25%**
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1000)			112	-	-	-	**112**
% change in under-5 mortality rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

LIVELIHOOD	Goal: Provide opportunities and skills so that youth can increase national productivity.					
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Baseline
Strategic Objective 1: Increase abilility to generate income							
Youth unemployment (15-24) (%)	-	-	-	6.1	-	-	**6.1**
% change youth unemployment	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Cost of starting a business (% of income per capita)	563.9	489.6	100.2	85.6	88.3	68.4	**68.4**
% change in cost of starting a business		-13.18	-79.53	-14.57	3.15	-22.65	**-22.65**
Strategic Objective 2: Improve agricultural outcomes							
Agriculture, value added (millions of current USD)	396.66	505.43				-	**505.43**
% change in agriculture	-	27.42%				-	**27.42%**
Strategic Objective 3: Improve job preparedness							
Persons (15+) who have done vocational training (%)	-	-	-	14.2	-	-	**14.2**
% change in over age 15 with vocational training	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Working for wage or salary if have done vocational training (15+) (%)	-	-	-	30.29	-	-	**30.29**
% Change in hirings after vocational training	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

INFRASTRUCTURE		Goal: Increase connectivity and the exchange of ideas through improved national access.						
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	**Baseline**
Strategic Objective 1: Improve road network							
Paved roads (as %age of total roads)	-	-	-	-	-	-	**6.2**
% change paved roads as percentage of total roads	·	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Total roads (km)	-	-	-	-	-	-	**10,600**
% change total roads per square km	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Increase access to communication and information							
Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)	16.19	23.36	28.29	39.34	-	-	**39.34**
% change mobile cellular subscriptions	-	44.29%	21.10%	39.06%	-	-	**39.06%**
Frequent internet users (18-35) (%)	-	3.75	-	-	-	-	**3.75**
% change internet users	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE		Goal: Increase youth participation in local and national politics, and reduce corrupt governance practices.						
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	**Baseline**
Strategic Objective 1:Increase youth participation in political process							
Attend a community meeting (18-24) (%)	-	53.41	-	-	-	-	**53.41**
% change in attend community meeting	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Voted in last election (18-24) (%)	-	73.85	-	-	-	-	**73.85**
% change voted in last election (18-24)	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Improve governance							
Corruption Perception Index	2.1	2.4	3.1	3.3	3.2	-	**3.2**
% change Corruption Perception Index	-	14.29%	29.17%	6.45%	-3.03%	-	**-3.03%**
Youth who say local official listens to them (%)	-	39.36	-	-	-	-	**39.36**
% change local official listening	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

PEACE AND SECURITY		Goal: Increase safety, engagement with police, and justie system effectiveness.						
Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	**Baseline**
Strategic Objective 1: Increase ability protect the country							
Global Peace Index	-	-	-	-	2.159	2.148	**2.159**
% change in Global Peace Index	-	-	-	-	-	-0.51%	**-0.51%**
Strategic Objective 2: Increase trust in and access to domestic security							
Liberia National Police-citizen ratio	-	-	1:880	-	-	-	**1:880**
% change in Liberia National Police-citizen ratio	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Trust of police (%)	-	31.63	-	-	-	-	**31.63**
% change in trust of police	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen institutions for peace and security							
Rule of Law Index	17.3	18.8	28.2	28.6	-	-	**28.6**
% change in Rule of Law Index	-	8.67	50	1.42	-	-	**1.42%**

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE	Goal: Increase trust in the community and youth participation in community decision-making.						
Indicator	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**Baseline**
Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen feelings of trust in society							
Trust of other Liberians	-	25.3	-	-	-	-	**25.3**
% change in trust of other Liberians	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Improve youth participation in community affairs							
Local council allows youth participation (%)	-	34.94	-	-	-	-	**34.94**
% change in local council allowing youth participation	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Traditional leaders who listens to youth (18-24) (%)	-	25.7	-	-	-	-	**25.7**
% change in traditional leaders who listens to youth	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 3: Reduce social pressure for young women to join Sandee Societies							
Female membership in a Sandee society (15-19) (%)	35.9	-	-	-	-	-	**35.9**
% change in membership in a Sandee society	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

FAMILY AND GENDER	Goal: Improve female agency in terms of both family structures and society at large						
Indicator	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**Baseline**
Strategic Objective 1: Improve family outcomes							
Females who used condom at last higher-risk sex (15-24) (%)	-	-	14	-	-	-	**14**
% change females who used condom at last higher-risk sex	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	143	139	135	-	-	-	**135**
% change adolescent fertility rate	-	-2.8%	--2.9%	-	-	-	**-2.9%**
Median age at first marriage (females 20-49)	18.6	-	-	-	-	-	**18.6**
% change median age at first marriage females	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Strategic Objective 2: Equalize gender balance in politics and decision-making							
Female representation in Congress (%)	-	-	-	-	10.68	-	**10.68**
% change female representation in Congress	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**

Appendix III

Matrix Indicator Descriptions and Sources

EDUCATION

National senior high school net enrollment ratio (NER)

    Description: The *national senior high school net enrollment ratio* is the ratio of students of official high school age enrolled in high school to the number of individuals of official high school age in the population as a whole multiplied by 100.

    Source: *2008/09 National School Census Report*

National senior high school gender parity index (GPI)

    Description: The *national senior high school gender parity index* is the ratio of boys and girls enrolled in senior high school. In this case, it is computed as the ratio of the gross enrollment rate of females to males at the senior high school level.

    Source: *2008/09 National School Census Report*

National senior high school pupil to teacher ratio **(PTR)**

    Description: The *national senior high school pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)*, also sometimes referred to as the *student to teacher ratio (STR)* is the ratio of the number of students in senior high school to the number of teachers in that level.

    Notes: Teachers are generally employed to teach in a school and not at a level. As such, many teachers teach at more than one level, and the same teacher is sometimes counted up to 4 times. The extent to which double counting is a problem depends on if there are time demarcations between responsibility for different grade levels.

    Source: *2008/09 National School Census Report*

Percentage of senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates

    Description: The *percentage of senior high school teachers with at least "B" level Certificates* is the number of those teaching at the senior high school level who hold a "B" Certificate or higher divided by the total number teaching at the senior high school level multiplied by 100.

    Notes: The "B" Certificate program trains teachers at the Junior High School level

    Source: *2008/09 National School Census Report*

Youth literacy rate

    Description: *Youth literacy rate* is the percentage of people aged15-24, who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.

    Source: *World Bank World Development Indicators*

    Link: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.ZS/countries

HEALTH

Access to improved water source (% of rural population with access)

Description: *Access to an improved water source* refers to the percentage of the rural population with reasonable access to an adequate amount of water from an improved source, such as a household connection, public standpipe, borehole, protected well or spring, and rainwater collection. Unimproved sources include vendors, tanker trucks, and unprotected wells and springs. Reasonable access is defined as the availability of at least 20 liters a person a day from a source within one kilometer of the dwelling.

Source: *World Bank World Development Indicators*

Link: http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do

Access to improved sanitation (rural)

Description: Access to improved sanitation facilities refers to the percentage of the population with at least adequate access to excreta disposal facilities that can effectively prevent human, animal, and insect contact with excreta. Improved facilities range from simple but protected pit latrines to flush toilets with a sewerage connection. To be effective, facilities must be correctly constructed and properly maintained.

Source: *World Bank World Development Indicators*

Link: http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do

Problem with distance to health facility (females aged 20-34) (%)

Description: *Problem with distance to health facility* is the percentage of women (20-34) who reported that "distance to health facility" is a serious problem in accessing health care for themselves

Source: *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007*

Concerned with no drugs available (females aged 20-24) (%)

Description: *Concern with no drugs* available is the percentage of women (20-34) who reported that 'concern no drugs available' is a serious problem in accessing health care for themselves

Source: *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007*

Prevalence of HIV/AIDS (aged 15-49)

Description: Prevalence of HIV/AIDS is the percentage of the population aged 15-49 with HIV/AIDS.

Source: UNAIDS

Link: http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/liberia/

Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000)

Description: The *under-five mortality rate (per 1,000)* is the average number of children out of every 1,000 live births who die before their fifth birthday.
Source: World Health Organization (WHO)
Link: http://www.who.int/countries/lbr/en/

LIVELIHOOD
Youth unemployment (aged 15-24)
Description: *Youth unemployment* is the number of unemployed youth as a percentage of the youth labor force, where a person is considered unemployed if that person has not done any work in the reference period and is available for work.
Source: *Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010 Report*

Cost of starting a business
Description: The *cost of starting a business* indicator is a part of the *Ease of Doing Business Index* from the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank. The indicator gives the percentage of income per capita that it takes to start a business.
Source: *Ease of Doing Business Index*
Link: www.doingbusiness.org/Custom-Query/liberia

Agriculture, value added (millions of current USD)
Description: Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1-5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the *International Standard Industrial Classification* (ISIC), revision 3. Data are in current U.S. dollars.
Source: World Bank
Link: www.databank.worldbank.org

Persons (aged 15+) who have done vocational training (%)
Description: This indicator measures the percentage of people aged 15 and over who report having ever done any formal vocational training.
Source: *Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010 Report*

Self-reported working for wage or salary if ever done vocational training (%)
Description: This indicator reports the percentage of those people that report ever having done vocational training that also report working for a wage or a salary.
Source: *Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010* raw data

INFRASTRUCTURE
Paved roads as a percentage of total roads
Description: This indicator divides the total distance of paved roads by the total distance of all roads (paved and unpaved) and then multiplies that number by 100.
Source: World Bank
Link: www.databank.worldbank.org

Total roads *(km)*

> Description: This indicator is found by summing together the total kilometers of all roads (paved and unpaved).
>
> Source: World Bank
>
> Link: www.databank.worldbank.org

Mobile cellular subscriptions

> Description: *Mobile cellular subscriptions* are the total number of cellular subscriptions for every 100 people. This variable estimates the number of subscriptions to a public mobile telephone service that provide access to Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) using cellular technology, including number of pre-paid SIM cards active during the past three months, expressed per 100 inhabitants. This includes both analog and digital cellular systems (IMT-2000 [Third Generation, 3G] and 4G subscriptions), but excludes mobile broadband subscriptions via data cards or USB modems. Subscriptions to public mobile data services, private trunked mobile radio, telepoint or radio paging, and telemetry services are also excluded. It includes all mobile cellular subscriptions that offer voice communications.
>
> Source: International Telecommunications Union
>
> Link: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/

Frequent internet users *(aged 18-24) (%)*

> Description: *Frequent Internet users* divides the sum of the number of 18-24-year-old respondents who self-reported using the Internet "a few times a month," "a few times a week," or "everyday" by the total number of 18-24 year old respondents and multiplies the quotient by 100.
>
> Source: *Afrobarometer*
>
> Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Attend a community meeting *(aged 18-24)*

> Description: *Attend a community meeting* reports the percentage of youth that attended at least one meeting in the last year. It is calculated by dividing the sum of the number of 18-24 year old respondents who reported that they had attended a community meeting in the last year, even if just once, by the total number of 18 24 year old respondents and multiplying the quotient by 100.
>
> Source: *Afrobarometer*
>
> Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Voted in last election *(aged 18-24)*

> Description: *Voted in last election* depicts the number of youth aged 18-24 that self-reported voting in the 2005 presidential elections. It divides the number of 18-24 -year-olds who responded yes divided by the number of 18-24-year-old respondents (not including those that responded that they were "not registered or too young to vote").
>
> Source: *Afrobarometer*, 2008
>
> Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Corruption Perception Index

> Description: The *Corruption Perception Index* ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. It is a composite index, based on a combination of polls, drawing on corruption-related data collected by a variety of institutions. It is scaled from 0-10, with 10 being least corrupt and 0 most corrupt.
>
> Source: Transparency International
>
> Link: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi

Youth who say officials listen to them

> Description: *Youth who say officials listen to them* tabulates the percentage of youth who report that it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that they could get together with others to make his or her local government officials listen to his or her concerns about a matter of importance to the community. This indicator is calculated by dividing the sum of those 18-24 year olds that responded to the question with either the answer "somewhat likely" or "very likely" by the total number of 18-24 year olds respondents and multiplying the quotient by 100.
>
> Source: *Afrobarometer*, 2008
>
> Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

PEACE AND SECURITY
Global Peace Index

> Description: The *Global Peace Index* ranks independent countries by their "absence of Violence" using metrics combining both internal and external forces. This Index is composed of 23 indicators, and aims to provide a quantitative measure of peacefulness that is comparable over time.
>
> Source: Vision of Humanity
>
> Link: http://www.visionofhumanity.org/

Liberia National Police to citizen ratio

> Description: The *Liberia National Police to citizen ratio* calculates the average number of citizens for every national police officer in Liberia.
>
> Source: *Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy — Progress Report December 2009* P. 15
>
> Link: http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10194.pdf

Trust of Police

> Description: This *Afrobarometer* question asked respondents how much they trust the police. The indicator is calculated by adding the number of 18-24-year-old respondents who answered "somewhat" or "just a little" and dividing by the total number of 18-24-year-old respondents.
>
> Source: *Afrobarometer*, 2008
>
> Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Rule of Law Index

> Description: This index is a composite of indicators on judicial process, judicial independence, sanctions, transfers of power, and property rights. It is scored from 0-100, with 100 being the highest score where the rule of law is upheld and 0 the lowest score.
>
> Source: *The Ibrahim Index*

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Trust of other Liberians

Description: This *Afrobarometer* question asked respondents how much they trust other Liberians. The indicator was calculated by adding the number of 18-24-year-olds who responded that they trust other Liberians "somewhat" or "just a little" and dividing by the total number of 18-24-year-old respondents.

Source: *Afrobarometer*, 2008

Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Local council allows youth participation

Description: This indicator reflects how well or badly the respondent thinks that his or her local government is performing in allowing citizens to participate in local government decisions. The indicator is calculated by adding the number of respondents aged 18-24 who answered "fairly well" or "very well," dividing by the total number of 18-24-year-old respondents, and multiplying the quotient by 100.

Source: *Afrobarometer*, 2008

Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Traditional leader who listens to youth (aged 18-24)

Description: This indicator reflects asks how much of the time the respondent thinks traditional leaders spend trying their best to listen to what people similar to them have to say. The indicator is calculated by adding together the number of respondents aged 18-24 who responded "often" or "always," dividing by the total number of 18-24-year-old respondents, and multiplying the quotient by 100.

Source: *Afrobarometer*

Link: http://www.afrobarometer.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=64

Female membership in a Sande society (aged 15-19)

Description: *Female membership in a Sande society* reports the percentage of young females aged 15-19 who were recorded as belonging to a *Sande* society on the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey.

Source: *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007 Report*

FAMILY AND GENDER

Females who used condom at last higher-risk sex (aged 15-24) (%)

Description: Percentage of young men and women (aged 15-24) who say they used a condom the last time they had sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner, of those who have had sex with such a partner in the last 12 months.

Source: UNICEF

Link: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html

Adolescent Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)

Description: This indicator is the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

Source: World Bank

Link: www.databank.worldbank.org

Median age of first marriage (females aged 20-49)

        Description: *Median age of first marriage* is the middle for which women were first married of the reported ages at first marriage for women aged 20-49.

        Source: *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey Report 2007* P. 81

Female Representation in Congress

        Description: *Female representation in Congress* is the percentage of women who hold office in the two houses of the Liberian government. Data is compiled on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments.

        Source: Inter-Parliamentary Unit

        Link: http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

Appendix IV

Communities Visited

*County Capitals

Zone 1:

Grand Cape Mount County
Lofa Bridge 2
Mano River
Tienii
Bo Waterside
Robersport*
Senji

Bomi County
Gbar
Sasstown
Sackietown
Tubmanburg *
Marry Camp
Coleman Hill
Suehn

Gbarpolu County
Garpolu Totoquellel
Bopolu*
Henry Town, Gbarma
Lofa Bridge 1

Montserrado County
Roseville
Pancer Corner
Segment
Harrisburg
Cureyburg
Elwa
Caldwell
Bensonville*
VOA Road
Cruzorville
Brewerville

Zone 2:

Lofa County
Salayea
Zorzor
Yela
Borkeza
Konia
Barziwea
Fissibu
Voinjama*
Konadu
Krukan
Kolahun
Foyah

Bong County
Gbarney
Gbarmu
Cuttington University
Kpatawee
Gbarlatuah
Gbarnga* (Ganta Parking, GST Road)
Foequellie
Gorlu
Gamo
Palala
Tamayta
Samay
Gornimah
Gbartala

Nimba County
Bahn
Zenpea
Sanniquellie*
Ganta (Small Ganta, Peace Community, Pearson

Community, Car-Wash)
Saclapea (Neepah, Sanquito)
Tappita
Yekepa

Zone 3:

Sinoe County
Greenville*

River Cess County
Timbo
Yannie
Cestos City*
Kpol ZimmieTown

Grand Bassa County
Compound 1
Waka Town
Fullsville
Buchanan*

Margibi County
Habel
Cartton Tree
Kakata*
Weala
Dolos Town

Zone 4:

Grand Kru County
Big Swen
Picnicess
Barclayville*

Maryland County
Karloken
Pleebo

175

Tubman University
Harper*

River Gee County
Killepo Kanweaken
Gbaepo Kanweaken

Pronoken
Fishtown*
Teajiliken

Grand Gedeh County
Zleh Town

Tiama Town
Zwedru*
Putu Penoken
Janzon
Pohan

Appendix V

Author and Contributor Bios

Tom Brownlee:
Tom Brownlee was born in England and grew up in San Mateo, California. He received a B.A. in Mathematics at Boston College. In 2005 he went to South Africa to volunteer with the Peace Corps where he worked with primary school teachers and administrators on effective education methods and with the community youth group on various issues such as HIV/AIDS. After returning to California in 2008, Tom taught high school math for two years. In 2010, he moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue an M.A. in Comparative and Regional Studies with a regional concentration on Africa and a subject focus on youth issues. In the last year, Tom has interned with Grassroot Soccer in Cape Town and Youth Advocate Program International in D.C.

Liat Krawczyk:
Liat was born to Argentinean parents and grew up moving between Israel and the United States. She holds a B.A. in Human Rights and Film and recently graduated with an M.A. in International Development. Liat has served as a 2007 Humanity-in-Action Fellow, a 2008 Public Service Scholar Fellow, and a 2010 Junior Professional Fellow at the United Nations University. She co-directs The Jeneba Project, a non-profit organization that expands educational opportunities for students in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia and works for the American Bar Association's Center for Human Rights. Through documentary film and field research, Liat has recorded the reality of marginalized, impoverished, and in-conflict people around the world, including survivors of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb; victims of violent insurgence in El Salvador, Sierra Leone, and Liberia; troubled youths in New York City; and Palestinian-Israelis.

Kate Krumrei:
Kate spent her childhood in Iowa and Illinois, dreaming of traveling to far off lands. At the age of 16 she set off on her first international adventure and has not stopped bouncing around the globe since. After completing her B.S. in ESL Education, she taught at the International Newcomer Academy in Fort Worth, Texas for three years. It was through her students that she discovered a curiosity for refugee issues, which led her to pursue her M.A. in Ethics, Peace, and Global Affairs in Washington, D.C. Through her experiences in various countries, like the Dominican Republic, India, Ukraine, Ecuador, and Bolivia, Kate has begun to explore the intersection of her two passions — international development and education. Most recently Kate has worked as an intern with Ivorian Hope in Washington and the Danish Refugee Council in Sanniquellie, Liberia — focusing on workshop and training implementation.

Cari McCachren:
Cari grew up in a small town outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. She earned her B.A. in International Studies in 2006 from UNC-Chapel Hill. Following graduation, Cari stayed in North Carolina to work in various non-profit organizations focused on international child welfare. In August 2010, Cari moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue an M.A. in Comparative and Regional Studies focused on Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Peace Building within the Americas. As part of that experience, Cari has been privileged to intern with the Joint Council on International Children's Services; Search for Common Ground's Children and Youth Division; and the Department of State's Office of Western Hemisphere within the Bureau of Democracy,

Human Rights, and Labor. Since graduation she has been working as a Foreign Affairs Officer at Department of State.

Neha Raval:
Neha grew up in New Jersey with Indian parents and frequently visited family in India. Her interest in issues of social justice peaked at Rutgers University where she studied Sociology and Women and Gender Studies. There she strengthened various non-profit organizations that work with immigrant communities. From 2007 to 2009, she worked as a community development volunteer with the Peace Corps in the Republic of Moldova and helped open a youth activism center and worked with a national NGO Resource Center. In 2010, she moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue an M.A. in International Peace and Conflict Resolution with a focus on NGO management. Since graduation, she has been working with the Global Fund for Children as a Grantmaking Officer.

Celeste Visser:
Celeste was born in Canada but moved to the United States at the age of 14. She completed her B.S. in Economics with a minor in Peace Studies and then, eager to learn first-hand about another culture, moved to South Korea where she taught ESL to elementary school-aged children for a year. Following that Celeste went with WorldTeach, an NGO based out of the Kennedy School of Government, to Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, in order to teach algebra II and geometry to under-served high school students. Celeste recently graduated with an M.A. in International Development/Development Economics from American University. Over the last year Celeste has held internship/research positions at the Inter-American Foundation and at the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. She would like to use the skills that she has learned from her studies to produce empirically informed analysis that is relevant for policy makers and development practitioners.

Logistics Coordinator and Search for Common Ground Intern
Amadou Bakayoko:
Amadou has over six years of proven experience in project management, proposal and contract development, training, microfinance, curriculum and adult learning materials development. He is bilingual in French and English with accomplished skills in research, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Areas of interest include youth, peace and security, justice and human rights, with a focus on small business development, and livelihoods opportunities for youth. He has recently completed an internship with Search for Common Ground in Washington, DC as a graduate program assistant.

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- The U.S. Agency for International Development*
- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency*
- The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation*
- The World Bank*
- The IMF*
- United Nations Population Fund*
- United Nations Development Programme*
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)*
- United Nations Children's Fund*
- UN Peace Building Support Office
- United Nations Mission in Liberia
- United Nations Volunteers
- Government of Liberia Representatives
- Liberian NGOs
- Civil society organizations
- Actors in Liberia's business sector
- Youth leaders operating in formal structures

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