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Joint SEED Project Orientation Workshop REPORT

LOCATION :

Montserrado County / S.T. Nagbe United Methodist Hall, 13th Street, Sinkor

DATE: September 17th, 18th and 19th



Summary:

The nature of development work relating to targeting at-risk, or street-absorbed youth in a post-conflict setting such as Liberia, requires a multi-sectoral approach that galvanizes private and public partners' resources, knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt towards more harmonized, pragmatic and sustainable solutions. With the purpose of seeking to rehabilitate, capacitate—and specifically as it relates to the corresponding activity reflected in this report—reintegration of disadvantage youth into communities and families presents favourable conditions for social cohesion, conflict mediation, peace building and sustainable development. SEED aims to transform the lives of young individuals who are potential agents for growth and prosperity of the nation harnessing the demographic dividend which they present; alternatively, youth can serve as conduits of political manipulation, instability and violence, which is familiar to Liberian social and political context. Overall, the orientation workshop(s) provided a transparent platform for inclusive and strategic dialogue, information dissemination and collaborative exercises, while ensuring national ownership across partners in government and reinforcing local decision-making structures, emphasis on community level engagement as a sustainable entry point for SEED's success.

With a cumulative total of more than 250 participants in attendance spanning the 3-day workshop, including partners and beneficiaries, facilitators inculcated participants on the fundamentals of the project, as well as its pilot nature and engaged in a series of interactive working group sessions that served to highlight common understanding of the challenges faced in dealing with disadvantage youth from slum and ghetto communities. The breadth of knowledge and experience shared in the 3-day workshop helped to validate, reinforce and cross-examine many of UNDP and UNFPA assumptions and strategies in working with at-risk youth population. The major outcome result achieved through conducting orientation workshop(s) included sensitizing and orientating authorities, community leaders and disadvantage youth on their respective roles and responsibilities in contributing to the success of the project and internalizing the opportunities, challenges and solutions which buttresses pragmatic and foresight approaches in planning, coordinating and implementing SEED outputs. More importantly, community leaders, authorities and disadvantage youth alike expressed their support and buy-in of the projects vision and objective which was cemented in their continued attendance and participation in the programme.

3-Day Orientation Workshop:

➤ INTRODUCTION

The SEED Project with funding from the Liberia Multi Partner Trust Fund/Peacebuilding Office (LMPTF/PBO) through its implementing agencies the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund (UNDP/UNFPA) in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports(MYS) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) organized a three day workshop but separate orientation sessions for community leaders, disadvantaged youth leaders, the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) and the Liberia National Police (LNP) through the hosting of discussion series towards setting the pace for the smooth implementation of the SEED Project and mainstreaming the project objectives into community initiatives. The Project is meant to assist disadvantaged youth who are mostly found in

ghettos, street corners, cemeteries, and other areas unfit for dwelling. Many of these youth are on drugs and other illicit substances. The community leaders, disadvantaged youth leaders and relevant security apparatus remain vital stakeholders to the successful implementation of the SEED Projects since they interact with the disadvantaged youth directly as neighbors or in their line of duties through law enforcement.

(SEED) Project Background:

The literature on the history of conflicts in Liberia shows marginalization as the main root cause for the rebellion. Within the current socioeconomic environment, disadvantaged and at-risk Liberian youth (Zogos/Zogesse) have grown increasingly agitated with the lack of opportunities for them and often times resort to destructive and destabilizing activities, including violent protests, criminal behavior, drug addiction and self-abuse, to express their concerns and deal with their issues. Acknowledging the UN global call for action through UNSC Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security) and 1325 (Women, Peace and Security). Liberia's fragile context now more than ever before rests on the comprehensive inclusion and engagement of youth in peace and development processes. Taking this call to action into account, there remains a unique demographic of citizens such as the at-risk youth who have suffered disproportionately as a result of their status and characteristics, justifies the support this project seeks to provide and integrate them into the mainstream society. Ultimately, if not positively engaged, this demographic of high-risk youth threatens the very foundations of progress by undermining the peace dividend gains made over the past 12 years.

Against this backdrop and within the context of Liberia's recent political and security transition, increased economic hardship and social volatility, the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Disadvantaged (SEED) Youth Project, as a pilot, resonates with concerns of the government, UN and other development partners about the need to address the increasing at-risk youth menace. It will contribute to sustainable peace and social cohesion through the transformation of at-risk youth from potential agents/threats of conflicts to facilitators of peace and constructive citizens engaged in decent means of livelihood. On the basis of an agreed criteria, the project will strategically select 500 at-risk youth in Montserrado, and enroll them into a series of vocational trainings, practical field exercises and other interventions, aimed at rehabilitating them and influencing behavioral change. These will include engagement in meaningful and constructive thinking and activities, improved self-image and access to social and health services, and thus laying the foundations for their social reintegration.

The project thus has three phases/stages (which overlap):

Phase (I.): Selection, Orientation and Rehabilitation;

Phase (II.): Capacity Building, Vocational Skills-training and Social Reintegration; and

Phase (III.): Job Creation and Linkage with Business Support Services, and its target county is Montserrado.

It is anticipated that through the SEED Project, beneficiaries will be rehabilitated, acquire vocational skills to earn their living, reintegrate into their families and communities, and participate effectively in local conflict prevention mechanisms, as their potential to destabilize their communities and the country are minimized, reduced and eventually eliminated.

➤ **RATIONALE/PURPOSE**

Considering the prevailing contextual challenges and while the registration and preparation for psychosocial counseling, drug rehabilitation and mental health support for disadvantage youth is ongoing through MoH and YWCA, their peaceful coexistence in communities depends on:

- a.) the willingness and leadership of their leaders;
- b.) Acceptance for reintegration into communities by community leaders and families;
- c.) Support and collaboration by the relevant security institutions understanding the aim/intent of the project by means of orientation and sensitizations through dialogue and focus group discussions.

To facilitate the meaningful contribution of the aforementioned stakeholders, understanding of the project objectives becomes paramount. The purpose of the orientation sessions is to ensure that the project objectives explained and discussed with disadvantaged youth leaders, community leaders and law enforcement agencies, harness their support and leadership in achieving the targeted results as well as reaching the target beneficiaries with project interventions and accepted behavioral change. The orientation session will also help in changing community perception in order to minimize the fear community members may have due to the presence of disadvantaged youth and their leaders in the communities.

Main Objectives:

In the light of the above, the main objective(s) of the workshop as outlined in the project as **Activity 1.2.4** is to conduct orientation/sensitization of the local authorities, police, community leaders and members including youth and women groups to peacefully co-exist with target group.

Expected Outputs:

- Present the background of the SEED Project (strategy, phases, theory of change, risks and etc.).
- Highlight the importance of mental health, community policing and negative consequences of stigmatization to the reintegration process.
- Brainstorm and rally support of the disadvantaged youth leaders, community leaders and security agencies through focus group discussions.
- Develop (formal/informal) communique committing the support of disadvantaged youth leaders, community leaders and security agencies.
- Facilitate small group dialogue by recording the discussions and giving feedback.

Expected Outcome:

- Peaceful co-existence among disadvantaged youth and community;
- Law enforcement officers' discretion and decision making;
- Identify leaders and resource persons who can support the project;
- Disadvantaged Youth Leaders acceptance of the project;
- Expectation and support from community leaders

➤ **Day 1 Orientation: Community Leaders**

Community leaders from across (10) identified locations were present to represent their various communities and participate in the orientation session tailored for their group on September 17th 2019. Composition of participants invited included, inter alia, the following: youth chairperson and deputies, community chairperson and deputies, secretary, elders, block leaders, women chair and etc. Attendee were welcomed and formally registered prior to the commencement of the day's programme to ensure mobile money payment for travel reimbursement by UNDP. The programme was facilitated in collaboration with project partners including representatives from the Ministry of Youth & Sports (MYS), Ministry of Health (MoH)/Mental Health Unit (MHU), LNP, DEA, CAFOD and LRRRC.

Mrs. Bendu Zaizay (SEED Project Manager / UNDP) and Mr. Gerald Witherspoon (Programme Officer / UNDP) led the first three sessions covering the introduction, background and objectives and situational analysis of disadvantage youth in Liberia. This initial exchange with participants set the tone for the programme and allowed for a Q&A portion in which community leaders freely expressed concerns, raised appropriate questions and comments on their understanding of the project. Although it was repeatedly communicated that the SEED project was a pilot with catalytic funding from PBSO and that it was not designed to institutionalize, or house beneficiaries, participants made it clear that they viewed this as a weakness in the project and suggested that it would prove difficult to completely rehabilitate drug users who would consistently return to the very destructive environment which produced their addiction and abuse, coupled with peer pressure from similar at-risk youth in those communities. The project team addressed this concern by highlighting the issue limited funding and the sustainability of undertaking such massive intervention if commitment (ownership, political will and resources) at the national level was not sufficient.

Mr. Joseph S. Quoi, Addiction Professional and Pharmacist for Mental Health Program of Liberia at the MoH, served as co-facilitator on behalf of the Ministry and provided awareness raising and sensitization on the topic of mental health and well-being. UNFPA (ASRH) Programme Assistant – BSc Register Nurse / Public Health Practitioner / Emphasis on Community Health, Comfort Kollie, enriched Mr. Quoi's presentation by expanding the discussion to the topic of SGBV and the importance of SRHR, both of which are increasingly relevant for the female demographic of at-risk youth given the promiscuous and risky behavior which they commonly engage in. While day-1 participants all served as community leaders, it was important that we start the process of de-stigmatizing them of their views and belief regarding disadvantage youth from an empirical stand point to allow room for more constructive and sound understanding of their fellow community members afflicted with drug addiction and acute poverty.

A session on Discrimination and Stigmatization of Substance Users looking at the role of communities in protection and empowerment was facilitated by Willet Salue, Programme Officer Livelihoods/Governance from the Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD). Community leaders were able to speak out their current approaches to supporting the social participation of disadvantaged youths in their communities. Generally, most of the leaders agreed that disadvantaged youths were excluded from community meetings, engagements and or developmental activities largely due to stigma about their habit.

At the end of the group discussions, the leaders recognized the need for inclusion of these category of youths in meetings as a way of community support and to promote self-change efforts which is the basis of empowerment.

LNP Chief of Community Policing, Samuel G. Ford, facilitated his session on the topic of narcotics and drug abuse in communities and the threat which they present infecting communities. Mr. Ford gave a succinct account of the Liberia's civil conflict and its earliest experiences with drug use and violence and led discussion to what present day has become of many street-absorbed Liberian youth. Notably, Mr. Ford spoke on the importance of matching development interventions with public policy commitment and political will of our lawmakers to criminalize and better regulate the flow of narcotics and illicit drugs into communities. Noting the economic dynamic of buying and selling drugs, Mr. Ford candidly spoke on the challenges to convince dealers and users of resisting from such exchanges as it poisons the community. Participants emphasized the need to involve dealers in the project by linking them with LNP or DEA to better curb the demand and supply of drugs in affected communities.

In closing, group discussions and brainstorming session pivoted the spotlight to attendees in allowing them to recollect what they took away from the orientation workshop and their understanding of their role in contributing to the successful reintegration of at-risk youth members.

➤ **Day 2 Orientation: LNP and DEA**

Orientation of security personnel and institutions relevant to the associated target beneficiaries (disadvantage youth) proved beneficial to the implementation strategy, considering the assumptions made concerning strained and cantankerous relationships between target beneficiaries and national and local security bodies. As well, LNP and DEA's appreciation of the project began to take hold gradually as day-2 orientation session proceeded. Given that the same presentation and facilitation method, facilitators and topic discussion were simulated over the course of the 3-days, with the exception of the working group and brainstorming session assignments, details reported henceforth overlap. Mrs. Bendu Zaizay (SEED Project Manager / UNDP) and Mr. Gerald Witherspoon (Programme Officer / UNDP) once again led the first three sessions covering the introduction, background and objectives and situational analysis of disadvantage youth in Liberia. This initial exchange with participants set the tone for the programme and allowed for a Q&A portion in which police officers and drug enforcement staff freely expressed concerns, raised appropriate questions and comments on their understanding of the project.

Mr. Joseph S. Quoi and co-facilitator Comfort Kollie on behalf of the Ministry and UNFPA provided awareness raising and sensitization on the topic of mental health and well-being, SGBV and SRHR. SGBV and SRHR are both increasingly relevant for the female demographic of at-risk youth given the promiscuous and risky behavior which they commonly engage in. Day-3's orientation session continued the process of de-stigmatizing participants of their views and belief regarding disadvantage youth from an empirical stand point to allow room for more constructive and sound understanding of their fellow community members afflicted with drug addiction and acute poverty.

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Partick Worzie, Senior Program Manager at LRRRC, presented his findings on the situational analysis of disadvantage youth in Liberia. Mr. Worzie's session was highly interactive and included ice-breakers and group exercises to allow for networking of security personnel and ease apprehension in the room. Overall, Day-2 proved to accomplish its goal of trust-building with security institutions and gaining their support to ensure that police service and activities are sensitive to the plight of young people in these communities. As well, Day-3's session improved coordination between partners and within their internal organizational arrangements. Enhancing communication of project activities, designated target communities and total number of beneficiaries to be engage specific to date, will inform LNP and DEA to better prepare in interfacing with these young people.

➤ **Day 3 Orientation: Disadvantage Youth Leaders**

Tantamount to the roll out of the SEED Project and its ultimate success would be the acceptance by disadvantage youth leaders and their support and buy-in of the project outcomes and objectives. Additionally, these leaders would serve as a bridge in reaching similar at-risk youth in their communities and ensuring their cooperation. It has been noted that Zogos, as they are referred to in local parlance, have their own organizational structure which recognizes the leader as the Five-Star and/or CIC; directly below him are his deputies and general ranking body members. Having research and thoroughly prepared for their onboarding to the project, Day-3's schedule proceeded with general question concerning the duration of the project, the nature of interventions and how the project would help reintegrate and empower these marginalized young people.

Following the same protocol laid out over the first two day orientation sessions, with the exception of a perception change exercise led by Mr. Witherspoon of UNDP, disadvantage youth leader were very much attentive and grateful to the UN and GoL for considering to help rehabilitate and empower some of their fellow comrades. The perception change exercise launched immediately after the welcome, registration and introduction, was powerful in itself because it allowed for the disadvantage youth leaders to take an introspective approach and reflect on how other people and society as a whole viewed them. Participants were broken up into groups as tasked with writing down their experiences of being called names,

stigmatized and/or being treated poorly throughout their time on the streets. Each group shared their thoughts and presented on what they commonly experienced being stereotyped by. This exercise allowed us the entire day to interact and engage and to determine whether what they wrote down was true by the end of the day. Life touching and transformational testimonies were shared by two survivors of illicit drug use and mental health respectively considered as champions in advocacy of addiction. These testimonies resonated in this session with the participants and served as a means of hope for recovery for many of these disadvantaged youths who had grown hopeless to the thought of abandoning their drug use.

With the exception of one incident relating to miscommunication by social workers and recruiters in the communities as to youth leaders receiving travel reimbursement, UNDP and UNFPA clarified to the best of its ability that no cash would be given to leaders, as vehicles were rented for their transportation and safety. Two gentlemen in particular felt manipulated and expressed their dissatisfaction with miscommunication; there were no other incidents which extended beyond these two individuals.

Discussion items, Feedbacks and Recommendations

Topics	Presenter	Participants Understanding	Recommendation
Situation analysis of disadvantaged youth in Liberia	Patrick Worzie (LRRRC)	<p>Youth are persons between the ages 15-35.</p> <p>Many disadvantaged youths are Living in slums, ghettos, shabby structures; market places, graveyards, unfinished buildings.</p> <p>Disadvantaged youth are faced with discrimination within communities thus leading to mental illness.</p> <p>Disadvantaged youths have Fewer chances to achieve good education and status in society.</p> <p>They are on Drugs, sex, peer pressure influence,</p>	

		<p>Limited purchasing power.</p> <p>Ghettos are found in every communities in Liberia.</p> <p>Post war trauma is one of the major contributing factors to disadvantaged youth emergence.</p>	
<p>Mental Health Implication of Substance Abuse/Drug addition: Mental Health wellbeing before and after use of drugs: Is in change Possible</p>	<p>Comfort Kollie (UNFPA)</p>	<p>-Drug abused affect human life including, health, jobs, families communication and academic.</p> <p>-Substance abused and drug addiction have both internal and external effect.</p> <p>Mental health is someone inability to think clearly.</p> <p>Drug changes the sexual behavior of a person and make a person engage in unsafe sex</p> <p>Drugs abuse brings about chronic brain disorder,</p> <p>Illegal drugs alter the mind and lead to abnormal behavior; It leads to illusion (day dreaming, It leads to poverty.</p> <p>Usage of illegal drugs leads to prostitution and teenage pregnancy,</p>	<p>Constant awareness and sensitization on the effect of drugs;</p> <p>Detoxification and rehabilitation of drugs users;</p> <p>Program for Reintegration of rehabilitated persons in communities</p> <p>Availability of rehabilitation centers, Adequate financial and logistical support to implementing partners.</p> <p>Government to put in place mechanism to prevent the illegal importation of drug.</p> <p>Legislature to enact non bailable drugs law</p>

		<p>It leads to crimes; It leads to stigmatization (the name Zogos and Zogess)</p> <p>It is necessary to manage ones health.</p> <p>Learn the advantages and disadvantages of reproductive health.</p>	
<p>Existing policies/laws/programmes/regulations including community policing</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities of community leaders</p>	Inspector Sam Ford (LNP)	<p>The history of community policing in Liberia,</p> <p>Police building partnership with the community</p> <p>Regaining lost trust with community and police</p> <p>Communication, trust and feedback is key for both community and police.</p> <p>Hindrance to trust</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies and community partnership in making sure positive response and cordiality exist</p>	<p>National Police should work in line with community leaders to minimize crime and drugs</p> <p>Strong border crossing points mended to detect drugs from coming in the country</p> <p>Community leaders to resolve conflict, Conduct regular community meetings, Community leaders to help stop mob justice; Engage central government for the passage of the drug law; Refer disadvantaged youth to health centers when they are sick and not leave them to die</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies form part of the recruitment process for disadvantaged youth enrolling in</p>

			rehabilitation programs; That CSO, UN buttress the effort of DEA to making sure the drug law is passed
Stigma and discrimination/protection and empowerment	Willet Salue (CAFOD)	<p>Stand up against discrimination of disadvantaged youth; Consider everyone as yourself</p> <p>Hear people's view;</p> <p>Inviting disadvantaged youth to take part in community services; Discourage stigmatization in every form;</p> <p>Encourage Religious life among one another</p> <p>The less-fortunate can still make a change in society with the support of community members</p>	<p>Provide strong stat laws and policies to stop illegal drugs entry;</p> <p>Building of Rehabilitation centers</p> <p>Harsh Penalties for illegal drugs dealers and importers</p> <p>Recovery, vocational and technical training for disadvantaged youth; Build vocational schools, Re open Boys Camp,</p> <p>Identification and reuniting disadvantaged youth with family members; Provide job opportunities;</p> <p>Create inpatient service for disadvantaged youth</p> <p>Every county need to benefit from the SEED Project</p>

Perception (What the disadvantaged youth leaders say people think or say about them)

- People call us zogs because we take in drugs and all drugs user are criminals,
- People are afraid of us because we take in drugs, always look dirty and bad off;
- We steal to support our habit;
- We do work that that decent people would not do all because we want money to buy drugs;
- Not worthy in society;
- We are crazy, TB patients, rapist, Rogues;
- We cannot be trusted;
- We are armed robbers
- Gamblers,
- Good for nothing
- Iron man;
- Dirty joes;
- Trouble makers;
- Community people call LDEA and Police on us because we are blamed for anything that goes wrong in the community.

Amidst all the perception how do Disadvantaged Youth view their habits

- Th habit brings shame and disgrace on us;
- Tired of living this live, but parting from it we experience tremendous pain in the head and body;
- Want to leave this life and go back home to our families;
- Strong drug laws will help us;
- We need the UN to help us to be drug free;
- We need treatment;
- We need medication
- We want to be placed in rehabilitation centers;

Photos

Session I September 17, 2019 (with Community Leaders)





Session II: September 18, 2019 (with Liberia National Police and Liberia Drugs Enforcement Agency)





Session III: September 19, 2019 (With Disadvantaged Youth Leaders)





