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# Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (YOVEX) in West Africa: Liberia Country Report

**Thomas Jaye & Alfred K. Tarway-Twalla**

CSDG

**CONFLICT, SECURITY & DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

## About this study

Youth and youth issues have emerged as key elements in the discourse and realities of Africa's conflict, security and development landscape over the past two decades. There is growing recognition that young people are at the heart of Africa's opportunities and challenges in the 21st century. This is founded on the continent's youthful demography (youth bulge) and the centrality of young people (as victims and victimizers) in civil wars, armed insurrection and stagnated socio-economic development. This study of youth vulnerability and exclusion in Liberia provides empirical data and evidence of the points of contact and disconnect between the state and youth. It assesses alternative choices available to and embraced by young people (as coping mechanisms) in the context of psychological and material deprivations, and highlights the different outcomes of youth's coping strategies.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **BWI** | Booker Washington Institute |
| **CBO** | community-based organization |
| **CCF** | Christian Children Fund |
| **CEDE** | Centre for Democratic Empowerment |
| **CSDG** | Conflict, Security & Development Group |
| **DD** | disarmament and demobilization |
| **DDRR** | disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration |
| **ECOWAS** | Economic Community of West African States |
| **FLY** | Federation of Liberian Youth |
| **GDP** | gross domestic product |
| **GEMAP** | Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme |
| **ICRC** | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| **JPC** | Justice and Peace Commission |
| **KBCC** | Klay Basic Craft Centre |
| **LINSU** | Liberia National Students Union |
| **LOIC** | Liberia Opportunity and Industrial Centre |
| **LURD** | Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy |
| **MSF** | Médecins Sans Frontières |
| **NGO** | non-governmental organization |
| **NPFL** | National Patriotic Front of Liberia |
| **TNIMA** | Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts |
| **ULIMO** | Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy |
| **ULSU** | University of Liberia Students Union |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNDP** | United Nations Development Programme |
| **UNHCR** | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| **UNICEF** | United Nations Children's Fund |
| **UNMIL** | United Nations Mission in Liberia |
| **UNSC** | United Nations Security Council |
| **USD** | United States dollar |
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |

| | |
|---|---|
| **WIPNET** | Women in Peace-Building Network |
| **WVSTTC** | William V.S. Tubman Technical College |
| **YMCA** | Young Men's Christian Association |
| **YOVEX** | Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (Project) |

# Acknowledgements

# Executive summary

Liberia has emerged from 14 years of war with enormous challenges and difficulties. With a population of three million people, more than half are below the age of 35 years. There are 1,245,821 people between the ages of 15 and 35, according to the 2008 census, constituting 35.7 per cent of the population. Those aged 15–24 constitute 20.2 per cent of the population (704,461 people). With average life expectancy at 47 years, the majority of the population of the country are youth.

Although youth constitute such a high proportion of the population, they do not influence the process of decision-making in the country in specific relation to politics and economics. The lack of national structures to empower youth and their organizations, which constitutes the focus of this report, makes matters worse.

In order to address this imbalance, a National Youth Policy was adopted in 2005 with the objective of promoting the role of youth in national policymaking and decision-making processes. However, implementing this policy has been difficult. In fact, it is questionable whether the appropriate authorities, including the national and international agencies working with youth, are using this policy.

Youth exclusion and vulnerability are high largely because the war years undermined the development and strengthening of youth organizations and groups throughout the country. Having said that, from this study, it has become clear that, gradually, youth groups are emerging in every part of the country, but they do not have any significant impact on decision-making processes. Most of their programmes are organized from the top and therefore there is more of a top-down approach to solving youth problems.

From the focus group discussions held in the country, there were recurrent references to the plight of youth and the efforts they are making to cope with the prevailing hopeless situation in which they find themselves. However, very little has been achieved and thus the need for an intervention by both state and non-state actors cannot be overemphasized.

Currently, youth are engaged in the formal and informal economies. Some are state employees, but many are using petty trading and other relevant activities to cope with the harsh realities of life. These informal activities involve selling basic commodities; running beer bars, video clubs and mobile phone shops (including battery charging); fishing; photography; etc.

In addition, many are involved in sporting and faith-based (religious) activities to cope with their situation. Others depend on family members and parents to cope with the challenges of living in pervasive poverty, particularly in a post-conflict environment. As some have observed, the current (2008/09) global economic crisis does not create favourable conditions for improving the lives of the people. Observers also make recurring reference to corruption as a malaise that is destroying the fabric of Liberian society and creating obstacles preventing youth from realizing their dreams. There is constant reference to the need to maintain peace and security in the country, because without this, there will be no national development.

The intervention of the government, development partners, and national and international non-state actors is highly needed in order to curb the current trends of youth exclusion and vulnerability. More specifically, there is need to revisit and review the existing National Youth Policy in order to make it relevant in addressing youth problems today. An improved/revised National Youth Policy should guide work among youth; and certain national institutions should be revived in order to provide training opportunities for youth so that they can access the job market.

# Chapter 1
## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Liberia has only recently emerged from 14 years of war and plunder in which young people played a significant role. Youths were either victims or perpetrators of violence. One of the significant changes in Liberia is the demographic change that occurred as a result of this war. A total of 35.7 per cent of the population are between 15 and 35 years of age (1,245,821 people), according to the 2008 census, with 20.2 per cent (704,461 people) being between the ages of 15 and 24, and this constitutes a major challenge, because many of these young people did not have access to education and hence cannot access employment in peacetime.

The war also impacted on the security, economic, governance and social dynamics of the country. This has implications for youth exclusion and vulnerability. For example, after 14 years of war, Liberia inherited a security sector that was highly dysfunctional, fragmented and factionalized; while its personnel had taken active part in the war as partisans of different factions. One of the consequences of the war was that it traumatized the young people because of their role as fighters and victims. By 31 October 2004, when the disarmament and demobilization (DD) phase of the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) process was declared successfully completed, about 103,019 fighters had gone through the DD phase. By the end of 2005, about 26,000 of these fighters were still waiting to be placed in reintegration and rehabilitation projects. Youth constituted a sizeable number of these fighters.[1]

After the war, some of the ex-fighters that went through the DD phase of the DDRR programme illegally occupied several rubber plantations in Bomi (Guthrie) and Sinoe (Sinoe Rubber Corporation) in order to cope with their exclusion and vulnerability. At the Firestone rubber plantation in Harbel,

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1        UN (2005), 9.

Margibi County, ex-fighters were also reportedly engaged in the theft of latex in large quantities to sell to private buyers. In Sinoe, about 5,000 ex-fighters occupied the rubber farm and some were involved in illicit gold and diamond mining in violation of United Nations (UN) sanctions.[2] Some of these fighters were also roaming River Gee County (in the south-eastern part of the country), where they were engaged in illicit diamond and gold mining, and hunting. Some were reportedly recruited to fight in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire.[3] For example, according to a media report in June 2006, each day truckloads of people were crossing into Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea as mercenaries.[4]

Armed robbery also increased, particularly in Monrovia in areas like Rock Hill community, where armed gangs were harassing residents.[5] Areas like Duport Road, Logan Town, Paynesville and others have been targets of armed robbery. Today, the crime rate continues to increase.

Liberia's economy was also affected by the war. Historically, it has relied heavily on iron ore, rubber, timber and other extractive industries for its exports and foreign earnings. However, the agricultural sector employs more people. The country has one of the world's lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita figures of about USD 151; and an unemployment rate of 85 per cent. The proportion of people living on less than USD 1 per day increased from 55.1 per cent in 1997 to 76.2 per cent in 2001. Similarly, the level of poverty increased from 14 per cent to 52 per cent.[6] About 1.4 million people in Liberia live in abject poverty on less than USD 0.50 per person per day.[7] There were estimates that the GDP would grow by 8 per cent in 2005 and 7 per cent in 2006–07.[8] There are no current figures to verify these predictions. But even if such growth were experienced in the Liberian economy, this would not necessarily translate into changing or improving the living conditions of the ordinary people, including youth. As we have seen elsewhere in Africa in general and Liberia in particular over the years, economic growth has not necessarily changed or improved the living conditions of the vast majority of the people, and only a few people who benefit from such growth. Moreover, the baseline GDP is so low that even with sustained economic growth rates of over 10 per cent , it would take many years for the masses to feel any real benefits. Youth, as we have observed during this study, will continue to bear the brunt of the economic problems in the country for a long time because of the nature of the economy and the lack of a clear blueprint for economic recovery in Liberia.

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2      *The News* (2006).
3      *New Democrat* (2006).
4      *Daily Observer* (2006).
5      Sworh (2006).
6      See Liberia (2004), 13.
7      Ibid.
8      EIU (2006), 53.

Agricultural production, particularly for smallholders or farmers and those who produce export crops, has been adversely affected; the linkage between this sector and the market was disrupted; and forest resources were exploited indiscriminately, with deleterious environmental consequences.

Like others sectors discussed above, the country's social services and infrastructure were badly affected by the war. Access to educational opportunities and health care declined, and most of the infrastructure was destroyed. Formal education broke down because school buildings were destroyed by marauding fighters, some of whom were youth. A typical example is the University of Liberia, whose library was looted, student and other records burnt, and buildings and equipment destroyed.

Life expectancy is at 47 years; the mortality rate for children under five was estimated at 235 per 1,000 live births in 2003; and there are 0.2 doctors per 10,000 people in post-war Liberia. Furthermore, malnutrition and diseases such as yellow fever and cholera are on the increase. [9] The figure for HIV/AIDS prevalence remains uncertain, but some estimate that it could be at 8.2 per cent or even higher. The Joint UN Action Plan on HIV/AIDS estimated that about 100,000 adults and children were HIV infected at the end of 2003. [10] Young girls aged 13 and above have been vulnerable to sexual abuse because of the pervasive poverty, and this issue was highlighted during the focus group discussions.

About 95 per cent of the 325 health facilities in pre-war Liberia were either partially or fully destroyed in the war; only 10 per cent of Liberians have access to health care; and there are only 34 medical doctors in the country compared to 400 in the late 1980s. [11]

The movement of goods has been difficult because of the poor transport network in the country, with only 6.2 per cent of the total road network of some 10,600 kilometres being surfaced, while most roads are in serious disrepair. In some areas, there are no bridges linking whole communities. Due to this situation, farmers have found it difficult to get their products to market and the sick cannot easily be transported to the nearest clinic or hospital. Liberia's seaports and airports were also damaged by the war. [12]

Most state institutions, including government ministries, are in a state of disrepair. There is no electricity, and water pipelines are very old and highly dysfunctional. The drainage system in Monrovia is also poor and exposes the residents to environmental and health risks.

Coping with the existing post-conflict challenges in Liberia will also require a stable and secure political environment. Certainly, an improvement

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9        Ibid.
10      Ibid.
11      *New Democrat News* (2006).
12      Ibid.

in the security situation, the economy and social services would go a long way to mitigate some of these challenges. However, on their own, such improvements will never provide a comprehensive response to these challenges, especially as they relate to youth vulnerability and exclusion. Hence, this discussion should also be embedded in a debate on governance and the rule of law as critical factors that could ensure that youth are not kept on the margins of society, thus making them more vulnerable.

An examination of the war years illustrates that the entire Liberian state and the societal structure collapsed in that period. During the war years, several efforts were made to rebuild central authority through various power-sharing political arrangements, but these failed to address the problem. On the contrary, rebels and their leaders became a law unto themselves, violating human rights with impunity.

One of the important structures of the rule of law, the judiciary, was badly affected by the war. For example, according to a 2006 International Crisis Group report, the 300 justices of the peace in the country's 15 counties were corrupt and incompetent; they charged excessive fees and meted out justice beyond their jurisdiction; and between half and 75 per cent of them were illiterate.[13] Of the country's 130 magistrates, only three had law degrees. This means that the vast majority of these people have little legal knowledge to serve in their posts.[14] Because of the damage caused to the infrastructure, some of the magistrates are forced to conduct judicial business from their homes and have to travel long distances to collect a monthly salary of about USD 22.[15] Attempts are being made to address these problems, but the process has been extremely slow and the results have not been very tangible.

Because there have been no courts and correctional centres in some parts of the country, those who commit crimes have been allowed to go free without punishment. This has enhanced the culture of impunity in some parts of the country. In other areas where correctional centres have been revamped, there has been some improvement in prosecution services.

The national legislature is also engulfed by enormous institutional and infrastructural problems that make it difficult for it to exercise its functions properly. There are few books in its library and parliamentary researchers have virtually no reference materials. Initially, office space was grossly inadequate and legislators were forced to share offices that had no furniture. It is only now that this issue has been addressed after the parliamentary building was renovated. Under such conditions, becoming an effective tool for exercising checks and balance has been a major challenge. In order to address youth vulnerability and exclusion issues, legislators must have the relevant conditions to do so.

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13      ICG (2006), 3.
14      Ibid., 4.
15      Ibid.

One of the issues raised throughout the focus group discussions was the role of corruption and economic mismanagement in making life difficult for the youth of the country. Corruption and economic mismanagement characterized both the pre- and post-conflict years. The poor management of the economy, particularly the country's natural resources, led the international community of states through the UN Security Council (UNSC) to impose sanctions on Liberian resources. In addition, under UNSC Resolution 1626 of 19 September 2005, the establishment of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) was welcomed by the UNSC. According to Renata Dawn and Laura Bailey, GEMAP was

> *… a response to international concern at mismanagement of public finances in post-conflict Liberia and the threat it potentially represented to the implementation of the peace process underway since August 2003. It originated among international donors and was based on a shared diagnosis of Liberia's problems and an analysis of options for actions based on development assistance experiences in other, mainly African countries.[16]*

Furthermore, they assert that GEMAP is a

> *… programme of wide scope that targets revenue collection, expenditure controls and government procurement and concession practices. Its key features are the provision of international experts with co-signature authority and management contracts in selected ministries and state-owned enterprises; authoritative oversight mechanisms; linkage to the peace implementation process and to UN Security Council sanctions.[17]*

However, a cross section of people interviewed in Liberia expressed the opinion that GEMAP is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a very intrusive programme that interferes with the work of local professionals, and, on the other hand, it has the potential to curb or reduce corruption.[18] Unfortunately, most Liberians are now complaining that they cannot see the fruits of the GEMAP programme, because the situation is one of 'business as usual'.

Against the backdrop of the above, it is clear that the demographic patterns, socio-economic and political dynamics, and development and security challenges are enormous in post-conflict Liberia. They cannot be resolved overnight or within the life span of the current administration. Addressing these problems and showing real results could take well over two decades. This means that young people will remain vulnerable in the face of these challenges, but in the short-term there is the need to prioritize the

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16    Dwan and Bailey (2006), 5.
17    Ibid.
18    Interviews with a cross section of Liberians, Monrovia, April 2006.

processes in the country that affect youth and pay attention to the plight of young people.

## 1.2 Adaptation of the YOVEX propositions to the Liberia case study

Within the context of Liberia, the six propositions advanced for the YOVEX Project have clear implications for the study of youth vulnerability and exclusion. Although there is no agreed definition of what constitutes youth, the results of the survey showed that the vast majority of the people interviewed defined youth largely in terms of age. This constituted about 73 per cent of respondents, whereas 20 per cent defined it in terms of social roles, and about 3 per cent each in terms of education and marriage.

In Liberia, the conditions for the social, economic and political vulnerability of youth derive from the existing governance environment in which they live. Constantly, young people made reference to high levels of corruption, poor economic management, and lack of support from elders and government. They also made reference to the global rise in the prices of basic commodities. Nonetheless, as indicated in this report, the government is making efforts to address youth problems.

Importantly, the youth of Liberia are making efforts to develop their own programmes, but they lack the means to sustain them. Thus, the programmes that they undertake are driven by a combination of their needs and what could attract money from the government and international partners. Throughout the focus group discussions, there were constant references to the need for support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the government and development partners. Without support from these sectors, it would be highly difficult to sustain their programmes. In this light, youth will have to rely on top-down programmes, and even where they are engaged in replicable activities like the youth in Buzzy Quarter, Montserrado County, who built latrines, drainage systems and foot bridges in their community, such projects still require outside intervention. Even some of the private initiatives that generate money to sustain them will also require the injection of money from outside.

As we have seen in Liberia, the exclusion of young people makes them vulnerable, but does not necessarily lead to violence immediately. Unfortunately, however, some young people resort to crime. In the country, many youth are engaged in activities that keep them away from violence. Sports, the church, community groups and others are strong institutional pillars for keeping youth away from the pressures of resorting to violence as an instrument for redressing their problems.

Youth in Liberia have coped with exclusion outside the realm of the state. They have done so through faith groups (religious bodies); sports and culture; education; and engagement in the informal economy through petty

trade, the transportation business or video clubs. Others rely on family and community support in order to cope with their exclusion. As we have seen in Liberia over the past decades, the conditions in the country, which was and continues to be characterized by poor governance, corruption, political instability, poverty and the marginalization of youth, determined and continue to determine young people's roles in society.

# Chapter 2
## Methodology and research process

This study was conducted in two main phases. The first phase involved generating both quantitative and qualitative data on Liberian youth issues, including the question of who constitutes youth in the country. The second phase was based on focus group discussions.

During the first phase of the study, questionnaires were administered to respondents between August and September 2006. To facilitate the effective management of the project, the director of the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) in Monrovia was invited to take part in preliminary discussions at CSDG, King's College London, during which methodological issues were discussed and finalized. This was followed by a visit by a team of researchers from CSDG to Liberia. The meeting enabled the team to further familiarize themselves with the Liberian situation and to familiarize themselves the practical logistics of the peculiarities of the Liberian context. Once this was completed, CEDE then carried out the study, visiting different Liberian counties to distribute the questionnaires.

In the case of Liberia, a number of background considerations must be borne in mind in understanding the fieldwork that was undertaken.
Fieldwork was concentrated on locations that can be considered as informal 'assembly points' for youth. These included soccer stadiums and other informal places where football was often played, beer parlours, churches, etc. We discovered during our preliminary visit that, regardless of the location, these were places where youth often gathered. While this was more the case in key cities like Monrovia and Gbarnga, other smaller cities like Zwedru and Ganta also displayed this tendency.

- Considerable attention was placed on the capital Monrovia, largely because a considerable number of youth in the country have moved to the capital city in search of employment opportunities. Researchers were thus of the opinion that the potential burden placed on the capital made it highly pertinent for the study to devote considerable attention to the city.

- The fieldwork took into consideration the background of prevailing political developments in the country, as it took place not long after President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the presidential elections against the largely youth-backed George Weah. This thus enabled the study to assess the reaction of youth to the defeat of a candidate they largely considered 'one of their own' and someone they had advertised as being of a 'new breed', who would do away with the 'old order' that Sirleaf allegedly represented.

- The fieldwork also took into consideration the prevailing nature of post-war reconstruction. DDRR had since been completed, but there still remained the deep conviction that arms were still kept in several parts of the country, especially as the DDRR exercise was not particularly successful in some parts of the country. Since youth were considered as being the key targets of the exercise, this fieldwork tried to situate their concerns within the disarmament process.

- Data was collected through responses to questionnaire, formal interviews and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were distributed among the youth and focus group discussions were held with them. Formal interviews were undertaken with youth leaders, government officials, international civil servants and others involved in addressing youth concerns in Liberia.

- The study also benefitted from secondary data made available by institutions working on issues relating to youth concerns, especially those relating to legal/judicial matters and gender issues. Specifically, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Gender and the Office of the Solicitor General offered useful secondary materials.

- To ensure the honest expression of views, the study offered questionnaire respondents the option of anonymity. While some wanted to include their names, it was generally decided that all respondents should be anonymous. The same option was given to those with whom formal interviews were conducted. In this case, however, the offices are mentioned, but the personal names are left out.

- Finally, all the gathered materials were analysed by a team of analysts from CSDG. The visits that CSDG staff have made to Liberia since the formal conclusion of the study have also allowed them to cross-check and revalidate some of the issues expressed in this report.

The second phase focused on conducting focus group discussions in various parts of the country, while researchers also recorded life histories for the study. Ideally, it would have been useful to cover the entire country, but the lack of resources and poor and damaged infrastructure as a result of 14 years of war made it impossible to reach various parts of the country. However, in order to address this limitation, we focused on areas that were

diverse enough to reflect the population of the country. Importantly, the pre-war population of Monrovia was about 500,000 people, but this figure had since trebled to roughly 1.5 million. Like other West African cities, Monrovia is a microcosm of the population of Liberia and people reside in places based on ethnic and regional affinities.

Against the backdrop of the above, we concentrated on certain areas in Monrovia that provided a Liberia-wide picture of the youth problem. The areas we concentrated on included: Logan Town, Paity Town, New Kru Town, Duport Road and Buzzy Quarter. We also conducted focused group discussions in Klay (Bomi County), Gbarnga (Bong County) and Kakata (Margibi). All of these areas were strongholds of different armed groups and hence they were populated by people from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds. For example, for more than eight years, Gbarnga was the headquarters for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Predominantly inhabited by the Kpelle people, the city of Gbarnga is now populated by people from different parts of the country. It has one of the nation's leading institutions of higher learning, Cuttington University, which was established by the Episcopal Church. During the war, the Klay area was occupied by the Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO)-J[19] and subsequently Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), whereas Kakata was a no-man's land fought over by ULIMO-J and NPFL from time to time.

Like Monrovia, Kakata and Gbarnga are major commercial cities in Liberia. Gbarnga is a commercial city where people are basically engaged in petty trading, but the surrounding areas are involved in the rubber business. Similarly, in the Kakata and Klay areas, people are engaged in petty trading and rubber tapping for survival. Most of those who own the rubber farms reside in Monrovia as absentee farmers.

In all, about 80 people participated in the focus group discussions throughout the country.

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19     ULIMO started out as a unified organisation, but later split into two opposing factions that fought each other consistently until the end of the war. ULIMO-J was the faction of General Roosevelt Johnson of the Krahn tribe.

# Chapter 3
## Research themes and findings: Youth identity/meaning/definition

### 3.1 Youth identity and understanding the term 'youth'

Understanding youth and youth identity within the Liberian context is not a straightforward affair, as these concepts are culturally based and socially constructed. A lot depends on the cultural setting in which an individual finds him-/herself, and it has to do with the way in which individuals perceive themselves. Thus, in one setting, one is considered a youth because of one's age, but in another, one is considered a youth because of the social roles (e.g. marriage) one plays or how one sees oneself. Changes in the perceptions of who constituted youth became more pronounced during the war years, when many of them adopted specific roles previously reserved for older people. For example, some of them assumed the title of 'general', and others became breadwinners for their families.

Nationally, youth is defined as that part of the population that falls within the age bracket of 15–35 years.[20] In Liberia, therefore, youth constitute the largest sector of the country's population (35.7 per cent). This is particularly true for those who fall between the ages 15 and 24 years, who constitute a significant percentage of the population (20.2 per cent). With life expectancy declining to as low as 47 years due to the effect of severe social and economic factors on morbidity and mortality, the youth population (15–35 years) has become the dominant group in society. It is certainly this demographic group that has the potential to either sustain peace or generate further instability and insecurity in the country.

In Liberia, the group defined as 'youth' is also classified into different categories of people and target groups, such as those with disabilities, street youth, youth affected by HIV/AIDS, unemployed youth and early school leavers.

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20        <http://www.icnyp.net/uploads/media/Bulletin_February06_04.doc>.

**3.2 Survey results for the meaning of 'youth'**

In addition to the official definition of youth discussed above, the survey conducted among youth regarding how they perceived themselves revealed that two major criteria were identified when defining youth-hood: age and social roles. About 73 per cent of the respondents considered age as the most important determinant, and others held the view that social roles determined youth, whereas a third category saw marriage as the key determining factor in the definition of youth. Others identified education as a factor.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of people who identified age, marriage, education or social roles as determining factors of youth-hood.

**Figure 1: Factors defining youth-hood**
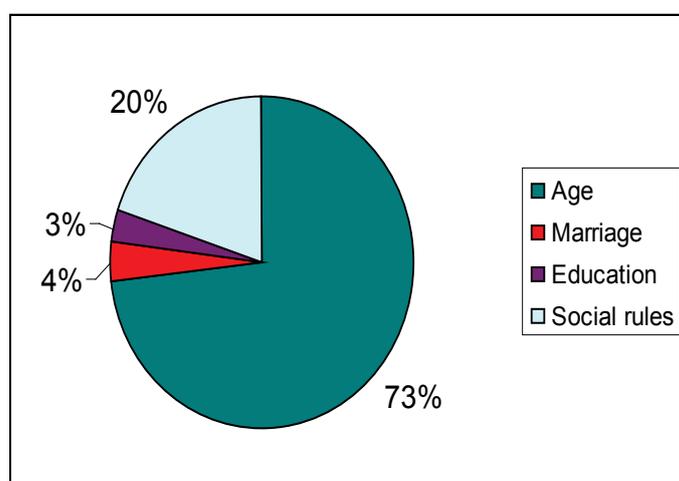


Figure 1 clearly shows that there are no agreed criteria to determine youth-hood in Liberia. Although the national definition puts youth in the age bracket of 15–35 years, the notion of youth remains highly contested; it is culturally sensitive and socially constructed, and being youth is what one makes of it.

**3.3 The socio-cultural, economic and political description of youth**

The socio-cultural, economic and political description of youth by respondents did not differ from the notion of youth described above. In many ways, their perceptions confirmed the assertion that the characteristics and duration of the transition from childhood to adulthood varied according to society, culture, social class and gender.[21]

The statements made by some youth during the survey verified this assertion. For example, some ascribed youth-hood to the type of activities that one engages in. As indicated by one youth, 'youth are those who create

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21      http://www.icnyp.net/uploads/media/Bulletin;
        http://www.eclac.org/Celade/publica/lcg2084i.doc.

problems, but abide by and understand socio-cultural beliefs that maintain our African identity'. Another youth said that 'youth are young people who are supposed to take over from the old folks to manage our cultural heritage and restore the value system following the death of the old ones'. In the Grebo-dominated locality of Paytay Town in Monrovia, youth were defined by their social roles. In their own experiences, there were times when an entire village was contracted to brush farm (i.e. cut down the bush as preparation for farming activities) for a particular individual based upon the capacity of the contractor to meet the demands of the village people. In these villages, gerontocracy played a very important role in terms of one's identity and the social role ascribed to one. When a farm was being brushed, the young people tended to do most of the work, but when it was time for lunch, older people ate the best part of the food. Therefore, in this locality, the assertion was made that 'youth are those who work on the farm in a Grebo village, but do not eat the best part of the food'. A respondent also indicated that 'youth are people without homes' and in most cases, they are excluded from decision-making processes.

The above statements have implications for youth identity. As youth, you are expected to behave in a particular way, and the same goes for adults. Therefore, if for example, an adult behaves like a youth, such behaviour will be considered as youthful.

In addition to the recurring reference to culture and social roles, the other criterion was age. From the focus group discussions in Monrovia and its environs, youth was considered to be people between the ages of 15 and 28 who were not working. They were either still in school or had joined political parties in order to put politicians into power, but remained in abject poverty. In this light, they saw themselves as mere pawns in the games that politicians played for political power. As one ex-combatant put it,

> … *our numbers and violent actions during political campaigns and war are only important to politicians when they are seeking power … but after getting into power, they forget about us. ... Young people do not have anything like money and property to care for their family after suffering for older people.*

Thus, in the discussion about the socio-cultural, economic and political description of youth, certain cross-cutting themes and issues continued to emerge. Recurring references were made to culture, exclusion, age, education, marriage, poverty and vulnerability. All of these issues and factors reinforced one another and could not easily be separated, because they were interlinked. Overall, the socio-cultural and political environment in which people lived had clear implications for their various roles and identities.

## 3.4 Dynamics of youth identity

From the survey and focus group discussions, the impression was that the dynamics of youth identity had changed with time. A so-called 'boyz II men' culture has emerged because of the experiences of many young people during the war years. To reiterate, during these years, many young people assumed adult roles, and since the end of the war, it had become difficult for them easily to see themselves once more as youth, and they continued to perceive themselves as adults. However, society has continued to force youthfulness upon this category of the country's youth population by referring to them as such because of their age and social roles in society. How to address this tension remains a major challenge.

Although many young people assumed diverse roles during the war years, the vast majority of them remained in their respective communities, while others fled the country, going to neighbouring countries and other parts of the world. In these places, they survived without parental care, and some became involved in dubious activities including duping people with false diamonds and other items. According to some of the respondents, some Liberian youth were in prison in different parts of the world because of such activities. Those who succeeded have either spent their money 'unwisely', as one youth put it, or have used it to construct their own residences. Many youth have also resorted to crime as their means of survival.

In the specific case of female youth, some of have resorted to prostitution in order to make a living, but others have also established their own small-scale businesses and become involved in petty trading to make ends meet.

Given the long years of war and plunder, in the survey we enquired about those who were affiliated with armed groups and the time they spent with such groups. Enquiries were also made about the gender affiliation of those associated with armed groups and those who did not affiliate with such groups. Figures 2, 3 and 4 illustrate clearly the distribution of youth in relation to the above enquiries.

**Figure 2: Youth affiliation with armed groups**
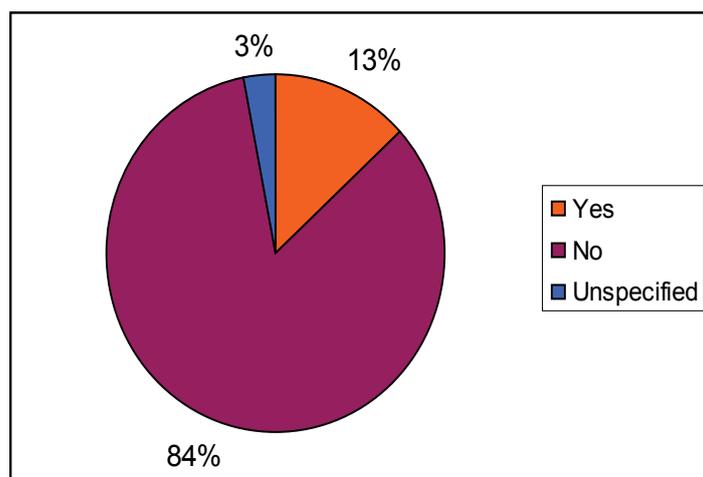


The gender affiliation of those who were affiliated with armed groups shows that 70 per cent were male and 30 per cent female, which was closely reflected by those who claimed not to have been affiliated with any of the armed factions, which stood at 69 per cent male and 31 per cent female.

**Figure 3: Gender of those affiliated/not affiliated with armed groups**
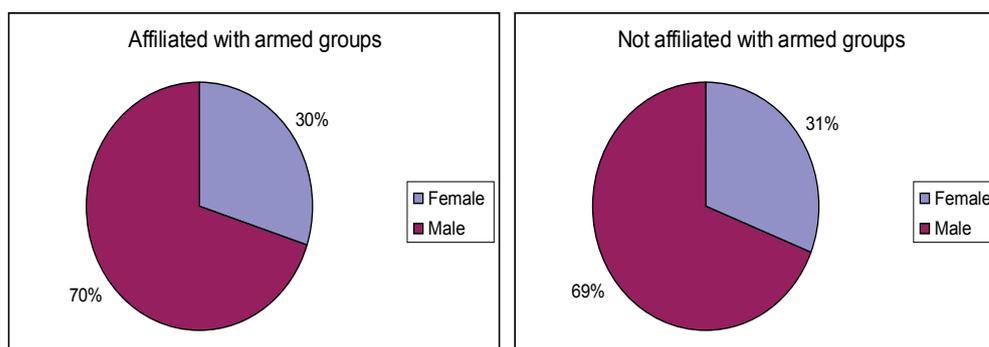


Previous YOVEX studies showed that of those who were affiliated with armed groups, a staggering 85 per cent claimed to have spent below two years with any of the armed factions. This was followed by those who spent between two and four years (7 per cent), and the 4 per cent of the respondents who indicated that they spent between five and six years, and the same percentage (4 per cent) of those who claimed to have spent seven years or more with the armed factions.

**Figure 4: Time spent with armed groups**
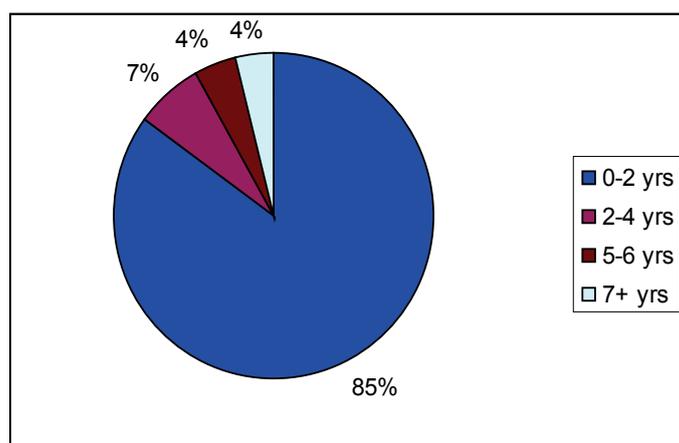


Politically, youth have made some gains. While it was difficult to establish the exact number of youth involved in national politics at the higher level, there is evidence to suggest that a number of young people have been employed in the government and were politically active throughout the country. For example, some young people were elected to parliament; many were county superintendents and district commissioners; and others occupied ministerial, deputy ministerial, assistant ministerial and other positions in government.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the dynamics of youth identity is very complex and the stories are mixed. On the one hand, the war years changed youth identity, but the vast majority of youth in Liberia continue to face enormous challenges that make it difficult to change. Currently, some young people are doing extremely well in national politics; others are involved in the informal and formal sectors of the economy with success; but the vast majority of them remain stunted in their growth processes. They are either involved in transnational criminal activities and resorting to prostitution, or remain in abject poverty in the country or in refugee camps elsewhere in West Africa.

# Chapter 4
## The context of youth exclusion and vulnerability

Based upon the findings of this study, it can be assumed that youth exclusion and vulnerability can be located within the contexts of long years of poor governance (including the socio-economic and political environment in which youth have lived), culture (gerontocracy – 'elders are wise') and dependency. The 14 years of war left a terrible legacy of security, economic, political and social deficits that constitute challenges for improving the conditions of young people in the country.

The war has deprived many young people of the opportunity to acquire education and skills, since it destroyed the fragile economy and environment, and caused state and societal collapse, thus impinging on governance while encouraging impunity. This is illustrated in figure 5.

**Figure 5: Educational background of respondents**
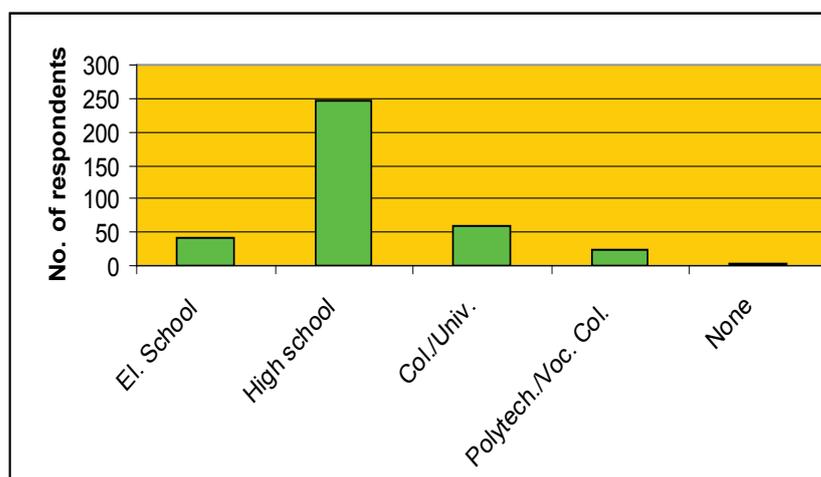


As indicated in figure 5, the educational background of respondents showed a significant bias in favour of high school graduates in comparison with those without educational qualification. The educational qualifications of respondents were also in line with the generally known educational characteristics of the country. Although the war years impacted adversely on educational institutions, regardless of deprivations, most Liberians will endeavour to attain a secondary level of education. The main issue has been

accessibility, affordability and availability. The relative low level of respondents from university reflected the fact that it was this category of education that was most affected by the civil war. Indeed, during the war, universities in the country were closed down and it was not unusual to have people taking up to a decade to undertake a four-year degree. Furthermore, the distribution of youth by age and educational level tallies with the other considerations identified earlier. Those between the ages of 15 and 24 who attained secondary education formed the highest percentage of respondents, while those aged 36 and above without any formal education constituted the lowest percentage (see figure 6).

**Figure 6: Age of respondents with different levels of education**
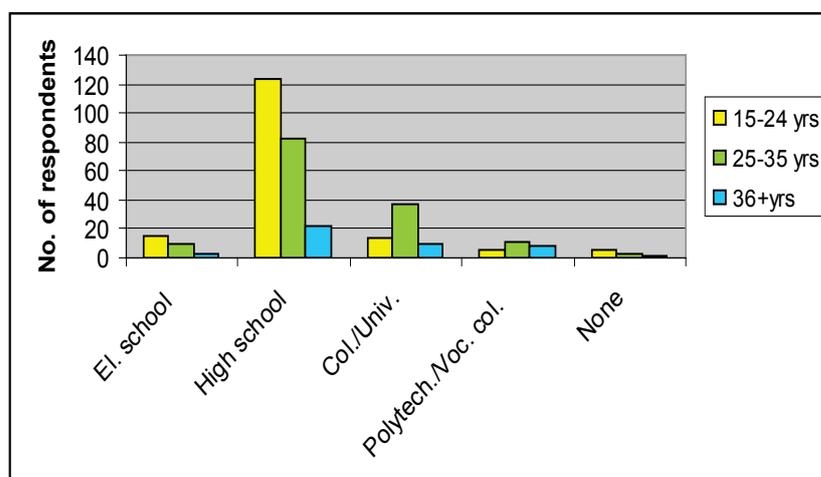


In all cases, those without formal education formed the smallest number in each category of educational level and this fits in well with the general literacy level in the country, as indicated in the figures from the previous YOVEX study in Liberia.

Moreover, youth throughout the country are engaged in self-help activities, but these are generally not sustainable; they require the intervention of the state, or formal institutions like NGOs, multilateral bodies and others. For their physical security, they rely on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and also on community neighbourhood watch groupings, intelligence agencies and the national police. The various indicators and instances of youth exclusion and vulnerability are indicated in the ten case studies in ten distinct communities and one-third of Liberia's 15 counties.

From the ten case studies discussed in detail later in this report, it is vital to stress that youth exclusion and vulnerability can be viewed from the perspective of the failure of institutional policies and practices. These are reflected in key areas such as employment, education, politics and physical security.

Youth exclusion and vulnerability are particularly reflected in the high level of youth unemployment, particularly in the formal sector of the

economy. It is estimated that unemployment in the informal sector in Liberia is 85 per cent, with the youth population constituting nearly half this figure. In Liberia, most formal sector employment is to be found in the public sector. As a consequence, unemployment exacerbates the exclusion and vulnerability of youth, as they are excluded from public employment. The 'no experience' criterion applied to youth by past governments increased the unemployment levels of young people. Similarly, the introduction of the government's policy of downsizing the public sector, which has affected most employees in this sector, has added to the exclusion of youth and increased their unemployment problems.

Nevertheless, the government is taking appropriate measures aimed at addressing youth exclusion and vulnerability through policy frameworks that seek to reduce youth unemployment. For example, it has crafted a draft National Employment Policy that seeks to promote the development of local enterprise and upgrade the informal economy so that it develops the capacity to employ more people. The policy also seeks to promote public–private partnerships for the creation of quality jobs and capacity development. In addition, a National Youth Policy Action Plan has been drawn up to address youth unemployment through programmes such as youth co-operatives in agriculture, reforestation and construction.

In Liberia, youth programmes are shared among three line ministries, including youth, labour and commerce. These ministries face acute shortage of human resources, inadequate infrastructure and meagre budgetary allocations. Irrespective of these weaknesses, the government is making efforts towards mobilizing resources for youth employment. In this direction, it aims to mobilize USD 25 million required to fund the Mano River Union Multi Stakeholders programme. Under this scheme, the government will rehabilitate vocational and educational training infrastructure and fund micro-finance projects in the country. Japan has already contributed USD 500,000 towards the fund.

Agriculture, the informal economy and small and medium-sized enterprises constitute the driving force for the integration of youth into the labour market. Nevertheless, their development is constrained by the absence of a credit system and an adequately skilled number of workers, particularly in the technical area. Currently, it is the informal sector that continues to provide employment for the youth. This assumption is verified by the findings of the ten communities surveyed for the purpose of this study. The study revealed certain common trends and patterns in relation to employment in all ten communities. The youth of the country are engaged in activities, particularly petty trade, in the informal sector of the economy. Although many are engaged in legal activities, some are engaged in illegal activities in order to cope with exclusion and vulnerability. For example, in Margibi and Bomi Counties, youth are engaged in illegal rubber tapping.

Partly, this is encouraged by those who purchase the rubber, even though they are aware that the young people are engaged in illegal rubbing tapping. In addition, in all of the communities, it was also observed that prostitution is a common trend among female youth. There are also young people who have resorted to burglary and other forms of petty crime and are therefore risking their lives.

Nevertheless, in the vast majority of cases, youth have been innovative in the way they have coped with their situation. Involvement in petty trading is high among the youth. Typical examples include video clubs; motorcycle transport, referred to locally as 'peen-peen'; and 'waiter market', which involves selling assorted products such as candies, biscuits, chewing gums and other items. In some areas like West Point, youth are engaged in fishing, and in most communities young people are also engaged in the sale of basic commodities like palm nuts, rice, cassava, fish and other items. Others are also involved in the charcoal business and the running of beer parlours, whereas some in the Paytay Town area in Monrovia survive on masonry and carpentry work. There are also some youth who transport goods for people with wheel barrows. In Tubmanburg, some youth are engaged in the cell phone business by setting up phone booths where people make calls and charge their phones for a fee. Women in this area organize hairdressing salons.

Access to health service constitutes a major challenge to young people throughout the country. Like other sectors, its infrastructure was badly damaged by the war. Thus, the lack of health services for youth, particularly reproductive health services in rural areas, is high. The rate of HIV/AIDs infection is put at 12 per cent of the total population in key health facilities in Monrovia and its environs. The increase in sex trade is worrying and caused primarily by pervasive poverty. There is a high teenage pregnancy rate and a high maternal mortality rate of 750 per 100,000 live births. The inadequacies of maternal health-care services, particularly among rural youth, and the inadequate health information and communication strategy in most parts of rural Liberia widen the gap of youth vulnerability to health problems because health-care services are inappropriate, limited or do not exist at all.

One of the factors that continue to hinder youth access to employment is inadequate training and limited or no education. Like the health sector, the country's educational infrastructure was badly damaged, thus rendering it ineffective, but it is now gradually recovering. Some of the damaged schools have been rehabilitated and new ones have been constructed or are under construction. There are 3,926 primary and 328 secondary schools in the country. Three universities are accredited, two public and the third private.

A special initiative to ensure girl child retention in schools has begun, and under this scheme, female students who meet a certain criterion regarding attendance are rewarded with take-home rations on a monthly basis. In the long term, this will increase female education and reduce the

exclusion and vulnerability that young women face. While general enrolment has increased throughout the country, the male/female ratio and girl child retention are still issues of concern. Without education, youth exclusion and vulnerability will continue to persist for a long time.

Although some youth recognize schooling as one of their coping mechanisms, the majority of them will end up dropping out and joining their colleagues in the informal job market, either because of lack of support or because of the search for a livelihood, since parents/guardians are unable to address their financial needs. The experience from the DDRR programme show that most of the former combatants and other war-affected youths who made up their minds to continue their studies in both formal education and vocational skills training programmes, ended up dropping out for three key reasons: (1) because the programme was not long enough to complete their secondary school/vocational training; (2) because of their inability to cope with the training programmes because they were overage; or (3) because they sold the training opportunities to other youth that were willing to make use of the opportunity.

In other words, the lack of funds to continue their educational programmes force many youth into the informal business market, which is the most popular coping mechanism they resort to. As a consequence, most of the youth in the project coverage areas chose to join the informal market to make quick but low incomes.

In relation to national politics, youth exclusion is also relatively high due to their illiteracy level and lack of skills. However, during political election campaigns, youth play a key role, and are thereafter forgotten in most parts of public sector ministries/agencies. Although some youth have made progress in national politics by holding ministerial, parliamentary and government posts, the vast majority of youth feel excluded from this area. In the communities surveyed for this study, the overwhelming view was that youth do not take part in national decision-making processes. Nonetheless, in certain communities like West Point and New Kru Town, youth do organize intellectual forums on issues of national relevance, and politicians and professionals are invited to these forums to speak on issues of national importance. Through such forums, they air their views and mobilize youth for political discussion.

In the light of the above, it is important to stress that the context for youth exclusion and vulnerability is the impact of long years of war on every facet of Liberian life. It destroyed the economy, and badly damaged the education and health infrastructure. Without education and skills, most youth find it difficult to access the job market. In response to the challenges of exclusion and vulnerability, youth have engaged in business activities in the informal sector. Others have sought solace in sports and carry out self-help projects in their communities.

# Chapter 5
## Social outcomes

From the focus group discussions held in ten different areas in Liberia, it was clear that although there were no major differences in terms of how youth cope with exclusion and vulnerability, each area contributed certain unique experiences to the study. The outcomes of ten focus group discussions in three out of the 15 counties and ten localities, including Monrovia, are discussed below.

**5.1 Key outcomes of Case Study 1: Kakata, Margibi County**

*5.1.1 E. Francis Senkpanie*

In Kakata we interviewed E. Francis Senkpanie, youth director of the Kakata branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Senkpanie is the 13th child in a family of 15 children. Although he lives in Kakata, his county of origin is Gbarpolu. He is a junior student at the University of Liberia. Personally, he sees himself firstly as a student, and then as youth director, social worker and public servant, in that order. Moreover, he identifies with and admires only three institutions in his life, including the YMCA, the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) and the UN. He thinks that the institution that has had most impact on him is the YMCA.

Senkpanie wants to change the lives of people and, more specifically, he is interested in improving the status of his family and serving as a role model who lives a modest life in the community. He feels strongly that the YMCA, the FLY, the Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, and the UN share his world outlook. Accordingly, he sees himself contributing to peace and security on the international level in the next ten years. Through his work, he wants to change people in order for them to promote good governance and become involved in peace-building and capacity building. Regarding his family, he would like to change their present status from poverty to a level where they can access educational opportunities as the way forward.

He sees the rapid increase in the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate and the growing poverty in the country as the greatest challenges in his life. Accordingly, he feels that if peace is enhanced and the economy is stabilized, then these challenges could be partially addressed. He does not want to be part of the present situation where leaders of the country are insecure.

Given his present role, Senkpanie thinks that he can now afford certain things in life and he is happy with the way the members of his community see him. They hold him in high esteem and this is progress for him. He holds the view that his relationship with other institutions is helpful to his work and thinks that his life is really improving and not stagnating.

In his view, he had a positive experience when he represented his organization, the YMCA, at an international conference in another country. Certainly, the experience was important because he shared experiences with other participants, but the negative aspect was that he saw children as young as ten who were able to work with computers, but this is something he could not do. To him, this was a negative experience.

### 5.1.2 Felecia C. Kpingbah

Felecia C. Kpingbah is the first of three children and is a high school graduate who hails from Bong County. She is commonly called Chucupee. In order, she sees herself firstly as a student and then a family person and an individual. She admires educated people and at the international level, she admires Merci Corps, whose work has had a profound impact on her. She cares about friendly people and the way they live.

As an aspiration, she would like a better standard of living for her and her family. Further, she would like to work as a nurse. In this light, the Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts (TNIMA), which trains nurses, is an institution that offers what she aspires to achieve. Hence, in the next ten years she sees herself as a professional nurse and life saver. She is interested in changing the health of the country and reducing the mortality rate of the people. She has lost confidence in the world around her and this includes both the socio-economic situation and the political environment. With money, the world around her could be a better place to live in.

She would not like to work in the sex trade, which she sees as highly negative. Unfortunately, she does not think that she is progressing in life, and things are instead getting worse, and so she feels that she is stagnating, but with money and a sense of direction she could improve her life. Her association with Merci Corps has been a positive experience for her.

**5.2 Key outcomes of Case Study 2: Gbarnga, Bong County**

*5.2.1 Edith Yorwah*

Edith Yorwah is a student and a mother of one child. She has ambitions to further her education. She admires and identifies with the local church, the Kpelle people, and the black race throughout the world. However, the institution that has the most impact on her is the church, and she cares about the issue of health care for the people. She wants to become a prosperous person, but what this means remains vague.

In her view, some NGOs share her concerns about health care and the other things she stands for. In the next ten years, she would like to be in a position to render substantial help to her family and friends. She would like to change the world so that that more and more people become educated, and she would like to change the educational status of her family. However, peer group influences and 'distractions' could affect her ambitions and may make things difficult for her to acquire education. She hopes that someone special will come into her life to encourage her to achieve the goal of acquiring education. Ultimately, she would like to become a medical practitioner and would not like to continue to live the rural life and get caught up in 'traditional society'.

According to her, her life is improving, and people are helping her with lessons and basic needs. She has never been part of any organization and so could not describe or choose the positive and negative experiences of any institution she had been involved with.

*5.2.1 Benedict Taigbaelee*

Benedict Taigbaelee is a high school graduate and a teacher in the city. He has a son. He runs study classes in the community. He sees himself as a teacher, a father and a high school graduate, in that order, and admires and identifies with the Kpelle people. At the international level, he admires the people of Ireland. There is Catholic presence in Gbarnga, and because some of the priests in Liberia originated from Ireland, some students or people from Catholic schools or the church admire them.

The Bong Students Association and Taigbaelee's church have had an immense impact on him. He cares about his parents and would like to improve their welfare and become a useful person in society. He feels that orphanage homes, which provide for unfortunate children, share his desire to do good. In the next ten years, he would like to become one of the most educated people in the city and change those that are not interested in education. He would also like to change the interpretation of the Bible, but failed to say which aspects he is referring to and how he would do this.

He would also like to improve the living conditions of his family. According to him, it might be difficult for him to achieve his aspirations, because of the attitude of people in authority. For example, they are self-interested and biased to such an extent that it becomes difficult for anyone to easily improve their status; such officials only want their families or in-laws to benefit from scholarships, for example. Therefore, it is only with support from a higher authority that he can achieve his goal of acquiring higher education. He would like to become a member of the Liberian legislature and be a part of the county's legislative caucus. He would not want to be a part of a secret society.

He was part of the Christian Orphanage, which takes care of orphans, but feels that they leave out other kids who are in dire need, but are not orphans. He feels that nothing has changed for him and so his life is stagnant.

### 5.2.3 Ruth S. Sumo

Ruth S. Sumo is a nursing student at Cuttington University in Suakoko, Bong County. She admires and identifies with her kin people, the Kpelle, as well as university students and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Catholic Church has impacted on her life and she cares about health issues in the world. Like others, Sumo would like to improve the living conditions of her family and wants to become the most caring nurse in the profession. She identifies with the Nursing Board of Liberia and the WHO. In the next ten years, she would like to become a medical lawyer and advocate for the rights of nurses.

School fees are very high and this could hamper her ambition to become a nurse, and therefore a reduction in school fees could help her in this direction. She would like to serve in the higher echelons of the Ministry of Health, but would not like to become a part of the Sande secret society, without explaining why.[22]

She thinks that her life is improving and her mother is a major source of support. The church provides fellowship and encourages its members to love one another, but could extend this principle beyond the narrow confines of its members to non-members who need fellowship as well.

## 5.3 Key outcomes of Case Study 3: Bomi County

### 5.3.1 Abraham Seitua

Abraham Seitua is considered in the community as an influential youth organizer. He admires and identifies with the Group of 77, which caters for

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22    The Sande society is a secret women's traditional society in Liberia. It is present in all parts of the country, except in the south-east (excluding Grand Bassa County).

disabled people in Liberia; the national government; and the Barcelona Football Club. The Western Region branch of the Catholic Youth Organization has had an impact on his life.

He would like to improve the lives of the disabled in the world and acquire a college education to the BA degree level. He would like to become a role model for young people and thinks that his views are similar to those espoused by Christianity in general, but by the Baptist denomination in particular.

Seitua would like to change the way in which the International Criminal Court in The Hague works and believes that it should not take anyone from his/her home country to be tried outside it. Furthermore, he would like to see an improvement in the way in which the UN supports and protects women and children. He wants to change the living conditions of his family so that they can live together in a prosperous way.

He would like to be part of the decision-making process in his community and would not like to take part in violence against other people. He feels that he has stagnated because his situation is neither getting worse nor improving. He has a job with a minimum salary to sustain him. He is not happy with his membership of traditional society, but is happy being a state employee.

*5.3.2 Hawa Coleman*

Hawa Coleman, also known as Yeiyei, is a businesswoman who fends for herself. She considers herself to be a 'strong business women' and admires and identifies with the Klay Youth Group, the Christian Children Fund (CCF) and the UN. The CCF has had an important impact on her. She cares about her family, the country and the world at large; and is concerned about education for her family and herself.

She wants to become a 'good person', without specifically explaining what this means. She thinks that she and the youth group stand for the same thing. She is against war and the rape of women, and therefore hopes that peace will be maintained in the country. She also wants better living conditions for her family, but the difficult situation in the country, including the lack of money, will make life difficult for her to achieve this easily. With a loan, she would improve her business activities. She wants to be part of the decision-making processes and get a loan to improve her business. In the future she does not want to be part of violent activities, because of their negative impact on the society.

Although she thinks that things are getting better, she also feels that they are not too good. On the whole, she is doing her best to improve her life through her business and so is making progress. She has been involved with the Klay Youth Group for Development and Empowerment and the Catholic

Women's Association, which helped her to gain exposure. Unfortunately, neither group gives loans for business.

### 5.3.3 Morris Johnson

Morris Johnson sees himself as an energetic person who is very friendly and is concerned about national issues. He admires and identifies with children and youth, the FLY and the UN, particularly the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and he cares about sports, because they have a unifying effect on the world. Thus, he thinks that the Barcelona Football Club fulfils his ideals. His desire is to acquire higher education for himself and his family. In ten years time he would like to obtain a doctoral degree and serve his country as minister of sports and as a role model.

He would like to reduce corruption and create awareness on HIV/AIDS issues, but he lacks the power and influence to ensure that his views form part of the decision-making processes on these issues. He thinks that access to a phone, a radio and other media outlets could enable him make his views felt on these issues. In this light, he would like to become part of the government in order to play a critical role in decision-making and policymaking on youth issues.

He would not want to be part of any violent acts and is opposed to corruption and discrimination. Life has been very difficult since his graduation from school in 2004/05 and he feels that things are getting worse for him. He works as a cleaner without remuneration and hence his association with the government has a negative impact on him. However, when he served as secretary to the boys club of Save the Children, things were positive because youth were brought together in order speak their minds on issues affecting them.

## 5.4 Key outcomes of Case Study 4: Logan Town, Montserrado County

### 5.4.1 Joseph Jallah

Joseph Jallah is friendly, religious, and loves business, sports and children. He sees himself firstly as a businessman. He admires and identifies with petty traders, the church and the French national football team. He has survived through encouragement from friends, and cares about improving the living conditions of his family by being an independent businessman. The WHO and micro-credit groups share his views and principles, and in the next ten years he would like to become an independent and international businessman.

Moreover, he would like to reduce corruption and promote love among people. He thinks that the soaring prices of goods and basic commodities make life difficult for him. Thus, once these prices are reduced,

life would be easier. He would like to join the import business and is against corruption.

In light of what has happened to him so far, he says that things are getting better, because his business is helping him. He worked with Global Alliance Trading Company to promote good health and sanitation, but was not paid on time. As part of a youth group, they tried to mobilize youth in the community, but found it difficult to do so.

### 5.4.2 Nancy Bainmie

Nancy Bainmie is a friendly girl who is religious, loves children and is a bold person. In order of importance, she is religious, friendly and bold; and admires and identifies with the Baptist Church, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the World Food Programme. The church has impacted on her life, and she cares about education for everyone in the world and about improving the living conditions of her family and herself.

In the future, she would like to become an independent and educated woman who can affect education for others. An organization called Twins shares her views, because it seeks to empower women in order to make them independent and educated. In the next ten years, she would like to have a college degree and become a 'respectful wife'. She would like to change the 'indecent dress code of people, especially women' and does not want to change the religious lives of others. She wants her family to remain as united as they are today, but improving their living conditions is crucial to her life. However, the deplorable economic situation in the country constitutes a hindrance to achieving this goal in the short term. Things would become easier if she had a fiancé and a sponsor to support her.

The lack of financial support is a hindrance to achieving her objective of acquiring education in order to work and become independent. She feels that her life is stagnating because of lack of money, and in the past, she worked in a salon and plaited hair, but was deceived by the owner that it was a cosmetics school. She also worked in a restaurant, but the salary was too low and its payment was often delayed.

### 5.4.3 Reuben Williams

Reuben Williams is a friendly person who loves people and sports. In order of importance, he loves people, music and sports, and admires and identifies with intellectuals and the Manchester United Football Club. He also supports the Barcelona Football Club. The Concerned Citizens for Youth Development, an informal group, has impacted on his life. He cares about the security of people and the financial well-being of himself and his family, and wants to become a politician.

In the next ten years, he would like to hold an MA degree and become a politician. He would like to fight against injustice and improve the current status of his family. The major obstacles are the current difficulties in the country, including corruption and lack of educational opportunities. With a job or a scholarship and a considerable decrease in corruption in the country at large, things could become easier. In light of this, he would like to become a member of the legislature in order to make laws that would protect and promote the well-being and security of the people. He would never want to become a lawless person.

He requires support, because his greatest obstacle is lack of money. Hence, although he feels that his life is stagnating, with a little support, his situation could improve.

## 5.5 Key outcomes of Case Study 5: Paity Town, Montserrado County

### 5.5.1 Gabriel Nyanfore

Gabriel Nyanfore is friendly, a businessperson and a 'perfect gentleman' who loves to 'look good'. In order of importance, he is a gentleman, businessman and friendly. He admires and identifies with the intellectual youth in the community, the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Chelsea Football Club. He shares the ideals and principles of the UN, because of its role in the country. He is interested in business, and would like his family to succeed. In addition, he wants to become a productive citizen of Liberia and in the next ten years would like to become a very successful businessman.

One of his ambitions is to change the world in order for it to become a peaceful and secure place to live. He feels that bad governance undermines the development of youth, but with sustained peace in the country, the environment would be created to achieve his goal. One of his goals is to become a part of the business community, and he is opposed to violence and corruption.

He feels that he is making progress because of his business, and through the UN he has learnt tailoring, which he is not practising. He is supporting his family and some of his friends through his business, but feels that when things are bad and one cannot help anyone, one is easily branded as a 'mean' and 'bad' person.

### 5.5.2 Patricia Tipayson

Patricia Tipayson is a teacher who loves sports. She sees herself as a teacher, respectful and lover of sports, in that order. She admires and identifies with her fellow teachers, the Pentecostal Church and Chelsea Football Club. According to her, the Earth Football Club has affected her, and in world

affairs she cares about peace and security. With money, she could sustain her family. She wants to bring development to her community.

She shares the ideals for which UNMIL was deployed in Liberia, because it has provided a space for her to pursue her goals and help improve the lives of others. In the next ten years, she would like to become a rich person with money to help the community. One of her goals is to change the high prices of goods, and she also wants to reduce illiteracy and build peace.

High levels of corruption in the country and the increasing crime rate make life difficult for most people in Liberia to achieve their goals. She wants to improve the status of her family. However, she would not change the process of peace-building and unity in her family. Her life can only improve once corruption and crime are reduced. Patricia wants to promote development and does not like corrupt people and criminals.

Asked whether things were getting better for her, she replied 'no'. Things are getting worse because of the lack of support to further her studies since she completed high school.

### 5.5.3 Daniel Wilson

Daniel Wilson loves school and business, and is a skilled youth working on air conditioners. In order of preference, he would see himself in terms of education, being a technician, carrying out his business and being a lover of sports. He identifies with and admires students in the community, the Press Union of Liberia and the Barcelona Football Club. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has impacted on his life by providing him with the skills needed to become a technician working on air conditioners. He would like everyone in the world to become educated.

He would like the living conditions of his family to improve and wants his family members to be united. He shares the goals and ideals of the UNHCR, which helps people to improve their living conditions. In the next ten years, he would like to complete school, graduate from college and use his career to support others. Globally, he would like to fight corruption and maintain religion in the world. Unfortunately, the rampant corruption, high prices and lack of job opportunities are hindrances to achieving his goals. Progress could be made if there were no corruption, if there were low prices and if there were job opportunities.

One of the things he would like to do is to contribute to national development, but not get involved in corrupt practices and sexual abuse. According to him, things are getting worse because of the high prices of basic commodities, lack of job opportunities and low quality education. With a sponsor, he could overcome his difficulties, but at the moment he feels that his life is stagnating.

**5.6 Key outcomes of Case Study 6: Buzzy Quarter, Montserrado County**

*5.6.1 Lovetee Jibbli*

Lovetee Jibbli is a student resident and youth of Buzzy Quarter who sees herself firstly as a Liberian and a student. She admires and identifies with local and national youth, and the UN Volunteers. The Buzzy Quarter Youth Development Organization has impacted on her, and she yearns for peace and justice in the world. She wants to become a good citizen of Liberia and in the next ten years, she wants to become one of the richest women of the country.

Her desire is to improve the educational system in the country, as well as the toilets in her community. In addition, she would like to improve the living conditions of her family. However, the pervasive poverty and lack of financial resources are major impediments to achieving her aspirations. Thus, with adequate funding, she could make progress in life. In the future, she would like to participate actively in national politics.

Assessing her own life, Jibbli feels that she is making progress, because the small business she is running is helping her to make ends meet. Her involvement with the Buzzy Quarter Youth Development Organisation has been very rewarding.

*5.6.2 J. Duston S. Narmah*

J. Duston S. Narmah is a student of the University of Liberia and resident of the community. He admires and identifies with Christianity locally, nationally and internationally. Religious institutions have had an impact on him. He cares about children and wants to be seen in the light of US President George Bush, but it is not clear what this means. He associates with the Sociology and Anthropology Students Association of the University of Liberia, and this had had a positive effect on him. In the next ten years he would like to acquire an MA degree in Sociology and Demography. One of his concerns is to change the deplorable living conditions of the people in the country, including those of his family. The current state of pervasive poverty in the country poses a threat to his ambition, but with a job, he could support himself. The lack of money is a hindrance to achieving his goal and he thus feels that his life is stagnating.

*5.6.3 Johnson Kesselley*

Johnson Kesselley is a plumber and member of the community. In order of importance, he places himself as a plumber and a youth. He identifies with local youth, national NGOs and international footballers. The Liberia Opportunity and Industrial Centre (LOIC), one of the vocational training

centres in Liberia, has had an impact on him. In the world, he upholds hard work and honesty, and wants to change the social status of his family and maintain unity among them. He wants to be seen as a peaceful person and therefore upholds the ideas and principles of the UN.

In the next ten years, he wants to have a successful career and would like to reduce racial discrimination, but maintain the UN. Low salaries and lack of access to the job market constitute major impediments to achieving his goals in life. Similarly, he would like to change the living conditions of his family and with an adequate salary and a job, he could contribute towards this. He wants to participate in community development and condemns theft and disrespectfulness.

As a student, things are getting better and so his life is not stagnating. Being part of the Buzzy Quarter Youth Development Organization has been positive, but the unwillingness of elders to encourage youth development activities has been negative.

## 5.7 Key outcomes of Case Study 7: New Kru Town, Montserrado County

### 5.7.1 Amos R. Marjahn

Amos R. Marjahn considers himself to be a determined, struggling and self-supported youth in order of importance. He identifies with and admires petty traders, civil society groups and the UN. His life has been impacted upon by civil society and he is interested in youth development and world peace. The well-being of his family constitutes a major concern as well. He would like to become a role model in his community and says that the community police share his values and principles. In the next ten years he would like to obtain a college degree and acquire a good job.

One of his desires is to change the mentality of the people and ensure that peace is maintained in the world. He also wants to change and improve the status of his family. He sees the current state of the Liberian economy as a major threat to achieving his goals. The increase in the prices of basic commodities is not helping the situation. Thus, if the economy improves, including a drop in the prices of commodities, this could change the situation for him. He aspires to become a state official in the future and is opposed to criminal behaviour.

In terms of his current status, Marjahn feels that he is progressing; things are not getting worse; and his current and volunteer work are helping him to cope with the current state of affairs in the country. He is part of the community police, who support the national police in fighting crime. Unfortunately, sometime the community does not support them. He says that his work with the Bomi University Students Association is positive because of its programmes off and on campus. But it lacks support.

*5.7.2 Lucretia Koffa*

Lucretia Koffa sees herself as a friendly, sociable and well-known person in the area. The groups and people she admires and identifies with most are the church, the UN and petty traders. The Women in Peace-Building Network (WIPNET) has greatly impacted on her life and she is concerned about global peace and the unity of her family, and wants to become a role model for others.

She shares the ideals and principles of the National AIDS Control Programme. She wants to become educated in the next ten years and advocate for the rights and welfare of women. She wants to change the increasing rate of prostitution, maintain global peace and security, and improve the social status of her parents. She feels that injustice and corruption in society could prevent her from achieving her dreams. With financial support, her life situation could improve.

In addition, she would like to advocate for the well-being of women, but would not like to engage in corruption and injustice. In her view, things are not good; she is not achieving her dreams, because of the lack of support, and therefore her life is stagnating.

She is involved in sports, with a keen interest in kick-ball and football. These are useful leisure and social activities that enable her to make friends, but there is no incentive. Going to church is also positive in her life.

*5.7.3 G. Baccus Karpeh*

G. Baccus Karpeh considers himself a humble person, a student and an intellectual in order of importance. The groups and people he identifies with and admires are intellectuals, politicians and the Barcelona Football Club. Youth groups, especially the University of Liberia Students Union (ULSU), have impacted on him. He would like youth to acquire education and skills training, and cares for the well-being and educational status of his family. He would like to be seen as someone who is providing support to the development of his fellow youth, and hence supports the principles of the ULSU, which seeks to empower youth through education.

In the next ten years, he would like to obtain an MA degree and promote the welfare of youth. Changing the status of his family and maintaining unity within it is of concern to him. However, the level of malpractices in society and the lack of opportunities constitute a hindrance that is preventing him from achieving his goals. Thus, he would like to see fair play and opportunities for the youth. He would like to advocate for the empowerment of youth and would never support anyone who is interested in exploiting the lack of knowledge and power of youth.

His life is not getting better, and the lack of support is a major obstacle, and therefore he feels 'choked' (stagnant), but the 'struggle continues'. He is

involved in intellectual activities through debates within the community on issues of national relevance. This enlightens 'ignorant' youth, but there is no support for such activities.

## 5.8 Key outcomes of Case Study 8: Duport Road, Montserrado County

### 5.8.1 Gayflor Quoiquoi

Gayflor Quoiquoi is a father of four who hails from Lofa County and considers himself a humanitarian. Thus, in order of importance, he is firstly a humanitarian and spokesman, but did not indicate for whom. He identifies with and admires community leaders, the government of Liberia and the UN. The Duport Road community has an impact on him, and he cares for the well-being of women and children. He wants to maintain unity and self-sustenance in his family. He shares the ideals of institutions such as the UN and its related agency like the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Don Bosco. In the next ten years, he would like to become a caretaker (of what he did not say) and a humanitarian. He wants people to leave the streets and live in homes and would not want to change anyone's religion .

The lack of job opportunities and free schooling for children is a major headache for him, but this could change if the government were to provide free schooling for children. He would like to contribute to the educational system and oppose violence. Things are getting better for him, because he lives in the community peacefully. This area was a battle zone during the war and to live in peace now is an important development.

### 5.8.2 Aminata T. Conde

Aminata T. Conde is a female resident who admires and identifies with students, the national army and the ICRC. MSF has had an impact on her because of the free medical treatment it provides. She cares about peace, freedom of movement and education for members of her family, and wants to save suffering humanity.

The two institutions that share her world outlook are the TNIMA and the John F. Kennedy Hospital, which provide health training and care, respectively. In line with the above, she would like to become a professional nurse in the next ten years and change the living conditions of her family, but would never want to change her nationality.

The current state of poverty and hardship makes it difficult to achieve her aspirations. However, with jobs opportunities and free education, this could change. The only thing she would like to do in the future is to become a nurse, but not become a prostitute and engage in robbery. With the help of the elders in the community, things are getting better; she is not stagnating, but

could do better with financial support. Working with the youth of Duport Road is important, but the lack of support from them is discouraging.

### 5.8.3 Lydia Collingwood

Lydia Collingwood is a female resident of the community, a high school graduate and member of the Duport Road South Youth Association. She considers herself to be a youth who identifies with and admires the elders of the community, MSF and the WHO.

Institutions like MSF and UNICEF that care about peace and unity as well as love and togetherness have had an impact on her life. She would like to become a role model who shares the ideals and principles of UNICEF.

In the next ten years she would like to become a caring mother who will contribute towards improving the living conditions of the people, but would not want to change the culture of other people. The existing hardship in the country is a major headache for her, but things could improve if there were jobs. Aspiring to become a humanitarian, Lydia would not want to become a prostitute.

She is trying to improve her life, but the lack of financial support is hindering her progress. Nevertheless, she does not feel that she is stagnating.

Working with the Duport Road South Youth Association has been a positive for her, but the slow progress in its work has been a disappointment.

## 5.9 Key outcomes of Case Study 9: West Point, Montserrado County

### 5.9.1 Rosaline S. Bonald

Rosaline S. Bonald is the second daughter of five, a Liberian, and a female police officer who prefers to be seen in the following order of importance: as herself, a police officer and a Liberian. She identifies with and admires the national and international police (i.e. Interpol). The national police have impacted on her life and she cares for justice and unity in society as a whole and for her family in particular. She loves being a peacemaker and a law enforcement officer who wants to reduce crime and prostitution. She would never want to stop law enforcement, but would like to stop gossip in the community.

Nothing could make it difficult to achieve her aspirations. She wants to serve in UN peacekeeping activities and would never want to be part of criminal activities and prostitution. Life is getting better for her because of her job, and she is making progress. Her association with the national police has been rewarding, but she does not see any benefit in being part of the T-Girl Club, which has no good objectives.

### 5.9.2 Reubel G. Marshall

Reubel G. Marshall is a university student who believes in fair play. In order of importance, he is herself, a student and a footballer. He only identifies with and admires footballers locally, national and internationally. The institution that has the most impact on him is the University of Liberia. He stands against racism, wants to achieve good living standards and would like to become an educated person who can contribute to the development of his community.

He sees himself as a 'strong businessman' in the next ten years, and wants to change the living standards of the people, but would not like to change his nationality. Pervasive poverty and low wages make it difficult to achieve his goals, but with financial assistance, this can be solved. He would like to become an international footballer, but rejects power and greed, which are destroying the fabric of society. Through petty business, things are getting better for him.

Playing for the Exodus Football Club has been good and positive for him, but the activities of the club are not improving.

### 5.9.3 Caesar Nyemah

Caesar Nyemah sees himself as a son, a Liberian, and an economist who identifies with and admires the staff of ECOBANK and the World Bank. The University of Liberia has influenced his life and he stands for peace, justice, transparency and fairness. He cares for the improvement of the living standards of the people and would like to be seen as a UN volunteer. Thus, in the next ten years, he would like to work for the UN and abolish corruption. The lack of a job is making life difficult for him, and hence with employment, things could improve.

Through his business, he feels that things are getting better for him. His association with the University of Liberia has been positive, whereas his association with NANSSAN (a local organization) has been negative.

## 5.10 Key outcomes of Case Study 10: Tubmanburg, Bomi County

### 5.10.1 Lauretta Bamiah

Lauretta Bamiah is a peaceful girl who admires and identifies with the ICRC branch in Tubmanburg, WIPNET and the International Rescue Committee. The Gender Ministry has impacted on her life; and she cares about global peace, wants to see her siblings returning to school, and would like to become a respected and educated women in the community. She stands for the same principles as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because she wants to reconcile people and promote unity and national healing.

In the next ten years, she would like to be an accountant who resolves conflicts and builds peace. She also wants to change the living conditions of her family, but the increasing poverty and gender-based violence such as rape are obstacles to achieving this ambition. Currently, she would also like to be part of the media and work against corrupt practices.

She feels that her life is stagnating, because nothing is changing in it: she receives no support and is living on her own.

### 5.10.2 Varflay A. Massalay

Varflay A. Massalay is a student who is a member of the Bomi Students Association. In order of importance, he sees herself as an honest, sincere and friendly person who admires and identifies with the youth of Tubmanburg, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and the UN. The local youth group has impacted on his life, and he would like to resolve conflict and contribute to global peace.

He is interested in improving the living conditions of people and promoting education. Furthermore, he would like to become a successful person who shares the ideals and principles of the UN. In the next ten years, he would like to obtain an MA degree in order to contribute to the process of national development. He is interested in improving the living conditions of the people, eradicating poverty, and maintaining global peace and security.

However, the current state of corruption is a major obstacle, but through political will, things can change for the better. In the future, he would like to serve in UN peace support operations. He does not want to take part in corrupt acts and violence.

Things are not getting better for him, and all his efforts to sustain himself have not been successful, because of a lack of resources; things are getting worse for him, because thieves burglarized his house and destroyed his business.

His association with the Tubmanburg Youth Association and Action Faim, which feeds hungry children, has been positive.

### 5.10.3 L. Varney Jallahquay

L. Varney Jallahquay considers himself to be a photographer and a sociable person. He admires and identifies with the Tubmanburg Youth Association and its football team, the Invincible Eleven Football Association, at the national level, and the Brazilian national team at the international level.

The National Photographers Union of Liberia has impacted on his life, he is concerned about children's education and wants a long life in order to be in the position to support the education of his family. He is a peaceful person who shares the objectives of the Tubmanburg Youth Association, which he would like to continue serving in the next ten years.

He wants to maintain peace in the world, but the ongoing conflicts pose serious challenges. If there is peace and development, things will become better for him. In this light, he does not want be part of those who promote violence and conflicts.

Having said the above, he thinks his life is improving, because he runs a photo studio with support from his wife. His life is not stagnating.

He has been part of the Tubmanburg Youth Association, which brings together young people, but it has been difficult to achieve a common understanding among them. His association with the National Photographers Union of Liberia has no negative experiences.

## 5.11 Perspectives of successful youth

From the focus group discussions, life stories and survey, it is clear that young people admire the work of a number of institutions in their respective communities, including health and community development NGOs, the YMCA, universities, the FLY, churches and Christian organizations, tribal groups, international football groupings in Europe and professional groups. The policies and programmes of these social agencies or institutions seem to meet the personal goals and aspirations of youth. Therefore, they feel strongly that these institutions could play a more significant role in their lives and hence help them to cope with the challenges of post-conflict Liberia.

The focus group discussions held in the ten project areas showed that, of the ten youth who considered themselves to be successful in life, 60 per cent admire the UN and its organizations. This is an indication that the UN and its agencies operating in Liberia are doing much to enable young people to find avenues for coping with their challenges. In this sense, these agencies are providing the space for youth to address the issue of exclusion and vulnerability facing them. Further, youth could be recognizing the contributions of UN agencies because of the role they play in bringing peace to Liberia; providing support for the DDRR programmes for ex-combatants, most of whom are youth; and providing funds for the resettlement of young people and their parents. The funds provided by such agencies to youth during the DDRR process enabled many youth to raise seed money to start petty businesses. In other words, the contributions of UN agencies are considered important to the lives of young people.

Because of these contributions, the UN and its organizations have an important impact on the lives of youth in the study areas. In light of this, the UN agencies have a critical role to play in supporting the government to address the exclusion and vulnerability of young Liberian people. This could be in the form of sound policy development or through resources that provide formal education and vocational skills training and petty businesses opportunities for youth throughout the country. The research revealed that

almost all successful youth admired the work of and preferred working with local organizations, including national NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) in an effort to achieve their set objectives. This also means that UN agencies should increase their support for NGOs and CBOs in their efforts to improve the lives of youth and reduce the level of their exclusion and vulnerability in Liberia.

It was apparent that half of the successful youth interviewed believed in the work of the government of Liberia and its ministries/agencies. Using the support that these institutions receive from donors, they were attempting to positively affect the lives of youth in Liberia.

It was also apparent that three of the ten successful youth interviewed believed that church organizations were having a tremendous impact on their lives. This means that religious organizations are important in the process of reducing the exclusion and vulnerability of youth in Liberia. Like the NGOs and CBOs, international organizations should direct their activities through churches if they want to influence youth positively and reduce their economic and social plight.

The study showed that 20 per cent of the youth who were successful in life admire European football teams, which means that sports could be promoted to improve the lives of youth. What needs to be done in order to expedite the process of improving youth livelihoods is to design proactive national sports policies, particularly as they relate to football, that will enhance the situation of youth. For example, the national policy of the Liberia Football Association on the development of football needs to support sports clubs, and county and national teams. This is the best way in which sports can benefit youth who are excluded from key economic and social activities, and who are vulnerable to violence and criminal activities in Liberia. Currently, the national policy on football decentralization is not functional and does not impact on the country as a whole. Hence, those who admire football and want to improve their lives through sports are receiving little if any assistance in this regard. In effect, the high level of centralization of football activities and the low levels of support provided to existing national, sub-national and club football in Liberia make many sports lovers (including youth in the study areas) admire European sports clubs.

Thus, it is worth noting that there was not much difference between the youth social agencies referred to by both the successful and stagnating youth, with successful youth considering government agencies as being among the institutions that they admire and identify with in their state of exclusion and vulnerability. Also, most of the successful youth mentioned the UN and its agencies as key social agencies that were influencing their lives, while most of those who considered themselves to be stagnating viewed international NGOs (excluding the UN) as key influential factors and

institutions that assisted them in their struggle to cope with exclusion and vulnerability.

Twenty per cent of the stagnating youth saw UN agencies as key institutions that helped them in their coping process. Another 20 per cent of the ten young people who were interviewed saw national and international sports (particularly football) as important institutions that were reviving their lives in post-conflict Liberia. It was also reported that two-fifth of the stagnating youths indicated that they admired and identified with churches and international NGOs such as MSF, CCF, ICRC, etc. They mentioned that the international NGOs were important to their coping strategies, and wished that they could continue to be assisted by these NGOs. They mentioned that the contribution of churches was two-fold: they provided relief services and at the same time developed spiritual awareness among the youth.

Unlike the successful youth, only one-tenth of the stagnating youth used government institutions to cope with their high degree of exclusion and vulnerability, which means that this latter group considered non-state actors as key social agencies to assist them with their coping mechanisms.

In relation to retrogressing youth, three of the nine young people interviewed considered the UN and its agencies as key institutions that they admired. Four out of the nine in this group admired the Press Union of Liberia, football clubs, and intellectual/political and youth groups. In addition, two of this group viewed local and international NGOs as key to their survival and achievements, while one of them believed in and admired the banking sector. This means that in order to prevent the high level of vulnerability and exclusion of youth in Liberia, the key social institutions (most of whom are non-state actors) should be supported through relevant policies and programmes.

The institutions that impacted on the lives of retrogressing youth were not only non-state actors, but also local and international organizations such as the Catholic Church, the National Photographers Union of Liberia, the FLY, UNDP, UNHCR, MSF and UNICEF, and youth development and informal groups. According to some of them, the only state actors that influenced the lives of most of them were the University of Liberia and the LOIC. This is an indication that most of the institutions that provided coping mechanisms for youth were non-state actors.

The distribution of youth by intervention institutions/agencies showed that only those social agencies that are available in the community are impacting on their lives. As indicated in Appendix 1, [23] there was no relationship between the type of social agency that youth associated with and

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[23]     Appendix 1 contains a logical framework of the social institutions/agencies impacting on the social and economic lives and other activities of youth, including post-conflict coping mechanisms, in Liberia. The appendix also shows respondents by employment status and the key activities that they engaged in prior to the YOVEX Project interviews.

the employment status of youth. For example, the employment status of youth who associated with local organizations was no different from the status of those who affiliated with international organizations. It was also found that, although youth mentioned that social agencies impacted on them, the level and nature of the impact were not mentioned. In effect, how the identification with social agencies impacts on the social and economic situation of youth, including employment status and professional career development (formal education and vocational skills training), could not be determined.

The analysis of respondents by employment status showed that 46 per cent of youth were employed, with 33 per cent self-employed in the informal sector and engaged in petty trading. However, the level of effective unemployment was realistically estimated at 87 per cent, since informal sector employment is unsustainable and has a low income-generating capacity. The low level of formal sector employment (13 per cent) among Liberian youth does not only highlight their exclusion from formal sector job opportunities, but also signifies their vulnerability to unwholesome activities such the sex trade, armed robbery and other criminal acts.

**Figure 7: Youth employment status in Liberia**
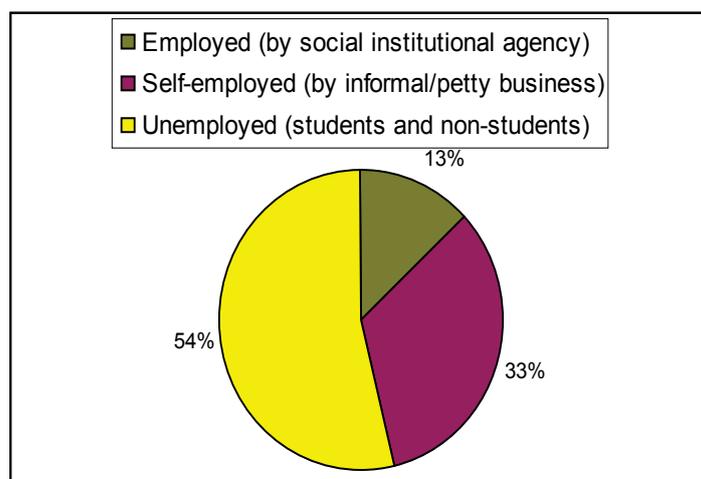


This is so because most of the youth interviewed had families to maintain, but had no sustainable employment and few skills to engage in sustainable economic activities, which explains their exclusion from public and formal sector employment and their vulnerability to entering questionable/illegal activities. The key activities of Liberian youth included, but were not limited to, schooling and petty businesses, which constituted the positive aspects of their coping mechanisms.

# Chapter 6
## Youth coping mechanisms

From the focus group discussions held in ten different areas in Liberia, it became evident that although there were no major differences in terms of how youth cope with exclusion and vulnerability, each area contributed certain unique experiences to the study. In what follows, we provide a narrative report on the ten focus group discussions and life histories. The outcomes of ten focus group discussions in three out of the 15 counties and ten localities, including Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia, are therefore given below.

While the sample presented in this section of the report may not explain the complexities and challenges of youth vulnerability for all Liberian youth, and while it may not explain how all of them are coping with youth vulnerability and exclusion, it provides the basis for understanding the challenges of vulnerability and exclusion within the Liberian context, because the stories reflect what is going on across the country.

From these life stories, there are certain cross-cutting issues that seem to affect the way in which young people have tried to address the enormous challenges presented by youth vulnerability and exclusion. These include, but are not limited to, peer pressure, adventurism, poverty, lack of access to education and others. Many of those interviewed have turned either to religious institutions, relatives, sports or the YMCA for inspiration. Some have been involved in violence because of peer pressure or mere adventurism. The experiences of the war years, which were characterized by high levels of violence, have also impacted on the lives of many young people.

In what follows, we present the life stories of youth from Bong County, Montserrado County and Bomi County. All of these political sub-divisions have diverse historical, political and economic experiences that have affected youth. For example, Bong County was the headquarters of Charles Taylor's NPFL, and therefore for many years, this part of the country was a sort of epicentre for the country's conflict system. It has rubber plantations and there are booming commercial and informal economies. Like Bong, Bomi County

also hosted armed factions: ULIMO-J and later LURD. It has rubber plantations, but not in comparison with those of Bong. Informal trade constitutes a major activity of the people of this area. By contrast, Montserrado County constitutes the nerve centre of the Liberian economy at the moment. There are more training opportunities here for youth than in the rest of the country. Regarding youth, the common pattern in all of these counties is political exclusion. The social outcomes of all the coping mechanisms reflect either success, stagnation or failure.

## 6.1 Coping successfully

### 6.1.1 Kakata

One youth explained:

> *I am a male youth living in Kakata, but a citizen of Gbarpolu County, who participated in two demonstrations that led to the closure of my school and the removal of some administrative staff. In the first demonstration, I was among ten students who were arrested by the police and detained temporarily and released later.*

According to him, his participation in the demonstration was based on peer group pressure and adventurism. After his participation in the first demonstration, he tried to make people take him seriously, because he was considered as one of the 'troublemakers' in his community. He also participated in the second demonstration by market women who were protesting the death of one of their members killed by armed robbers.

Later, he participated in a workshop organised by the YMCA on peer education, which had a tremendous impact on him. He also participated in another workshop by the YMCA on 'youth leadership'. After this, he developed an interest in similar workshops, because they offered a different perspective on life. Through the workshop, he developed an 'interest in social work' and became interested in developing youth esteem and responsible leadership in post-conflict societies: he wanted youth to turn against violence and other vices.

Since then, he has assumed leadership responsibilities as the youth director of the Kakata branch of the YMCA. His story therefore constitutes a successful one, because he is now employed and helping others to become useful citizens in society.

### 6.1.2 Gbarnga

The second life story is about a female from Gbarnga, Bong County. She is the first of three children and is a high school graduate. Because of peer group influence, she began to dress inappropriately, which made her vulnerable to male attention and the possibility of being raped. In one incident in Gbarnga,

she and her friends were targeted by a group who almost raped her one night in 2005. They were saved by a group of community members who heard them crying when the men attacked them. In the process, one of her friends was injured by one of the four attackers. This incident scared her, but did not stop her from dressing inappropriately at night. Her style of dressing gave the impression to some men that she was inviting them for sex.

Later, she was invited to a workshop on adolescent reproductive health, where she learned about sexually transmitted and infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. One of the things she learned from the workshop was the need to avoid having sex with many men, but to stick with one partner in order to avoid being infected with the HI virus. Her fears were confirmed by the death of one of her colleagues from AIDS. It was then that she decided to go to church to thank God for protecting her from the rapists and sparing her from being infected with the HI virus.

Since then, she has become interested in health issues and wants to help reduce the mortality rate of the country. Even though her life has not improved economically, she feels strongly that the fact that she is still alive today illustrates her success. Being aware of the virus and doing away with dressing inappropriately are achievements that she is proud of.

Therefore, while there are some who measure success in terms of material wealth, education and social status, there are others, like this respondent, whose sense of success is based on moral achievements and avoiding the temptation of sliding into the sex trade, like other girls in the country.

### 6.1.3 Gbarnga

The other person interviewed for this project also originated from Gbarnga. She was a female who participated in a student demonstration in the city in 2004, was detained, and felt humiliated as a result. According to her, initially, she was afraid of student activism, but after the arrest, she changed. She is a student and the mother of a child. The detention shamed her because most members of her family and friends considered the action of going into the streets to demonstrate as wrong. In her view, she was right for going into the streets to express her feelings.

As a consequence of her experience, she became determined to pursue further education. She holds the view that with higher education she will be in a position to 'correct some of the ills in society, including the misappropriation of funds from schools'. As she said, 'I hate to remember the day, but it made me strong in God and schooling'. She would like to change the educational status of her family. In her view, she has been successful because of her pursuit of higher education and commitment to fight the ills of society.

In the three success stories discussed above, the perception of success differs for each individual. One of them rose to the position of youth director in the YMCA, another saw the pursuit of further education as the basis for success, whereas the third thought that being able to survive rapists and avoiding being infected with the HI virus constitute success. Two institutions, the YMCA and the church, were responsible for providing the enabling environment for the respondents to cope. These stories could easily replicate themselves throughout Liberia, because many experiences of youth are similar to them. The overall assumption therefore is that success is relative and it is socially constructed.

## 6.2 Stagnating

### 6.2.1 Montserrado

Although there are success stories among the youth of Liberia, there are also cases of stagnation. The three life stories presented below constitute examples of this.

The first is about a young female student who yearns for peace and justice, but has a temperament that has created problems for herself, including causing her life to stagnate. As she explained, 'my friends are always involved in confusion with other girls in our area and they fight in most cases. We fight in school, in the streets, in the yard and in the night clubs and video centres'. She continued:

> … the other day, I was put in jail at the Central Police station (Women and Children's Unit) for fighting with a razor blade and slashing the face of a classmate in the school yard …. I left my parents' home and I am living with friends in Monrovia. So I did not complete the last school year and am not sure of completing this one, unless someone like you can help me.

She also explained that

> … since I was put in jail, I feel that people will take me as a 'gronah' girl [someone living a criminal and rough life]. Because of this, I feel ashamed of asking my relatives for support, because all of them consider me to be a bad child that will not change.

What makes matter worse is the fact that her fiancé is involved in taking drugs. Thus, she has been in jail because of him. On one occasion, he was involved in drug-related activities and she was arrested because the police met her in his room. They wanted to know his whereabouts before she could be released. She explained to her parents what had happened, but they did not believe her and even threatened to disown her because of her shameful acts.

In her explanation, she cannot overcome her misfortune, because someone has 'bewitched' her to become a '*gronah*' girl. Although she is eager

to continue with her schooling, she is finding it difficult to do so. Her life remains stagnant, with no prospect of improving in the future. She does not have the financial resources nor any form of support to help her achieve her goal of pursuing her education.

### 6.2.2 Duport Road, Montserrado County

The next respondent is a female resident of the Duport Road community who admires and identifies with students, the national army and the ICRC. She also participated in the Muslim–Christian riot in Liberia in 2005. Having participated in the riot, she has decided to join the army because of the experience. According to her,

> … from the Liberian Muslims and Christian war, where I joined my colleagues in a violent protest, I feel like joining the army to make a difference in reducing the high level of discrimination that led to the 2005 Liberian religious war that I was part of.

She became involved when she saw her colleagues attacking a church in revenge for an attack on a mosque. As she said,

> I was plaiting my hair when I heard the noise across the streets because of an attack on a mosque by Christians in the Jacob Town area, where I was visiting my uncle. Then my friends ran to a church in the same area to take revenge. I went with them in order to express my anger for the attack on our mosque. We were then arrested by UNMIL and the Liberian police and put on the police prisoners' bench for the whole day.

On another occasion, she insulted someone and even slapped him because of his derogatory statements against Muslims. A boy said that Muslims were 'juju people', and she attacked him and even scratched his face to the extent that it required police intervention. She was arrested by the police and charged with assault.

As she pointed out, participating in the Muslim–Christian riot has made her aggressive. This is why she wants to join the army in order to discipline the people that promote discrimination in society. The only problem for her is her lack of the appropriate education needed to become an officer and not just an ordinary soldier. One of the factors hindering the achievement of her goal is poverty and the slow pace of acquiring education. She feels that her life is stagnating because it is difficult to achieve her goals of acquiring education and becoming an officer in the Liberian army.

### 6.2.3 Tubmanburg, Bomi County

The third respondent was a sympathiser of the ULIMO armed faction, but did not say whether he fought during the war. He maintains that he was a close associate of the warring faction because his close friends were members of the faction. He participated in the last riot before the end of the war and the

subsequent departure of President Taylor to Nigeria, where Taylor was arrested and sent to The Hague for trial.

The respondent is a student and member of the county's student association. He was once arrested in Tubmanburg for participating in a student demonstration, but freed later after investigation of the incident. Neither his participation in the demonstration nor the imprisonment impacted on his life. He wants to become a politician and to serve in UN peace support operations. He is against corrupt practices and participation in violent demonstrations, because for him peace is the way forward.

According to him, he wasted a lot of time associating with friends in ULIMO, and this is why he is still in school. He is not sure of completing school, because life is not getting better for him. As he explained, 'things are actually getting worse now today because the thieves burglarized my house and destroyed my business'. He feels that his life has become stagnant.

Like the success life stories, all three stagnating life stories present a picture that is mixed, but there are cross-cutting issues. In the first place, all three reflect a violent past. Given the nature of the war and its impact on young people, this is not surprising. Either the respondents were associated with people that directly participated in the war or other violent activities, or they actively participated in violence. During the war years, many young people did not have the opportunity to go to school. In one of the cases, religion played a role in making the respondent become violent. The sense of discrimination she feels has roots in the war years when Muslims, mainly Mandingos, were targeted for two reasons: the perception that the Mandingos supported the Doe regime and the formation of ULIMO-K.[24]

The other issue has to do with pervasive poverty, which makes it impossible for all three to pursue their goals.

## 6.3 Failing lives

The issue of failure constitutes a major challenge for most Liberian youth. Our third category of youth interviewed fall within this category. Like their colleagues in the success and stagnating categories, the youth that fall within the failure category have unique experiences, but also cross-cutting ones. Peer group pressure, poverty, lack of access to opportunities and the war years have all impacted upon the lives of these young people.

### 6.3.1 Bomi County

The first case is of a female who has been influenced by teenage peer pressure and behaviour. According to her, she would not have found herself selling in the market in a rural area if she had not followed friends who were engaged

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24    ULIMO-K was the ULIMO faction of General Alhaji G.V. Kromah of the Mandingo tribe.

in risky behaviour, including supporting militias. As she explained in her own words, as the wife of a militia member, she 'was arrested and detained whenever my boyfriend took money from people and refused to pay'. As an associate of a militia member, she was regularly involved in group demonstrations against rival armed factions for fear that they would defeat the armed faction to which her fiancé belonged. She said, 'one morning, we just heard shooting in our communities, which turned out to be a new armed group'. Because she was associated with the rival faction of her fiancé, she was arrested again and asked to reveal his whereabouts.

By associating with fighters, she abandoned the idea of pursuing her education. She regrets not going to school, because most of her friends have completed their high school education. In her view, she may never complete high school. She feels a complete sense of failure because she has not completed school.

### 6.3.2 Logan Town, Montserrado County

The second case is of a male respondent who is friendly, religious and loves business and sports. He was involved in the 1997 election campaign that brought Charles Taylor to power and suffered an injury as a result. He said:

> *I was targeted by some rebels who accused me of talking against their leader. I seriously took part in the risky 1997 election campaign for my party because of my hatred for the idea of a rebel leader taking over Liberia, because of the harm that they [the rebels] inflicted on the population. I didn't want to campaign for the main rebel leader like my friends were doing, and this is why I was the enemy of the rebels, who were saying that they would kill anybody who would not vote for the* papay *[old man].*

He further said that he had been living '*gronah*' (a criminal or rough life) prior to the elections. He was always accused of stealing while in school and this is why he left his uncle's house. He joined the Boy Scouts and did not complete high school. He cannot get a job because everywhere employers are asking for skilled and educated people. He regrets his past and would like to go to school to improve his living conditions, but he has no support to help him do this. As he said, 'I love religious and sporting activities and hope to get money to be a businessman, since I do not know book [i.e. is not educated] because of the rough life that I have been living, which has failed me now'.

### 6.3.3 Logan Town, Montserrado County

The third and last case is of a male youth who loves sports and wants to become a politician in the future. He participated in more than two demonstrations, but was never injured or arrested. The first time he participated in a demonstration had to do with the misappropriation of money by the principal of his school. In his own words, he explained that

*… my first demonstration was a school-related one where we did not want our principal to misuse the school's money. Because of the first demonstration, I was removed from the school's football scholarship. Then there was another demonstration involving all public schools. The public school teachers stopped teaching because of delays in the payment of their salary. In order for them to start teaching, the public school students staged a two-day demonstration, which I joined because I was feeling sorry for them. One of my teachers saw me and reported me the next day. It was then that I was expelled from my private school as a result of joining the demonstration of public school students.*

Because his scholarship was removed and he was expelled from the private school, his relatives classified him as a troublemaker who was not serious about life. Since then, he has lost the opportunity of continuing with his schooling. However, he would like to continue if the opportunity is granted him. In the meantime, he has not given up on his desire to become a politician, because he wants to fight for the rights of the people.

In all three cases of failure, common trends could be observed. Peer group influence and pressure, the adverse impact of the war years, the lack of opportunities and pervasive poverty were responsible for these respondents' problems. However, like others who have tried to cope, some of these failed youth could make greater attempts to deal with this situation. But in the face of limited opportunities, this is easier said than done.

# Chapter 7
## Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, it is vital to stress that the six propositions for the project have clear implications for understanding and explaining youth vulnerability and exclusion within the Liberian context. From the survey and focus group discussions, it became apparent that there is no universally agreed definition of what constitutes youth in Liberia. While the government defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 35, others see the youth age range as lying between the ages of 15 and 28. Nevertheless, there are cross-cutting factors such as age, social roles, education and marriage that were referred to by the different groups as the criteria for defining youth. According to the survey results, about 73 per cent of the respondents defined youth in terms of age, whereas 20 per cent defined it in terms of social roles and about 3 per cent each defined it in terms of education and marriage. The definition of youth is therefore socially constructed.

In specific relation to youth exclusion, the point should be made that while the role of youth in national decision-making has been minimal, this deficiency should be located within the context of 14 years of war and plunder, during which the entire socio-economic and political fabric of Liberian society collapsed. Youth constitute more than half of the population of Liberia, but very few of them had access to education during the war years. Some were either victims of the conflict or perpetrators of crimes and violence. Thus, their access to the modern sector of the economy is limited because it generally requires skilled personnel. In order to cope with exclusion and vulnerability, some youth are involved in petty trading and other activities within the informal sector of the economy. Engagement in the informal sector has paid off in the short term, but it is not sustainable because of the nature of such businesses. With pervasive poverty in the country, young people who are engaged in the informal sector are responsible for the survival of entire families. This has a serous impact on the growth of their businesses.

Politically, youth and their organizations remain relatively weak, and unless their capacities are strengthened, they could remain in this position for a long time. There are several youth groups that are organized at the community, local and national levels. Most youth programmes are driven from above and national youth organizations like the FLY have not developed enough capacity to influence government youth policy.

Nonetheless, individual youth have made progress in national politics. Some are ministers, superintendents and district commissioners, and others hold high positions within the national security sector. In these positions, such young people impact on others as role models. Unfortunately, the young people holding high state positions have not consciously done much to ensure that the issues of youth exclusion and vulnerability are addressed nationally.

The life stories from the study verify the above assumptions. From these life stories, it is evident that the youth have turned to faith groups, sports, the informal economy, culture, NGOs and others for coping mechanism. There is a large section of them that continue to depend on family and community support in order to cope. While some have made individual progress, others have either stagnated or failed to move forward. At the community level, while the activities organized by youth are geared towards meeting their needs, many are influenced by those that could easily attract state and donor funding.

Importantly, the positive thing about Liberian youth is that while youth exclusion is a major factor that makes young people vulnerable, they have nonetheless not resorted to violence in an organized way as a coping mechanism. Many are engaged in activities that are keeping them away from violence, but others have resorted to drugs and crime, including armed robbery.

In order to fully address youth exclusion and vulnerability, it is vital for the Liberian government and its partners to take conscious measures aimed at dealing with these issues. There are several opportunities for addressing the skills gap of youth. Liberian youth should given easier access to existing training facilities. The strengthening of the Booker Washington Institute (BWI) and the reopening of the William V.S. Tubman Technical College (WVSTTC) and some of the smaller technical training institutions like Klay Basic Craft Centre (KBCC) will go a long way in partly addressing the skills gaps in the country.

Against the backdrop of the above, we would like to make the following recommendations for consideration by the Liberian government, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), youth groups or associations, international aid and development agencies, and NGOs. Overall, there is the need for the Liberian government and its partners to pay attention to the challenges of youth exclusion and vulnerability by formulating an appropriate youth policy that will reflect the existing socio-economic and

political realities of young people; such a policy should emerge from a nationwide consultation with strong youth involvement. This requires revisiting the National Youth Policy that was adopted in 2005, but has not been implemented.

## 7.1 National government

The government of Liberia should make efforts to create an enabling environment for the youth of the country to be included in national decision-making, and ensure that they acquire skills that will allow them to enter the modern economic sector. In this light, government should intensify efforts aimed at economic recovery and the rebuilding of schools, so that youth can access jobs and training. With more than 80 per cent of youth unemployed, and with many still out of school throughout the country, the need for training cannot be overemphasized. There should be packages for vocational training and tertiary education. More concretely, the reopening of the WVSTTC in Harper, Maryland County is crucial. It will provide the much needed and relevant training that will produce the sort of skills required for economic recovery and the overall rebuilding of the country.

State institutions such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Gender and Development, Public Works, Labour and others have a critical role to play in this process. In order to effectively do so, they must co-ordinate their respective activities if they are to have a serious impact.

The National Commission for DDRR should be repackaged to address the residual problems emerging from the DDRR process in the country. It should address the issue of reintegration and rehabilitation properly. The issues of drugs and counselling were not properly addressed during this process and therefore require special attention, because many young people are involved in drugs in some way.

The role of private businesses or companies in addressing youth exclusion and vulnerability is important. Therefore, the government should exploit ways in which the private sector can be involved in youth issues through training and the provision of financial and other forms of support to youth programmes, including training programmes.

The government should revisit the National Youth Policy through a national dialogue with youth groups and associations and identify key priority areas for timely intervention by the state, international aid and development agencies, youth groups and associations, and ECOWAS. It should take the lead in harmonizing the activities relating to youth by carrying out an audit of the activities of all those working with Liberian youth.

## 7.2 ECOWAS

Youth unemployment is not unique to Liberia; it has regional relevance and constitutes a threat to the security of the region. In this light, ECOWAS should develop a regional youth policy that will seek to address the issues of youth exclusion and vulnerability. This will require working with member states directly on these issues. ECOWAS can appeal to donors for support for programmes (dealing with employment, training and education) that aim to reduce youth exclusion and vulnerability.

## 7.3 Youth groups and associations

There is the need to strengthen the institutional capacity of Liberian youth groups and associations in order for them to play a major role in national decision-making processes. The FLY should be strengthened and the Liberia National Students Union (LINSU) should be rejuvenated so that both institutions together can influence national decisions. If both groups can work together, instead of pursuing separate agendas in the country, they could certainly ensure that youth exclusion and vulnerability is reduced. In the 1970s and early 1980s, LINSU played a critical role in national politics through its secretariat and member organizations.

## 7.4 International aid and development agencies

The international aid and development agencies should continue to provide support to the overall peace-building and post-war reconstruction process in the country, including support to youth programmes. More specifically, they should provide support to the BWI and Monrovia Vocational Training Centre, and revitalise the WVSTTC, as well as institutions like the KBCC and others. These institutions have the potential to provide young people with the skills required to enter the labour market.

## 7.5 NGOs

National and international NGOs can also contribute to the process of reducing youth exclusion and vulnerability through advocacy and direct support for youth programmes through the provision of training.

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# Appendix 1

## A logical framework of the social institutions/agencies impacting on youth coping activities in Liberia

| Location | Category of youth interviewed | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Kakata, Margibi County** | **Successful youth** | **Stagnating youth** | **Failed youth** |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | University of Liberia and YMCA | Merci Corp | n/a |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | YMCA | Merci Corps | n/a |
| Key activities | University student/policymaker | High school student and Merci Corp social worker | n/a |
| Employment status | Employed YMCA youth director | Associated with Merci Corps | n/a |
| **Gbarnga, Bong County** | **Successful youth** | **Stagnating youth** | **Failed youth** |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Local church and Kpelle | Kpelle and Irish people | University students and WHO |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Church | Bong County Students Association and church | Catholic Church |
| Key activities | Student | Teaching | Student |
| Employment status | Unemployed | Employed | Unemployed |
| **Klay, Bomi County** | **Successful youth** | **Stagnating youth** | **Failed youth** |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Group of 77 and government of Liberia | Youth and CCF | FLY and UN |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Catholic Youth Organization | CCF | FLY and UNDP |
| Key activities | Youth organizer | Petty business | Cleaner without pay |
| Employment status | Unemployed | Self-employed | Unemployed |

| Logan Town, Montserrado *County* | Successful youth | Stagnating youth | Failed youth |
|---|---|---|---|
| Key social agencies/ institutions admired | Micro-credit organizations and WHO | Baptist Church and MSF | Intellectuals and Manchester United Football Club |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | | | |
| Key activities | Petty business | None | Petty business |
| Employment status | Self-employed | Unemployed | Self-employed |
| Paity Town, Montserrado County | Successful youth | Stagnating youth | Failed youth |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Youth organizations, armed forces | Teaching, religion and international football | Students, Press Union of Liberia and international football |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | UN | Earth Football Club | UNHCR |
| Key activities | Petty business | Teacher | Technician |
| Employment status | Self-employed | Employed | Self-employed |
| Buzzy Quarter, Montserrado County | Successful youth | Stagnating youth | Failed youth |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Youth and UN Volunteers | Christian religion locally and internationally | Youth, local NGOs and international footballers |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Buzzy Quarter Youth Development Organization | Religious institutions | LOIC |
| Key activities | Student | University student | Plumber |
| Employment status | Unemployed | Unemployed | Self-employed |
| New Kru Town, Montserrado County | Successful youth | Stagnating youth | Failed youth |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Petty traders, civil society groups and the UN | UN, religious groups and petty traders | Intellectuals, politicians and international football |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Civil society | WIPNET | UL Student Union |
| Key activities | Student | None | Student |
| Employment status | Unemployed | Unemployed | Unemployed |
| Duport Road, Montserrado County | Successful youth | Stagnating youth | Failed youth |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Community leaders, government and UN | Student, the Armed Forces of Liberia and ICRC | NSF, WHO and elders in community |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Duport Road community | MSF | UNICEF and MSF |
| Key activities | None | None | High school |

| | | | graduate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employment status | Unemployed | Unemployed | Unemployed |
| **West Point, Montserrado County** | **Successful youth** | **Stagnating youth** | **Failed youth** |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | National and international police | Footballers | Banking sector |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Liberia National Police | University of Liberia | University of Liberia |
| Key activities | Policing | University student/petty business | Economist/petty business |
| Employment status | Employed | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| **Tubmanburg, Bomi County** | **Successful youth** | **Stagnating youth** | **Failed youth** |
| Key social agencies/institutions admired | Local Red Cross, IRC and WIPNET | Youth, JPC and UN | Youths and Footballer |
| Key impacting social agencies/institutions | Gender Ministry | Youth group | National Photographers Union |
| Key activities | None | Student | Photographer |
| Employment status | Unemployed | Unemployed | Self-employed |