

YOUTH AS A CATALYST TO DRIVING THE ECONOMY AND CONSOLIDATING PEACE IN LIBERIA

JOINT PROGRAMME ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

CONTEXT

Despite the end of the war in Liberia five years ago, its negative impact continues to be felt on the lives and livelihoods of the group that will ultimately determine the country's future and its ability to emerge from its history of armed conflict: its youth.

Fourteen years of war prevented far too many youth from attaining basic education. A majority of Liberian youth between the ages of 15-35 also lack access to adequate health care and reproductive health services, and have neither the requisite education, nor the technical and entrepreneurial skills to obtain gainful employment in both the private and public sectors. As a result, employers cannot find qualified youth in the country's active labour force. This acts as an impediment to investment and encourages the use of migrant labour for skilled work. In addition, the prevalent perception of youth as a threat to peace discourages many employers from hiring and training them.

During the war, children and young people constituted the largest group of recruited fighters; they are part of an entire generation that, until now, has never experienced peace in their lifetime. A significant number of youth, including a large number of ex-combatants, are vulnerable to exploitation. They are susceptible to being drawn back into the only command structure they know, especially if viable employment options are not made available.

Furthermore, young women in Liberia continue to be disadvantaged compared to young men. This arises because young women's social and reproductive roles entail more responsibilities and other social constraints that render them more vulnerable. This results in unequal access to education and vocational training, higher drop-out and illiteracy rates, limited participation in decision-making and unequal power relationships at home and within institutions.

KEY FACTS

Duration:	3 years (January 2009 – December 2011)
Total funding:	US\$ 27,603,400
Funding available:	US\$ 8,660,250
Funding required:	US\$ 18,943,150
Lead Ministry:	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Other Ministries:	Ministries of Labor and Gender and Development
UN Agencies:	UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, ILO, UNMIL and the World Bank.



A Joint Programme of the Government of Liberia and the United Nations



JOINT PROGRAMME

The Government of Liberia (GoL) has prioritised employment generation in its four-year Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) as a means of reducing poverty. Employment is also firmly placed at the centre of both public and private sector growth. Liberia's youth needs to be empowered to participate in this process.

The youth of Liberia are a heterogeneous group that needs targeted and differentiated interventions. The Joint Programme signed between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and the United Nations aims to address youth employment and empowerment in a holistic and integrated manner.

The Joint Programme's objective is to empower youth by providing them with the necessary life skills, vocational training and employment support services. The intent is to enable youth to become productive citizens and offer them the opportunity to make significant contributions to the country's reconstruction. The Joint Programme also recognizes that special efforts are needed to ensure that young women are employable and have access to decent work. It emphasizes community participation in the planning of activities and takes into account the needs and skills of displaced people who have returned to Liberia.

The Joint Programme is comprised of five interrelated components that facilitate the transition from a humanitarian to a development- oriented approach (see box).

The reform process of technical vocational education and training (TVET), development of TVET curricula and a TVET teacher training programme will be initiated.

As it will take time to reform the overall training system, a focus on up-grading the informal apprenticeship system will be pursued as this can give direct access to training for young women and men.

There will also be a focus on the introduction and expansion of community based training for employment and income generation, including training in cleaning, maintenance and waste management.

Given that youth empowerment and employment are cross-cutting issues that cover broader areas, linkages will be created with activities outside the Joint Programme, particularly job creation schemes.

The Ministries of Youth and Sports, Labor, and Gender and Development signed the Joint Programme with the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank, in February 2009.



THE FIVE OUTCOME AREAS

- Youth policy review and institutional support to Government and Civil Society, especially youth-led organizations
- Skills training for employment
- Facilitating the transition of young people to employment
- Empowerment and social cohesion of young people
- Promoting decent work for youth in the informal economy and in agriculture

The Joint Programme is set to run from 2009 -2011

IMPLEMENTING MODALITIES

A Joint Programme Steering Committee will guide the implementation of the programme and provide oversight and accountability. The committee will be led by co-chairs, the Minister of Youth and Sports and the UN Resident Coordinator. Representatives of the Ministries of Youth and Sports, Labor, Gender and Development, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNMIL and the World Bank, as well as the Danish Government will sit on the committee. A dedicated programme manager will convene the Steering Committee and will be based at the Ministries of Youth and Sports.

The rationale behind the Joint Programme for youth is to maximize impact in the field and minimize duplication, by pooling expertise and harmonizing the UN's efforts with the government's priorities.

The Joint Programme includes activities for which funding already exists. In such pre-existing cases, each UN agency will manage its own funds. New funds that are raised will go through a pass-through mechanism. UNICEF will act as administrative agent for the Joint Programme under the pass-through funding arrangement. Resources will be channelled to UNICEF, which will be responsible for disbursement of funds to the various agencies based on a common work plan that addresses strategic government priorities as set out by the steering committee.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Quick funding will enable the implementation of a well formulated Joint Programme that will assist youth: a group that has the potential to consolidate, or destroy the critical peace gains of the last five years. The total estimated budget for the entire Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Empowerment amounts to US\$ 27.6 million.





CASE STUDY

Innovative project enables Liberian youth to drive reconstruction and development effort

An innovative project based on volunteerism is helping Liberian youth get involved in reconstruction and development projects. Under the project's first phase, over 60 youth volunteers were trained and deployed to work in the health and education sectors in four counties in Liberia.

The 67 youth who formed the first batch of recruits, under the newly formed National Youth Volunteer Service (NYVS) Programme, first underwent a rigorous training schedule that covered various subjects that included HIV/AIDS awareness, peace building and the MDGs. They were drawn from a pool of 100 university graduates who applied for the programme. The NYVS was launched in September 2007 by the Government of Liberia with the support of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Programme and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

National youth volunteers were assigned to Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Maryland to work in the areas of Health and Education. They were attached to government health institutions and schools. The volunteers were involved

in creating awareness in the areas of hygiene, Millennium Development Goals, peace building, poverty reduction strategy, HIV/AIDS, malaria and the national youth policy framework.

Many of the volunteers also worked with communities on several sustainable development projects, even mobilizing communities to construct additional classrooms and increase school enrollment.

The government in October 2008 called for applications for the second batch of recruits under the NYVS programme. Once trained, these volunteers are expected to be deployed in ministries and institutions within the selected counties. The government is hoping to recruit 100 additional volunteers in the next phase and extend the programme from four to eight counties in 2009 as well as include agriculture to the work areas. It hopes to also open applications to high school graduates in order to expand the scope for Liberian youth to take part in the volunteer programme.

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