USAID/LIBERIA
YOUTH SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

February 7, 2019

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USAID's YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international youth development. We are leading research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base and inform the global community about how to transition young people successfully into productive, healthy adults. PYD is defined by USAID as:

> Positive Youth Development (PYD) engages youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	Accelerated basic education
AEP	Accelerated education programs
AYP	Advancing Youth Project
BWI	Booker Washington Institute
CART	Center for Action Research and Training
CBO	Community-based organizations
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CF	Community Forests
CSYA	Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DG	Democracy and Governance
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
EDC	Education Development Center
EG	Economic Growth
EHELD	Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIFES	Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability
FP	Family Planning
GOL	Government of Liberia
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IIP	International Implementing Partner
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
LACE	Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment
LADA	Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity
LAVI	Liberia–Accountability and Voice Initiative
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LD	Liberian Dollar
LL	Learning Links
LMD	Liberia Media Development
LOIC	Liberian Occupational Industrial Center
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PYPP	President's Young Professionals Program
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RH	Reproductive Health
SGBV	Sexual-and gender-based violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIFPO2	Support for International Family Planning Organizations 2
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SMS	Short Message Service
SOW	Scope of Work
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
USG	United States Government
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loans Associations
YEEP	Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Project
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YOCEL	Youth Coalition for Education Liberia
YOP	Youth Opportunity Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This cross-sectoral youth assessment aims to capture the experiences, aspirations, challenges, and assets of Liberian youth ages 15-35. USAID/Liberia will use the data to inform their approach to working with youth, incorporating findings into their 2019-2023 Country Development and Cooperation Strategy. Assessment results are also intended to provide donors and development practitioners working in Liberia with information on youth's journey from adolescence to adulthood.

The assessment was conducted during September-October 2018 and consisted of a desk review and field visit to six counties prioritized by USAID (Montserrado, Lofa, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, and Margibi). The research team was made up of an international consultant, local consultant, and five youth researchers. During the field visit, the assessment team conducted 30 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 275 male and female youth ages 18-35; 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 96 local community stakeholders; and 38 interviews with 79 key informants (KIIs) from government, USAID, other donors, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The assessment answers three major sets of questions:
- What are the different youth cohorts in Liberia, broadly speaking, and how would they be characterized? Which youth are considered the most vulnerable and/or marginalized in Liberia?
- What are youth life goals and what are the factors that hinder them from achieving their goals? What are the youth's biggest concerns and challenges? How do these goals and challenges diverge for different youth segments?
- What is working well to support youth in Liberia and enable them to actualize their civic and economic potential? In that regard, what do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for promoting private sector engagement in issues impacting youth, and how can the interests and capacities of youth be better aligned with the interests the private sector? What do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for advancing self-reliance (and how do Liberian youth envision the concept of their role in building self-reliance)?

The analysis uses a positive youth development lens to offer a snapshot of the youth experience across a number of sectors, including education and skills development, employment and entrepreneurship, agriculture, health, security, social engagement and civic participation.

Findings

How can we distinguish youth cohorts?

Within the Liberian context, the most appropriate way to identify youth cohorts is by the relative assets that they possess, including relative skills, physical and financial assets, information, access to services, and personal networks. Results from the assessment confirm that the most vulnerable youth segments in Liberia are those who possess the fewest assets, most often characterized by the following features:
- **Younger youth** under age 25 generally have fewer skills, work experience, financial resources, physical assets, and networks; they also appear to have less access to services than older youth.
- **Youth from poverty-affected families,** typically defined as those living in the lowest two wealth quintiles (an estimated 70% of the population).
- **Out-of-school youth,** as well as those at-risk or dropping out of school, who have not yet completed high school (approximately 60% have not completed primary education)..
- **Youth living in rural areas,** representing roughly half of all youth and yet who are disproportionately under-served by government and donor-funded programs.

- Youth working in the **informal sector/ vulnerable employment**, and especially in the **agro-food system** which are both characterized by low-value, physically demanding (and risky) work.
- **Females:** especially younger girls at-risk of unintended pregnancy, those who are pregnant, as well as unmarried young women with dependents (one-third of young women give birth before the age of eighteen).
- **Youth living with disabilities.**
- The most vulnerable segment is the **at-risk street youth** in urban areas, locally referred to as *Zogos* (males) and *Zogese* (females).

What is the youth experience?

In Liberia, the youth experience is largely driven by poverty and lack of education. Overwhelmingly, education is the number one aspiration among youth, and is strongly linked to—and very often equated with—earning a livelihood. In fact, the majority of youth struggle with completing their education while concurrently earning a livelihood, up through their mid-twenties and beyond. The association between education and livelihoods cannot be underestimated: youth most often define their education priorities as vocational education, or learning a trade, and they stress that education is most relevant when tied to job intermediation and entrepreneurship support.

Teenage pregnancy—often a result of transactional sex due to poverty—is a compounding factor that negatively affects young mothers who are forced to leave school to raise their children on their own, perpetuating the cycle of lack of education and poverty. Unintended pregnancy is fueled by widespread misinformation and low uptake of family planning and reproductive health among youth.

When it comes to livelihoods, youth are often involved in multiple income-earning activities to support themselves and their families. While jobs that earn "quick money" are the means for immediate survival, youth aspire to more skilled occupations, and those that offer meaning or contribute to society. Agriculture plays many important roles for both rural and urban youth: as a means of survival, as a stepping stone to other livelihood opportunities, and as a desired livelihood in and of itself.

Unfortunately, youth face daily life disruptions due to security issues (crime, corruption, safety). Girls who are economically vulnerable are especially at risk of violence, rape, and sexual coercion in the home, at school, in the street, and in the workplace. Security concerns are more prevalent among urban versus rural youth.

Linked with the issue of crime and violence is the pervasive substance abuse problem—a surprisingly salient concern among youth. While supporting evidence is needed, adults and youth alike assert that youth on drugs are the main perpetrators of violence. Drug-related problems are more present in urban areas, with youth in Monrovia naming it as a serious concern. However, the substance abuse issue seems to be affecting females and males equally.

What do we see with a positive youth development lens?

Overall, "youth participation," a key component of the positive youth development (PYD) approach, does not seem to be a high priority. While several youth encourage community volunteerism and appear satisfied with the level of youth involvement in community processes and decision-making; others are more skeptical and want to see a tangible result of their efforts. In terms of political engagement, many youth are involved in elections, but largely see it as a transaction, such as a source of income, as a way to earn food or clothing, or as a way to obtain a job or avoid political fall-out. Importantly, youth note that they have few outlets for positive engagement, especially outside Monrovia, and express a need for youth-friendly safe spaces where they can express themselves, learn from others, take on leadership roles, and engage meaningfully in society. Nevertheless, the quantity of exceptional youth-led organizations and social enterprises throughout the country demonstrate a strong precedence for youth engagement.

When considering whether there was an enabling environment for PYD, a few salient themes emerged:

- Government Attitudes, Policies, & Regulation: Most key informants and secondary sources agree that Liberia's national policies have integrated youth across all sectors, but require greater coordination and follow-through. Youth have mixed attitudes toward government, ranging from expectations to disappointment to frustration. Frustration with public servants—especially teachers, nurses, and police—is a common theme.

- Private Sector Engagement: Youth entrepreneurs, larger established firms, and the informal small- and medium-sized enterprises expressed a notable desire to be actively engaged in the development of Liberian youth. But the capacity of youth, as well as the extremely constrained economy, give businesses pause in their ability to grow and take in additional youth as interns or employees.

- Gender: Restrictive gender norms seem to be most prominent in the livelihoods domain. There is often clear discrimination toward women, compounded with the barriers created by early marriage, unintended pregnancy, and childcare responsibilities.

- Youth with Disability: Youth (and even community leaders) with disabilities endure hardships to education and livelihoods that are not adequately addressed by local institutions and communities where they live. Systemic discrimination and social stigma appears to reinforce the inequity that youth with disability face in their daily lives.

- Inter-Generational Relations: Like in most countries, there are inherent tensions between Liberian youth and adults. Parents play an important role in youth's lives and are in need of support—in many cases the parents are youth themselves.

What are the opportunities for improving the lives of youth?

We recommend eight opportunities that have high potential to make a difference in the lives of Liberian youth:

#1: INCREASE YOUTH EARNINGS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR. There is a great unmet demand for programs that offer skills, assets, and supports for youth to generate income through self-employment in the informal sector. Targeting rural areas, and the agriculture sector, is important for reaching a wide swathe of under-served youth. Successful youth livelihood interventions in Liberia have combined a number of integrated supports, using flexible, modular components that can be tailored to the needs of different youth segments.

#2: GROW LIBERIAN MICRO-, SMALL-, AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT. Another potential opportunity is to develop "demand-side" interventions that promote the growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), especially in the agriculture sector, in ways that create jobs for youth. Other "investment hub" opportunities that lead to youth employment include: feeder roads, storage facilities, small-sized processing, aggregation services, farm mechanization support services, and transport.

#3: INCREASE YOUTH'S ACCESS TO FINANCE. While service providers should continue current efforts in savings mobilization and financial literacy, there is a need to introduce flexible loan products and/or value chain financing for youth startups that "graduate" youth from grants. The expansion of mobile money offers potential for youth entrepreneurs, especially in the north. Moreover, expanding agriculture financing for small- and medium-sized agri-businesses has shown to create downstream effects for youth employment.

#4: EXPAND YOUTH-FRIENDLY VOLUNTARY FAMILY PLANNING. Youth have enormous potential to spark a massive cultural shift in family planning attitudes and behaviors across Liberia. Innovative behavior

change communications interventions that enlist youth as creators and that "meet youth where they are at" have shown promise in increasing family planning awareness and utilization.

#5: ADDRESS THE EMERGING SUBSTANCE ABUSE EPIDEMIC. Given the overwhelming numbers of youth describing the substance abuse problem in their communities, there is a critical need to invest in action research on this topic.

#6: APPLY POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES WITHIN YOUTH PROGRAMS. Youth success in Liberia is clearly tied to cross-sectoral factors. Youth demand programs in Liberia that are more youth-driven. It is also important to engage other adult stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, nurses, police, and CBOs, who all play important roles in the lives of youth.

#7: BE INTENTIONAL WHILE TARGETING YOUTH SEGMENTS. New programs should pay greater attention to vulnerable youth segments, particularly in rural areas. USAID could start by setting a minimum target for reaching youth cohorts with certain characteristics of vulnerability (as defined by this report), or by dedicating discrete activities to serve certain at-risk youth segments.

#8: ESTABLISH A BODY FOR COORDINATION. Although national policy is cited as being youth-inclusive, greater coordination around youth services is needed. While several successful models for youth development and youth livelihoods have been tested and implemented in Liberia, many projects have been ultimately discontinued once the program periods end and donor interest wanes. Now is the time to take advantage of the existing youth development resources, experiences, and lessons learned in a more strategic and sustained manner.

I.   INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has long supported programming for Liberia's young people across sectors such as education, economic growth, civic engagement, and health. USAID/Liberia's Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) has a goal of "Strengthened Liberian Institutions Positioned to Drive Inclusive Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction." This strategy describes the "pro poor" development objectives of the Government of Liberia (GOL), with human capital and rural poverty as binding constraints to Liberia's progress, and emphasizes attention on rural development challenges.

USAID/Liberia's current CDCS expires in June 2019. In preparation for the next five-year strategy, USAID/Liberia requires a thorough analysis of the status and landscape of youth and youth initiatives in Liberia, the National Youth Policy, and youth development plans in Liberia. This youth assessment serves as the basis for decisions on strategic planning and future programming targeting or including youth in the 2019-2023 CDCS. Understanding the context of youth in Liberia will directly benefit the development of the new CDCS, with emphasis in the areas of education, economic status and job creation, civic participation, unemployment levels, and health outcomes.

PURPOSE OF AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS UNDER THE CROSS-SECTORAL YOUTH ASSESSMENT

In October 2018, USAID/Liberia commissioned the USAID YouthPower Learning project[1] to conduct a cross-sectoral youth assessment. Using a Positive Youth Development (PYD) lens, the assessment sought to better understand the status and aspirations of Liberian youth ages 15-35 in their journey from adolescence to adulthood—a transition that includes starting a productive working life, developing healthy lifestyles, and exercising citizenship.

PYD is both a philosophy and an approach to youth development that "engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems."[1] This approach has a proven positive impact across an array of outcomes and sectors in the United States and other high-income countries. Donors, governments, practitioners and policymakers are increasingly looking to this approach to provide more holistic support for youth in low- and middle-income countries.

The PYD Framework (Figure 1) offers four domains

FIGURE 1. PYD FRAMEWORK

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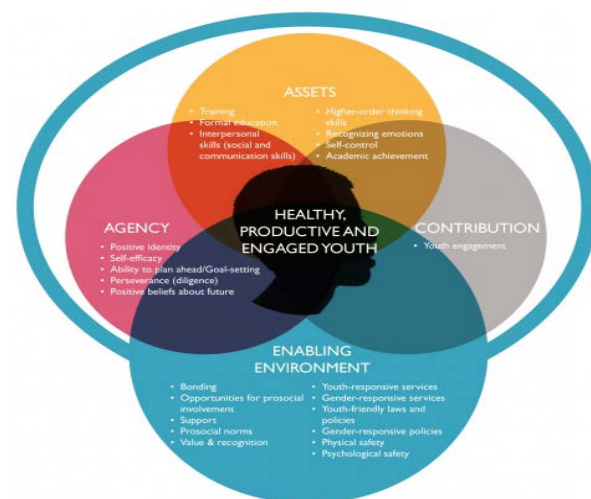
[1] USAID's YouthPower Learning project is a global activity based in Washington, DC that generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) in international development. For more information on the YouthPower Learning project, see http://www.youthpower.org/youthpower-learning.

through which the vision of healthy, productive, and engaged youth can be achieved:

- *Assets.* Youth have the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.
- *Agency.* Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions to achieve desired outcomes.
- *Contribution.* Youth are engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities' positive development.
- *Enabling environment.* Youth are surrounded by an environment that develops and supports their assets, agency, access to services and opportunities, and strengthens their ability to avoid risks and stay safe, secure, and protected, and live without fear of violence or retribution.[2]

The assessment identifies opportunities to optimally support youth and guide USAID/Liberia toward a more strategic engagement with youth as: a) beneficiaries and participants of sustainable Liberia-owned development solutions that can be brought to scale over time and, b) key actors empowered to identify and prioritize challenges to the lack of livelihoods and propose innovative solutions.

The following sets of questions served as the main framework for the assessment:

- What are the different youth cohorts in Liberia, broadly speaking, and how would they be characterized? Which youth are considered the most vulnerable and/or marginalized in Liberia?
- What are youth life goals and what are the factors that hinder them from achieving their goals? What are the youth's biggest concerns and challenges? How do these goals and challenges diverge for different youth segments?
- What is working well to support youth in Liberia and enable them to actualize their civic and economic potential? In that regard, what do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for promoting private sector engagement in issues impacting youth, and how can the interests and capacities of youth be better aligned with the interests the private sector? What do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for advancing self-reliance (and how do Liberian youth envision the concept of their role in building self-reliance)?

Annex A provides a full set of the research questions used to guide this assessment.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The assessment process consisted of several data collection methods:

- a desk review of over 150 secondary sources; and
- a field visit to six counties, as prioritized by USAID: Montserrado, Lofa, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, and Margibi that included
  - 30 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 275 male and female youth ages 18-35;
  - 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 96 local community stakeholders such as community and traditional leaders, religious leaders, parents, representatives from Liberian community-based organizations (CBOs), and entrepreneurs and employers; and
  - 38 individual- and group-based interviews with 79 key informants (KIIs) from the Government of Liberia (GOL), USAID and US Embassy staff, international donors, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implementing youth programs across Liberia.

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[2] An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term "environment" includes four key domains: (1) social- relationships with peers and adults, (2) normative- attitudes, norms, and beliefs, (3) structural- laws, policies, programs services, and systems; and (4) physical- safe, supportive spaces.

Desk Review: The literature review included gathering data from resources on the general background and context of Liberia; Government of Liberia statistics, strategic plans and priorities; evaluations and progress reports from existing USAID and other donor-funded projects; and relevant material related to the youth experience in Liberia as it relates to economic opportunity, education, skills, health, conflict, and civic participation. The data gathered from the desk review helped the assessment team frame the field work methodology, as well as provided supportive and comparative data for validation of findings.

Youth Focus Group Discussions: The assessment team conducted youth FGDs with separate male and female groups of youth ages 18-35, living in peri-urban and rural areas in the six selected counties (see Figure 2). To select the data collection sites, the team used purposive sampling, choosing municipalities based on physical accessibility (at least fair road conditions, in relatively close proximity to a main road); presence of youth-serving facilities and services including GOL- and USAID-supported projects; concentration of youth populations; and diversity of socio-economic characteristics among the total sample population (e.g. rural/urban, levels of poverty/ food insecurity, presence of youth migrants/refugees, religious and ethnic composition, etc.). Table 1 lists the sites where focus groups were conducted.

FIGURE 2. MAP OF DATA COLLECTION COUNTIES
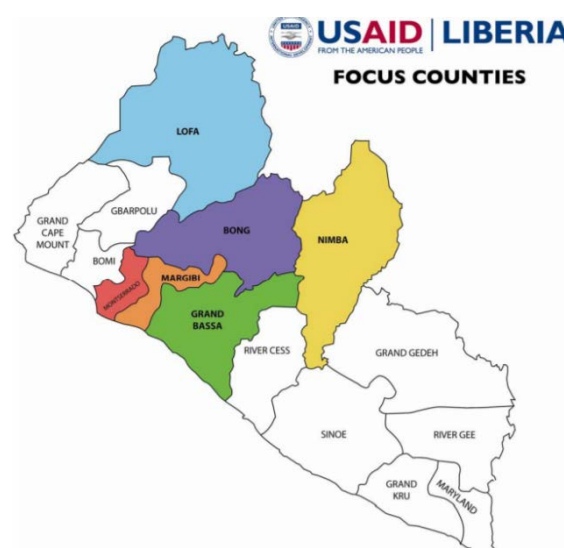
TABLE 1. COUNTY AND MUNICIPALITY SAMPLING

County	Site #1	Site #2
Bong	Gbarnga City	Palala Town, Kpaai District
Grand Bassa	Buchanan City	Compound #3, Gorblee
Lofa	Voinjama City	Foya City, Foya District
Nimba	Sanniquellie	Ganta
Margibi	Kakata City	Harbel, Firestone
Montserrado	Monrovia	Todee Town, Todee District

The assessment team also used purposive sampling to identify between eight and ten same-sex and age-specific individuals for each focus group. The assessment team sought to include youth within the age and sex categories identified who were *willing to participate* and *to freely share their perspectives and expertise.* The assessment team made every effort to ensure participant homogeneity within focus group, i.e. having similar age, sex, ethnic and socio/economic/demographic characteristics, while simultaneously ensuring that collectively the participants represented a variety of backgrounds, including youth with disabilities, where possible. Dedicated focus group discussions with near-peer youth ages 18-19 were intended to capture memories or experiences of friends/family in the 15-17 age range.

As illustrated in Table 2, of **275** youth that participated a little more than half (57%) were from urban areas, and the remaining (43%) from rural areas. Forty eight (48%) of youth participants were male; 52% were female. About half (47%) were older youth ages 25-35, while 53% were 18-24 years old. The data collection team completed a structured FGD intake form with each FGD participant, covering demographics (sex, age, marital status, children), as well as educational attainment and employment data. Protocols for the focus group discussions are located in Annex B.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF YOUTH FGDs BY COUNTY, SEX, AGE BANDINGS, & RURAL/URBAN MIX

County	Total	Urban	Rural	Ages 18-19	Ages 18-24	Ages 25-35	Total	Male	Female
Montserrado	6	4	2	2	2	2	53	28	25
Lofa	5	2	3	2	0	3	46	27	19
Bong	6	4	2	1	1	4	56	29	27
Grand Bassa	5	3	2	0	2	3	40	20	20
Margibi	4	2	2	1	3	0	41	10	31
Nimba	4	2	2	0	2	2	39	19	20
Sub totals	30	17	13	6	10	14	275	133	142
Percentages		57%	43%	20%	33%	47%		48%	52%

Over half of participants reported having high school degrees; as such, the educational attainment of informants was well above the national average of 27.9% of Liberians aged 15 and above with formal education who have attained a high school degree.[2] Approximately one-third (36%) of participants reported being enrolled in school. Almost half (49%) reported working in the informal sector, and one third (34%) reported they were not employed and looking for work. Refer to Table 3.

TABLE 3. EDUCATION LEVELS & EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Educational Attainment, as Reported by Youth Focus Group Participants	Percent
No Schooling	4%
Primary School Graduate or Below	11%
Some High School (Lower & Secondary)	32%
High School Graduate	57%
Tertiary Graduate	1%

Employment Status, as Reported by Youth Focus Group Participants	Percent
Formal Employment	9%
Informal Employment	49%
Not Employed, Looking for Work	34%
Not Employed, Not Looking for Work	3%
Unable to Work	5%

Community Group Discussions: Additional focus group discussions were held with community leaders and with CBO representatives in the six districts. Community leader discussions consisted roughly of: a tribal chief/ traditional leader, religious leader, youth leader, women's leader, and 1-2 business leaders. CBO participants represented a range of sectors (education, employment/ entrepreneurship, health, civic participation) serving different types of youth cohorts in the region. Discussions were similar to the youth focus group discussions, with emphasis on adult attitudes and experiences with youth in their community, as well as their perceived priorities for youth development.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): The team conducted individual and group-based interviews to generate information on program experiences and country-level priorities. The team used purposive sampling to develop a preliminary list of KIIs in coordination with USAID, prioritizing USAID and US Embassy staff; key GOL institutions tasked with serving youth at the national and sub-national levels; international donors; and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implementing youth programs in the six target counties. The team identified additional interviewees during the data collection process using snowball sampling.

Due to time limitations and the need to maximize time with youth FGDs, the team generated feedback from national implementing organizations in Monrovia using a group discussion approach, combined with a literature review of program documentation, brochures, and reports provided to the team by these organizations. Organizations participating in key informant group discussions were also asked to complete a *CSYA Questionnaire for Liberian NGOs and INGOs* to understand how these organizations engage with Liberian youth. Discussion with USAID staff also took place through group KII discussions, along with some individual

KIIs, across each office. Protocols for the key informant interviews and group discussions are located in Annexes B and C. For the list of key informants, please see Annex D.

Team Composition

The core team was comprised of: (1) a *Team Leader* with overall responsibility for methodology design, implementation, team training and supervision, quality control, data analysis and reporting; (2) a *Deputy Team Leader* who supported data collection planning and team training, shared oversight of FGDs and conducted KIIs; (3) a *Project Officer* who supported the desk review and initial fieldwork, provided input to the assessment, and managed contracting and logistical arrangements for this assignment; and (4) six *youth Researchers*[3] who conducted FGDs. Additional support and leadership was provided by the YouthPower Learning team and USAID/Liberia staff.

Quality Control

To ensure quality of data collection, the Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader used an *Assessment Team Training Guide* to provide three days of quality control training, including facilitation techniques, human research ethics, and notetaking techniques. The youth researchers pilot tested the data collection tools under the supervision of the Team Leader and Deputy Team Lead, who conducted observation and feedback using a standard quality control checklist. Once FGDs were underway, the assessment team performed daily debriefs, using a *Daily Analysis Guide* to process the information and identify data collection needs in real time. For data processing quality: (1) the youth researchers took handwritten notes in a dedicated *Field Notebook* with clear labels for the location and composition of each FGD, which they electronically transcribed daily; and (2) the Team Leader reviewed transcripts to provide feedback regarding areas for clarification or improvement, as needed. The Team Leader also regularly reviewed the FGD participant intake form database to ensure accuracy.

Analysis

The team conducted its analysis in two phases. In Phase 1, the Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader guided a daily debrief with the youth researchers regarding the key themes, trends, explanations, and outliers arising from the day's data collection. The debrief sessions provided insights into key findings and emerging themes, while serving to identify process challenges and jointly identify solutions. The Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader then documented the emerging themes and gaps identified by the youth researchers and included them in Daily Analytical Memos. The "gaps" identified were used to reinforce the use of probes and follow-up questions to ensure sufficient explanatory data in subsequent interviews. Once the FGDs were completed, the assessment team conducted an initial, one-day participatory analysis exercise in Monrovia, facilitated by the Team Leader, during which the team used deductive analysis to identify salient findings and discuss outliers.

During Phase 2, the team used both manual strategies and qualitative software to identify common themes across the youth and community FGD notes, driven by the key research questions. Data was coded to determine commonalities and differences by gender, age bandings, rural/urban locations and other demographic factors. Data across all methods of collection were triangulated to ensure consideration of multiple viewpoints and facilitate robust conclusions.

Limitations

Although the breadth of the assessment was quite extensive, it was not possible to answer all 74 research questions exhaustively. Where feasible, the data collection team conducted follow-up interviews and additional literature reviews to deepen analysis of the most salient issues, policies, and programs. As a largely

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[3] Making Cents engaged a local Liberian firm, CART (Center for Action Research and Training), which identified the local youth researchers.

qualitative assessment using purposive sampling, the assessment cannot purport to be statistically representative or generalizable to all youth in Liberia.

II. DISTINGUISHING YOUTH COHORTS IN LIBERIA

Youth Demographics in Liberia

Liberia today is experiencing a dramatic increase in its youth population, with over 70% of its population under the age of 35 and an annual population growth rate of 2.6%. Although fertility rates are relatively high, at nearly 5 births per woman, they have been consistently declining over the past several decades.[4] Figure 3 shows the age distribution of Liberians ages 0-40 years and highlights the relative youth of the overall population; nearly 50% of the population is between the ages of 10-35.[3]

FIGURE 3. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LIBERIAN POPULATION, 0-40 YEARS
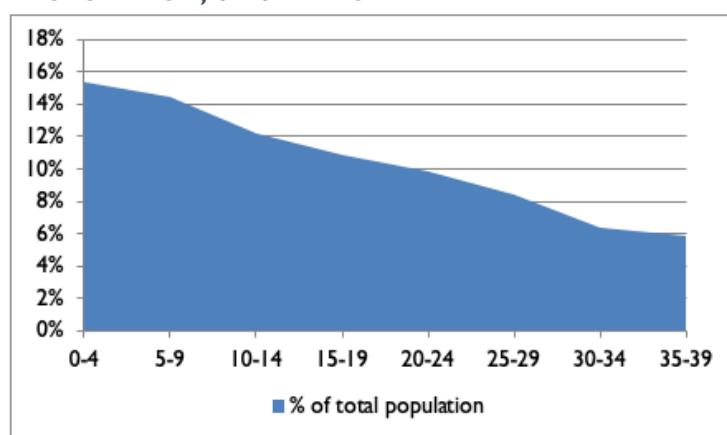
Data source: LISGIS (2011). "Republic of Liberia 2008 Population and Housing Census: Analytical Report on Population Size and Consumption," Table 3.1

Youth are nearly equally distributed between rural and urban areas. According to the 2010 Labour Force Survey, 45% of youth live in rural areas and 55% in urban areas, with the Greater Monrovia area showing the highest concentration of youth, approximately 40%.[4] The gender breakdown of youth between male and female is consistently just over 50% female in both rural and urban areas.[5] Many youth migrate to urban areas looking for work, increasing dependency on remittances in rural areas.[6] This strong pattern of urban migration is evidenced by the doubling of the population in Monrovia since 1984 and the decline of the populations in other counties.[7]

Although Liberia's educational indices are improving, females and rural youth continue to experience disproportionately lower levels of education. While the country's education indices are low (an estimated 51% of youth ages 15-24 are illiterate and approximately 60% have not completed primary education),[8] they have been improving steadily over the past few years, with the mean years of schooling increasing by 1.8 years between 2000 and 2015. The gains in educational attainment have not been equal; Figure 4 shows educational attainment by age and gender and illustrates the lack of educational attainment by women as compared to men of the same age cohort. The World Bank "Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector" (2016) report states that "an examination of the level of education obtained by different cohorts of youth shows that over 50 percent of females above 25 years old have no schooling."[9]

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[4] Liberia's fertility rate in 1996 was 6.11 live births per woman; in 2016 it was 4.58 births per woman. Source: World Bank Data (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?contextual=default&end=2016&locations=LR&name_desc=false&start=1996)

Considering the low levels of educational attainment in rural areas, illustrated in Figure 5 – almost 40% of youth in rural areas have no educational attainment at all – young rural females appear to be exceptionally vulnerable. Female rural youth are particularly affected by out-of-school rates as high as 75% and literacy rates also being amongst the lowest for female rural youth.[10]

FIGURE 4. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, BY AGE AND GENDER
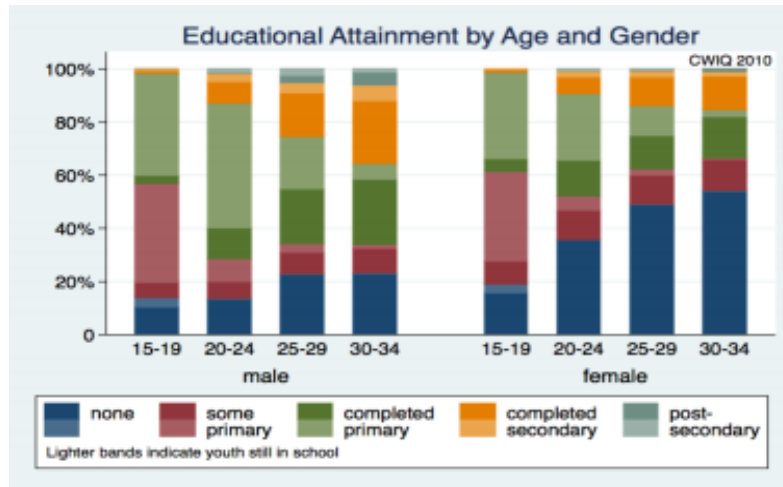
Source: World Bank (2016). "Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector." Report No: ACS18530, Figure 6.

Many working-age youth are still in school, forcing them to balance school completion with earning a livelihood. In Liberia overall, 68% of all school age children are classified as out-of-school children;[11] the majority of these are either pre-primary or primary school age. However a comparison of overall enrollment and enrollment at rightful age reveals only 17% of primary children are of primary age.[12] This data suggests that children of school age are not entering the education system until later in age, resulting in an overabundance of older learners, increasing the age at which youth are able to complete schooling and enter the workforce with higher levels of education.

FIGURE 5. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, BY MONROVIA/URBAN/RURAL
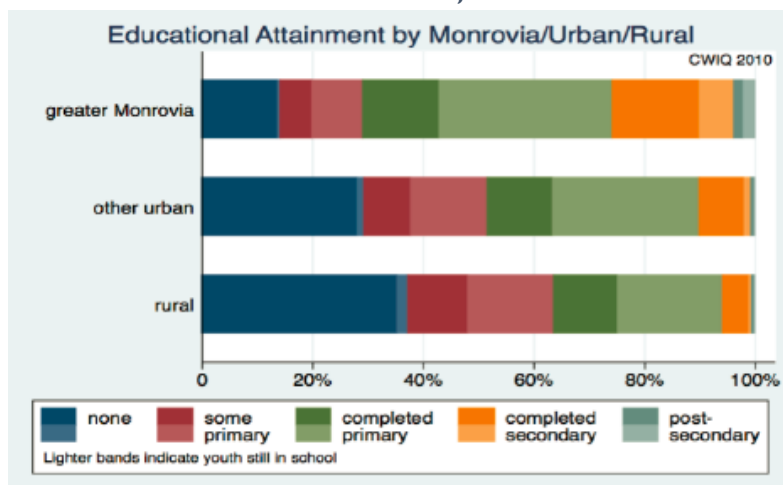
Source: World Bank (2016). "Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector." Report No: ACS18530, Figure 7.

Rural youth in isolated areas are more likely to be affected by poverty. Poverty is twice as high in rural areas (71.6%) than in urban areas (31.5 %) and 68% of the country's poor are in rural areas, approximately 1.46 million people.[13] Poverty levels are lower for households whose heads have completed secondary education, however nearly 50% of rural household heads have no education at all, compared with 30% of urban households heads.[14] Isolated households also have a higher probability of being poor – the North Central, South Central, and South Eastern regions make the largest contributions to poverty, due to their comparatively lower levels of access to food, infrastructure, and basic services, including education, health, and potable water.[15] In addition to having low levels of educational attainment as detailed previously, rural youth are also impacted by a lack of connectivity to the rest of the world, with mobile technology being the only available Information Communication Technology (ICT) service in many rural areas.[16] Youth are also less likely to have assets (physical or financial) of their own, which are an important determinant of current and future welfare.[17]

Defining Vulnerability

Looking at these demographics, statistically speaking the largest proportion of the youth population are those who are generally younger, have a primary education or less, fall under the income poverty line, work in the informal sector, and are female. There are many different youth segments, however, and they are defined by the range of demographic factors, as well as biological stages, cultural milestones, or personal identity. Within the Liberian context, the most appropriate way to identify youth cohorts is by the relative assets that they possess. The term "assets" is defined as the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes. Youth with relatively high assets either own or are able to access physical assets (equipment, inputs, facilities, housing, technology), natural resources (water, land, energy, etc.), financing (savings, financial gifts, remittances, or loans), education and skills training, information, services, or personal support systems and networks (family, community members, peers).

Results from the assessment confirm that the most vulnerable youth segments in Liberia are those who possess the fewest assets, most often characterized by the following features:

- **Younger youth** under age 25 generally have fewer skills, work experience, financial resources, physical assets, and networks; they also appear to have less access to services.
- **Youth from poverty-affected families,** typically defined as those living in the lowest two wealth quintiles.[18]
- **Out-of-school youth,** as well as those at-risk or dropping out of school, who have not yet completed high school.
- **Youth living in rural areas,** representing over one third of all youth, and about half of female youth[19] and yet who are proportionally under-served by government and donor-funded programs.
- Youth working in the **informal sector/ vulnerable employment**, and especially in the **agro-food system** which are both characterized by low-value, physically demanding (and risky) work.
- **Females:** especially younger girls at-risk of unintended pregnancy, those who are pregnant, as well as unmarried young women with dependents.
- **Youth living with disabilities.**

Also often mentioned by respondents were the most vulnerable, at-risk street youth in urban areas, locally referred to as *Zogos* (for males) and *Zogese* (females). These are youth who usually experience homelessness, lack parental or family support, and are typically engaged in substance abuse, prostitution, and/or related criminal activity. A recent report on these youth suggests a mix of long-and short-term recommendations for reaching them; and that any intervention designed for these at-risk youth should recognize "both the push and pull factors that attract them to the streets and the intersectional nature of social and economic forces that underlie discrimination against them, making the group underserved, understudied, and hard-to-reach."[20] Working with this youth population requires addressing a range of factors from reducing incentives for entering the streets; improving substance abuse/addiction prevention activities; and addressing the economic dimensions of the rising drug epidemic.[21]

III.   FINDINGS: YOUTH GOALS, PRIORITIES, & BRIGHT SPOTS

OVERALL FINDINGS

The Cycle of Youth Dependency

The assessment underscored a mutually reinforcing "cycle" of youth dependency driven by poverty and inadequate education, and further compounded by teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. Figure 6 illustrates a simplified causal model of this cycle: at the center, education and youth livelihoods are inexorably linked. Roughly two-thirds of Liberia's population lives below the income poverty line.[22] According to the latest data from 2010, 62.4% of youth (72.0% female, 52.2% male) between the ages of 15 and 24 had a less than basic education.[23] Poverty (lack of financial resources) is the number one reason for school drop-outs,[24] especially among younger youth cohorts.[25] The highest levels of poverty (66%) are found in households where the head has no education.[26]

Overwhelmingly, education is the number one aspiration among youth, and is strongly linked to—and very often equated with—earning a livelihood. Education is most often defined as vocational education, or learning a trade. A large amount of respondents viewed education and livelihoods as inexorably linked, as educational opportunities are seen as the main pathway to livelihoods, and not earning a sufficient income is a major barrier to completing one's education and/or obtaining higher education. These findings substantiate the findings of other youth assessments in Liberia.[27]

FIGURE 6. CYCLE OF YOUTH DEPENDENCY IN LIBERIA: A SIMPLIFIED CAUSAL MODEL
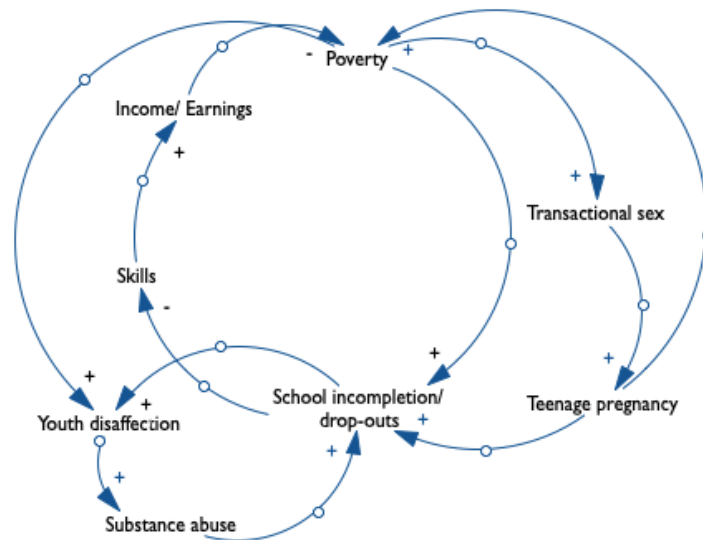
To compound this cycle, teenage pregnancy—often a result of transactional sex due to poverty—negatively affects young mothers who are forced to leave school to raise their children on their own, as well as the children who eventually become a young person raised in poverty. Well over one third (37.0%) of young women between the ages of 20-24 gave birth before the age of 18,[28] giving Liberia one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world. According to the assessment, many young girls attribute teenage pregnancy to the transactional sex that they engage in to earn money for school fees, food and other basic needs—thus reinforcing the cycle. The high rate of teenage pregnancy is perpetuated by misconceptions around reproductive health and family planning. (Notably, teenage pregnancy and lack of family planning have been identified as the top two contributors to Liberia's high rates of maternal mortality.[29])

Among the challenges that youth described, security (crime, corruption, safety) ranked as number one. Girls are especially at risk of violence due to their economic vulnerability, since working in the streets exposes them to the threat of rape and sexual coercion. The assessment pointed to a pervasive substance abuse problem among youth, and research has associated drug use with dropping out of school.[30] Youth participants blame their "frustration" with poverty and unemployment as key drivers of substance abuse.

The following quotes illustrate how this vicious cycle manifests itself in the life of a young person:

> *"Some children are bread winners for their homes. They go sell in the street and end up been raped which may lead to pregnancy, HIV and all this damages the child future because they haven't reached the age." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

> *Majority of the teenagers get pregnant; some can come down with many sicknesses because their parents lack job opportunities in generating income for their children. They send their kids on the street to sell around in the community to bring income and this lead to rape on many occasions. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)*

Summary of Findings

Table 4 summarizes the overarching findings of the assessment, which are described further throughout the report.

Differences by Youth Cohorts

Ranking exercises used during focus groups suggest that major priorities remain consistent across youth segments. Education is the top aspiration for urban and rural youth equally, and both groups prioritize livelihoods after education[5]. The same holds true for males and females. These priorities were further validated in an explicit ranking exercise, as illustrated in Annex F.

However, the assessment team noted some slight differences between youth cohorts from the FGD:
- Urban youth tend to express more concern about security than rural youth.
- Female respondents are more concerned with security and health than male respondents.
- Drug-related problems are overwhelmingly more present in urban areas. Youth in Monrovia are very concerned about security and drug abuse related issues, including the impact of drugs on health and security. All but one of the focus groups indicated that substance abuse was a problem equally for females as well as males.[6]
- When it comes to security, women are much more concerned with their safety in moving around, and the possibility of falling prey to rape, sexual violence, or sexual coercion.

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[5] Other topics such as substance abuse, health, or civic participation, were mentioned much less frequently in response to this question.

[6] Only in one rural area did youth mention that boys are more likely to be involved in substance abuse than girls.

TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM USAID/LIBERIA CROSS-SECTORAL YOUTH ASSESSMENT (IN ORDER OF MAGNITUDE)

	EDUCATION	LIVELIHOODS	HEALTH	"SECURITY"	
YOUTH PRIORITIES	Vocational skills/ learning a trade: education as pathway to earning a livelihood Pathway for respect/ voice Financing of education (links to poverty, livelihoods)/ parental support Teenage pregnancy, gender biases for girls/ women Access to vocational training facilities Quality/ integrity of teachers (public servants)	Poverty: influence on education, transactional sex/ personal security, food security, substance abuse, personal respect/ voice Self-employment in the informal sector Agriculture as survival, as stepping stone to other livelihoods, as an end goal in and of itself Skills: vocational, business, financial, soft skills Access to finance (flexible loan products) No single salient policy issue	Teenage pregnancy: transactional sex due to poverty, low uptake in family planning due to misconceptions about contraception Substance abuse Other basic service delivery issues: lack of access to health facilities due to cost of service; Availability of pharmaceuticals; Poor quality of nurses (public servants) Water and sanitation	Substance abuse/ drugs Crime Impunity, justice, corruption: quality/ integrity of police (public servants) Women's personal safety threatened by transactional sex, rape, sexual- and gender-based violence (SGVB), sexual extortion in schools & workplace, and migration	S (p c c c C P tr F e Y G w
BRIGHT SPOTS	Service providers offering demand-driven training, work-based learning, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship; investments in non-formal accelerated learning Scholarships "Peer influencers"	Service providers offering demand-driven training, work-based learning, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, access to capital follow-on support; in agriculture, brokering land arrangements, mobilizing youth, and access to cash/ in-kind grants Financing: savings, grants, banking & mobile money, some value chain finance Precedence for private sector engagement Personal connections, networks	Youth volunteerism (Ebola, water, sanitation) Family planning messaging via youth entry points (schools, beauty salons/barbers, beach, playground, etc.); Use of media, radio; "Peer influencers" Successful program precedence, current efforts to integrate RH/ soft skills into MOE curriculum	Youth community watch groups CBOs and NGOs, including faith-based organizations	S C Y C C "
PROGRAMMATIC GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES	Livelihoods for young parents of school-age children, and for vulnerable youth Integration of soft skills into teacher training Professionalization of youth development workers	Expanding access to demand-driven skills, entrepreneurship, market linkages, finance, esp. in rural areas Investing in "hub" MSMEs that grow & create jobs for youth Access to finance: savings, MSME financing, youth-friendly micro-finance, agriculture finance Agriculture: market linkages, land brokering, infrastructure, improved methods/ new technologies	Voluntary family planning behavior change communication via youth entry points (schools, beauty salons/barbers, beach, sports, etc.) and through social media, radio	Introduce substance abuse prevention (& rehabilitation) through a positive youth development lens Support youth-led community safety initiatives Positive peer influencers Safe spaces for youth	S Y v c C IC te

EDUCATION

Priorities in Education

Education—most often defined within the context of vocational training, or learning a trade—is the predominant priority among Liberian youth of all demographic backgrounds. This assessment confirms the findings of other past youth assessments:[31] —youth of all backgrounds seek to complete their education and/or pursue a higher level of education as their top goal. Importantly, the term "education" is defined by most youth as vocational education or learning a trade. Probably the most salient take away from all of the data, education was implicitly and explicitly linked to earning a livelihood, and is viewed as the pathway to earning a livelihood. Even when asked about livelihoods, respondents often reverted to talking about education as a means to get a good livelihood.

> *Education can help to break the long cycle of poverty in families. (Urban male, age 25-35, Lofa)*
>
> *I did not go to school and presently, I'm not able to go to grade school because of my age. I can only make business to send my children to school. But if there is a trade school in the community, I will be able to attend and achieve knowledge for future benefit. For example, if I learn trade like baking and travel out of this community, I will still be able to put the idea into practice by making bread and selling. (Rural female, age 18-24, Grand Bassa)*
>
> *There is no trade school opportunity for the youth around here. After high school, if your parents do not have the financial backing to send you out of the community for advancement, they are bound to stop at that level. We need vocational training that will lead to jobs. (Rural male, 18-24, Margibi)*

In many instances, education is also perceived as improving youths' self-worth, as well as stature in the family and in the community. Many youth talk about education as a way to earn respect from others. Many mentioned that education helps youth learn morals ("know their right from wrong") or gives them a compass for navigating life. For women, education helps give them a voice in the community.

> *Every youth's goal is to get educated… but if you're not employed, you're vulnerable, you're not respected, and anything can happen to you. (Male university student, Montserrado)*
>
> *Education is important to me because it will help me to represent the nation. To bring change in my family (advocate) if you are poor and you achieve in life, you can help your family to avoid being marginalized and to be heard among friends and respected. (Rural male, age 18-19, Lofa)*
>
> *When you're not educated, people overlook you. (Rural female, age 18-24, Grand Bassa)*

However, a large proportion of youth are unable to complete their education due to lack of financial resources. The inability to afford educational expenses was cited by youth and by secondary sources[32] as the primary reason for school drop-out. Inevitably when youth expressed their desire to advance their education, their statements were most often followed with "… but there is no (financial) support." Both boys and girls alike noted that in poor families, earning an income for their families, or parental pressures, often prevented youth from going to school. Many youth report that they ride motorcycles, sell goods on the streets, or engage in prostitution to pay for school fees:

> *When he started school his parents helped him up to 5th grade. He had a little money, so he started showing play station to pay his school fees from the 6th grade until he graduated high school. After he graduated, the government ordered all play station shops to be shut down so he did not have a means to get money for college so he decided to go back to the farm and started planting potato; he hope to raise enough money from the potato to start college. (Rural male, age 18-19, Bong)*

> *When some youths see their peers going to school and they're not, they feel lonely so they start sleeping with older people in other to pay their fees in school. (Urban female, age 19-24, Margibi)*

Even though the 2011 Education Reform Act establishes free compulsory primary and basic education for Liberian citizens, youth point to the reality that they and their families are burdened by the fees for tuition, registration, and graduation, the cost of uniforms and school supplies, as well as relocation expenses (travel, lodging) needed to access higher education institutions in cities. A 2011 report on education and fragility in Liberia notes that households provide three fourths of the total funding of primary education,[33] which "runs the risk of … perpetuating informal exclusionary practice and exacerbating disparities in access to quality education between the well-off and the poor."[34] According to youth, even the scholarships designed to increase equitable access to education perpetuate exclusion:

> *As scholarships come to the community, the leaders give them to people they know or those who have money to buy the scholarships. (Rural female, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

> *Youths need equal opportunities because when it comes to giving scholarships women are the least while the men get more, the vetting should be transparent and should not be based on gender. (Urban CBO Representatives, Nimba)*

Teenage pregnancy (and subsequent childcare) is a considerable educational barrier among girls. Youth describe girls are especially at risk of dropping out of school due to pregnancy, and in fact a UNICEF survey on out-of-school children found that two-thirds of households reported pregnancy as a main reason for school drop-outs among girls.[35]

Other gender biases hinder female educational attainment. The literature confirms that females face exceptional barriers to education. According to the 2010 Liberia Labour Force Survey, 60% of Liberian women aged 15-34 were literate in 2010, compared with 81% of men. Overall, female respondents faced more barriers to education than the males, with early pregnancy and childcare being the primary additional burden. Girls are also pressured to find a partner and drop out of school: the median age at first marriage is 18.8 years.[36] Moreover, young women have very few mentors or role models: roughly only one quarter of teachers are female.[37] Females report harassment and even extortion by teachers for admission into class or for grades.

> *Sexual harassment from teachers. If the teacher harassed you sexually and you refused they can fail you. All of this can discourage us from going forward in education. At times they do not want to see us in class so it is stopping us from learning. (Rural female, age 18-24, Nimba)*

> *Many at times teachers encourage students not to take their lesson serious because of accepting bribe from students. Some teachers are loving to those children and it makes those girls not to respect them in classes. They have sex with teachers to enable them get free grades which will not be helpful for their future. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)*

Access to educational facilities (especially those offering vocational training, and/or opportunities to learn a trade) is a barrier to youth education. While some youth note an insufficient number of public schools in their community, many complain of not having a vocational training institutes and trade school in their communities, and describe how most are located in Monrovia or other major cities. While a select number of vocational and livelihoods programs stand out as offering skills training, access to finance, and job intermediation services, secondary data revealed that a large proportion of services are available in Monrovia, with a smaller number of services available in a select number of other urban hubs. For example, one survey found that 70% of Liberia's 470 vocational training providers are located in Montserrado around the capital.[38] Subsequently only youth who can afford the costs of migration (travel, lodging), or those with family in major cities, are able to attend higher forms of education including vocational schools.

Inequitable access to education highlights a number of other inclusion issues. The unavailability of facilities poses risks particularly to female students: one report notes that because most TVETs are located in major

cities, and most students come from towns and villages far from these schools, the associated transportation and accommodations costs poses risks for female students who seek "'boyfriend' accommodation solutions as a coping mechanism."[39] Secondary data highlights the inability of the Liberian education system to accommodate the circumstances vulnerable youth; for example, one USAID-funded activity notes that their female participants' education suffers because "they may need to work on family farms or at market days, not only for their own children but for their siblings or parents who cannot work."[40] Youth with disability mentioned the difficulty in physically accessing schools due to inadequate means of transportation/ wheelchairs.

Poor teaching quality was reported as a barrier to education, albeit less frequently than the other factors already mentioned. Youth mention poor teacher training, overrun classrooms, and corruption among teachers. Generally speaking, males express more concern with corruption at schools and poor quality of teaching, as illustrated in this statement:

> *We need quality education. We have lots of schools here but our teachers are not trained (not qualified), they are not well paid so there is lot of bribery in the schools. As a result, we are not qualified for jobs, most of us are not qualified that's why the big companies here … go out to hire people from other countries. (Urban male, age 18-24, Nimba)*

Bright Spots in Education and Skills Development

The most salient bright spot in youth education and skills development is the number of service providers, many of them private, implementing exceptional models of youth skills development and workforce readiness, as well as accelerated learning programs for out-of-school youth. Many report that youth have achieved success with the assistance of organizations such as the Liberian Occupational Industrial Center (LOIC), Booker Washington Institute (BWI), Mercy Corps, USAID/EDC Advancing Youth Project, YMCA, Salvation Army, Don Bosco, Humanity First, and others. These programs combine demand-driven training, work-based learning, internships, and entrepreneurship training to prepare youth for the work world. Fewer, however, offer accelerated learning and basic education (literacy & numeracy) for younger youth to transition back into formal education. Key informants note that USAID's previous investment in basic education and accelerated education programs (AEPs) filled a key void in meeting the educational needs of out-of-school youth, and should be reinstated.

Notably, many of these skills development programs are applying standard best practices in the field of workforce development. The more successful programs combine practical, hands-on methods, as well as on-the-job training and other job intermediation and entrepreneurship supports that help prepare youth in their transition to employment and self-employment. Many serve youth of all education levels and are tailored to those with low literacy levels. Some provide psycho-social counseling for students coming from poor families, street children, and other vulnerable youth. Importantly, many programs have developed curriculum for teaching transferrable soft skills and work readiness skills; however, there remains no current standard for teaching these skills. UNFPA has been working with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF to develop a curriculum framework and policy for competency-based sexual and reproductive health education in the schools and for out-of-school youth, which will include soft skills curriculum. Once this curriculum is piloted in 50 schools, it may offer a standard framework for soft skills training; further investigation is required to determine the alignment of such curriculum to meet the demands of the market.

Youth seek the many scholarship programs in order to return to or stay in school. In at least half of the focus group discussions, youth spoke about scholarships as an important success factor. One young man in Grand Bassa, for instance, said that he has a gainful job because he received a scholarship from UNDP to attend LOIC, which then led to an internship and finally a full-time job. Among those who spoke about scholarships, roughly half of them mentioned how scholarships can be "sold" (including through transactional sex) or distributed based on "who knows you," as noted previously. One project experienced mixed outcomes with implementing a scholarship program for university students, i.e. that scholarships may not be

cost-effective in that they were helpful for the individual recipients but not sustained beyond the life of the program.[41]   Careful attention should be paid to the implementation of scholarship programs for youth.

"Peer influencers" also help encourage youth to return to or stay in school.   Several youth talk about there being "two types of friends: good friends and bad friends."   While peer pressure can lead a young person into unhealthy behaviors, many youth said that friends also encourage them to make positive choices like staying in school.   Peers offer a source of moral and financial support for youth.   Youth programs can capitalize on the role of peers in positive behavior change and communications.

LIVELIHOODS

Priorities for Youth Livelihoods

Earning a livelihood is the second top youth priority, and often discussed interchangeably with youth's primary goal of achieving an education.   Education is most often seen as a pathway to livelihoods, while having a job or earning an income is conversely seen as a necessary way to complete one's education. Youth often mentioned "vocational training" or "trade schools" as equivalent to having a viable income.

> I dropped out of school and started going to trade school, I learned mechanics, heavy duty driving. I started working with SSL but now no job, so I decided to learn another trade, slipper making. I learned by myself and that is what me and my family are living on now because my husband is not working. We need trade school here to be able to teach other women, we need materials and women centers to be able to work together and improve each other skills and lives. (Urban female, age 25-35, Nimba)

> The youths have nothing doing after high school and they usually have family to take care of. Some of them go back to their villages to do farming because they don't want to ride bike and they use farming to raise income or capital to later invest in education or higher or vocational education which is not available in Foya. Some don't want to do anything at all so they are involved in stealing. They need vocational school to better their lives. (Youth CBO leader, Lofa)

Indeed, poverty is an underlying, cross-cutting theme for all youth concerns, linked to education, transactional sex and teen pregnancy, feelings of self-worth and substance abuse, and many other related variables.   As mentioned, poverty is at the center of the vicious cycle of youth dependency. (Refer to Figure 6.) Livelihoods have also been observed as an important priority for youth programs that were not initially designed to address youth livelihoods.   For example, the mid-term evaluation of the USAID-funded Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability (FIFES) activity found that community forest programming raised expectations about livelihoods, and that "male youth in the FGs unanimously wanted to be engaged in remunerated work."[42]   Meanwhile, young pregnant women participating in the USAID Learning Links activity have expressed a desire to transition to vocational training.[43]   The final performance evaluation of USAID's Advancing Youth Program recommended integrating short-term, practical skills training into accelerated basic education (ABE) programs.[44]   Moreover, it stated, "solutions should not stop at just the provision of education. (The) best way (to) engage youth in positive youth development is also showing we are addressing their livelihoods needs."[45]

Youth from all backgrounds are involved in multiple income-earning activities, characterized by self-employment in the informal sector, in order to support them and their families.   In Liberia, well over three-quarters (78%) of the population is engaged in "vulnerable" employment with inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult work conditions,[46] and youth are no exception. In focus group discussions, youth described engaging in petty trade (selling products, mostly agriculture goods, on the streets), riding motorcycles, making and selling coal, and/or working as a daily contract laborer (usually in agriculture), just to earn small amounts of income to survive, or to obtain food for their families for that day. Many youth seek income-earning opportunities to pay for their school fees and associated education expenses, or simply to

pay for food for that day. Girls engage in transactional sex as a source of income. People with disability mention they resort to begging to survive.

While jobs that earn "quick money" are the means for immediate survival, youth aspire to more skilled occupations, and those that offer meaning or contribute to society. Many youth speak about activities that earn "quick money" for food, for school fees, or to pay for basic amenities like a mobile phone or a hairdo. However, when talking about their goals, youth aspire to public service jobs (teachers, nurses), high-skilled white-collar jobs (doctors, political representatives, lawyers, bank manager), or to work in the trades (baker, mechanic, hairdresser, tailor, plumber), or in agriculture.   When speaking about these aspirations, many youth talk about wanting to help others or to improve Liberian society:

> *I want to own a gas station to employ others. (Urban male entrepreneur, age 24-25, Grand Bassa)*

> *I want to employ more youths, like 1,000, and have many branches of my business around the country. (Urban entrepreneur, Lofa)*

> *I want to have a barber shop and teach others to do it in the home… I want to pass on the education to others. (Urban male entrepreneur, age 24-35, Grand Bassa)*

Agriculture plays an important role in survival, as a stepping stone to other livelihood opportunities, and as a desired livelihood in and of itself. Agriculture is the largest source of employment for Liberian youth (currently the sector represents an estimated 70 percent of the total labor force).[47] This sector is a slightly higher priority for rural youth than urban youth, however urban youth also place importance in agriculture. For many focus group participants, agriculture is a key means of survival, allowing youth to earn enough income for food for the day, or to pay school fees. For some, like respondents in Sanniquellie and Foya, agriculture is a means for financial empowerment, and something that fulfils a higher purpose of feeding the nation or helping reduce poverty and food insecurity.   Importantly, youth describe agriculture as a pathway into more lucrative businesses, a finding confirmed by other surveys.[48]

> *Farming is what we do to survive. (Urban female, age 18-19, Lofa)*

> *Some youths live by agriculture production and they are into growing vegetables, palm to help support themselves and their families as well. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)*

> *I go to school in the morning and after school, I go to the farm to dig cassava to sell and support my family. (Rural female, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

Reports suggest that Liberian youth are not interested in low-value, labor-intensive production of commodity crops, and indeed, one young woman expressed, "I don't want to do hard work"[49] and another said, ""it makes people older sooner."[50] Nevertheless, many youth report are already being engaged in agriculture in some form or another—either as laborers, as sellers of agricultural goods, or as growers/producers, as well as in postharvest activities.[51] Global evidence finds that youth tend to be more interested in higher-value crops with relatively short production cycles, and/or in off-farm activities up and down the value chain.[52] In Liberia, youth and other informants note that youth's low skills, and their subsequent reliance on traditional production practices, hinders their productivity and earnings. Access to markets, land, and capital are the other major constraints, alongside the need for feeder roads, transportation, storage facilities, and processing equipment. Certain crops (cocoa, rubber, vegetable farming, and cassava) offer greater promise for youth than others, and certain functions (traditional small-sized processing, aggregation services, farm mechanization support services, and transport) are more conducive to youth participation.[53]

Youth cite skills as the top success factor for earning a livelihood. Most youth spoke about the need for vocational skills ("learning a trade") as a prerequisite to earning a livelihoods or having a job. Soft skills were also mentioned implicitly, and with great frequency. For example, when youth were asked about factors for livelihood success, the top soft skills mentioned were being "focused" "determined" or "persistent," as well as having qualities such as "seriousness," "self-reliance," "commitment," "honesty," "sincerity," and "creativity". This finding was echoed by a recent World Bank survey of household enterprises, which found

that "technical skills were often considered relatively unimportant as compared to character traits…, work ethic…, and general management skills…."[54] There were many stories of youth who lacked "seriousness," and squandered the opportunities that were available to them. Frequently youth told stories of how working hard, being resourceful and saving money, over time, led people to be successful:

> When you are focused, you can't be distracted from your dream that you want to achieve in life. (Rural male, age 18-24, Margibi)

> I started my business by riding motorcycle for someone, due to my seriousness the person bought another motorcycle and gave it to me for work and pay. I ran that motorcycle every day and paid a certain amount of money until I was able to pay him back and the bike was given to me. I then used that same motorbike to also buy a brand new one, and I was also able to buy a land and build a house. Now I am doing a mobile money business. (Rural male, age 25-35, Nimba)

> Another woman used to sell cold water and because she was focused and determined, she now has her own business. (Rural female, age 18-24, Nimba)

In addition to these soft skills, youth discussed the need for business skills and financial literacy. Many youth cited that peers who started businesses ultimately failed because they didn't manage their money effectively. Youth also cited a need for agricultural skills. One respondent noted that most youth ages 20-35 were displaced as a result of the conflict, and therefore did not learn on-farm experience growing up.[55] A report on youth in agriculture reports that over half (54%) of respondents had not received any agricultural training.[56]

> "Youths in my community need knowledge on how to start business and learn how to spend their money". (Female university student, age 18-24, Montserrado)

> Many people are in the field of agriculture lacking the knowledge in the area they find themselves. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)

> There is no knowledge on agriculture activities. We need training or education in that direction on the soil type in the community and they should go about making farm. (Rural male, age 18-24, Montserrado)

While youth mentioned literacy only a couple of times, and numeracy not at all, much of the secondary data, as well as key informant interviews, points need to teach these basic skills as fundamental to work readiness and financial literacy programs.[57]

Access to finance—both savings and loans—is another major priority for youth livelihoods. According to the literature, access to capital is cited as the main barrier to the growth of Liberian enterprises,[58] and this concern is no different for youth. While this assessment did not go into detail regarding the availability of finance, several salient themes emerged. First, the accumulation of savings is the dominant success factor for youth entrepreneurship, as discussed later on the following page. Conversations about loans indicate a great need for innovations in financing products. When youth describe lending options, they inevitably complain of high interest rates and short repayment periods (an immediate payment required in 30 days). Key informants also indicate that the legal requirements (e.g., registration) from financial institutions, as well as collateral requirements, pose a barrier for informal youth enterprises.[59] In focus group discussions, youth in almost every case named BRAC as the main provider of micro-loans; loans provided by VSLAs were also noted. Youth said that most startups are not in a position to take advantage of these loans because of the unfavorable terms:

> When you save with the VSLA and you want a take loan, they give you an interest rate of 10% because it is your own money you're saving. This is helping some women to support their families. If women know how to save for themselves it will help them a lot. (Urban adult entrepreneur, Margibi)

> Youths are not benefiting (from loans); it's the individuals who already have businesses running that are the one benefiting from these loans. (Community leader (adult) in Margibi)

Also noted in FGDs was the need for agriculture financing products, especially those of larger principles and longer repayment periods to accommodate production cycles; this need was validated in key informant interviews and secondary sources. Moreover, many donors and practitioners cited the need for middle-market SME financing.[60]

Strategic investments in market infrastructure can make a difference for youth entrepreneurs. In urban areas, expanding the availability of affordable market spaces may help address the number of youth engaged in illegal and hazardous street vending activities. Many youth participants also highlighted the need for feeder roads and storage facilities to facilitate agricultural earnings. Storage facilities would not only reduce losses in perishable goods, but would also help adjust for the oversupply of dry goods.

Some policy-related barriers affect youth livelihoods; however, no single policy appears to be a salient priority for all youth. Youth views on policy often depended upon their personal background and circumstances (age/experience, level of poverty, geographic location, etc.). The policy-related assessment findings are discussed later in further detail.

Bright Spots in Youth Livelihoods

A considerable asset in boosting youth livelihoods is the many private & public service providers offering youth demand-driven training, job intermediation, and entrepreneurship. As noted on earlier, youth see the benefits of practical and on-the-job training, job intermediation, and entrepreneurship support—an overwhelming finding also among key informants and secondary sources. These programs are most successful when they combine skills development with access to capital and some form of follow-on support. [61] [62] [63] [64] In the agriculture sector, initiatives appear to be most successful when they supplement skills training by mobilizing youth into groups, brokering land arrangements for youth, offering technical assistance, and offering grant- or in-kind support for the purchase of inputs. Several major GOL- and donor-supported programs are supporting this range of services, as illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5. EXAMPLES OF MAJOR PROGRAMS IN LIBERIA SUPPORTING YOUTH LIVELIHOODS

Project Title: Donor, GOL Ministry	Budget (Project Period)	Summary Description	Youth Entry Points	Identified Gaps
Youth Opportunity Project (YOP): **World Bank, MYS**	$10M (2017-2020)	YOP provides training and employment support to 5,000 vulnerable youth in Monrovia, and also provides agricultural and life skills training and supports to 10,000 rural youth across all fifteen counties (667 youth per county, or roughly 23 communities per county).	LACE is the lead implementer. The project works through a network of CBOs to provide agricultural and life skills training and supports to rural youth.	The World Bank notes that the reach of the rural component is limited and requires additional donor support. In addition, there is a gap in "demand-side" programs that support agri-business MSMEs, which, in turn, create jobs for youth.
Prospects III: **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), MYS**	$5.8M (2017-2020)	This third-phase project is working in Montserrado, Bong, and Nimba, providing 20,000 young people with employment and entrepreneurship services. Interventions include training in business development skills, small cash grants to start businesses, and facilitating internships for youth in the private sector.	Mercy Corps is the prime partner. The program works through 4 MYS youth centers, plus 2 Mercy Corps-established youth centers, and a network of CBOs.	There is a great need for youth startup financing (soft loans), as well as middle-market financing for MSMEs that wish to grow. Overall, efforts should provide "demand-side" technical and financial support to MSMEs to grow and create jobs for youth.
Youth Rising/ EU Support to Technical and Vocational Education and	$22.7M (2018 - 2024)	This activity, currently in the design phase, will support six public TVET institutions at the secondary level: the Booker Washington Institute in Kakata;	UNIDO will be the implementing partner, alongside the 6 select TVET institutions.	Because of its focus on the formal TVET system, the project is only able to reach secondary-level students with at least a grade 9

Training (TVET) for Young People in Liberia: **European Union (EU), MYS**		the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre (MVTC); W.V.S. Tubman High School in Monrovia; and three schools in Sinoe, Gedeh, and Maryland counties.		certificate.[65]
Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Project (YEEP) **African Development Bank, Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS)**	$2.4M (2016-2019)	This program is strengthening select institutions to design and deliver skills development for employment, job readiness training, and entrepreneurship development.	The project is delivered through Booker Washington Institute (BWI), the University of Liberia, and Nimba County Community College.	Services are limited to students with grade 9 completion and above.

As illustrated in Table 5, the only major downside to these programs is their limited coverage, particularly among more vulnerable youth. For instance, approximately 60% of youth ages 15 to 19 have not finished primary school, and only 10% of youth have participated in vocational training that prepare them for the work world. A recent study of training institutions in Liberia suggests that those who are able to access formal and non-formal TVET[vii] are those who are slightly older, have an education that is higher than the national average, can afford tuition fees, and/or have personal networks that give them access to apprenticeships and on-the-job training. Moreover, females are less likely than males to participate in TVET and even less so in apprenticeships and on-the-job training.[66]

Savings was identified as the dominant success factor in youth entrepreneurship—a strong theme in the literature and confirmed by this assessment. As mentioned, many livelihood success stories involved entrepreneurs who engaged in multiple economic activities, and over time accumulated enough savings to invest in a bigger business or more lucrative activity. (Refer to Box 1 for a case study example.)

Box 1. Case Study: Story of an Enterprising Youth

"John" is a successful young entrepreneur in an urban area of Liberia. He started his business after the war, selling pharmaceutical tablets in the street and earning sufficient income; however, because this was a dangerous and illegal activity, he decided to stop this business and use his savings to open a small phone charging booth. Over time, he began to accumulate more savings and his business started to grow. Eventually he saw an opportunity to sell cold water. With his savings he bought a small generator and one freezer to sell cold water. He then eventually saved enough to purchase equipment that enabled him to produce and sell water sachets. He achieved all of this business expansion just with his savings. Through the water business he currently employs twelve informal workers.

John had a dream to further expand his business, so in 2015 he took out a loan from Access Bank to purchase a large-capacity generator. The 20,000 LD loan had an 8-month repayment term; John paid off the loan in four months. With this generator he now sells electricity to 67 households. This activity represents the bulk of his earnings and allows John to employ an additional twelve informal workers. John says of his workers: "I always like to bring on board students to help them pay school fees. I see their seriousness—they must stay in school, and so they have vision/determination to stay in school."

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vii There are two types of TVET in Liberia. Formal TVET refers to TVET within the formal public education system under the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Formal TVET is available to students with a grade 9 certificate and above and provides classroom-based training in both vocational and technical skills. The second TVET, non-formal or informal TVET, refers to (mostly private) institutions that are outside the school system, and that provide on-the-job training or apprenticeships in a trade or specialized skill. Non-formal TVET is often available to any student regardless of education; however, roughly half of non-formal training is supported by participant fees, and 70% is run by private, for-profit service providers, thus suggesting that non-formal TVET is available largely to those who have the financial means to do so. Source: World Bank (2016.) "Republic of Liberia. Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector."

John recently purchased two trucks with his savings, which he uses for transporting his goods and as a transport business. When asked about his future plans for growth, John says, "Maybe one day I might take a loan, but not now I'm not in the mood," mentioning that as business rises and falls he may need a loan to cover cash needs. Generally, however, John says that when he invests in his business, he prefers to use savings over loans because of the banks' high interest rates and unfavorable repayment terms.

Most youth projects offer access to finance as a necessary condition to working with young people, usually in the form of savings mobilization[viii] and/or grants[ix]. Implementers of business grant interventions say that these savings and grants are necessary to prepare youth for the lending market—essentially they give youth the experience to become more bankable. In addition to these mechanisms, there are emerging examples of other forms of financing, such as value chain financing in the motorcycle transportation sector. Mobile money also is emerging as a new practice with potential to benefit youth enterprises.

Key informant interviews indicate that there is a sufficient precedence for private sector engagement in youth livelihood programs. This topic is discussed in greater detail later.

Personal networks enable youth to learn skills and successfully navigate the market; they can also sometimes pose a burden for successful youth. Youth entrepreneurs were asked where they learned their skills to be successful; in response, they most often pointed to a parent, sibling, or other family member or friend who offered shadowing/mentoring and/or informal, on-the-job training to the young person. Personal networks also enable youth to complete their education (for example, by financing school fees, or offering a place to stay in the city), access assets (e.g., a sewing machine handed down by a father), access information, and navigate the job market.   But these same networks also carry personal responsibility that can inhibit livelihoods success. Youth mention that once youth are successful in their business, friends and extended family approach them for money or for a job:

> *People you've never seen before will come to you…. If you refuse, you'll be considered the worst in the family. (Entrepreneur, Grand Bassa)*

> *I had a girlfriend who used to like going out and spending money all of the time which caused my business to nearly collapse. (Urban male university student, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

> *My little sister can eat my money; that way I can't eat it. (Urban youth entrepreneur, Bong)*

HEALTH

Priorities in Health

Teenage pregnancy is a dominant theme concerning all sectors. Teenage pregnancy is mentioned frequently (in over half of the discussions) in both rural and urban communities. Nationwide, well over one third (37.0%) of young women between the ages of 20-24 give birth before the age of 18,[67] giving Liberia one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world. There are also social stigmas attached to pregnancy: one program found that girls who leave school during pregnancy and after childbirth are at risk of gender-based violence and cultural ridicule.[68]

> *"Teenage pregnancy is rampant." (Rural female, 25-35, Bong)*

[viii] For example, the USAID Advancing Youth Program, originally designed as an accelerated learning program, mobilized village savings and lending associations, and the USAID FIFES activity (designed as a conservation activity) has established savings groups for women.

[ix] The LADA project (USAID/ CNFA), the Youth Opportunity Project (World Bank/ MYS/ LACE), and PROPECTS III (Sida/Mercy Corps) offers business grants to finance the expansion of MSMEs. However, these efforts extend to a relatively limited number of MSMEs.

"Girls get pregnant and it's the end of their education." (Female university student, age 18-24, Montserrado)

Child care is stopping girls from going to school. If you get pregnant and there is no (financial) support, it stops you from going to school. (Urban female, age 18-24, Bong)

Females mention pregnancy as a priority much more often than their male counterparts.

FIGURE 7. TEENAGE PREGNANCY AS YOUTH PRIORITY, ACCORDING TO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS, BY GENDER
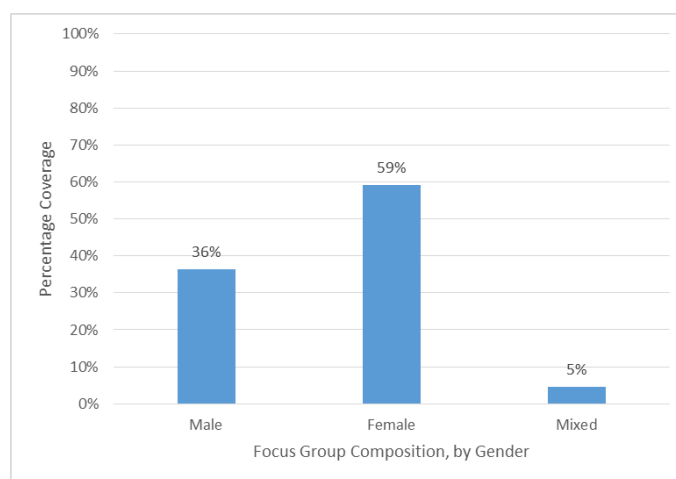
Transactional sex (as a result of poverty) is strongly associated with teenage pregnancy. Youth describe how poverty drives young girls to engage in transactional sex in order to earn money for food, for schooling, or to support their families. Transactional sex is pervasive; girls expect it as a necessary requirement for meeting basic livelihoods needs. In some cases girls mentioned for affording luxuries that their friends can afford, such as clothes, mobile phones, or going to the beauty salon.

Teenagers are involved with prostitution because of the lack of (financial) support and girls end up getting pregnant. (Female university student, age 18-24, Montserrado)

"Society is against it (transactional sex) but they have to accept it, because the child is the bread winner of the family." (Urban female, age 18-24, Bong)

"Women have the ability to do sex work, but men don't." (Urban male CBO representative, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)

FIGURE 8. FAMILY PLANNING AWARENESS IN LIBERIA

"Awareness of modern contraceptive methods is widespread among women…. This broad awareness, however, is not translating into widespread contraceptive adoption. Individual barriers include lack of comprehensive and accurate knowledge on fertility period, pregnancy risk, contraceptive methods, and return to fertility, especially in the postpartum period. Such knowledge gaps propagate myths and misconceptions that are deeply rooted in societal norms. Traditional, cultural, and religious beliefs continue to widen the know-act gap in Liberia. …Gender norms also impact contraceptive decision making and fertility preferences."

(Government of Liberia. 2018. Liberia Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan (2018-2022). Monrovia: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.)

Teenage pregnancy is further compounded by a low uptake in family planning, which is fueled by societal misconceptions about contraception. The main issues mentioned by respondents are the lack of sexual education and misinformation about family planning, access to contraceptives, and poor quality of care. The modern contraceptive prevalence rate among all women, estimated at 30.7% has increased significantly over the past decade, especially among women below age 35, those in the three poorest quintiles, and in urban

21

areas.[69] Nevertheless, contraceptives are not widely adopted (see Figure 8). Focus group participants express mixed opinions on the access to contraception, with price being the main discrepancy: some report that prices for family planning can be prohibitive for youth, while others say they have access to free contraceptives. Nevertheless, many agreed that youth prefer to not use contraception. Moreover, girls and young women engaging in transactional sex are powerless to demand contraception.

Focus group discussions confirm the many misconceptions around family planning, including: condom breakages requiring surgery; the need for taking antibiotics while using contraception or after intercourse; and severe complications (infection, hospitalization, infertility) associated with different contraceptive methods. Misinformation is propagated by youth, parents, and the media alike.

> *We need awareness because people are afraid to take the family planning because they feel that they will never give birth if they take it, so they need awareness. Most young women are getting pregnant because of this. (Rural female, age 25-35, Bong)*

> *After sex you take 2 paracetamol, 2 Septrin and 2 amoxicillin. This can prevent you from getting pregnant. (Urban female, age 18-24, Bong)*

> *One of the health workers went on the radio saying that family planning has side effects. He said that most pregnant women that are being operated on now a days is as a result of the family planning, it causes growth, makes you to bleed, you cannot receive your period on time and it causes infection. Abstinence is not working because most of us are self-supported and we have to get a man to help us to sustain ourselves. (Rural female, age 18-24, Nimba)*

Substance abuse is also frequently mentioned priority. Responses among youth and adults were frequent and passionate across most focus groups, leading the assessment team to conclude that Liberia is very possibly on the verge of a substance abuse epidemic. This topic is further explored in the next section, "Security."

When explicitly asked about health as a priority, youth described a wide array of health priorities, usually related to basic service delivery. Other than teenage pregnancy and substance abuse, the most commonly mentioned health problems are threefold. First, the lack of access to healthcare is most prevalent, due to expensive costs of treatment (according to a young man in Todee, "*Free hospital is not free*"), and poor roads to hospitals that are located far away. Second, the unavailability of pharmaceuticals is a common complaint. This phenomenon is attributed to nurses who pilfer the pharmaceuticals from government clinics, and sell them in their own private clinics for income. As one young man in Todee stated, "*Corruption is at the clinic.*" The assessment team also saw many complaints about the quality of nursing staff—in most cases when nurses were mentioned, youth inevitably described them as "talking on their phones" or "looking at Facebook" rather than attending to patients. In a few cases, nurses were blamed for being too judgmental of younger girls asking for family planning of reproductive health services. For example, young women in Gbarnga described nurses as giving them "some harsh words" for early sexual activity and/or pregnancy.

In terms of diseases and health problems noted by youth, the lack of clean water and poor sanitation and the resulting dysentery is a prevalent concern among respondents. Reproductive health complications were mentioned many times. Infectious diseases such as Malaria, Typhoid, Tuberculosis, Ebola and HIV/AIDS, were mentioned a few times. Food insecurity was directly mentioned a few times, but was generally not probed in focus group discussions:

> *"When I wake up in the day, all I think is to find food to eat." (Urban male, age 18-24, Grand Bassa)*

Bright Spots in Health

While bright spots related to contraception were far and few in between, a handful of personal success stories emerged. Two respondents expressed positive views about condoms (including female

condoms). One respondent mentioned that some parents educated their children about sex and this was helpful. Lastly, two communities (Sanniquellie and Gbarnga) were reported to have family planning that is working. In Gbarnga female youth reported that there are free condoms (three different types, including female condoms) in the hospital and that this encourages them to use them.

> *Condom prevents you from getting pregnant and I like it. (Urban female, age 18-19, Lofa)*

> *Family Planning seems to be working here, although there are myths and miscommunication about SRH Commodities, youth are reportedly utilizing family planning services, because "no one wants to be a 'baby producing machine' for anybody." (Urban youth, age 18-35, Nimba)*

> *Family Planning is free of charge here and girls are actually taking advantage of it, but there is a need for more awareness – due to the many misinformation and myths about family planning services – awareness should be done through the media, girls' social club and peer-to peer education, as well through local established organization. (Urban youth, age 18-35, Nimba)*

Youth volunteerism is a major way in which youth are contributing to health solutions. Many youth mentioned mobilizing during the Ebola outbreak; and several also mentioned being part of water & sanitation teams. These volunteer efforts are discussed in greater detail in the youth engagement section of this report.

Strategic investments in Liberia's health sector have led to select improvements in health outcomes, suggesting that an increased commitment to and concerted effort in family planning has the potential to do the same. In the past one to two decades Liberia has seen improvements in reducing child mortality, malaria, as well as an increase in immunization coverage. As the 2013 DHS report states, "Use of any method of contraception by married women has increased from 6% to 20% in the past 27 years. Use of modern family planning methods has increased from 6% in 1986 to 19% in 2013." Although fertility rates are relatively high, at nearly 5 births per woman, they have been consistently declining over the past several decades.[70] But the continuing high rates of teenage pregnancy and subsequent maternal mortality in Liberia[71] call for an increased commitment to family planning. Indeed, in September 2018 the National Family Planning Conference in Monrovia resulted in a 25-count resolution that articulated a commitment to the fight against teenage pregnancy in Liberia.[72]

Past and current family planning programs in Liberia have been effective at youth behavior change when they "meet youth where they are at". Firstly, linking healthy behaviors with economic opportunity works with Liberian youth, as "Young Liberians' strongly value their educational outcomes and career prospects and appreciate the potential of (family planning) to help prevent unintended pregnancy and enable them to achieve their goals."[73] As a result, one project developed youth-focused materials that emphasized the link between 'living your dreams', sexual health and voluntary use of FP. "Future voluntary FP communications efforts could valuably reinforce awareness of this link."[74] Secondly, family planning messaging has been most effective when offered through youth-friendly outlets and spaces such as barber shops/ beauty salons, beach parties, mobile clinics, youth centers, and radio programming.

Working with family and community members (community leaders, teachers, health workers, etc.) in family planning activities are a necessary supplement to the direct messaging among young people. Youth in focus group discussions indicate that parents are reluctant to talk about family planning or provide contraceptives for fear of condoning their children's sexual activity and other risky behaviors. One program recommended that youth-focused programs must "seek to equip parents with the correct information to properly communicate with their children."[75] Key informants also underscores the need to engage schools and community and religious leaders in family planning education.[76] Another project found that integrated health services, such as those that combine family planning services for mothers bringing their infants to the health facility for routine immunization, lead to increased contraceptive use.[77]

SECURITY

Priorities for Youth's Security

The assessment uncovered a surprisingly high level of reported substance abuse among youth. Half of the focus groups—both youth and adult—cited drug use as a major problem among youth in their communities, and many ranked it among their top priorities. Urban youth (especially in Monrovia, Kakata, and Buchanan) mentioned the issue more than rural youth. Females mentioned the issue only slightly more than males. Youth were reported to be regularly using marijuana, cocaine, heroin, Tramadol (an opioid used to treat pain), as well as alcohol. One adult participant cited drugs (presumably marijuana) being grown in Nimba, Bong, Lofa, and Sinoe, and being imported from Sierra Leon, Ivory Coast and Nigeria. Participants stated that youth are using drugs because of "frustration" due to "no opportunities" or "nothing doing," which "lead most of them in negative activities just to get their daily needs." Many mentioned the impact of peer pressure.

> *Half of the people in my community sell drugs … they depend on that business to survive. (Female university student, age 18-24, Montserrado)*

> *"I have learned trade already and I am using it to make my living, all I need is to break this addiction." (Urban at-risk female, age 18-19, Montserrado)*

> *Some schools in this community are also involved with selling of drugs. My son is highly involved in taking in drugs and if I tried engaging him on that, he tells me that if I continue with such embarrassment in his life, he will kill me and be totally free. (Urban adult, Grand Bassa)*

FIGURE 9. SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A YOUTH PRIORITY, ACCORDING TO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS, BY LOCATION
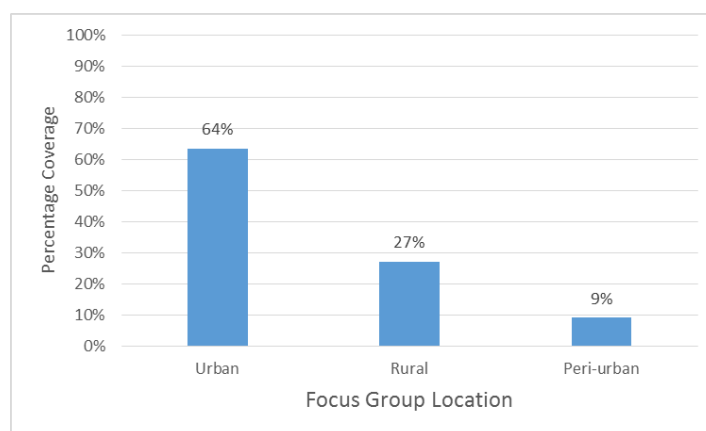
Among the focus groups mentioning substance abuse as a priority, 64% were in urban areas, while 9% and were in rural and peri-urban areas, respectively.

Youth's drug use is seen as directly related to crime and community insecurity. Drug use and sales are perceived to be at the crux of criminal activity such as theft and police corruption. For instance, one adult in Buchanan said, "*If we control drugs, things will be fine.*" Some urban youth are pushed to sell drugs to make a living due to lack of other opportunities. Other youth are driven to steal due to poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and parental pressures to earn money. Across the board, communities expressed high degree of concern about the growing crime around them. This same concern was felt by entrepreneurs participating in focus groups. The World Bank survey of household enterprises also confirmed this same finding, noting that entrepreneurs were concerned with theft, and in ""nearly all cases, young men were the apparent criminals."[78] Overall, this assessment confirmed the Bank's observation that youth expressed "an evident degree of lack of trust of young people toward other people, youth, and adults, generally."[79] Another youth assessment found that Liberian youth "expressed frustration at how conflict or crime is often attributed to their age cohort without sufficient attention to underlying, contributing factors."[80]

Local authorities are a large source of conflict, frustration, and distrust—and they are perceived as perpetrators in the substance abuse epidemic. When discussing the drug and crime problems in their communities, both youth and adults alike expressed a high level of frustration with the high level of impunity for drug-related crimes, which is fueled by corruption by the police (specifically among officers in the DEA) and the justice system in general. Many described local police and DEA agents as colluding with drug dealers, using drugs themselves, or re-selling products that had been previously seized. Many mentioned that because police were connected with criminals, victims were unable to report crimes without fear of retribution. Girls mentioned an inability to report rape due to police corruption. Distrust of police was a finding of USAID's youth assessment in 2009.[81]

> *People in our community are selling drugs and when police have them arrested, they release them after few hours and you will start seeing them in the same community again and even those police themselves are taking drugs. (Urban female, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)*

> *"Police and thieves are best friends and do things in common." (Urban female, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)*

> *"If you don't have personal contacts with someone in the police, you don't get help on time." (Urban female, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)*

Personal security, namely the threat of rape and other sexual- and gender-based violence, is notable among girls. Rape was directly mentioned in six of the focus group discussions, of which four were comprised of female-only youth. Urban youth tended to cite this issue only slightly more often than their rural counterparts. According to respondents, rape happens under a number of circumstances: by fathers, by men heads of household living with non-relative young girls, in the streets while young girls are working, by teachers asking for sex from their minor-age students, or by pedophiles who take advantage of young children. Parents were often the subject of blame, as they force their girls to earn a living and thus subject them to the risks of working in the streets. In many cases, young men and women alike mentioned that the girls themselves were sometimes to blame, namely for dressing inappropriately. Sexual violence was also mentioned in the domestic context, where men are reported to beat their wives and demand sex.

Bright Spots in Youth Security

Youth and other citizens mobilize to make their communities safe. As the most salient bright spot to combatting insecurity, nine focus groups made reference to the community watch teams that youth organize to maintain security in their neighborhoods.

> *For boys, they set up vigilante groups to protect the community from the Zogos; they volunteer to serve to work at night. (Urban female, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)*

> *Young people provide their own security for example during the Ebola they used to sleep by the pumps and wells so as to ensure their community water don't get contaminated. (Male university student, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

> *"Our leaders here do nothing for us, we protect our own community." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

Key informants and the literature indicate that programs are making headway on combating gender-based violence. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), engages adolescents and youth in behavior change activities around gender-based violence. By engaging boys in accountable practice, IRC's programs are shifting behavior trends as youth develop. "Among boys, once these changes happen and are sustained over time, communities become safer spaces for all."[82]

It was more difficult to identify bright spots in addressing the widespread substance abuse, indicating that few are sufficiently responding or paying attention to this issue. When probed about how the

community can stop the drug problem, or prevent youth from using drugs, most people called for harsher penalties, stricter laws, or assigning police to different locations on a rotational basis so as to minimize their collusion with drug dealers. A few groups mentioned the role of churches in bringing in at-risk youth off the streets and rehabilitating them. Only four participants mentioned positive youth development programs as a way to prevent substance abuse. One young man mentioned the need for drug awareness programs. Another mentioned an international NGO program that builds self-esteem, provides civic education and raises awareness through the media. Another person in the same focus group mentioned the student unions that engage "working class people" and offer scholarships to students. A county-level youth representative stated that financial "empowerment" through technical and vocational education is most important in fighting substance abuse. Parents/PTAs, radio messages, and religious leaders were noted as important actors in community security.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: SOCIAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Priorities in Youth Engagement

Although "youth participation" is not as high an explicit priority for youth, across many conversations youth brought up the need for youth-friendly safe spaces. Youth mentioned that they have few outlets for positive engagement, especially outside Monrovia. Among the identified priorities, youth expressed a need for "playgrounds" (sports facilities), recreational centers, youth centers, women's centers, libraries/ reading rooms, and (among Monrovia's more elite youth) an innovation hub.

> *There is nothing like youth activities for keeping us busy after school and work. We are totally lacking of a recreation center in this community which is important to our living. (Rural/ peri-urban male, age 18-24, Margibi)*

> *We need a center for women where their voices will be heard, they will be empowered through grants, loans, and scholarships. (Urban adult CBO representative, Nimba)*

> *The ideal youth center is a place that draws us closer to the rest of the world… somewhere a person can come and say "I want to do this," and where another person can help them work through it. (Urban male youth NGO leader, Montserrado)*

When asked about how youth spend their time outside of work and school, the top answers were doing drugs, involved in crime, or doing nothing special. Table 6 illustrates youth's responses when asked "what do youth in your community do when they're not in school or working?" While most youth report having very few options for positive engagement outside of school and work, some attend church on a regular basis, and also participate in youth clubs, volunteer activities, or on-campus activities. Many also visit internet cafes, video clubs, or *ataye* shops, which often youth described in negative terms. Many simply hang out in the street. In most cases, youth report that these places are not conducive for all youth (e.g. video clubs tend to appeal to males, and internet cafes can be unsafe). The existing youth centers run by the MYS appear to be severely under-funded. Social media is also used by many Liberian youth, but only those who can afford it.

TABLE 6. RANKING OUTLETS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth perspective: What do youth do when they're not in school nor working?	Harbel Rural (& Peri-Urban) Males (18-24)	Harbel Rural (& Peri-Urban) Female (18-24)	Bong Mines Female (18-19)	Total
Responses:				
Doing drugs/ involved in crime	7	7	5	19
Nowhere special/ streets	6	2	6	14
Café, computer center, video club	4	4	4	12
Social media/ texting/ calling	4	3	4	11
At home	3	3	4	10
Other	5	1	3	9
Church/mosque/religious	2	3	4	9
Volunteering/ community service/ advocacy	2	3	3	8
Youth clubs/ activities (sports, dance, music, etc.)	2	2	4	8
On-campus activities	2	2	4	8

Several youth encouraged community volunteerism and appeared satisfied with the level of youth involvement in community processes and decision-making; others wanted to see a tangible result of their efforts. There is a strong culture of volunteerism in Liberia, and many focus group participants mentioned either working for, volunteering in, or leading a community-based organization. Youth described events during the Ebola outbreak when youth mobilized around awareness and prevention. Others mentioned leading or participating in water, sanitation, and hygiene volunteer efforts in their communities. In terms of decision-making, some youth appeared satisfied with the level of youth engagement in their communities, pointing to the fact that each community has an appointed youth representative. They also mentioned the public announcements of community meetings in which youth are invited to participate. One rural woman (age 25-35) in Todee mentioned that women tend to participate in these meetings ("husbands go to the farm") and share information with their families about any major decisions.

> *On some campuses, every Friday students prove their talents by singing, dancing, drama etc. in their area of specializations. We also do clean up service at times. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)*

> *We can join our elders to fix our roads, speed bumps and bridges when they get damaged. We don't depend on the government for everything when we know fully well that they will not be a help to us quickly in that direction. (Urban female, age 18-19, Margibi)*

> *Youths have to be part of decision making because the majority of the community dwellers are youths and the elders are retiring. (Community leader (adult), Lofa)*

But other youth were more skeptical: they mentioned that when meetings occur, few youth participate. According to these respondents, youth engagement was determined by the perceived returns to be gained by their efforts. This finding is confirmed by secondary data: one youth survey found that while 75% of respondents affirmed that youth participate in community meetings, many described youth participation as limited. But surprisingly this same study found that overall "youth do not consider themselves to be socially or politically excluded; however, youth perceive themselves to be economically excluded." [83] This finding underscores youth's concerns that economic success leads to increased voice and community respect (see below).

> *"Anytime they call a meeting we didn't want to go there for nothing." (Rural female, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

> *Most of the time, we the youth don't volunteer in our community because when we volunteer and the opportunity comes, the leaders of the community will share among themselves without youth benefiting." (Rural/peri-urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

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Youths don't participate in the community cleanup project, some feel too proud to be cleaning the community, giving awareness on sanitation. Some are willing to carry on the cleanup project but now we don't have the means to sustain this program. We don't have materials; no public latrines, and "some youths don't want to volunteer because they don't want to work for free." (Urban youth CBO representative, Grand Bassa)

For many youth, political participation is a transaction. According to a 2014 report by the National Elections Commission, half of Liberia's voters are youth, and 73% of youth are aware or highly aware of the electoral process.[84] Our focus group discussions revealed politically active and hopeful youth: young men in Gorblee stated that they voted because of their hope for change, while women in Harbel expressed that they voted expecting a change from their local leaders at the municipal level. But the NEC report also describes a "growing apathy" among youth. Indeed, focus group discussions indicate a pragmatic, if not skeptical view, of political engagement. Many describe political involvement as a means of earning income. For example, older male youth in Gbarnga mentioned that politicians pay youth "small money" or scratch cards to publicize negative things about the other candidate. Young women in Harbel talked about getting involved in the election rallies as a way to get a T-shirt or something to eat.[85] Stories abounded of youth being paid to be trucked to other locations to vote. Some viewed political involvement as necessary to one's career success, i.e., if one begins to speak out with strong political views, political parties may ultimately find a job placement for that youth in order to silence them. Many youth, particularly university students, expressed that criticizing a politician may endanger their livelihoods.

Most youths are involved into politics because they feel it's a way of getting job. (Male university student, age 25-35, Montserrado)

Young people feel that if you don't get involved into politics you will not be employed. (Male university student, age 25-35, Montserrado)

"If you don't sing with the politician name, you become a problem to the politician." (Urban male youth, age 25-35, Bong)

Youth express frustration with "being used" by politicians, community leaders, and other adults. Politicians and community leaders were often described as making promises to garner youth support, but not delivering on those promises. A few youth mentioned their leaders mis-using the County Development Fund[x] for their personal gain.

Youth are involved in advocacy with the mindset that it will build us up for the future more especially during political season. They (politicians) come appealing and making lot of promises that if they win, we will benefit (scholarships, community development, advocating for youth empowerment) but when they gain that seat, they no longer recognized you in the community. They even find it difficult in visiting the rural communities where they succeeded in getting the positions. (Rural/ peri-urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)

Some youths get their livelihood through program like cleanup campaigns. During the election season, people created interest in it and brought that program in the community where they were paying 5 USD per day. With that program some Zogos (street youth) stopped stealing because they had somewhere they were getting money from (a paying job). Right after the election, all stopped because they have gotten what they needed which was our votes. (Community Leaders, Margibi)

Youth perceive that their voice in society is determined by their education and earnings. This sentiment was also echoed by adults who also mentioned that generally a young person needs money and/or

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[x] The County Development Fund, or CDF, is a governmental effort that transfers some decision-making authority to local communities through a systematic agenda for decentralization of national governance. Funds are allocated to each of Liberia's 15 counties annually in the national budget; some counties also receive Social Development Funds from concession companies under the CDF. [Source: Quato, Benedict. "How Liberia's County Development Fund Works." *The Bush Chicken.* Op-Ed August 13, 2015 (https://www.bushchicken.com/how-liberias-county-development-fund-works/)]

other visible accomplishments, or networks (such as being a member of a bush school/ secret society) in order to be heard. While both men and women shared the same feelings of earning "respect" in a community (see p. 12), women appeared to speak more often than men about the concept of "voice":

> *If you have money, they allow you to talk; but if you don't, you will not be allowed. (Urban female, age 18-19, Lofa)*

> *Many youths don't participate in decision making because elders and community leaders don't respect our views when we don't have money. Once you're a youth and you have a little cash, they will give you all the respect and they won't conduct a meeting without you being present. (Youth community leader, Margibi)*

> *They don't give us chance to talk; sometimes we are small, sometimes because we are women. (Urban female, age 18-19, Lofa)*

Bright Spots for Youth Engagement

Youth's engagement in volunteerism and community decision-making, well as the existing youth-serving programs and spaces, offer positive youth outlets that should be built upon. The existing youth resources—youth centers, on-campus activities, vocational training programs, community radios—albeit limited and/or under-resourced, all present opportunities for engaging youth. One of the most common youth-serving space was the faith-based organizations that youth say provide them an opportunity for moral development. Imams and pastors were seen as important stakeholders who could incorporate relevant messages into their preaching.

> *Churches and mosques help to advise the youths when they are going wrong. When youths get close to churches and mosques, the preaching can help to change them from bad habits they are in to. (Rural/ peri-urban male, age 18-24, Margibi)*

> *The church helped me in getting a job. (Rural male, age 18-24, Margibi)*

> *Some youths are in those churches and mosques to know God for themselves, some go for the name of the church, and some go for change through pastor preaching. Every Sunday they re-dedicate their lives to God. (Rural female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

There are several exceptional youth-led organizations and businesses throughout the country, and many programs have incorporated positive youth development approaches to achieve successful youth outcomes. Compared to many other countries, Liberian stands apart in the quantity of community-based organizations and social enterprises[86] that are led by youth. Youth-led organizations span all sectors, such as: the Youth Coalition for Education Liberia (YOCEL) and Youth Movement for Collective Action (UMOVEMENT) in the education sector; Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia (health); youth-led community radio stations (civic engagement); the *phen-phen* motorcycle unions and Green City Waste Management Company (business sector). In addition, several youth-serving programs successfully incorporate youth engagement and positive youth development principles[87] into their approach. Many youth expressed a need for youth-driven projects, designed and implemented by youth. The shared iCampus learning space in Monrovia was noted by youth as an exceptional example of youth-led development, as it provides youth a physical safe space for "multi-disciplinary, innovation and community space for change-makers focusing on the intersection of technology, accountability and social change."[88] Annex E provides examples of these organizations and programs.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Government Attitudes, Policies, & Regulation

Youth have mixed attitudes toward government, ranging from expectations to disappointment to frustration. Government was directly mentioned 151 times across the various focus groups, with most mentions being negative or as a statement of needed services. Mentions of politicians, police, or local sector leaders were also mostly either negative or demands for change. Urban youth (particularly ages 25 to 35, and male) mentioned disappointment in the government and expectations for better programs. Youth complained about poor leadership, government corruption, and being used by political candidates. They also referred to the poor government schools and health facilities, as well as the inequitable or insufficient distribution of services.

First, there were widespread expectations that government should be better taking care of youth concerns—with better education, with jobs, better health services. At the same time, many expressed disappointment in the government's inability to provide these basic services. Corruption and Accountability was also a recurring theme:

> *Government should provide jobs and technical training for youths to empower us. (Male urban university student, age 25-35, Montserrado)*

> *Most often when NGOs are in charge of projects those projects go on easily but when it is turned over to government those same projects die down. (Community leader (adult), Nimba)*

> *Leadership is a huge problem in the country. At the community level, there is leadership problem. There is a need to carry on awareness on leadership and peace building for Government employees. They lack this knowledge… (Youth CBO leader, Grand Bassa)*

Frustration with public servants (teachers, nurses, and police) was a common theme. Many youth cited the lack of ethics, poor customer service, and corrupt practices among public servants, especially the police (as discussed previously), nurses, and teachers. Of the 94 mentions of nurses (with 82% mentioned by youth 18-35), the vast majority express a negative sentiment. Numerous FGDs mentioned nurses being on Facebook instead of tending to patients, and nurses who take public free drugs and sell them in their personal pharmacies for their personal gain. Teachers are overwhelmingly identified as ill-equipped, sexually coercive and abusive, and corrupt. A significant finding is that girls and women mention teachers (in that same negative light) more than three times as much as male focus group participants. Some focus groups mentioned how teachers don't show up for school (presumably to be earning money elsewhere), and instead they send unqualified teachers aids/volunteers—sometimes even a "smart student"—to teach on their behalf.[89] Most youth proposed that the government needs to pay public servants a more sufficient salary, and in a timely way. Others suggested that improved training for teachers and nurses could improve the quality of service. Some mentioned the need for better "monitoring" services to assess nurse/ teacher performance. Across several focus groups, the term corruption is mentioned, most often with regard to police and health workers.

> *Teachers and nurses lack ethics. They accept bribes from students and patients due to lack of finance. Teachers are not well paid and they are not paid on time. With this condition, they ask students to place money in to their assignments to enable them support their families. Nurses, too, face a similar problem. They are not well paid and due to that, they all have established or construct their pharmacies in the community where they take medication supplied at the hospitals for sell to enable them meet up with their needs. (Urban female, age 25-35, Grand Bassa)*

> *Most of the teachers take bribes and this is because the teachers are not taking good pay. The ones that are taking pay have to go way to Monrovia to collect their salary, and before they get back to*

[redacted] they have already finished spending their entire salary. Now they have to collect bribe to survive; if not, they will fail us. (Rural female, age 18-24, Nimba)

Youth mentioned government policy constraints only occasionally, and there was no single salient policy that came to the forefront. As one male university student, age 25-35, states, "Government policies are not realistic to encourage youth." The policies mentioned more than once were the following:

- **The impact of taxes/fees/bribes on youth startups and informal businesses:** Taxes were mentioned 12 times, with all mentions negative and indicating high and unstable tax rates. One entrepreneur in Voinjama mentioned his struggle in keeping his tax clearances up-to-date, which then impacted his ability to obtain contracts to keep him in business. Some informal street vendors complained that when their goods are seized, the bribes that police asked for often exceeded the value of the goods they seized. Further investigation is needed on this particular policy area. As the World Bank report on household enterprises confirms, it is not always clear "whether the police actions were within the law or actually extortion."[90]

- **Policies and regulations regarding the informal sector:** Key informants and secondary data emphasize how national policies are rather unfavorable to the informal sector (and ergo youth) writ large. Regulations also bias against household enterprises who are at the mercy of "local authorities, who are responsible for zoning and other regulations which determine access to workplaces, infrastructure, and support structures."[91] The need for policy reforms in the informal sector was corroborated with the observations of a USAID-funded study on the business enabling environment for micro- small- and medium-sized enterprises.[92]

- **Liberianization policy:** This is the act that amends the Business Law to set aside select business activities exclusively for Liberians.[93] This policy is not adequately enforced, according to several youth entrepreneurs and other informants. One Buchanan entrepreneur complained that he has been squeezed out of the market by foreign firms who have access to significantly more capital and are able to capture significantly more market share. Another complained that companies hire foreigners at higher salaries, while Liberians are paid very little. This finding was also echoed by key informants,[94] as well as the World Bank household enterprise survey.[95]

- **Customs fees and currency fluctuations** affect youth in the north (Ganta, Voinjama) who are involved in cross-border trade. Because businesses have to exchange their Liberian dollars into US dollars to buy goods, and then sell again in Liberia dollars, youth entrepreneurs talk about being "penalized twice" by the unfavorable exchange rates.[96] Some youth call for the enforcement of the use and acceptance of the Liberian dollars, so that traders are less vulnerable to these currency fluctuations.

- **Laws on drug trafficking, drug sales:** In response to the emerging drug epidemic, adults called for stronger legislation and enforcement of drug trafficking, as well as stronger penalties for drug dealing/ sales.

Liberia's national policies have integrated youth across all sectors, but require greater coordination and follow-through. When asked about "what is working well in positive youth development in Liberia," several key informants pointed to recent national policies that are inclusive of youth development. Some cited the National Youth Policy and the Pro-Poor Agenda[97], as well as the Liberia Education Reform Act of 2011, National Policy on Girl's Education, National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and the Liberia Getting to Best Education: Education Sector Plan. Many of these policies highlight the crucial gaps and needs in national youth development efforts. Skills-building (human capital development) comes out as a strong priority, especially considering Liberia's economy continues to rely largely on natural resources,[98] and as it seeks to move away from natural resources into other sectors.[99]

Private Sector Engagement

Youth entrepreneurs, employers and lead firms expressed a firm desire to be actively engaged in the development of Liberian youth. Large, established firms and informal SMEs alike participate in youth projects: these companies contribute to curriculum development, provide on-the-job training and job shadowing, offer short-term internships for entry-level youth (sometimes leading to full-time employment), and sometimes serve as mentors to young people. Youth entrepreneurs stated they wanted to build or expand their business so that they could employ and teach fellow young people; many of them already mentor younger siblings or friends. Several of the larger employers expressed pride in being able to train or employ youth. But this spirit of corporate social responsibility was not always aligned with business interests. For instance, one interview with a lead firm indicated that youth interns were brought on only as beneficiaries of charitable support, not as productive market actors whose labor was in demand. Some programs have reported difficulty in getting businesses agree to pay for interns' stipends; other programs have not had this same challenge. Future livelihoods programs must work to ensure market-based solutions, whereby youth concerns are more closely aligned with private sector interests.

The capacity of youth tends to be at the forefront of business concerns. For example, two USAID implementing partners reported that skills levels are severely inadequate, and employers are most concerned whether "can this person deliver." One lead firm representative said of youth, "You have to be on them all the time." It should be noted that several lead firm representatives mentioned the harsh business environment—businesses are just struggling to make it, so they have a limited ability to take on inexperienced youth into their companies. Not surprisingly, some programs have found that employers are reluctant to pay for youth interns, and many GOL or donor-funded projects end up subsidizing youth internships. Nevertheless, other projects have been able to identify companies willing to pay for skilled youth, thus indicating the possibility of a more sustainable, market-based approach.

The workplace poses a personal, physical threat to many young girls. A few young girls reported being subject to sexual extortion by employers in order to obtain a job or earn a promotion. This finding is consistent with the other situations in which girls are forced to have sex in return for benefits: to be admitted to school, to earn a school grade, to receive a scholarship, or to access a busy computer center.

> *"At the work places, our bosses want to have sex with us before they can give us a promotion or even give us jobs." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

> *"I was marginalized at my office, I was working in the department where we receive tips which was helping me and my family, and my boss wanted me for sex. But because I did not agree and another girl slept with him, he promoted the girl to my job and I got demoted. This girl started throwing talks on me at all times which discouraged me and I resigned my post and went back to school." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

Gender

Gender norms were most prominent in the livelihoods domain, particularly in terms of societal pressures and discrimination toward women. Young women note that certain occupations are off limits (e.g., riding motorcycles, clearing brush from fields), while others are more conducive to females (nursing, teaching). Women are also subject to coercive sexual behaviors on the part of employers (see p. 35). According to young women, employment is a way to support family and child dependents; however, they carry mixed feelings about how this affects their relations with male partners. A few youth said that men look down on women who earn a living or earn too much, as it is emasculating to the male partner. Meanwhile, men generally echoed more traditional views of gender and livelihoods:

> *During those days women were not involved in anything, but for now, ladies are involved in everything. We are making a major impact. "What man can do, woman can do also." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)*

"When the women are also educated and make more money, they refuse to respect their husbands in the home. This is getting more men afraid of getting women who can generate more income than they do." (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi)

Women have always believed that being an engineer is very tedious and not too many women engage in these courses. Women prefer nursing. They create these beliefs on themselves. (Urban male, age 25-25, Bong)

Barriers to Female Employment

A Mercy Corps survey of 147 vulnerable youth aged between 16 and 24 in urban and semi-urban settings in Liberia revealed several findings about female engagement in the work world. This survey revealed the following narratives:

- *"I cannot"* – girls consistently reported lower self-confidence and self-esteem than did their male counterparts.
- *"I am too busy to work"* – motherhood, family, and household responsibilities challenge female labor participation.
- *"He is better educated than me"* – Lower education levels among females negatively impact their earnings and livelihood potential.
- *"My man provides"* – women rely on income from men more than vice versa; Furthermore, 69% of both male and female survey respondents reported the belief that men should exercise control over household finances.
- *"I am socially isolated"* – fewer women reported trust in the community
- *"I am not part of the club"* – Men are more likely than women to obtain employment through connections, while females tend to seek more formalized job-seeking practices.

(Mercy Corps (2015). *Barriers to Employment Facing Young Women in Liberia. Prospects Learning Papers No. 1*.)

There are also frictions between males and female in how they talk about unintended pregnancy and childcare responsibilities. Many women expressed anger at the widespread phenomenon of men who do not financially support their partners following pregnancy, or their children. They accused boys of "abandonment" or not being "responsible," and one stated that "boys use us and dump us after getting pregnant." Among all the male focus groups, only two participants within the same focus group (Zogos in Monrovia) expressed a desire to financially support their children and partners, and a sense of shame or worry that they couldn't.

The topic of leadership surfaced a number of strongly-held, traditional gender norms. Most agreed that there are traditional gender norms that restrict female leadership, and that many men were uncomfortable with the idea of a female in a high position of authority. Many spoke about men having a stronger, more dominant approach to leadership, while women were described as having a "soft," consultative approach. Some mentioned girls' lack of confidence to lead due to poor education. Nevertheless, several women leaders in the adult focus groups demonstrated their challenge to these stereotypes. Men, too, spoke about the need to break these stereotypes, over time.

When women are in leadership, they have the passion for what they do. When women are given leadership role, they try setting a legacy in a positive direction and will always incorporate people, allow everyone to participate in decision making and bring togetherness among people. With men, they love dominant power. (Urban female youth CBO representative, age 24-35, Grand Bassa)

Gender stereotype. Anyone can be a good leader. Men are vigilant and women are soft. These ideas are not acceptable. It should not be acceptable. Both males and females can be leaders but we need to work on the gender stereotype. (Urban male, age 25-35, Bong)

Youth with Disability

Youth (and even community leaders) with disabilities endure hardships to education and livelihoods that are not adequately addressed by local institutions and communities where they live. Respondents included the visually impaired and those with physical disabilities. According to these participants and key informants, the first issue is that youth with disabilities cannot easily make money, which means they cannot easily pay school fees. As a result, some youth are forced to beg or rely on limited financial assistance from others in order to attend class and even meet their basic needs for survival. The second major issue faced by people with disabilities is physical access to schools, public institutions, and roads that are not suitable for wheelchairs (which at least one youth mentioned he needed and was lacking), or for the visually impaired. One key informant called for a need for more inclusive basic education, with another simply stating, "Schools are not accommodating to people with disability." People with visual impairments were noted as procuring the assistance of young children (usually relatives) to act as guides, which had the secondary effect of hampering the child's education.

Systemic discrimination appears to reinforce the inequity that youth with disability face in their daily lives. Stigma and stereotyping were mentioned as fundamental priorities that needed to change, alongside institutional policies:

> People with disabilities do not have access to education in the rural areas. When our parents send us to school we are mocked at on campus. Awareness should be carry on in the community, on the media, in churches, mosque and in schools about persons with disabilities. There should be an inclusive education system where everyone can participate in class. There should be an atmosphere for us to fit in the society. (Community leader with a disability)

> People with disability deal with stereotyping, and are unable to get a job. People assume your physical disability is a result of the war, and they don't take time to listen to your story. (Urban male youth, Montserrado)

> You can't just work exclusively with a group of blind people, because they'll be working within a broader community. (Urban male youth, Montserrado)

Inter-Generational Relations

Like in most countries, there are inherent tensions between Liberian youth and adults. Youth often used the words "being used" to describe their interactions with adults including parents, teachers, and politicians. It was noted in at least three separate focus group discussions that the recent education efforts in human rights and children's rights have led to tensions between elders and youth. Parents blamed these programs for having "lost control" over and respect by their children, or for even imprisonment as a result of their own children reporting them to the police. It is also noteworthy that adults participating in focus groups held slightly different ideas about youth priorities during the rankings exercises, placing less importance on education (25% of adult rankings, compared to 42% youth) and a greater emphasis on health (28% of adult rankings, as opposed to 18% youth).

> "Young ones are not to talk ahead of older people. Young ones should always be followers." (Urban youth, age 25-35, Bong)

> Some relatives also cause early marriages; we call them 'No Good Advice.' Our parents encourage us to have boyfriends…and be giving them money. For me, if I know my future is bright, I will avoid men and focus on my education. (Urban female, age 18-24, Margibi

> "Youths don't want to do anything; they love to gamble instead of going to school." (Community leader (adult), Lofa)

Parents play an important role in youth's lives and are in need of support—in many cases the parents are youth themselves. Parents are often described by youth as neglectful, or in conflict with youth. As

noted, many youth feel an undue pressure by parents to financially support themselves and their families, and to their own detriment. In general, it is the adult community leaders who tend to express a more sophisticated understanding of the parent/youth dynamic:

> *Continuous parental advice helps (youth) to succeed. Sometimes parents can be the cause for children deficiencies. Children need advice at all times. (Community leader (adult), Lofa)*

> *Parenting workshops for parents who are adolescents would help fill critical gaps – potentially in both school and out-of-school settings. (International Rescue Committee, Key Informant Interview)*

Migration

Youth's internal migration occurs within the context of pursuing higher education, and it poses a number of risks, especially for females. When youth spoke about migration, they reported moving from rural to urban areas to attend university.[xi] These migration opportunities were seen as options only to youth with access to people or networks in major cities, who could act as a host family and offer lodging, food, transportation, and other expenses. According to the literature, youth internal migration also poses risks of economic exploitation and sexual abuse by host families.

> *"If you don't have people in Monrovia or Kakata to take some responsibilities (lodging, feeding, transportation, tuition, etc.), you will not be able to leave from this community." (Rural male, age 18-24, Montserrado)*

Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT)

Word of mouth, radio and social media are most commonly mentioned youth communications methods. Many of Liberia's community radio outlets are operated by youth, and many journalists are also youth. These forms of media offer a tremendous opportunity to engage young people in youth-driven development. Currently, Liberia's internet penetration is limited, at 16%.[100] One program engaging pregnant teens in Bong County found that it had to make program adjustments because mobile literacy was much lower than expected: "some struggle to send SMS messages while others have issues navigating the basic functions of their phone like the volume or congested inbox."[101] Nevertheless, many youth focus group participants talked about the use of social media, including its advantages and disadvantages:

> *"Social media: there are positive and negative aspects of this media and all depend on how you use it. Youths are using this for insulting Government officials who are going wrong, people are on Facebook during working time, and sometimes (people) use it to attract investors. For example, when my present Boss decided to establish NGO, he decided being busy on social media seeking support opportunities. He was able to get investor who came to Liberia and started helping with finance which make our organization to stand today and we have empowered over 200 persons." (Rural/ peri-urban male, age 18-24, Margibi)*

IV. OPPORUNITIES AND PROGRAMMATIC GAPS

Reflecting upon the priorities of youth, and the examples of what is working well in their communities, the assessment team identified eight salient opportunities, or programmatic gaps, with high potential to make a difference in the lives of Liberian youth.

[xi] Youth mentioned wanting to leave the country and seek better livelihoods abroad, but it was less common than concerns expressed about internal migration.

#1: INCREASE YOUTH EARNINGS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

There is a great unmet demand for programs that offer skills, assets, and supports for youth to obtain a stable source of income through self-employment in the informal sector. Youth highly value education and livelihoods as their top goals and priorities. Global research suggests that low-potential, low-income countries such as Liberia should focus its employment interventions for youth on "resurgent opportunities in the informal sector."[102] In Liberia, well over three-quarters (78%) of the population is engaged in "vulnerable" employment with inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult work conditions,[103] and youth are no exception. Boosting youth earnings in the informal sector involves the development of transferrable skills (soft skills), entrepreneurship and other work-ready skills among youth, namely by expanding access to alternative learning and workforce readiness programs. It also requires an expansion of youth's access to finance (financial literacy, savings, loans, mobile money); improving market linkages; and offering other supports (e.g., mentoring, counseling, youth-friendly health services) that are necessary to increase and sustain youth earnings.

Importantly, targeting rural areas, and the agriculture sector, is important for reaching a wide swathe of under-served youth. There are many existing program models in Liberia that have successfully helped youth obtain education and livelihoods; however, the majority are located in urban centers, and very few sufficiently focus on self-employment in the informal sector, which is where the majority of jobs for youth reside. In rural areas, agriculture and self-employment should be part of any youth livelihood approach. Liberia's current economic state indicates that agriculture will remain, at least in the short term, the largest source of employment for youth. Increasing agricultural productivity will be important for economic transformation in Liberia; as Liberia's economy begins to diversify away from its dependence on natural resources, the development of human capital will be ever-more important to that transition.[104] Given that most of the current youth agriculture efforts focus exclusively on production, using mainly traditional practices, programs should encourage new technologies and upgrading, and include more practical activities that integrate youth along different parts of the agricultural value chain.[105] Efforts should focus on off-farm activities through the facilitation of market linkages, support to rural and agribusiness MSMEs, storage, feeder roads, transport, and youth adoption of new technologies that boost productivity.

Successful youth livelihood interventions in Liberia have combined a number of integrated supports, using flexible, modular components that can be tailored to the needs of different youth segments. A few select evaluations from Liberia demonstrate that youth skills training, when combined with access to capital and some form of support (mentoring, counseling, job intermediation), yield tangible improvements.[106] [107] [108] [109] Importantly, these programs have engaged the private sector as actors within the program, so that youth interests and capacities are effectively aligned with the demands of the market. Consideration should also be given to the enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship, including policies, regulations, cultural norms, and other factors.

Youth livelihood programs must align the aspirations of youth with the demand trends of the market. As noted, youth often aspire to many of the same trades or white-collar jobs. A recent World Bank survey indicated that household enterprises and aspiring entrepreneurs are currently mostly involved in retail.[110] Looking at demand trends, reports suggest a growing demand in the services sector (including construction, telecommunications, retail, hospitality, and vehicle repair), sustainable energy, recycling in urban areas, as well as in public service jobs like teaching, child care, and health care.[111]

#2: GROW LIBERIAN MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Another major programmatic gap is the need for "demand-side" interventions that promote the growth of Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs), especially in the agriculture sector,

resulting in job creation for youth. The assessment showed that MSMEs in Liberia have the potential to become hubs for youth job creation when they have been offered targeted supports that help them to grow. Although agriculture employs the greatest share of Liberians, productivity remains low, and there is a great need for product diversification, value addition, and export. Liberia is heavily dependent upon food imports; for example, over two-thirds of cereal consumption comes from imports,[112] and foodstuffs comprise one of the country's top four imports.[113] This presents an opportunity for increasing youth employment. Global research points to the employment multiplier effects of growing agri-business MSMEs in a low-income economy such as Liberia's.[114] USAID project experience under the Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity (LADA) also shows that jobs for youth have been created as a results of investments in post-harvest agriculture infrastructure, technologies, and market linkages that boost growth up and down the value chain. For example, by working with rice processors, millers, and cassava processors, the project has helped create a seasonal demand for youth aggregation agents who collect commodities from village to village. Another local NGO also describes its success with introducing *gari* processing, which has led to the creation of new extension jobs for cassava production.[115] One youth respondent also notes the importance of lead firms in boosting opportunities for youth:

> *AIIC [Agriculture infrastructure and Investment company] is helping a lot. They have started buying the seed rice and process it to see in Monrovia. They have employed some young people. They also have farms and some young people work on the farm while others are supervisors for the farm." (Youth CBO representative, age 25-35, Lofa)*

Key informants suggest that the investment opportunities that lead to youth employment include: feeder roads, storage facilities, small-sized processing, aggregation services, farm mechanization support services, and transport. One recent survey report on businesses in Liberia recommended that programs "pick winners to invest in and develop to become 'export ready' businesses… (through) capital, technical assistance, and buyer identification/matching."[116] Further investigation is needed into exactly what a successful project would entail, and whether such an activity would cover only the agri-food system or other high potential sectors as well.

#3: INCREASE YOUTH'S ACCESS TO FINANCE

Further investigation is also needed to identify ways to open up financing alternatives that support youth livelihoods. The preliminary recommendations emerging from this assessment are the following:

Current efforts in savings mobilization and financial literacy should continue. As noted earlier, savings is the primary way youth businesses acquire capital. Savings mobilization through VSLAs have been highly successful, especially among women, while younger youth in the more remote rural areas expressed a need for VSLAs in their communities. Financial literacy and accounting skills also were important factors for youth business success.

Introduce flexible loan products and/or value chain financing for youth startups that "graduate" youth from grants. Many donor/NGO projects currently offer cash grants to youth startups and youth cooperatives. The World Bank study on household enterprises found that "successful household enterprises attributed their success to unconditional financial assistance from relatives…ranging from LRD 42,000 [US$500] to LRD 3,000 [US$35]," indicating that even the smallest of grants offers an important way for businesses to get started. Many of these same enterprises, however, also took loans from family under favorable repayment terms.[117] At present, no single financial institution or informal VSLA appears to offer loans to youth startups with flexible repayment schedules or other terms that are favorable to youth. As a result, youth entrepreneurs largely rely on working capital, or on personal gifts/loans, to finance startups. This observation indicates a market-based opportunity for "soft" loan schemes for youth startups.

In addition, the assessment team observed a robust example of value chain financing within the motorcycle transport sector. This sector offer an array of financing for youth: (a) youth lease-to-own motorcycles from

the motorcycle retailers, (b) drivers arrange various rental or leasing arrangements from motorcycle owners; (c) financial institutions provide loans for people to purchase a motorcycle, to "pay back as they ride"; and (d) the motorcycle union uses member dues to offer a form of accident insurance. Such a model could be explored for other sectors that are relevant to youth.

There is a gap in middle-market financing & investment for MSMEs that wish to grow. Like financing for startups, it appears that many projects offer more sizeable grants to ongoing businesses as the primary way of financing growth. The PROSPECTS III project, funded by Sida and implemented by Mercy Corps, has introduced offer grant subsidies ranging from $7,500 – 20,000 each to 25 businesses in Montserrado to grow and create jobs for youth. The LADA project offers a loan guarantee scheme with three financial institutions, which has funded agribusinesses with loans ranging from 44,000 (for 120 people), to $100,000 (57 women), and upwards of $300,000 for an agribusiness with previously successful loan performance. In theory, these investments trigger demand also for value chain financing, e.g., by a miller/processer who offers financing to his suppliers. These kinds of efforts are only a small start, and should be expanded further. According to a recent survey by Building Markets, 96% of all surveyed firms view access to finance as a constraint to the operation and/or growth of their business. However, that same study found that only 35% of firms were interested in taking out a loan. Indeed, "historical data shows a decrease in MSMEs' interest in formal loans," and a sizable number of firms (38%) "are not confident or are uncertain that they would succeed in obtaining a formal loan."[118]

Expand agriculture financing to create downstream effects for youth. A number of programs (YOP and others) have successfully offered small-sized grant assistance to youth producer groups for the purchase of inputs and/or the leasing of land. USAID is currently investing in small- and medium-sized agri-businesses (such as processors) with grant support and technical assistance to grow these businesses and create jobs for youth. Apart from these grant mechanisms, however, this assessment did not find additional examples of agriculture financing for youth, be it conventional debt instruments or value chain financing. More market research needs to be done on the demand and market feasibility of introducing different agriculture financing that could potentially benefit youth along the agriculture value chain.

Expansion of mobile money offers potential for youth entrepreneurs, especially in the north. The Building Markets study points out that, with over half of Liberians (55%) having "no access or very limited access to a physical financial institution,"[119] mobile banking has the potential to offer financial services for Liberia's unbanked population, and can especially benefit informal traders and those conducting cross-border trade,[120] such as the youth in the northern counties.

In any case, interventions must consider the financial behaviors and preferences by different youth segments, taking into account age and gender. The assessment found that older male youth participants (over age 24) tended to prefer formal financial institutions and used mobile money for both business and personal purposes, while older female youth preferred the *susus* and used mobile money only for personal transfers; meanwhile, younger youth tended to not use any formal or informal financial institutions at all.

#4: EXPAND YOUTH-FRIENDLY VOLUNTARY FAMILY PLANNING

Clearly there is an enormous need—and opportunity—to create a cultural shift in Liberian youth attitudes and behaviors toward family planning. Although this assessment did not look deeply at youth reproductive health, lessons from previous projects demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative behavior change communications interventions that enlist youth to increase family planning awareness and utilization. Such interventions should be supplemented with youth-friendly family planning services that include counseling and advice, focusing on young (in-school and out-of-school) poor populations, especially in rural areas. Interventions may also entail community-based distribution, as well as the training/re-training of health care personnel of all modern contraceptive methods, including long-term methods.[121] Investing in this area would render other benefits, such as the reduction of maternal mortality.

#5: ADDRESS THE EMERGING SUBSTANCE ABUSE EPIDEMIC

Given the overwhelming numbers of youth describing the substance abuse problem in their communities, we urge the government of Liberia, donors, and implementing organizations to invest in action research on this topic. A scan of secondary sources revealed some limited mention of substance abuse in Liberia, and little to no data on the topic. Moreover, focus group discussions with youth and adults alike indicate a limited awareness of prevention approaches and models that could work in Liberia. These factors indicate a great need for a dedicated research effort on youth substance abuse in Liberia, to understand prevalence, behaviors, risk factors, and recommended models for prevention among different youth cohorts across Liberia. Many youth and adults also expressed a desire for rehabilitation programs for those engaging in substance abuse as well, and yet other than select churches there appears to be few organizations addressing this issue.

#6: APPLY POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES WITHIN YOUTH PROGRAMS

This assessment underscores the cross-sectoral inter-dependencies of youth success; indeed, a review of successful youth programs in Liberia indicate that cross-sectoral approaches are necessary for achieving desired outcomes among youth. Youth in Liberia place enormous importance on gaining a market-relevant education that leads to improved livelihoods. Education and livelihoods are interdependent and exigent. But youth's education and livelihoods success is affected by other factors, most notably teenage pregnancy and substance abuse that perpetuate a vicious circle of youth dependence. As program experiences in Liberia have shown, this dynamic means that improving any single youth outcome cannot be done in isolated, sector-specific manner, but must take into account the salient youth influences across sectors.

In fact, many youth livelihoods programs (EPAG, AYP, YOP, Prospects) have integrated skills development with employment supports, alongside counseling or mentoring. Several education programs (AYP, Learning Links) have found that youth desire vocational training and job intermediation. One family planning program (SIFPO2) found that youth were more receptive to reproductive health messaging that was linked to education and livelihoods success; conversely, livelihoods programs such as AYP have successfully integrated reproductive health messaging into their training.

Youth demand programs in Liberia that are more youth-<u>driven</u>. Several youth urged the assessment team that programs must listen to young people and allow them the space to voice their ideas and implement their own solutions to community problems. One key informant agreed that there is a "lack of (youth) interest in projects or advocacy campaigns because youth are not consulted in the design phase…."[122] According to a youth leader, youth engagement means more than having a dedicated government-funded youth center: "The gap between youth and government is very wide, and (youth) do not have spaces where they can exercise leadership or innovation…. We need to graduate from traditional youth centers with prescribed programs based on county assessment needs. We need to invest in places where young people can develop their *own* ideas—led by young people, focused on what young people want to do."[123]

The assessment identified several practical ways that the GOL, donors, and implementers can increase the active engagement of youth:
- Youth-led grants that are designed and implemented by youth, for youth, through a flexible funding mechanism;
- Formation of youth-led youth clubs at the school level,
- National and county-level youth summits;
- Financial support to the youth clubs led by the Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- Expansion of youth-led community radio, internet, access to information, social media;

- Establishment of ICT centers that also serve as "youth innovation hubs." (See Figure 12)

FIGURE 10. YOUTH INNOVATION HUBS: A PROGRAM CONCEPT DEVELOPED BY YOUTH

In a focus group discussion with youth CBO leaders in Monrovia, participants emphasized the need for a "youth innovation hub" that would give youth the space to develop and receive support to implement their own ideas. The main concept of the hub is that it is a "free space for the free flow of ideas," and a place where youth can drive the creation and implementation of projects. According to one focus group discussion, the key features of the Youth Innovation Hub concept included:
- "Open": no boundary and no criteria set for participation;
- Inclusive: accepts every young person, and open 24/7 to accommodate all youth;
- Offers opportunities for training and coaching in youth's particular area of interest;
- Engages youth in the broader society: "things that draw us closer to the rest of the world."

Engage other adult stakeholders, such as parents (who are often youth themselves), teachers, nurses, and police, and CBOs, who all play important roles in the lives of youth. As noted throughout this report, adult interactions with youth—positive or negative—impact youth outcomes. A teacher's request for a bribe from a student can discourage her from staying in school; a parent reluctant to discuss family planning may perpetuate misconceptions about contraception that are held by the child; a nurse reprimanding a young patient may dissuade the youth from returning to the health facility. Conversely, a mechanic who mentors a young person in his auto garage creates a budding young entrepreneur; a relative who pays for a student's school fees puts the young person on course to achieving his/her goals. One key informant called for the "professionalization of youth workers," which would offer a training credential for youth workers in adolescent development, and possibly with courses extended to other public servants serving youth populations. Engagement of PTAs, faith-based institutions, and CBOs, and government Ministries is required for any youth interventions.

#7: BE INTENTIONAL WHILE TARGETING OF YOUTH SEGMENTS

Programs should pay greater attention to vulnerable youth segments, particularly in rural areas. As noted previously, youth who are at a relatively greater disadvantage are those living in rural areas, under the age of 25, out-of-school, affected by poverty, working in the informal sector, female with dependents, and/or living with a disability. Youth with these characteristics appear to be proportionally under-served by livelihoods programs.[124] Furthermore, the assessment team observed several youth-inclusive programs that carry an unintentional favoritism for youth with higher levels of assets, e.g. older youth, located in urban areas, male, with higher levels of education and access to networks and other personal connections. The assessment team concludes that new programs should be more intentional in reaching groups that are not currently targeted by existing GOL and donor investments, for example by setting a minimum target for reaching youth cohorts with certain characteristics of vulnerability, or by dedicating discrete activities to serve certain at-risk youth segments. Improving youth assessments, monitoring, and evaluation throughout project implementation also helps programs better understand whom they're reaching and what is working with different segments.

#8: ESTABLISH A BODY FOR COORDINATION

Although national policy is cited as being youth-inclusive, many key informants called for greater coordination around youth services. While Liberia has seen many successful models for youth development and youth livelihoods, many projects have been tested, implemented, and ultimately discontinued once the program periods end and donor interest wanes. The reality is that the financial and human capacity within the Government of Liberia is severely limited, and donors will likely have to bear a

large responsibility for financing youth programming for the foreseeable future. As the Minister of Youth and Sports stated, "Development partners have done well… there are lots of youth empowerment and employment programs. (But) all of these have a time limitation. There's an expectation that government will continue this, but that's not the case."[125]

The extent of Liberia's youth development problems, addressed by a limited number of uncoordinated projects (some un-sustained, others with greater levels of commitment), demands a greater level of leadership. It requires the coordination of different Ministries, donors, and implementing partners around a strategic set of investments. For example, according to one key informant, the TVET policy calls for a TVET Commission to coordinate training programs across the country, but this is not yet functioning. Given its limited financial resources to implement youth livelihoods projects, for example, the Ministry of Youth and Sports could consider elevating its role as policy-maker—particularly for policies that promote youth in the informal sector, particularly in rural areas and in the agriculture sector, as well as policies for out-of-school youth.

The team found a few bright spots related to coordination around youth activities. The three major donors of youth employment projects—Sida, the World Bank, and now the EU—appear to have established a well-coordinated set of activities, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The internal learning platform/ community of practice, led by the Sida/Mercy Corps Prospects project, offers project reports, lessons learned, and research around youth livelihoods in Liberia.[126] Another successful coordination model was found within the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, which leads an Adolescent Girls Working Group. Under this working group, the GOL, donors, and implementers have successfully coordinated around monitoring, program coordination, capacity building, and advocacy for adolescent girls projects. Among its achievements, this group has collectively developed a Girls Manifesto and a subsequent implementation strategy, a petition around amendments to the Rape Law, and has organized events such as the International Day of the Girl. A large part of this success is attributed to the efforts of the group's lead facilitator (a Ministry representative), as well as the commitment of its members to contribute resources to shared youth events and products.

With the many examples of successful youth livelihoods initiatives in Liberia, the country has moved past the stage of pilot-testing independent interventions. Now is the time to take advantage of the existing youth development resources, experiences, and lessons learned in a more strategic and sustained manner.

V.   ANNEXES

ANNEX A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE CROSS-SECTORAL YOUTH ASSESSMENT

Guiding Research Question:
1. What are the different youth (defined in Liberia as aged 15 - 35) cohorts in Liberia, broadly speaking, and how would they be characterized?
What are the defining structure and characteristics of youth cohorts in Liberia? What are the prevailing differences between male and female, urban and rural youth, by county, and by age cohorts?
Which youth are considered the most vulnerable and/or marginalized in Liberia?

Guiding Research Questions:
2. What are youth life goals and what are the factors that hinder them from achieving their goals? What are the youth's biggest concerns and challenges?
- What do youth express as their priorities and ambitions?
- How do the goals differ for urban vs. rural youth?
- What are the contextual risks that hinder or impede positive youth development? Contextual risks may include political, economic, social, security and environmental risks.
- What are their greatest frustrations? How are these ambitions and frustrations expressed? For those young people who may be dissatisfied, what are the sources of their frustrations?
- How do youth in Liberia define successful youth programming?

Secondary Research Questions: Demographics
- What do migration patterns look like among different youth? What drives youth from rural to urban areas? What incentives encourage youth to stay in rural areas?
- What percentage of youth has access to computers? Internet? Mobile phones? How do youth use the internet? How does this differ among male and female youth? How do innovation hubs and schools help extend ICT skills to youth?

a) *Secondary Research Question: Distinguishing the Most Vulnerable*
- Among the most vulnerable and marginalized youth populations in Liberia, how do their life goals and access to opportunities differ from others as well as what are their unique needs? (differentiated by gender, age, urban/rural, county, other marginalization)

Secondary Research Questions: Entrepreneurship and Employment
- What are relevant economic policies and how do they support/inhibit youth employment or job creation?
- What are the statistics on youth employment and unemployment in Liberia? What are the primary occupations of youth, and how does this vary by youth cohort and demographic?
- What are the aspirations of Liberian youth with regard to employment/self-employment/livelihoods disaggregated by age cohort, gender, and rural/urban location? What are the key opportunities and barriers to getting employed?
- What current skill sets do youth believe can help them earn income?
- What's hindering them from accessing skill development programs in their communities?
- What can be done to make employment in the agriculture (economic growth) sector a viable or desirable livelihood option for youth?
- What vocational, entrepreneurship, employability and life skills training institutions/programs exist in Liberia, and are these accessible to most youth? Are these institutions/programs adequate as viewed by the youth and are they responsive to labor market demands?
- What challenges do youth face when accessing, staying and completing vocational and entrepreneurship programs?
- What opportunities and barriers are faced by youth in accessing credit and building savings?

- To what extent are youth moving between rural and urban areas and/or migrating to other countries or regions to find employment?

Secondary Research Question: Exercising Citizenship
- How do youth engage civically and politically in Liberia?
- What barriers do youth experience in their civic engagement? How do these challenges differ by age, gender, disabilities, and/or other demographic information or marginalization?
- What informal or traditional structures exist at community level that involve youth in civic engagement activities?
- What opportunities are there for supporting leadership development of young people?
- What youth-led and/or youth-oriented networks exist in Liberia? What has allowed some networks to be effective and others not? What relationships and networks are or can advance youth engagement and participation?
- Where do the youth-led networks and initiatives get their support? Who give them and what type of support?
- Where do youth get their news from? What social media outlets do they use for civic/political engagement?

Guiding Research Questions:
3. What is working well to support youth in Liberia and enable them to actualize their civic and economic potential?
- What promising policies, structures, programs and partnerships currently exist that could be learned from, scaled up, and/or borrowed?
- What has worked in youth employment (micro, small, and medium enterprise development, increased farm productivity, agriculture service provision, etc.)? What types of interventions/sectors have the potential to improve youth work-related skills and human capital?
- What has worked in youth civic engagement with youth?
- What has worked well in health and youth?
- What has worked well in education and youth?
- What has worked in engaging youth in agriculture/food security?
- What models of USAID programming from contexts similar to Liberia might be useful to review to advance youth development in health, education, civic engagement, ag/food security, economic growth?

Secondary Research Questions: Institutional and Policy Infrastructure for Supporting Youth
- What other donors, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and CBOs have youth-centered activities in Liberia? What have been their experiences and accomplishments? What lessons learned and/or recommendations do they have for potential USG youth programming?
- What institutions, structures, programs and/or policies has the GOL set up to address youth issues in Liberia? How do these institutions or ministries collaborate to address youth issues?
- What is the capacity of Liberian institutions (e.g. schools, NGOs, CBOs, relevant government agencies) to support and engage youth and/or respond to their needs?
- What rules, laws and policies impede or support full engagement of youth civically and economically?

Guiding Research Question:
4. What do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for promoting private sector engagement in issues impacting youth? How can the interests and capacities of youth be better aligned with the interests the private sector?

Secondary Research Questions: Landscape of Liberian Private Sector and their Needs
- What are the growing sectors in Liberia that offer opportunities for youth employment and self-employment?
- What market gaps could potentially be filled by youth operating in the informal sector?
- What skills are in most demand by these sectors & by employers/lead firms, especially for entry-level youth?
- What partners/ programs could USAID work with in the area of youth employment/ entrepreneurship?
- What opportunities are there for youth to access apprenticeships/internships?

- What opportunities are there for youth to access finance (savings and/or credit) for youth entrepreneurship? What are the barriers youth face in accessing finance?
- How do youth and potential employers perceive the relevance of knowledge and skills provided through education opportunities?
- What are the barriers or challenges that employers have encountered in hiring youth?
- What is the rural youth perspective as it relates to agriculture as a pathway for income generation?

Guiding Research Question:
5. What do people perceive as specific strong opportunities for advancing self-reliance (and how do Liberian youth envision the concept of their role in building self-reliance)?

ANNEX B. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOLS

Intake Form

FGD INFORMATION		Date: ___/____/___ __
Name of Facilitator:		
Name of Recorder:		

County:	Community:	FGD # in this location: _____

FGD sex: ( ) Male ( ) Female	Age cohort:[12] ( ) Ages 18-24 ( ) Ages 25-35	Observations / comments:

Part I. Individual Intake Form
[Before the start of the focus group, complete the intake form below for each youth participating in the focus group. The intake form should be completed for each participant individually, in a private place out of the hearing range of others.]

Introduction to Part 1

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. My name is _____ and my colleagues' name(s) is/are _____. We are part of the YouthPower Learning Assessment team. Together, we are conducting n assessment on Liberian youth, to better understand the economic, social, and political aspirations and challenges young people like you have. You have been asked to participate in this study because your knowledge, views, and experience as youth are very valuable and important to us.

Our discussion today will take place in two parts. First, I am going to ask some questions to learn more about you. We will do this individually so that only I will hear your responses. Then, we will ask some questions about the lives of Liberian youth like you and particularly what aspirations and challenges young people like you have. We will do through a group discussion.

Whatever information you provide for us during our time together will be kept strictly confidential and will not be attributed specifically to you. We will not be recording your name or any other identifiable information at any time. We ask that you not share who took part in this discussion or what others have said in this room with anyone outside of this room. However, we cannot promise others will not share what you have said during the discussion. We ask that you respond to the questions based on how you think youth in general would respond. Please do not share personal experiences when you respond to the questions. Participation in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any individual question or all of the questions. You can also stop the discussion or leave the group or individual interviews at any time. However, we hope you will participate in this discussion since your views are important.

Will you join us today for this discussion? Please feel free to ask if you have any questions at any time, even before I start. *[Note any questions raised by participants and your responses in the comments section below.]*

We anticipate our time together will be up to 90 minutes long. Refreshments will be served at the end.

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[12] Only youth ages 18-35 will be eligible to participate in focus groups

Comments:

Demographic Information: We would now like to spend approximately 5 minutes collecting individual information from each of you. My colleague _____ and I will fill out an individual form for each of you that gives us a bit more detail about some of your basic background. *[Complete the form individually, in a private place out of the hearing range of others.]*

Sex: ( ) Female   ( ) Male   ( ) Other   **Age:** _____

County: _____   **Municipality:** _____

Marital status?
( ) Married
( ) Partnered (not married, co-habitating)
( ) Unmarried / Unpartnered

If Unmarried, or un-partnered, have you been married/partnered previously? ( ) Yes   ( ) No

Do you have children?
( ) Yes **If yes, how many:** *( ) 1   ( ) 2   ( ) 3   ( ) 4 or more*
( ) No

What formal educational level have you completed?
(Grade) _____

Are you currently enrolled in a formal education program:
( ) Enrolled   **If enrolled, please provide grade level**_____
( ) Not enrolled

Are you currently enrolled in a *non-formal* education program:
( ) Enrolled   **If enrolled, please describe program type** _____
( ) Not enrolled

What is your employment status:
( ) Formal employment **If formally employed, list type of employment** _____
( ) Informal employment **If *informally* employed, list type of employment** _____
( ) Not employed, Not looking for work
( ) Not employed, Looking for work
( ) Unable to work [please indicate reason why] _____

COMMENTS:

Protocol for Focus Group Discussions

FGD INFORMATION		Date: ___/____/_____
Name of Facilitator:		
Name of Recorder:		
County:	**Community:**	**FGD # in this location:** _____
FGD sex: ( ) Male ( ) Female	**Age cohort:**[13] ( ) Ages 18-24 ( ) Ages 25-35	**Number of FGD participants:**
COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS		

INTRODUCTION

Hi! Welcome, and thank you so much for agreeing to participate with us in this Focus group discussion! I am _____ and this is _____ and we are here on behalf of YouthPower Learning, a global USAID-funded program based in the United States that seeks to generate information about effective youth engagement. USAID has asked us to conduct an assessment in Liberia to identify challenges and potential opportunities for effectively engaging youth in Liberia. We're excited to be here with you!

As mentioned earlier, during this Focus Group Discussion, we would like to talk with you about the lives of Liberian youth like you, with particular focus on what aspirations young people have and what challenges you face. We would like this be a *conversation* between us here in the room. As such, in this process, there are **no right or wrong answers**, only differing points of view. You don't need to agree with others, but we would request that everyone listen respectfully as others share their views. In that spirit we would ask that you speak one-at-a-time. We look forward to this being a lively and energetic conversation where everyone feels safe and comfortable speaking. Remember, participation is voluntary, and you can choose to leave the group at any time. However, we hope you will participate since your views are important. And we also think it will be fun and informative for all of you!

My role will be to facilitate the discussion. You will notice that my colleague, _____, will be taking notes. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we want to make sure we don't miss any of the important insights you will provide for us! So you'll probably see [recorder's name] furiously writing! As mentioned, we will not record your names. Instead, we will use the information you provide us to generate a report and recommendations for USAID regarding potential future strategic investments to better support youth in Liberia.

Remember, in keeping with our commitment to the confidentiality of all participants, we ask that you not share with people outside of this group EITHER who took part in this discussion OR what they have said during the course of our discussion

Do you have any questions for us before we start? *[Record both questions raised by participants as well as responses]*

Okay, let's get started!

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[13] Only youth ages 18-35 will be eligible to participate in focus groups

FGD QUESTIONS

Note: Due to limits of time and attention spans, most FGDs are able to cover only a few questions at a time—usually no more than five questions within a 90-minute period. As such, each FGD is expected to cover only a select number of questions listed here, usually focusing on a specific topic within each FGD.

1. Because this conversation is confidential, we are not going to be using any names today. Instead, you will be given a number. Here is a koosh ball, and we will pass this ball around in a circle and count upward: as you get the koosh ball, you will call out the next number from the person before you. That will be your number for this conversation. Only the person with the koosh ball is allowed to speak. Each time you wish to speak, ask your friend to toss you the ball, and when you get the ball, you call out your number.

[Work with youth facilitators to determine the most appropriate way to address introductions]

2.a. I'd like to start by talking about the goals and dreams of people like you in your community. Thinking about the people your age that you know in *[COMMUNITY NAME]*, what are some of the dreams and goals they have for the future?

Probes:
- *What do some of the people your age that you know seek to achieve or become in the future? (university studies, office jobs, jobs as farmers, etc.)*
- *What are some of your own goals and ambitions? These can be related to education, work, family or anything else you like. (They're your goals so they can be anything you like!)*
- *Do you feel like these goals are achievable? Why/why not?*

2.b. ALTERNATIVE OPENING QUESTION: **So we are not from this community and we'd like to understand what it's like to be a typical young person in your community. What do they do during the day? Describe a typical day for an average young person in your community. What do youth like to spend their time doing for the day?**

3. Now I'm going to lay out some note cards with some words on each of them. These are things that are important to a person's well-being. We will be asking you to reflect on which top two things are the most important priorities for youth like you in your community.

- **Improved health**
- **Stronger connections with family/ friends**
- **Increased safety/ security**
- **More active participation and decision-making in the community**
- **Improved spiritual life**
- **Increased education (academic or vocational)** *(FACILITATOR SHOULD PROBE)*
- **Better livelihoods/ business opportunities/ jobs**
- **Other** *(Blank card, facilitator to PROBE)*

I am now going to give you 2 buttons for you to indicate which ones are the most important. Among these things, which are the top two prioirities for youth in your community. Which two things that would most improve the quality of life for youth in your community? *[FACILITATOR prepares cards by writing several themes on pieces of paper, with each topic listed on a separate piece of paper (see below bullets). Facilitator then lays each piece of paper on the table or ground. Facilitator provides each member 2 buttons (or stones/marbles). Youth participants are asked to place their 2 buttons each on top of their top 2 priorities. Facilitator asks youth about their responses.]*

4. What opportunities exist here in *[COMMUNITY NAME]* that support people your age to reach their goals/ improve the quality of their lives? *[THIS QUESTION WILL ALSO ADDRESS CHALLENGES. Try to fully engage around one topic before moving on to the next]*

Probes:
- *What social activities are available in your community (religious, sports, theater, dance, music, etc.)?*
- *Are you aware of any vocational / entrepreneurship education programs in [COMMUNITY NAME]? If so, which ones? Who sponsors those programs (government, CBOs, NGOS)? What are the key barriers to accessing those opportunities? If you think about what*

you have heard about those programs, how successful have they been in linking people to employment? Do the people you know who have participated in those activities had success finding employment?

- Are you aware of any programs that friends your age have participated in that have helped them secure employment (on/off-farm, local businesses, etc.)? Which ones? Who sponsors those programs (government, CBOs, NGOS)? What have you heard about those activities?
- *What kinds of health services are available to youth? Do you know young people who have used these services?*
- *Which services and opportunities would be most useful for you? Why?*

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5. Can you think of any other challenges or barriers that keep people you age from achieving their goals?

Probes:
- *Is crime a challenge in [COMMUNITY NAME]? What are the most common kinds of crimes here in [COMMUNITY NAME]? What are the key causes?*
- *To what extent are youth moving between rural and urban areas and/or migrating to other countries or regions to find employment? How does this affect [COMMUNITY NAME]?*
- *How do the views of parents, community leaders, employers or business people affect youth's ability to achieve their goals?*

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6. Suppose that you were in charge and could make changes to help young people like you achieve their goals and ambitions. What would you do?

Probes:
- *What do you think could be done to improve job opportunities / vocational training / agriculture and food systems programs / links to private businesses, etc.?*
- *Thinking about the programs you have seen, which ones do you think should be replicated or expanded and why?*

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7. We have talked about many topics related to the goals, ambitions and available opportunities for people your age. We'd like to discuss the participation of people your age in the community.

Thinking about the people you know, in general how actively do the young people you know participate in community activities and leadership opportunities?
Probes:
- *What kinds of social activities do you or other young people in your community enjoy? (prompt: sports, dance, music, arts, clubs, religious events, community events, or other recreation.)*
- *What informal or traditional structures exist at community level that involve youth in civic engagement activities?*
- *What challenges do youth experience in their civic engagement? What are the key barriers to youth participation?*
- *How do older people's attitudes about people your age affect participation?*
- *Now I would like to ask you some questions about "leadership." In your opinion, what does it mean for a young person to demonstrate "leadership"? What does it look like?*
- *How actively do youth participate in decision-making bodies, such as water boards, community development committees, or other groups that influence local decision? Why/why not?*
- *Do you know any young people in your community who are involved in politics? (FACILITATOR PROMPT: "politics" could mean: advocacy for local, regional, or national issues, involvement on local forums on public policy issues, attending political rallies or political party events and activities, involvement in electoral campaigns, and voting in elections. (PROMPT: If no, why not? Do you know of any girls or young women who are involved in politics?)*
- *What kinds of civic activities would you be interested in doing more? What would encourage you to become more active in your community?*
- *How do young people in your community share and obtain information about what's going on in the community?*

8. Okay, most of you have talked about the importance of going to school, and/or earning a livelihood. I am also interested to know how young people spend any of their free time. We are going to do a little exercise, or game. I would like to first ask you a question, and would like for you to reflect on this question. I don't want you to answer right away, but to think about this question: **When youth are not in school or not trying to earn cash, how do young people in your community spend their time?** (Pause). **Okay, now we're going to do this game.**

(Facilitator lays out index cards on the floor/ table. Each index card is labeled with a word or term. Facilitator hands out 2 buttons to each participant.)

I have laid out these index cards, and on them are certain words or phrases. I have also given you two buttons, and I would like you to answer the question by ranking your top two choices:

(Facilitator repeats the question) **When youth are not in school or not trying to earn cash, how do young people in your community spend their time?**

Ranking Index Cards will have the following terms – one term per card:
- At home
- Youth clubs/ youth group activities
- On-campus activities
- Church/ Mosque/ other religious place
- Social Media/ texting/ calling
- Café, computer center, video club
- Nowhere special/ in street
- Volunteering/ Community service/ Advocacy
- (BLANK CARD)

Probes:
What do you do there?
Who are you with?
How often do you go there?
How satisfied or happy are you being there?
Are there adults there to offer guidance?
Are these places mostly for males or females? Safety/ security?

(Facilitator explains what each card means. For the blank card, participants are allowed to put a button there, in case their response is not indicated in the other cards. After everyone has placed their buttons on the index card, Facilitator then counts out loud the number of buttons on each card. Facilitator identifies the top-ranking card (the one with them most buttons) and asks respondents to talk about that topic, why they chose it, describe what they were thinking about. After talking about the top-ranking items, facilitator can choose to probe on any of the other topics, as desired. Facilitator can also ask participants if anyone has a burning urge to talk about one of these topics. Facilitator can probe about the frequency of these activities, quality of these activities, satisfaction with these activities, barriers, who benefits from these activities and who doesn't, etc.)

8. Thinking about youth in your community, describe the young people who have been most successful at obtaining employment, starting a business, or earning an income.

- What has allowed these youth to be successful in earning a livelihood? (Probe: mentors/family/friends, personal skills, education & training programs, etc.)
- What sectors or occupations are youth most interested to engage in? Why?
- What sectors are least attractive to youth? Why?
- What opportunities exist for youth in the agriculture and food systems sectors? What is the level of interest in participating in agriculture among the people your age that you know? High interest, neutral or little interest? [Ask them to use the faces to rate interest]
- What are the key barriers to earning an income?
- Do youth in your community save money? Tell me more about the savings habits of young people you know.
- Do youth in your community take out loans? Tell me more about how youth are able to access credit. Are there any barriers to accessing credit in [COMMUNITY NAME]?

9.a. *[Questions for youth entrepreneurs]* **So all of you are earning a good living. This is not easy to do. How did you make it? How did you get to where you are today? What factors have contributed to your success?**

9.b. Thinking about the future of your business or job, what dreams to you have for your future, and how do you plan to get there? *(Note: If participants end up talking about barriers, try to re-direct to goals and plans. Try to keep the discussion on barriers short, as we will be focusing on that in the next question.)*

9.c. Okay, we've talked about our business plans/ dreams. I would also like to know about some of the struggles

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you've encountered as a business person, or the things that holding you back from achieving your dreams. We are going to do a little exercise, or game. I would like to first ask you a question, and would like for you to reflect on this question. I don't want you to answer right away, but to think about this question: What have been the top barriers to success for you as a business person? *(Pause).* **Okay, now we're going to do this game.**
(Facilitator lays out index cards on the floor/ table. Each index card is labeled with a word or term. Facilitator hands out 2 buttons to each participant.)
I have laid out these index cards, on them are certain words or phrases. I have also given you two buttons, and I would like you to answer the question by ranking your top two choices:
What have been the top barriers to success for you as a business person?

Ranking Index Cards will have the following terms – one term per card:
- Skills/ Education
- Money/ Assets (materials, tools, equipment)
- Family/ Friends
- Government/ Policy
- Health
- Security
- Infrastructure
- (BLANK card)

(Facilitator explains what each card means. For the blank card, participants are allowed to put a button there, in case their response is not indicated in the other cards. After everyone has placed their buttons on the index card, Facilitator then counts out loud the number of buttons on each card. Facilitator identifies the top-ranking card (the one with them most buttons) and asks respondents to talk about that topic, why they chose it, describe what they were thinking about. After talking about the top-ranking items, facilitator can choose to probe on any of the other topics, as desired. Facilitator can also ask participants if anyone has a burning urge to talk about one of these topics.)

11. Now I'd like to ask about the health and well-being of youth in your community. Tell me about how youth in your community stay healthy.

Probes:

- Teenage pregnancy
- Food security
- Physical fitness
- Physical safety
- Mental wellness, counseling services – whom do youth go to for help
- Substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, other)
- Access to youth-friendly health services
- Access to youth-friendly reproductive health services
- Attitudes toward contraception
- Access to health information (internet, friends, family, school, clinic, other

12. Wrap-up: As I mentioned earlier in our discussion, in our study we are trying to understand the situation of young people like you living in Liberia today. Of all the things we discussed today, what do you think is the most important thing for us to understand? *[Recorder to highlight the key issues raised]*

Have we missed anything? Is there anything else we need to know about what it's like to be a young person living in Liberia today? *[If they add anything else, probe for rationale and other relevant information as youth share their thoughts with the group.]*

As we finish our discussion, do you have any questions for our team? *[Recorder to capture questions and answers]*

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for your thoughts and insights today. We really appreciate your time and energy!

ANNEX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

KII INFORMATION	Date: ____/_____/_____
Name of Facilitator:	
Name of Recorder:	
County:	Municipality:
Name of Respondent:	Institution

INTRODUCTION

Hi! Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with us. I am *[NAME]* and this is *[RECORDER'S NAME]* and we are here on behalf of Making Cents International, the implementer of USAID's global YouthPower Learning project, a global activity based in Washington DC that seeks to achieve sustainable outcomes in health, education, and political and economic empowerment for youth. The project seeks to empower youth to contribute to, and benefit from, the creation of more peaceful and prosperous communities. USAID has asked us to conduct an assessment in Liberia to better understand the status and aspirations of Liberian youth, ages 15-35 and living in Montserrado, Lofa, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, and Margibi counties, in their journey from adolescence to adulthood. During our time together, I'm going to ask you a series of questions related to: youth goals and aspirations, opportunities for youth engagement, the priorities, policies and programs of your office/organization, as well your recommendations about how to improve youth engagement programming. My role will be to lead the interview. You will notice that my colleague, *[RECORDER'S NAME]* will be taking notes to record the interview. We will use the information you provide us to generate a report and recommendations for USAID regarding potential future strategic investments to better support youth in Liberia. Do you have any questions for us before we start? *[Record both questions raised by participants as well as responses]* If not, then let's get started.

[Note: Interviewer should always carry a blank USB thumb drive, in case key informants would like to share relevant electronic reports, documents, or other secondary data.]

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

When you think about "youth" in Liberia, how would you describe a young person in Liberia? Broadly speaking, what are the different youth cohorts/ youth segments in Liberia, and how would they be characterized?
What are the defining structure and characteristics of youth cohorts in Liberia? What are the prevailing differences between male and female, urban and rural, youth and age cohorts?

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1. What are the key challenges for youth development in Liberia? What are the key challenges that youth in Liberia face?
Probes:
- *How do youth think their education has prepared them for the decisions and challenges they face in their lives, or not?*
- *What do they identify as barriers to completing education? (by gender)*
- *What opportunities and resilience factors positively influence youth access to safe, quality education?*
- *What opportunities and resilience factors positively influence young people's ability to persist in and complete a minimum basic education?*
- *How, and has, education prepared youth to earn income and meet life priorities?*
- *What are the main causes of drop-out? Grade repetition? (by gender)*
- *What can schools do to better prepare youth for work opportunities?*
- *After completing secondary school, would youth rather go to university of TVET? Why?*
- *What are the aspirations of Liberian youth with regard to employment/self-employment/livelihoods disaggregated by age cohort, gender, and rural/urban location? What are the key opportunities and barriers to getting employed?*
- *What current skill sets do youth believe can help them earn income?*
- *What's hindering them from accessing skill development programs in their communities?*
- *What can be done to make employment in the agriculture (economic growth) sector a viable or desirable livelihood option for youth?*
- *What vocational, entrepreneurship, employability and life skills training institutions/programs exist in Liberia, and are these accessible to most youth? Are these institutions/programs adequate as viewed by the youth and are they responsive to labor market demands?*
- *What challenges do youth face when accessing, staying and completing vocational and entrepreneurship programs?*
- *What opportunities and barriers are faced by youth in accessing credit and building savings?*
- *To what extent are youth moving between rural and urban areas and/or migrating to other countries or regions to find employment?*
- *How do youth use the internet? How does this differ among male and female youth? How do innovation hubs and schools help extend ICT skills to youth?*
- *What drives youth from rural to urban areas? What incentives would make youth stay in rural areas?*

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2. Can you tell us a little bit about [ORGANIZATION NAME'S] priorities/strategies/programs as they relate to youth aged 18-35 in Liberia?

Probes:
- *Describe the programming conducted by your office targeting young people, ages 18-35? names of programs offered; locations where they're implemented [In the case of USAID and other donors, ask the names of implementing partners; Obtain youth program descriptions, program summaries, reports, evaluations, website links, etc. Be sure to drive how the point about why the age groups]*
- *Probe to see if the office's programming for youth covers any of the following themes: civic engagement, community service, entrepreneurship, financial services, life and employability skills, vocational/technical skills, youth leadership*
- *What are the characteristics of the young people, ages 18-35, who are targeted by your office's programming?*

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3. How you rate young people's civic engagement opportunities?

Probes:
- *How do youth engage civically and politically in Liberia?*
- *What barriers do youth experience in their civic engagement? How do these challenges differ by age, gender, disabilities, and/or other demographic information or marginalization?*
- *What informal or traditional structures exist at community level that involve youth in civic engagement activities?*
- *What opportunities are there for supporting leadership development of young people?*
- *What youth-led and/or youth-oriented networks exist in Liberia? What has allowed some networks to be effective and others not? What relationships and networks are or can advance youth engagement and participation?*

- *Where does the youth led networks and initiatives get their support? Who give them and what type of support?*
- *Where do youth get their news from? What social media outlets do they use for civic/political engagement?*

4. What currently works well to support youth in Liberia?

Probes:
- *What policies, programs and partnerships have you observed in your own work that you would consider effective? Why did you choose those programs? Please provide examples?*
- *What activities have you seen that you think offer strong opportunities for learning? [request copies of reports, evaluations, or other evidence]*
- *What are the youth-centered activities of other donors, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Liberia? What have they done well? What do you think they could change?*
- *Which programs/strategies/approaches do you think should be scaled up or replicated? In particular, what has worked with regard to engaging the private sector? Supporting youth to develop self-reliance?*

5. Where are their opportunities for aligning private sector interests with the interests and capacities of youth?
- What are the growing sectors in Liberia that offer opportunities for youth employment and self-employment?
- What market gaps could potentially be filled by youth operating in the informal sector?
- What skills are in most demand by these sectors, and by employers/lead firms more broadly, especially for entry-level youth?
- What partners and/or programs could USAID work with in the area of youth employment/ entrepreneurship?
- What opportunities are there for youth to access apprenticeships/internships?
- What opportunities are there for youth to access finance (savings and/or credit) for youth entrepreneurship? What are the barriers youth face in accessing finance?
- How do youth and potential employers perceive the relevance of knowledge and skills provided through education opportunities?
- What are the barriers or challenges that employers have encountered in hiring youth.
- What is the rural youth perspective as it relates to agriculture as a pathway for income generation?

6. What recommendations would you provide for decision-makers (GOL, donors, your own organization) to increase youth engagement in productive, remunerative, and leadership activities? Please provide a rationale for each recommendation you may make.

Probes:
- *What specific priority areas and programs should be the strategic focus of future support for youth in Liberia?*
- *How can institutions across sectors be engaged to support increased impact?*
- *What areas for partnership offer the most potential benefit for engaging youth, (e.g., partnerships with other USG agencies, the private sector, NGOs, universities, faith-based organizations)?*
- *Are there currently mechanisms to support coordination between agencies? Which ones? Do they work effectively? What could be changed to make them better?*

7. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me before we end this interview? Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for taking time to talk with me today and sharing your insights!

Note: Interviewer can take any remaining time at the end of the interview to copy relevant reports onto the USB thumb drive.

ANNEX D. LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Name	Title	Institution	Location
Jacqueline A. Sayre	Head of Human Resources	Access Bank Liberia Limited	Monrovia; E-mail
Glenn A. Lines	Chief of Party	ACDI-VOCA	Monrovia; E-mail
Johnny K. M. Ndebe	National Dispute Resolution Manager	The Carter Center	Monrovia; E-mail
Samuel Sackie	Title note available	CENTAL	Monrovia
Victor Ngorbu	Senior Agribusiness & Private Sector Advisor	CNFA	Monrovia
Julius Y. Saye Keh-nel	Montserrado County Coordinator	CNFA	Monrovia
Father Raphael	Parish Priest	Don Bosco Youth Center	Sinkor, Monrovia
Denise Clarke	Country Director	Education Development Center (EDC)	Monrovia; E-mail
Elisabeth Harleman	Counsellor, Head of Development Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden	Monrovia
Prutus M. Sackie	National Program Officer	Embassy of Sweden	Monrovia
Goto M. Cooper	Founder/Executive Director	Educate the Future (ETF)	Monrovia
Laura Virgili	International Cooperation and Development	European Union	Monrovia
Lorpu Scott	Project Officer	European Union	Monrovia
Eilijah Lewis	Agriculture Coordinator	Grand Bassa Youth Caucus	Buchanan
Francis Fallah	Project Officer	Green Coast Agriculture, Grand Bassa	Cotton Town
Joseph	Assistant Coorinator	Group of 77	Todee
Janjay Cole	Director and Actor	Inter-visionary Artists	Ganta
Yvonne Kodl	Deputy Director for Programs	International Rescue Committee	Monrovia; E-mail
Jan McArthur	Chief of Party	InterNews (LMD)	Monrovia; E-mail
Joe Roosevelt	Owner, Entrepreneur	Joe's Business Center, Buchanan	Buchanan
Nyumor Bondi, Jr.	Title not available	Kaizen Company	Monrovia
Liz Heller	Learning Links Program Manager	Kaizen Company	E-mail
Anita Sokolubali-Marshall	Productive Public Works Officer	Liberian Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE)	Monrovia
Richard Duo, Jr.	President	LAFASA	Monrovia
Keheh Beyan-Paulymah	Program Coordinator	Last Mile Health	Monrovia; E-mail
Moses Manston	Chairman	Liberia Business Association - Bong County Branch	Gbarnga
Moses R. P. Johnwaye	President	Liberia Business Association - Lofa County Branch	Voinjama
Eddie Gibson	President	Liberia Motorcycle Union, Grand Bassa	Buchanan
Victor D. Joe	Operations	Liberia Motorcycle Union, Grand Bassa	Buchanan
Christopher Yarwoe	Station Manager	Magic Heaven FM, Grand Bassa	Buchanan

Nyema Richards	Program Manager, PROSPECTS	Mercy Corps	Monrovia
Wah Ajavon	Employment and Entrepreneurship Services Manager	Mercy Corps	Monrovia
Hawa Dunor-Varney	Director, Adolescent Girls Division	Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection	Monrovia
Hon. Zeogar Wilson	Minister	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Monrovia
Jallah T. Sekpeh	Grand Bassa County Coordinator	Ministry of Youth and Sports, Grand Bassa County	Buchanan
Lansana Tarawally	Chairman	Motorcyclists Union, Foya	Foya
Salawala Mason	President	National Network of PTA/ Regional PTA	Center Street, Monrovia
Thomas Du	Senior Program Officer	National Democratic Institute (NDI)	Monrovia
Moses Sammie	Unit Manager	Nimba Rural Community Finance Institution	Sanniquellie
Mathias Jackson	Director, Business Development	Plan International	E-mail
Rena T. Flomo	Executive Secretary	Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia (PPAL)	Monrovia
Hh K. Zaizay	Executive Director	President's Youth Professional Program (PYPP)	Monrovia
Urias W. Brooks, Jr.	Head of Programs	Youth Movement for Collective Action (UMOVEMENT)	Monrovia; E-mail
Siemon L. Wee	Advocacy/Communication Officer	UMOVEMENT	Monrovia
A. B. Towaye	National Program Officer	UNESCO	Monrovia
Comfort Dumbar Kollie	Program Assistant for Adolescent Reproductive Health	UNFPA	Monrovia
Michael Weah	Program Associate	UNFPA	Monrovia
Josephine Wachekwa	Program Assistant Maryland County	UNFPA	Monrovia
Maybe Livingstone	National Program Officer for Adolescents and Youth	UNFPA	Monrovia
Michael McCabe	Agency Youth Coordinator	USAID	Telephone
Malcom Phelps	Director, Education Office	USAID	Monrovia
Mardea Nyumah	Education Specialist/ Youth Focal Point	USAID	Monrovia
Aliou Tall	Deputy Team Leader	USAID	Monrovia
Ollie White	Education Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
Miriam White	Education Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
Anthony Davis	Education Office Assistant	USAID	Monrovia
Wambui Gathenya	Education Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
Ara Chea	Education Program Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
April O'Neil	DG Deputy Team Lead	USAID	Monrovia
Emily Kurnic	DG Team Lead	USAID	Monrovia
Kolana Choko Sano	Youth POC for DG Team	USAID	Monrovia
Louise Fahnbulleh	Democracy and Governance Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
John Gorlorwulu	Director, Economic Growth Office	USAID	Monrovia
Rasheena Reid	EG Deputy Team Lead	USAID	Monrovia

Maurice Ogutu	Agriculture Development Officer	USAID	Monrovia
David Kalper	Economist	USAID	Monrovia
Yoel Kirschner	Climate Integration Lead	USAID	Monrovia
Alexis Roiter	Program Officer	USAID	Monrovia
Laurie Rushton	Health Population Officer	USAID	Monrovia
Selim Ariturk	Public Affairs Officer	USAID	Monrovia
Laurie O'Neill	Monitoring, Evaluation and Program Coordinator	USAID	Monrovia
Pamela Bernard-Sawyer	Family Planning and Reproductive Health Specialist	USAID	Monrovia
Oni Lusk-Stover	Senior Education Specialist, Liberia Education Co-Team Leader	World Bank Group	Telephone
Kaliope Azzi-Huck	Senior Education Specialist, Liberia Education Co-Team Leader	World Bank Group	Telephone
Mack Capehart Mulbah	Social Protection Specialist	World Bank Group	Monrovia
Victoria Strokova	Senior Economist	World Bank Group	Monrovia
Mai Urey	Chief Executive Officer	Wulki Farms	Monrovia
Beyan F. Pewee	Head of Programmes	Youth Coalition for Education in Liberia (YOCEL)	Monrovia
Varmah V. Kamara	Journalist, Youth Activist	Youth Coalition for Education in Liberia (YOCEL)	Monrovia
Matthew S. Karley II	Senior Program Manager	Youth Coalition for Education in Liberia (YOCEL)	E-mail

ANNEX E. SELECT EXAMPLES OF YOUTH-LED AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS IN LIBERIA

TABLE 7. LIBERIAN ORGANIZATIONS LED BY AND/OR SERVING YOUTH

Name	Description/ Examples of Activities
Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL)	A Liberian NGO that acts as the local chapter of Transparency International, CENTAL fights corruption by building a culture of integrity among all people and institutions in the country.
Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE)	An association of 5 organizations (CENTAL, LETCOM, LICPA, LEJA, FLY) dedicated to advocacy for the education sector in Liberia.
Educate the Future (ETF)	Dedicated to developing the next-generation leaders by means of educational empowerment, vocational training, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and advocacy. Current program focuses on tutorial program for senior high school students to pass the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE).
Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY)	A quasi-governmental umbrella organization, created by an act of legislation, in charge of coordinating the efforts of young people in Liberia. Projects are geared towards environmental awareness, information technology, HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual and reproductive health rights, gender and social development, youth leadership, vocational education and youth networks.
Green Coast Agriculture	A local NGO based in Kakata, operating in Margibi that aims to move youth from subsistence farming to farming as a business. The NGO offers training, technical assistance, and grant support to farmers to introduce new production and processing technologies, and also partners with agri-businesses to train and employ youth in wage-based agricultural employment.
Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment	Improves the living standards of poor communities through the provision and strengthening of basic social services and promotes a community-based approach in sub-project identification, preparation, implementation, administration and maintenance. It is the implementer of the Youth Opportunities Project.
Liberian Amputee Football and Sports Association (LAFASA)	Affiliated with the World Amputee Football Federation (WAF) & Amputee Football Federation of Africa (AFFA), this sports association is dedicated to offering opportunities for athletes with disability. It also representing and providing services to youth amputees.
Liberia Motorcycle Transport Union	One of the three unions of Phen-Phen drivers that are registered in Liberia. LMTU is the largest, with about 40,000 members across several counties. The unions offer members loans of motorcycles with favorable conditions, as well as advocacy for and other support to motorcycle drivers.
Liberian National Students Union (LINSU)	A quasi-governmental umbrella organization for all youth organizations in the country, created by an act of legislation
Liberian Youth Network (LIYONET)	A non-governmental, nonpolitical and nonprofit organization committed to promoting children and youth in sustainable development and good leadership.
Magic Heaven FM	One of the many youth-led community radio stations in the country, Magic Heaven FM is Grand Bassa county's radio station, serving a listenership of 85,000 people.
Mano River Union Youth Parliament	A national body of 30 parliamentarians. Two Parliamentarians are elected in competitive races from each of the 15 counties, to serve for a two-year tenure.

National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE)	A political-action youth-led group that promotes citizens' understanding of democratic processes and the long-term benefits of their participation in these processes.
Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia (PPAL)	As Africa's longest established family planning organization, PPAL provides family planning; information, education and communication around SRH; and services related to the prevention and management of HIV and AIDS including voluntary counselling and testing. FPAL operates 92 service points, including 8 static clinics and 2 youth centers. It has a permanent staff of 26, and fieldwork is carried out by 42 community-based distributors (CBDs) and 134 peer educators.
President's Young Professionals Program (PYPP)	A youth capacity building program launched in 2009 with a vision to build the next generation of Liberia's civil service leaders. PYPP recruits, trains and mentors high achieving college graduates who are then placed in government ministries and agencies for a 2-year period.
Youth Media Action (YMA)	A youth-based organization that works with students and high school press clubs in Liberia.
YMCA	One of the longest youth-serving organizations in Liberia, and with 8 branches in 6 counties, YMCA works for the growth and development of youth and communities, empowering them for social transformation. YMCA works across multiple sectors: governance, employment, healthy living, and education.
Youth Coalition For Education Liberia (YOCEL)	Empowers young people and facilitate the systematic inclusion of youth in education decision making.
Youth Movement for Collective Action (UMOVEMENT)	Primarily works in the education sector: early grade reading, teacher training, monitoring and evaluation, preventing violence in learning institutions,
Youth Network for Reform (YONER-LIBERIA),	Youth Advocacy organization (NGO) that offers a blend of programmes and services for children and young people.
Young Ambassadors for Peace	A peace advocacy youth group with branches in several counties.

TABLE 8. EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES IN LIBERIA

Organization/ Program Title	General Description	Application of Positive Youth Development Features
Advancing Youth Program (USAID, Education Development Center)	Increased equitable access to quality alternative primary education services, social and leadership development, and livelihoods for 22,000 out-of-school youth with limited or no literacy skills.	Incorporated a cross-sectoral approach that included accelerated basic education, soft skills development, work readiness training and entrepreneurship, village and lending associations, and health education through peers and community health workers.
BRAC	Operating multi-sectoral programs including microfinance, education and child development, girls' empowerment, and health, & agricultural development.	BRAC operates a network of clubs for adolescent girls, called Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), offering them mentorship, life skills training and microfinance. Financial services are tailored to different age cohorts: For younger girls, the emphasis is on social skills development and creating a savings mentality, but by their mid-teens there is a demand for livelihood training, financial literacy and sometimes micro-loans.
International Rescue Committee	Implements two programs that address gender-based violence among women and girls in Montserrado.	Provides life skills trainings and peer mentorship to build girls' social networks and reduce vulnerability to gender-based violence. Also engages boys in accountable practice and behavior change.
Learning Links (USAID, Kaizen Company)	Increasing the literacy and numeracy skills of 2,500 girls, ages 15-19 who live in target communities of Bong County and who have dropped out of formal school due to pregnancy.	Uses a peer education model, training 260 literate and numerate women to connect with pregnant girls and serve as tutor-mentors for the Liberian Ministry of Education's (MOE) Alternative Basic Education (ABE) curriculum.
Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative (LAVI)	Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnership to advocate for and monitor policy and accountability reforms.	The shared iCampus learning space offers youth an outlet for learning and advocacy.
Liberia Media Development (USAID, InterNews)	Increasing Liberian citizens' access to independent and reliable information and empowerment through a sustainable, quality, more pluralistic and freer media.	One of the five program objectives is to achieve a "plurality of voices" in media, which translates to addressing gender, youth, and rural issues. Toward this end, LMD provides media training to young citizen journalists (including basic computer literacy training) and high school press clubs. A special skills training and mentoring program is available for young female journalists. Moreover, many of the 21 community radio stations in 15 counties are led by youth (students and volunteers) to run their outlets. A handful of youth-serving and youth-led organizations are sub-partners on this project.
President's Young Professional Program (PYPP)	Two-year fellowship program for young Liberian professionals to assume positions in Liberia's Civil Service.	Interventions incorporate mentorship (healthy relationships and bonding); alumni engagement (belonging and membership); and immersion excursion and continuous responsive training (skills building).
Support for International Family Planning Organizations 2 (USAID, Planned Parenthood Association of Liberia)	Provided family planning services for unmarried young people ages 15-24.	Interventions "met youth where they were at": mobile outreach, university campuses, integration with immunization services. Youth-focused materials emphasized the link between 'living your dreams' (education and livelihoods) with sexual health and voluntary use of family planning. Family and community members (teachers, health workers, community leaders) were important stakeholders.
Waves for Change	Provides safe spaces, caring mentors, 'surf therapy' sessions, and child-friendly mental health services to at-risk youth.	In addition to its holistic youth approach (safe spaces, mentoring, counseling), this organization engages youth in program design/ implementation by training them to conduct participatory youth research.[127]

Youth and Child Friendly City Project (Plan International)	Fights urban child poverty and exclusion by contributing to the development of child and youth friendly cities.	Empowers youth to conduct social audits, prepare the findings, and hold local government accountable for improving communities.

ANNEX F. OTHER GRAPHS AND CHARTS

Table 9 illustrates the responses by Liberian youth, when asked to conduct a ranking exercise of the top two priorities, by sector.[14] Education, most often defined as vocational education or learning a trade, came in at a strong first place.

TABLE 9. RESULTS FROM YOUTH PRIORITY RANKING EXERCISE

Youth Ranking Exercise: What top two priorities do youth have for your community? What top two things would make a difference in improving the circumstances for youth in your community?

	Monrovia Urban Male Street Youth (18-19)	Street Youth Urban Female Monrovia (18-19)	Univ. Students Urban Female Monrovia (18-24)	Todee Rural Male (18-24)	Todee Rural Female (25-35)	Gorblee Rural Female (18-24)	Gorblee Rural Male (25-35)	Buchanan Urban Female (25-35)	Buchanan Urban Male (18-24)	Kakata Urban Female (18-24)	Voinjama Urban Male (25-35)	Gbarnga Urban Female (18-24)	Ganta Rural Male (25-35)	Sanni-quellie Urban Female (25-35)	Ganta Rural Female (18-24)	Total
Education	6	6	4	8	7	7	7	8	7	8	9	7	10	10	10	114
Health	1	2	3	8	2	3	2	4	2	2	5	5	2	7	0	48
Livelihoods	5	2	4	2	3	3	0	1	1	5	3	5	3	3	4	44
Security	3	2	3	1	0	2	3	4	4	4	1	n/a	2	0	2	31
Connections Family/ Friends	4	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	15
Youth Participation	0	2	0	1	3	0	1	3	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	16
Other (Blank)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Note: not all youth focus groups conducted a ranking exercise.

Although livelihoods nearly tied with health in second place in the rankings exercise, it should be noted that statements about livelihoods appeared throughout the duration of the conversations. Moreover, the concept of livelihoods was often interchanged with education, and completing a vocational education was often equated with having a job. Youth also often noted health and security as important sectors, usually in the latter parts of the focus group discussions, or during the rankings exercise.

Looking at these rankings by youth segment, Table 10 illustrates how different youth cohorts responded, as compared to the average rankings:
*   Livelihoods appeared to have more importance for younger youth, for females, and in urban areas
*   Security was more important for younger youth, and those in urban areas
*   Younger youth also placed more importance on their connections with family and friends
*   Women were more likely to value youth participation in decision-making

TABLE 10. YOUTH RANKINGS, BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Priority:	Total # Votes in Ranking Exercise	Younger Youth	% of Total Rankings Younger Youth	Older Youth	% of Total Rankings Older Youth	Males	% of Total Rankings Males	Females	% of Total Rankings Females	Urban	% of Total Rankings Urban	Rural	% of Total Rankings Rural
Education	114	63	55%	51	45%	47	41%	67	59%	65	57%	49	43%
Health	48	26	54%	22	46%	20	42%	28	58%	31	65%	17	35%
Livelihoods	44	31	70%	13	30%	14	32%	30	68%	29	66%	15	34%
Security	31	21	68%	10	32%	14	45%	17	55%	21	68%	10	32%
Connections Family/ Friends	15	11	73%	4	27%	7	47%	8	53%	9	60%	6	40%
Youth Participation	16	7	44%	9	56%	5	31%	11	69%	9	56%	7	44%
Other (Blank)	3	3	100%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%

Note: "Other" was noted in only 1 focus group discussion comprised of young urban men, ages 18-24, from Buchanan. In these 3 responses, "Other" was defined as: substance abuse, food insecurity, and the role of agriculture in livelihoods.

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[14] In select focus groups, youth participated in a ranking exercise, where they were asked the question, "What are the top two priorities for youth in your community?" or "What are the top two things that would improve the circumstances of youth in your community?" Index cards were placed in front of them, with the sector label written on each. Each participant was given two buttons to place on top of two index cards, indicating their top two priorities.

ENDNOTES

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[29] (a) DHS (2013), p. 79. (b) World Health Organization African Health Observatory, Health Situation Analysis. Retrieved from: (http://www.aho.afro.who.int/profiles_information/index.php/Liberia:Analytical_summary_-_Health_Status_and_Trends) (c) "UNFPA Resident Representative, Dr. Oluremi Sogunro, disclosed that 60 percent of fistula cases are from teenage mothers." Octavius Augustine. (September 28, 2018) "A resolve to beef up family planning education in communities." (https://newspublictrust.com/2018/09/28/birth-rate-on-the-rise-amongst-liberias-teenage-girls/)

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[71] (a) DHS (2013), p. 79. (b) World Health Organization African Health Observatory, Health Situation Analysis. Retrieved from: (http://www.aho.afro.who.int/profiles_information/index.php/Liberia:Analytical_summary_-_Health_Status_and_Trends) (c) "UNFPA Resident Representative, Dr. Oluremi Sogunro, disclosed that 60 percent of fistula cases are from teenage mothers." Octavius Augustine. (September 28, 2018) "A resolve to beef up family planning education in communities." (https://newspublictrust.com/2018/09/28/birth-rate-on-the-rise-amongst-liberias-teenage-girls/)

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[86] Such as those participating in USAID-sponsored exchanges, e.g., the founders/owners of MOIE, and Liberia Pure Honey.

[87] According to the USAID YouthPower project, the fundamental positive youth development principles span across four key domains: assets (skills building), agency (youth's ability to exercise assets), contribution (in the community, economy, society), and enabling environment (considerations of other stakeholders, institutions, and policies/ norms/ practices that affect youth outcomes). (www.youthpower.org)

[88] Refer to: https://www.icampus.io/. Within iCampus, the the USAID-funded LAVI Learning Lab is a physical and online hub for Liberians and international organizations, including youth, to collaborate, share lessons-learned, and access useful resources to improve programmatic learning, advocacy campaigns, and open and accountable governance in Liberia.

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[96] See also: Weedon and Heaner, p. 64.

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[99] "Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development" (PAPD). A Five-Year National Development Plan Towards Accelerated, Inclusive, and Sustainable Development (July 2018 – June 2023). Zero draft, dated July 11, 2018."

[100] Internews/ USAID. Liberia Media Development (LMD) Quarterly Report, Year 3, Q3

[101] According to Liz Heller, Learning Links Program Manager, Kaizen Company, written response to questionnaire, October 2018. "Consequently the program adjusted by simplifying the product design, and added a 2-day training so that participants were able to use the program's SMS-based mLearning system."

[102] Fox, Louise and Upaasna Kaul (2017). "The evidence is in: How should youth employment programs in low-income countries be designed?"

[103] The World Bank. (https://data.worldbank.org) Derived using 2017 data from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in September 2018.

[104] "Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development" (PAPD). A Five-Year National Development Plan Towards Accelerated, Inclusive, and Sustainable Development (July 2018 – June 2023). Zero draft, dated July 11, 2018."

[105] World Bank (2016.) "Republic of Liberia. Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector."

[106] The World Bank-funded EPAG program provided adolescent girls with training in business skills, life skills training and mentorship. Overall the program increased employment by 47% and earnings by 80%. Adoho, F., Korkoyah Jr., D. T., Lundberg, M. K. A., & Tasneem, A. (2014).

The Impact of an Adolescent Girls Employment Program: The EPAG Project in Liberia. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, (No. 6832). Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/17718/WPS6832.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[107] The Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) in Liberia (the predecessor pilot project for EPAG) combined business skills training, job skills training and job placement support, linkages to credit, a small stipend and cash bonus for participating and completing training, as well as assistance in opening a bank account. Results showed that business skills training, in particular, may be effective for startups when combined with financial support. World Bank. 2012. *Can skills training programs increase employment for young women? : the case of Liberia (English)*. Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) results series. Washington DC ; World Bank. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/471171468057238901/Can-skills-training-programs-increase-employment-for-young-women-the-case-of-Liberia

[108] A program implemented by Action on Armed Violence provided agricultural training, capital inputs, and counseling for high-risk ex-combatants who were illegally mining or occupying rubber plantations. Participants increased their farm employment and profits, and shifted work hours away from illicit activities. Findings also suggested that "the impacts of training alone, without capital, appear to be low." Blattman, Christopher, & Annan, Jeannie. (2016). Can employment reduce lawlessness and rebellion? A field experiment with high-risk men in a fragile state. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1), pages 1-17.

[109] An evaluation of the USAID Advancing Youth Program (AYP) found that accelerated education and skills development programs should not be stand-alone education programs, but must be combined with and linked to tangible entrepreneurship and employment supports. Furthermore, savings mobilization was particularly effective in helping youth expand their businesses, building resilience to shocks, and improving youth's social standing in the community. Education Development Center (2017). The Advancing Youth Project Learning Agenda, Youth Participation in Village Savings and Loan Associations in an Integrated ABE Program.

[110] Weedon, Emily and Gwendolyn Heaner. (August 2016) "Household Enterprises in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: Results from a Qualitative Toolkit Piloted in Liberia, Volume 1 – Report." World Bank Discussion Paper No. 1608. It should be noted that this survey covered five communities, of which three—Monrovia, Buchanan and Saniquellie—are areas also covered by this assessment.

[111] Sources: (a) In-Depth Study: TVET and Youth Economic Empowerment in Liberia In-Depth Study of the Swedish Embassy Support to TVET/Youth Economic Empowerment, and Identification of New and Innovative Youth Skills Development Areas to Support in Liberia. Draft Report 18 May 2018.

[112] IFPRI. Food Security Portal: Liberia. http://www.foodsecurityportal.org/liberia/resources

[113] Source: https://tradingeconomics.com/liberia/imports. Data was last updated December 2018.

[114] Refer to: (a) Fox, Louise and Upaasna Kaul (2017). "The evidence is in: How should youth employment programs in low-income countries be designed?"; And (b) Jayne, T.S. et al. (2016, October). Agri-Food Systems and Youth Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa. Michigan State University Working Paper 150.

[115] According to Francis Fallah, Green Coast Agriculture, Key Informant Interview, Harbel (October 13, 2018).

[116] USAID/Building Markets (2017). Liberia Market Overview Report.

[117] Weedon and Heaner, pp. 53-54.

[118] Building Markets (2017). "Liberia Market Overview Report April 2017." Original data source: Financial Inclusion Baseline Survey in Liberia, 2015.

[119] Building Markets (2017). "Liberia Market Overview Report April 2017." Original data source: Financial Inclusion Baseline Survey in Liberia, 2015.

[120] USAID/Building Markets, 2017.

[121] World Bank (2011). "Reproductive Health at a Glance: Liberia."

[122] According to Johnny K. M. Ndebe, Carter Center, written response to assessment questionnaire, October 2018.

[123] According to group-based interview with Liberian youth NGO leaders, Monrovia, October 2, 2018.

[124] See, for example: (a) USAID (2016). Advancing Youth Project Performance Evaluation: Final Report. A USAID/Liberia Project to Provide Alternative Basic Education for Liberian Youth Ages 13-35; and (b) World Bank (2016.) "Republic of Liberia. Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector."

[125] According to Hon. Zeogar Wilson, Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sports, interview, October 2018.

[126] See: https://prospectsliberia.com/

[127] https://www.youthpower.org/usaid-youth-led-innovations-journey-self-reliance