

Illustrative Program Description¹

Support the Establishment of a Liberian Youth Service Corps

Subject:	Support the establishment of a Liberian Youth Service Corps to achieve Educational, Vocational Training, Civic engagement and community development objectives
Target Groups:	College students and recent graduates, high school graduates, and out-of-school, unemployed young males and females ages 18-30 years
Period of performance:	3-5 years
Place of Work:	All major districts in each of 15 political subdivisions of the Country beginning with Monrovia.
Summary:	Recently the President of Liberia called for the establishment of a Youth Service Corps to engage youth in the rebuilding of the country. This project would provide support to that vision. It would necessitate collaboration with appropriate ministries, youth and youth-focused NGOs and others among the donor community with particular attention to UNDP's commitments in this area. It would include the areas of education, health, labor, public works, agriculture and the environment. The Project will improve overall employability, civic engagement, and health awareness of youth participants while, at the same time, contributing to Liberia's overall reconstruction and development needs. The Project will strengthen linkages between national policy and local implementation by offering a comprehensive approach in partnership with the joint National Youth Policy Implementation Committee comprising the Ministry of Youth and Sports and other youth-serving Ministries, Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), UNDP and other local and international NGO service providers.

¹ In order to be as concrete as possible, this illustrative program description targets a specific country. This however doesn't answer a specific request from USAID.

I. BACKGROUND

The population of Liberia is estimated at 3.5 million of which 55.6% are youth between the ages of 15 to 35 (National Youth Policy 2005). These young people represent a large human reservoir to help rebuild the country. They also face many challenges, which include among other things illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, poor quality education, and the affects of increasing HIV/AIDS prevalence.

Low literacy and high demand for school teachers in Liberia has created a need for numerous teacher and educator education and training programs and placement in schools as they rebuild and are refurbished.

Liberia has the highest teen age pregnancy rate in the world according to WHO and UNICEF estimates with the highest prevalence among age group 15-18. This means many young people under eighteen years are engaged in unsafe sex. Drug and substance abuse amongst unemployed and idle youth is increasing further exposing them to HIV/AIDS. If the current trends continue, nearly a quarter of the youth population might be infected with the HIV virus.

In 2000, Human Poverty Index (HPI) for Liberia was calculated at 51% (LDHS, 2000), meaning a little over half of the population was living in abject poverty in both urban and rural areas. Today, relative and absolute poverty stand at 76.2% and 52% respectively. A significant proportion of that population is youth.

The National Youth Policy (NYP, 2005) identifies youth unemployment as one of the country's most pressing issues that exacerbates many other social and economic problems. Disengaged and unemployed young people represent underdeveloped and utilized human and social capital, losses in economic productivity, increased rates of violence and crime, risky behaviors, reduced social cohesion, and increased expenditures on remedial social welfare services.

The closure of industries and businesses due to 14 years of civil strife and economic decline has reduced formal employment opportunities for all Liberians, and youth have been the hardest hit. Training opportunities have increased in the last year for building trades, some technical areas and some agriculture, but the coverage is unequal and the numbers of slots are limited. Combined with a low literacy rate of 42% among the 15-35 year old population, the combined effects results in youth without technical or entrepreneurial skills that can enable them go into potentially gainful self-employment.

The majority of the economically active population is turning to the informal sector of the economy as a means of finding alternative employment and incomes. According to Ministry of Labor sources, they estimate over 75% of the country's total labor force is in the informal sector. The majority of informal sector employment only serves to help the poor survive day-to-day, but does not offer a viable alternative to poverty. They are also often hazardous and place youth in exploitative situations.

In an attempt to address the many challenges facing young people, the Government of Liberia and the Federation of Liberian Youth with support from UNDP, Action Aid Liberia and other partners convened a meeting of youths from around the Country and higher institutions of learning resulting to the formulation of a National Youth Policy for Liberia. The current elected Government has not only affirmed support for the National Youth Policy but has also affirmed its support for the establishment of a youth service corps as one of its major priorities for youth. The National Youth Policy vision is to: “enable young people to secure the right to live in safety and security and the opportunity to realize their dreams and aspirations, and to exploit their maximum potential by participating productively, in the economic, cultural, political, social and religious life of society, and by so doing, prepare them today as tomorrow’s leaders.

In order to achieve this vision, a National Youth Policy Implementation Committee has been set up to a number of initiatives to address problems in the education system, vocational training programs, and to promote youth entrepreneurship and job creation. The Committee includes The Ministry of Youth and Sports and other line Ministries, the Federation of Liberian Youth, UNDP, local and international NGOs, and other relevant partners. Included among these initiatives is the establishment of a youth service corps which was embraced recently by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The aim is to teach citizenship and civic responsibility through the application of learning and skills to community service and national development.

III. ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Liberia is confronted with the challenge of how to address youth needs while also considering overall economic and social development. Civic service is one of the few proven and effective strategies for empowering young people in both rural and urban settings to play an important role in addressing the development priorities in their communities. The Liberia National Youth Service Corps (LNYSC) programs will deliver needed community and national service activities while providing corps members ‘hands-on’ learning opportunities where the youth will develop transferable skills and competencies; create pathways to further training and employment; gain basic education; offer constructive alternatives to negative behaviors; and, empower youth to actively address urgent social, economic, and political issues in their communities.

Project Goal: To assist in the establishment of a national youth service corps that would create meaningful employment and participation in community development for young people in urban and rural communities throughout Liberia.

Project Objectives:

- Provide access to service opportunities for college students and recent graduates, high school graduates, and out-of-school, unemployed young males and females

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- ages 18-30 years to contribute in meaningful ways to their families, communities and society;
- Increase the long-term employability and income for young people through relevant education, skills training, and hands-on experience;
 - Develop a national model demonstrating how civic service can improve reading, writing, and basic math skills, employability, and life skills including HIV/AIDS prevention;
 - Create a cadre of trainers and mentors at the district and provincial levels to ensure high-quality training and support to youth participants; and
 - Facilitate district, province, and national level coordination and collaboration for multi-sectoral synergy and long-term sustainability.

Guiding Principles:

- Young people are a tremendous resource to their communities and society *today* and they benefit by being viewed as contributors;
- Civic service combines an asset-based approach towards youth development, having concrete educational and vocational goals – combine with social value;
- Youth engagement in *authentic* service addressing *real* issues is essential for youth to feel meaningful to their families, schools, communities, and societies; and,
- Sustainable and cost-effective national service programs need to be flexible to local realities, but based on a replicable program design and quality curriculum.

Main Activities:

The project objectives will be met through three levels of intervention/beneficiaries:

- (a) Hands-on service experience and sectoral education and training for college students and recent graduates, high school graduates, and out-of-school, unemployed young males and females ages 18-30 years from best practice models;
- (b) Training, technical assistance, coordination, and support to national and county level leaders and program implementers; and,
- (c) Technical assistance to develop the capacities of partner NGOs, involved ministries (youth and sports, education, health, labor, public works, agriculture and the environment), and the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY).

Activity A: *Educate, Train, and Engage District Youth and Students in Activities to Meet the Critical Needs of their Communities*

This activity will result in a cadre of youth engaged for a nine month period in a variety of activities to meet critical needs in their communities. The focus of the service activities will vary from rural to urban, and district-to-district depending on the needs, but include such activities as:

Classroom assistance to tech literacy and other basic education subjects in schools and community centers across Liberia.

Training of Trainers workshops and seminars for teachers and implementing partners.

Training youth to serve as mentors for children in partnership with local schools and organizing and running after-school programs and curricula on important social issues including violence prevention, and AIDS awareness;

Training youth to provide critical services such as home-based healthcare to help mitigate the impacts of HIV/AIDS

Building skills in much needed infrastructure improvements in both urban and agricultural sectors such as housing, roadways, irrigation and sanitation systems, recycling, and other environmental preservation efforts.

Assessment

For this activity, a rapid assessment will be conducted at the national and county levels to identify: the local understanding of service/volunteerism, existing needs/opportunities, potential partners and processes, structures, and assets that can be built upon. In addition, the current education and skill levels of the target youth population will be assessed.

Design

Based upon the assessment and subsequent stakeholder engagement, the program will be designed with the target population and community needs/assets in mind. The design phase will involve potential implementing partners at the national, provincial, and district levels. Existing training materials and curriculum will be adapted to the local service program including a hybrid of basic education, job readiness and life skills, and preparation for the specific service-learning experience. It will include classroom, hands-on, experiential, and one-to-one mentoring learning opportunities.

M&E

Documentation and monitoring of the program will be built in through a regular data collection and reporting structure, designed for continuous learning and improvement, as well as overall impact analysis.

Activity B: *Capacity Building of Implementing Partners*

The quality, scale, and sustainability of this Project will depend in large part on building up the capacity and facilitating the coordination of the national, county implementing partners – including government authorities, non-governmental and faith-based organizations, businesses and other partners. This Project will develop and or employ a cadre of highly qualified technical advisors and trainers to provide implementing partners with the following types of due-diligence services:

- Feasibility and “market-surveys” on the proposed service project/s
- Program design and implementation
- Appropriate technical expertise and assistance
- Organizational development and planning assistance
- Linkages to relevant supply and demand chains for service
- Identify and train mentor pools
- Documentation, monitoring, evaluation assistance
- Financial systems and management
- Annual financial audits and program evaluations

The relationship with each of the selected program implementers will start with high levels of support and involvement, but move towards an intentional process of self-sufficiency so that by years 4 and 5 only minimal facilitation and communication functions are provided by the Project.

Activity C: *National Policy Framework and Support*

In Liberia, there already exists a highly supportive and favorable attitude within the national government to address the needs of youth. Service has been identified as a major strategy and recently President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has expressed support for establishment of a youth service corps as part of her government’s strategic plan to deal with the youth issue. However, without experienced technical, logistical and financial support, it is unlikely the youth service program will achieve the scale and impact required to affect a significant number of young people. In order to support the goals of sustainability, scale, and replication, this Project will facilitate:

- Encourage inter-governmental collaboration and coordination to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure financial and material resources are well leveraged;
- Ensure that the Liberia National Youth Service Corps does not compete with formal schooling but rather compliments educational and vocational initiatives;
- Establish inter-sectoral partnerships and linkages at the national level with county implications;
- Facilitate stakeholder workshops and dialogues bringing policy makers and practitioners together, as well as stakeholders from all sectors;

- Coordinate the documentation and dissemination of lessons learned across counties and implementing partners; and,
- Conduct rigorous impact evaluation and cost-benefit analysis to ensure/justify sustainability of program.

IV. EXPECTED RESULTS

1. Increased numbers of formerly youth and students meaningfully engaged in civic service
2. Increase literacy learning achievement scores and basic math/numeracy skills, improved education
3. Acquisition of transferable and marketable skills for sustainable livelihoods (i.e. enhanced employability)
4. Increased life skills as evidenced by improvements in personal confidence, self-esteem, decision-making skills, healthy behavior, HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge, and other topics covered
5. Participants recognized as contributing members of their families and communities – with tangible benefits to community and society
6. Increased capacity and effectiveness of implementing partners – both NGO and governmental (strengthened Federation of Liberian Youth as the coordinating group for youth and student activities).
7. Evidence of improved collaboration and coordination at national and county levels

V. ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIOS/ POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS

Civic service has proven to be an easily adaptable model that can be designed to respond the needs/assets of diverse target populations (i.e. ages, gender, street children, illiterate, in-school or out of school, college-level, low-income or privileged, urban or rural) and to different contextual and cultural realities. The model is, in fact, most successful and sustainable when it is flexible and adapted to meet the *real* needs and concerns of participants and the communities in which they live. Following are some illustrative examples of possible adaptations:

Post-conflict, post-crisis, fragile environments – Civic service programs have been successfully implemented to positively re-engage young people after conflict, war, and or

natural disasters. In environments where traditional structures have broken down; families have been separated; communities, homes and schools are in disrepair; and children and youth are coping with a range of difficult issues – civic service programs can serve to bring people back together around a common agenda and help to re-build a sense of connection and community. Civic service programs can engage youth in projects requiring low-skill, labor-intensive reconstruction and public works projects that provide them an opportunity to become part of the solution.

Mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS in high-prevalence areas – The Liberia National Youth Service Corps model incorporates HIV/AIDS prevention as a central part of the life skills training – in other contexts it can become the focus of the civic service activities. Youth can be trained to become home-health care providers, help orphans and other vulnerable children, distribute information and condoms, manage community livelihood projects mitigating the economic impacts and so forth. These programs have the dual benefits of increasing the knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention while providing critical services to those most vulnerable.

Pathways to Employment and or Academic Credentials – Civic service programs may provide complimentary or alternative education resulting in equivalency credentials that enable youth to seek better jobs or continue to the next level of education. Likewise, the successful completion of a civic service program can be linked to employment by qualifying participants to apply for micro-loans to start their own small businesses or compete for relevant job openings. The civic service program can incorporate linkages to future employment and educational opportunities, helping youth by creating new pathways.

Agricultural-based business Preparation – In rural environments, the civic service experience and educational component of the program may focus on appropriate skills and knowledge young people need to work in the local agricultural sector. The curriculum and service experience is designed to meet the local realities and market opportunities.

Pre-vocational training – Regular work helps structure life for young people. In a post conflict environment where many youth have not been positively engaged in joint activity with others, participation in service projects can be a strong pre-cursor to vocational training. Service that includes on the job coaching and training, guided reflection about the individual's connection to community, and support to youth to examine work and career directions, prepares youth with structure, motivation to achieve and some skills to navigate the social and training aspects of vocational education and give them a sampling of the world of work.