

Youth And Peacebuilding



LIBERIA

Overview and Objectives

Young Liberians under the age of 25 make up almost 60% of the total population. Youths, most notably young women and girls (who make up 40% of the youth population), continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups affected by any conflict.

In 2015, the [United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250](#) formally recognizing the impact of conflict on young people and the need to involve them as active agents in peacebuilding. In 2016, the Government of Liberia and the UN system agreed on a new "Sustaining Peace and Securing Development Peacebuilding Plan" which built on Security Council resolution 2223 and laid out clear priorities for the peace-building process during the 2017 elections, the United Nations Mission In Liberia (UNMIL) drawdown and beyond. Additionally: "the UN sustaining peace resolutions connect peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. They also strongly support the idea of an integrated UN approach to peace-building in countries like Liberia- with an increased role of women and youth as central to this process."

This report is part of the UNDP Youth and Peacebuilding project carried out by Accountability Lab Liberia over a period of 7 months. One of the objectives of the project is to improve the understanding of the state of national youth policies as well as building knowledge around international agendas among civil society organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), government policy leads, and lawmakers.

This report identifies existing policies, and the level of youth engagement in Liberia's peacebuilding efforts. It documents existing mechanisms for sustained youth contributions to peace and social cohesion; and provides analysis of relevant trends in relation to the role of innovations related to peace, constructive dialogue and social cohesion as a key component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Methodology

This report is based on qualitative research, including findings from desk research, key informant interviews, and a national stakeholders forum.

Desk research: as part of the desk research, we identified national as well as international policies relevant to peacebuilding, with a special focus on youth; challenges implementing these policies; examples from Liberia on innovative youth led efforts for sustained peace and social cohesion.

Key informant interviews: interviews were carried out among 10 individuals involved in peacebuilding efforts in Liberia representing government, local and international ngos as well as religious organizations, including Federation of Liberian Youths (FLY), Liberia Council of Churches (LCC), National Democratic Institute, Youth for Change, Inter Religious Council of Liberia, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Naymote, YONER Liberia, Mano River Union Youth Parliament. The interview questions focused on government effectiveness towards preventing conflict; youth peacebuilding efforts and gaps in policy implementations and how they can be improved.

National Stakeholders Forum: this involved convening 33 national stakeholders including representatives from the national legislature, development superintendent, clan/town chiefs, community chairpersons, national media, and national youth led organizations. Recommendations from the forum are included in the report.

Context



According to a [World Bank report](#), around 1.5 billion people live in “fragile situations”, which includes two third of the developing world population and more than 30 countries, most of which are in Africa. The report defines fragility in Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) as “periods when states or institutions lack the capacity, accountability, or legitimacy to mediate relations between citizen groups and between citizens and the state, making them vulnerable to violence.”

Despite the absence of large-scale violence, the drivers of conflict are still present in Liberia. According to the [Liberia Peacebuilding mapping studies 2010](#), there is one or more drivers of conflict in each county, but the report further mentioned that for six counties- Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Montserrado, Margibi, and Nimba- there are two-four drivers each. In a [2017 study](#) carried out by Liberia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, more than one third of respondents acknowledged the presence of factors that could undermine peace in Liberia. Some of these drivers include- disputes related to land and natural resources, corruption, lack of development and employment opportunities, impunity, ethnic and religious differences. All this is adding to mistrust among Liberians, most notably among vulnerable and marginalized groups, including youths. More recently, a [preliminary study](#) by the OECD for its [Fit for Fragility Project](#) also identified disenfranchised youths, driving Liberia towards fragility.

Drivers of Conflict

Land and resource insecurity continue to be a major factor preventing sustainable peace in Liberia: land and resource governance are seen as critical issues that need to be resolved in order to sustain peace in Liberia. Despite the passage of the Land Rights Act in 2018, there are critical gaps in ensuring Liberians' access to land for productive use and resolving land related disputes. This has become the source of conflict in many regions because of the Government's inability to effectively implement what has been prescribed in the laws. This [mapping exercise](#) across all the Liberian counties found that almost 60% of respondents perceived land dispute as a potential driver of conflict. According to another [study](#), "countrywide protests and riots by rural people in defence of their land rights that are threatened by land concessions to foreign companies clearly put land among the top possible triggers of another violent conflict such as seen during the civil wars." Increase in population, exclusionary land policies and environmental factors are likely to further fuel land and resource crises.

Inequitable distribution of government resources and services has created a divided society: basic public services, such as education, health, water and sanitation are not distributed equally across Liberia. This is especially true for the urban and rural areas, but even within urban areas, there are discrepancies. Besides basic services, there are also discrepancies in providing political and administrative services. Liberian Government's [policy document](#) also highlights this: "The concentration of educational and economic opportunities in Monrovia and surrounding areas has led to the disproportionate recruitment of justice, rule of law, and security personnel from these areas." For instance, when the government declared a state of emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic, people venturing out for food beyond the stay indoors deadlines were [caught, detained and, in some instances, beaten](#) by security forces. Similarly, measures adopted by the courts, such as [limited hearings](#), have further inhibited timely justice delivery. A [study](#) carried out in 2016 by the Liberian Ministry of Internal Affairs found that the majority of respondents were motivated to engage in violent behavior because they harbored feelings of disadvantage and marginalization.



National Policy Landscape

The Liberian government has put in place various policies that include youths as a target group. This section highlights some of these policies with a focus on youth and peacebuilding.

Sustaining Peace and Securing Development Peacebuilding Plan 2017-2020: [this plan](#) was developed with the United Nations and provided a framework of peacebuilding after the exit of the UNMIL in 2018. It was formulated “in accordance with Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), and “directs the role of the United Nations system and other relevant partners in supporting Liberia’s transition”, during the drawdown of UNMIL, and beyond, as provided for by the resolution.” Besides prioritizing the involvement of youths in the 2017 national elections, the plan also emphasises reforming the education system to provide the right skills to youths as one of the main pillars for sustainable peace in Liberia. According to the plan, UN priorities in Liberia with regards to youths include:

1. support the Government’s review of the National Youth Policy, promote the passage of the National Youth Bill and help implement youth related aspects of the national reconciliation roadmap;
2. support increased youth engagement and participation in governance and development processes at all levels, to enhance rule of law, peace building, and prevention of conflicts and violence, with special focus on making the 2017 elections peaceful and successful;
3. develop and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the youth situation in Liberia to inform joint youth policies and development interventions.

The National Peacebuilding Plan was drafted in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including government representatives, and national civil society organizations, and provided a timeline as well as a roadmap for action on the basis of which subsequent national policies were formulated.

Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) 2018-2023: the [PAPD](#) replaced the [Agenda for Transformation](#) and is regarded as the “One Vision, One Plan and establishes the basis for much-needed dialogue and a possible agreement with ODA partners on how New Deal priorities, processes, tools and mechanisms can be built upon in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation.” Pillar three of Liberia’s PAPD focuses specifically on sustaining peace through a cohesive society, and is seen as essential to achieve the goals and targets of all the other pillars of the PAPD. The key goals under this pillar include “ending fragility and the root causes of conflict, improving the justice system and human rights protection, and enhancing national defense and security.” This pillar is expected to lead to the following three outcomes: i) a society that embraces its triple heritage and guarantees space for all positive cultures to thrive; ii) a society where justice, rule of law and human rights prevail; and iii) improved security service delivery nationwide with adequate capacity to deter and or respond to security threats.

Pillar Three is also regarded as being important for building capable and trusted institutions, which are essential blocks for any peacebuilding process as they help bridge the gap between citizens and its government. It directly corresponds to SDG Goal 5 on gender equality as well as Goal 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Government has identified reconciliation as an important tool to build social cohesion, where youths (including young women) will be empowered through [economic, cultural as well as social activities](#) as a way of “decreasing economic disparities, improving intra- and inter-group harmony, and improving overall social cohesion.” Some of the initiatives include- leadership, non-violent communication and conflict mediation training program for youth; National Youth Service Program; community based finance and insurance schemes; create awareness of national policy frameworks.

Table 4.3 Short, Medium, and Long-Term Priorities for Decreasing Violent Tendencies

No.	Hi-Level National Targets	Short-term interventions	Mid-term interventions	Long-term interventions
1	SCORE Index rating for violent tendencies decreases from 1.9 to 0.5 ⁷⁹ on SCORE Index (disaggregated by county, gender) National average for tendencies towards SGBV decreases from 1.5 to 0.5 ⁸⁰ (disaggregated by county, gender)	Develop conflict sensitive national reconciliation policy based on county visions and plans; Undertake 7 county reconciliation dialogues and organize phase II national conference on reconciliation	Strengthened conflict Early Warning and early response System at county and district levels; Leadership, non-violent communication and conflict mediation training program for youth; Restructured Palava Hut engagements to: address conflicts/atonement; mental health training for PTSD (group therapy) and to create awareness of national frameworks that are more appropriately suited to resolve serious crimes – particularly SGBV	ADR through Palava Hut and other forums; County Peace Committees – at district and county level; Address transitional justice issues in Liberia in line with the TRC recommendations
2	National average for tendencies towards aggression in daily life decreasing from 2.7 to 1.0 ⁸¹ (disaggregated by county, gender)	Technical and human capacity building at the Liberia Land authority to strengthen land administration processes	Developing regulatory framework for the actualization of Liberia Land Authority Act and the Land Rights Act	Implementing the Land Rights Act, particularly customary land rights provision; Improve land use planning and natural resource management frameworks to ensure fair distribution of benefits from natural resources

Source: Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD)

While Pillar Three focuses largely on the peacebuilding agenda. There are other pillars of the PAPD that also prioritize youth activities which are seen to help build a cohesive Liberian society. Youths are a key demographic for Pillar One- giving power to the people- mainly through building their capacities to have better livelihood options and contributing towards the government’s “desired outcomes in human capital development”. The government hopes to transfer Liberia’s economic growth by “expanding social inclusion” and harnessing the demographic dividend. The government aims to do this by providing both education, jobs and life-skills opportunities to different cohorts of youths-such as women (targets half of the beneficiaries to young women); out of school youths. Under the Youth Opportunities Project (YOP) the program aims to “improve access to income generation opportunities by vulnerable youth, as well as to strengthen the government’s capacity to implement the embedded public works cash transfer program” directly benefiting 15,000 youths aged 15-35 years. Besides providing pre-employment social support, business development support to household enterprises, as well capacity and systems building through the YOP project, the PAPD also looks at sports as a tool for sustainable development and a major contributor towards achieving the outcomes of Pillar Three.

Similarly, Pillar Two on the economy and jobs respond to two peace building SDG goals by promoting gender equality and reducing other forms of inequalities. The focus is improving youths’, including young women’s participation in production and value chains- including in the agriculture, fishery, technology, infrastructure sectors. This is seen as a way to keep youths engaged and contribute towards macroeconomic stability and, ultimately, [sustain peace in Liberia](#)- “providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the youth will ensure that they are productively engaged and mitigate some of the security risks associated with this demographic.”



National Youth Policy and Action Plan 2019-2023: this policy and action plan was formulated with the aim of “harnessing the energy and creativity of its large youth population and ensuring that they are directed towards reconciliation, sustained peace, and national development.” One of the guiding principles and values of the policy includes dialogue, reconciliation and peace as cornerstones for positive, non-violent change in Liberia. Recognizing the role youths play in all sections of the society, the policy document prescribes three broad strategic interventions: i) ensure the promotion of early warning and prevention systems and at the same time create opportunities for young people to earn a living in communities; ii) promote dialogue, social cohesion, and reconciliation in communities; iii) support capacity building of youth organisations through policies and programs that will enable them lead peace efforts; and iv) encourage Inter and Intra-generational conversation between and among youths and adults with emphasis on motivating adults to support young people to work towards promoting peace and development in their communities.



International Framework

2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): the 2030 agenda for sustainable development identifies a set of 17 interlinked sustainable global or SDG goals which are regarded as the “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” SDG16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. National governments work closely with UN agencies to align peacebuilding priorities to achieve the SDGs. For instance, Liberia’s PAPD was drafted to align closely with the SGD priorities. The UN Peacebuilding Fund provides financial support to carry out some of these activities. In Liberia, this has meant support to various groups, such as [the support](#) for Liberian youths to participate in free, fair elections in 2017. Some of the ongoing projects under Goal 16 targeting youths include: supporting national stakeholders in the establishment and strengthening of peace infrastructures, including (CLMDC, MSPs, GBV Observatory, Early warning, Peace huts and Palava huts etc.) to prevent and respond in a sustainable gender, human rights and youth responsive manner; and strengthening the capacity of existing community-based structures, CSOs to address issues affecting women, youth, children including marginalized groups to participate in peace building efforts and promote rights of marginalized groups.

United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework 2020-2024: this is the [latest UN framework](#) for its work in Liberia and began with the launch of the PAPD to align to the national medium-term framework. One of the four major priorities within the framework is to support the Government of Liberia to consolidate and sustain peace; enhance social cohesion, rule of law and human rights. Emphasizing the role youth play in peacebuilding processes and embracing the UN’s leave no one behind principle, the framework will mainstream youth perspectives and relevant action across all its outcome areas. The framework “recognizes the rights of youth and enhances meaningful engagement of youth as essential actors in civic and political decision-making processes at all levels.” It ensures availability of age and sex disaggregated data in support of an analysis of the needs and priorities of young men and women, including youth among vulnerable and marginalized groups.



Tracking Progress

Tracking progress against national policies as well as the international commitments is resources and time intensive. The Government of Liberia uses Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) to measure progress towards the SDG goals. The Government has 169 SDG targets and 26 national indicators for SDG 16 which are challenging to track. According to the [UN's statistical unit](#), "properly monitoring change across the 169 targets, particularly on SDG Goal 16 given the strong reference to sustaining peace and building a capable state in the PAPD, will severely stretch the capacity of the national statistical system and those of government MACs. Accordingly, a minimalist approach has been formulated." In 2020, the Government of Liberia presented a voluntary [report](#). The report identifies progress, including on youth and peacebuilding, such as:

- training and deployment of 30 youth agents of peace in 15 counties to carry out peer education on peace and reconciliation issues through the Connect for Peace (C4P) project;
- restructuring Palava Hut/Peace Hut engagements to create awareness of national frameworks that are more appropriate for the resolution of serious crimes – particularly SGB, as well as bring awareness on economic opportunities;
- providing economic opportunities and loan schemes through the Rural Women Economic Empowerment Project;
- vocational training and rehabilitation of disadvantaged youths to participate in local conflict mechanisms carried out in collaboration with Socio-Economic Empowerment of Disadvantaged Youth (SEED).

Despite government efforts to highlight some of the positive outputs, there is discontent among citizens regarding government efforts. Majority of those interviewed as part of this project believe there are sufficient policies, but implementation remains a major challenge. While government's efforts are recognized to some extent, it is not seen as enough to bring sustained and lasting peace. Respondents raised issues around trainings and capacity building initiatives that do not result in jobs for youths. Government's effort to involve youth peacebuilding initiatives is also questioned, including concentration of efforts at the national level with limited support at the local levels.

It is difficult to understand as to what GoL is doing with regards to early warning prevention, we think is on the books or papers, but implementation is serious issue.

Survey Respondent

I was part of an organization called Pudie peace project, and they had a workshop on peace building in collaboration with GOL. They were helping to disabuse the minds of young people when it comes to violence and telling them that dialogue is the best solution in solving problem.

Survey Respondent

Yes, in Bong County, youths are involved in dialogues and reconciliation through community meetings, districts meetings, peace symposium in schools and awareness.

Survey Respondent

Government needs to look at national budget, increase youth budgetary allotment and improve effective capacity building.

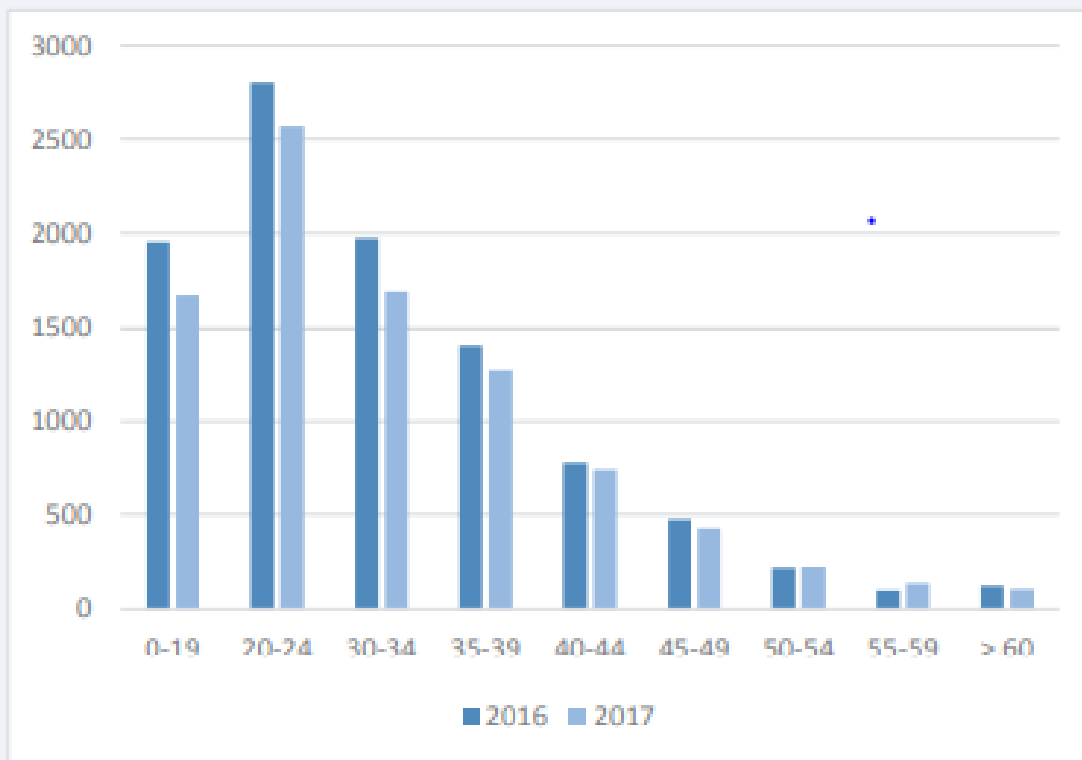
Survey Respondent

Youth and Peacebuilding

Current literature on youth and the drivers of insecurity in Liberia primarily analyses it from a security perspective. Young people are seen as actors perpetuating violence, but not as key stakeholders in managing conflict and building peace. Government policies solely focus on providing jobs and other life skills opportunities but fail to recognize their roles in decision making processes that affect them. There is also limited understanding even among educated, young Liberians on the different drivers of insecurity and their role in peace building. Young Liberians do not fully understand the different kinds of conflicts and their drivers, and how different socio, economic and political factors interact to drive conflict. This limited understanding means they can be easily motivated to take part in violent activities, as seen during elections when young people are recruited to undermine the legitimacy of government processes.

Lack of education, high unemployment rates and limited livelihood opportunities are seen as the 'push-factors' driving youth to violent activities. Young Liberians have been raised around ongoing conflicts and most of them do not see a positive recourse out of the current situation. This is mainly due to lack of trust in any government processes as well as a loss of sense of nationalism or patriotism. With high unemployment rates, youths often engage in criminal and gang activities. Criminal and terrorist activities carried out by youths further deteriorate economic conditions creating a vicious cycle leading to fewer employment opportunities. Drug abuse is another element perpetuating violence among young Liberians. The "African Youth Bulge" suggests insecurity in African nations, including Liberia, is likely to only increase as its largest demographic are left out of productive opportunities.

Figure 4.4: Crime and Age 2016 to 2017



Source: Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD)

Young people are using creative ways to be agents of peace, but with limited support: young Liberians are also the group most early waiting for a new future, and continue to be the change they wish to see in their society. For instance, [this initiative](#) uses motorcycling as a medium to not only provide livelihood options for youths but “young riders also establish themselves as active peacebuilding subjects, enacting their own ideas to counter the insecurity and marginalisation of post-war life.” In other examples, young Liberians like [Henry Toe Amaze](#) are using the popular Hip-Co music to creatively engage Liberian youth to advocate for democracy, inclusive governance, and social development by providing a unique platform for youth voices. Despite their enthusiasm and creative approaches, young Liberians are working in isolation, disconnected from the right networks and resources and often lack the support, skills and tools to build sustained movements. Even where young people are involved in the informal process through civil society, they lack the right skills or the networks and communities through which to engage with other stakeholders- such as the policy experts or lawmakers to influence policy making. While government policies mention youths as an important demographic, there are limited ways for them to engage in peace building processes. Most of the recommendations focus on providing alternative employment options to youths. Incorporating youth voices in peace and security has not led to concerted efforts to provide the right spaces, tools and skills for them to actively engage in development and peacebuilding processes.

Traditionally, men tend to dominate the formal roles in a peacebuilding process; there are mainly male peacekeepers, male peace negotiators, male politicians, and male formal leaders: young Liberian women, particularly, remain deeply excluded in political, economic and social terms. Traditional gender roles undermine women’s independence, widespread domestic violence perpetuates female subordination and lack of access to opportunities. The recent [UN Gender Inequality Index](#) ranked Liberia 156th out of 188 countries, lower than Afghanistan and Yemen. Today, women represent only 12% of the legislature and hold only 6% of local government positions in Liberia. All of this undermines peace- when over 50% of the population is systematically abused, excluded and marginalized this breeds resentment, precipitates violence, undermines economic growth and ignores the significant capacity these women have to support peace-building. Power is unequally distributed between men and women and the majority of women do not have a [voice in local and national decision-making](#) processes.



Youth Led Initiatives

As part of this project, 20 local CSOs were provided with capacity building- from which 10 were elected through a competitive process to receive seed funding to deliver various peacebuilding initiatives in their communities. A couple of initiatives are highlighted below as examples of youth led peacebuilding approaches in Liberia.

- **Young Women Initiative for Transformation (YOWIT) in Grand Bassa-** is a project that seeks to strengthen youth and communities' participation in the peacebuilding process through training, peace dialogues and awareness creation on the prevention of violence in the target communities in and around Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County. Participants will include representatives of political party youth structures, young people with disabilities, and ghettos youths who can be easily driven into conflict.
- **Youth in Action for Health Promotion in Grand Gedeh-** is a project that seeks to build trust between the formal justice system and the youth of the county. The project activities involved organizing a community non-violence peace awareness campaign by bringing together community leaders, the national police, some political leaders and youth from three key communities (Kudah Bye-pass Gunnie, ELRZ, and the New Zwedru communities) the activities were; 1. A studio discussion followed by a public call-in participation, 2. A radio drama highlighting the dangers of mob violence and, 3. A peace dialogue town-hall meeting between the justice system (police and the courts) and youth groups in Zwedru with the aim of educating community members, and youths to be patient and follow the due process at police station or court, not taking laws into their own hands.



County	Youth CSO	Peace-building Activities
Bomi	Liberian United for Rescue Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi stakeholder dialogue on resolving election-related conflict and violence in the county Workshop on misperception, prejudices and biases related to conflict
	Dewoin Youth Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Dispute Workshop in Vincent Town, Dagweh Town, Gbaigbon
Bong	Community Solution Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peace Walk – a youth-led and community awareness campaign in Gbarnga, District #2 and a peer learning session
	Youth in Technology and arts Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town Hall Youth Peace Dialogue Radio talk show on Peacebuilding Setting up a Peace Watch Council
Grand Bassa	Children Rescue Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Group Discussion with community members and leaders Peace Awareness on the dangers of electoral violence, mob violence, and land dispute
	Young Women Initiative for Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peace dialogue forums with community leaders, youth and women representations including influential people to discuss issues facing disadvantaged youths (such as drugs & substance users)
Grand Gedeh	Siebo Safety and Environment Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two radio talk shows Dialogue and call-in participants on conflict resolution with county stakeholders Meeting with student bodies to promote social cohesion and institutional development of youths in Grand Gedeh .
	Youth in Action for Health promotion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peace building awareness in Kudah Bye-pass, ELRZ community, and New Zwedru Communities Interactive Radio talk show on the lack of trust in the local justice system and Radio drama between the justice system and youth in Zwedru
Montserrado	Molding Minds & Changing Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> House-to-house public Interviews Community dialogue Peace sports meet involving communities' leaders, youths, lawmakers to raise concrete ideas to sustainable peace in districts 6 and 7
	Liberia Youth Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group discussion Interactive dialogue on peace building in districts 4 and 5 to discuss issues threatening peace and stability of the country Peace drama on conflict resolution

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. **Continuously engage** the youth and communities in peace-building activities
2. **Pass a whistleblower policy** for the protection of community members who are third-party-whistle -blowers in land conflict and other national issues
3. Allocate more **budget** for logistics to support the security sectors
4. Encourage political aspirants/candidates contesting in chieftaincy, legislative and national elections to **condemn electoral violence** by their supporters
5. Establish and or **strengthen community peace committees** to respond to **early warning** issues
6. Ensure routine stakeholders briefing on community conflict-trigger issues so as to close the feedback loops
7. Empower local CBOs and youth movements to **identify gaps in peace-building efforts** in the communities
8. Support the **building of rehabilitation centers for disadvantaged youth**
9. Support youth CBOs/CSOs/NGOs in printing and distributing the land rights law in small handbills, designing murals in the communities, and discussing it on community radios, for public consumption.