

YOUTH FOR COMMUNITY ACADEMIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

YOCADS

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**Youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Actions
and Adoption for a Progressive National Youth Policy on
Liberia**

SUBMITTED:

**On The National Youth Policy conference
Kakata, Margibi County, Republic of Liberia**

**PREPARED BY: Youth and the MDGs
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION WORKING COMMITTEE**

Phone Numbers: 06539342, 077074558

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INTRODUCTION

In September of 2000, 189 member States of the United Nations pledged to work together by making the world a better place for all by 2015, thus by addressing the World's most present problems. This commitment was contained in a document known as the "Millennium Declaration" and was little developed into the Millennium development Goals commonly known as MDGs. The Liberian Government was not in attendance at the Millennium Summit, but fully embraces the out come.

The goals are initiated towards proving the standard of living of the World's poorest people of which Liberia is no exception. Eight Millennium Development Goals were adopted, committing rich and poor nations, as well as her development partner working in a global partnership to be achieved preferable by 2015. This provides national government and her partners monitoring key area of human development and growth such as poverty & hunger, primary education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease control, environmental sustainability and global partnership.

Bulk of the work around the MDGs implementation is center on national government, civil society and institution pulling in the same direction at the country level since its inception Liberia had made little progress on the MDGs, moreover, government of the past had demonstrated little political will. Liberia stands a better chance for making progress by committing herself to transparency and accountability in government management and public resources prioritizing health, education, socio-economic infrastructure respect for human rights and the rule of law, good governance which are the bench mark for achieving the MDGs.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT & CHALLENGES

Many young people the world over are making significant contributions to the MDGs; they are recognized as key stakeholders in decision making and development. Young people made up the vast majority of Liberia's human capital. Yet they are often marginalized in decisions that affect their very lives. Over the year since its adoption, very little is known about the MDGs and their role as youths in its implementation except for the Youth for Community Academic and Development Services (YOCADS) that had been deepening the dialogue and creating a massive awareness on the MDGs at the national level among the young people. The work of such youth-led initiative need to be strengthened and acknowledged so as to serve as a means of motivation and encourage others to follow suit.

Yet building the capacity and creating a sustained partnership with young people are crucial strategies to achieving the MDGs that had not been fully realized in Liberia. Youth organizations must be fully mobilized as partners in facing the many political and socio-economic realities in youth led servicing activities. These youth led services activities must not only be enhanced and supported by national government and her development partners but also integrated into concrete youth policy and agenda for the overall development of Liberian youths.

In our recent past, young people have been the victim of forcible military conscription, sexual exploitation, poor governance, no role models, subjected to low standard of living, culture of violence, banditry, lawlessness, low self esteem, self-image, breakdown of societal values and a sense of general hopelessness. The MDGs has renewed their hopes and aspiration in building a secure and new future.

POVERTY & HUNGER

Liberia is indeed among the poorest countries in the world with human development index at 0.276 and ranked 174 out of 175 countries in human development. With Liberia's alarming poverty rate at 76.2% of which the vast majority are young people, young people can never make a significant impact because they themselves are living in poverty. Their basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter are hardly met. This high level of poverty have affected all levels of their undertakings, including young people who could be doctors, teachers, nurses, farmers, technicians, engineers and entrepreneurs. This situation coupled with insecurity and urban migration of young people for better opportunities have also decreased food productivity in rural communities. The young people of Liberia are particular at risk of being unemployed, with a 75% unemployment rate of young peoples they can never lift themselves out of poverty.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Recent studies had shown that Liberia is the only country in the world with an increasing illiteracy rate. 67% of this number is occurring mostly among young boys and girls. A large percentage of Liberian youth cannot read nor write. Another 60% don't go to school. 40% of children that are enrolled in school will be forced to leave before the known how to read and write. Education enables people to take care of

themselves build a secure future and lift themselves out of poverty. Without an education youth people have no hope of ever lifting themselves out of poverty.

GENDER EQUILITY & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Cultural practices, religious norms, early marriage domestic labor are the main source of discrimination against women. The Liberian society placed a high emphasis on male development as compared to women; it is male dominated. This is evident to the higher number of boys' enrollment in all level of education to girls. Society have limited their role to the household and limited their capacity to participate in national decision making and have even denied them the right of inheritance.

Their sources of earning have limited them to the agriculture sector, with only 11.4% of them working outside of the agricultural sector.

CHILD MORTALITY

Every Year in Liberia 220 out of 1,000 children will die before they reach the age of five. These deaths occur mostly among babies of teenage mothers. Teenage pregnancy threatened child survival. Most of the cases of child deaths are due primarily to poverty, malnutrition and lack of health and sanitary care.

MATERNAL HEALTH

Pregnancy is the leading cause of death for teenage girls. Out of every six babies that are born one is to a teenage mother. Early pregnancy carries a high risk of illness and deaths. Rape, sexual harassment, economic coerced sex affect the maternal health of most young girls.

HIV/AIDS, MALARIA & OTHER DISEASES

Everyday, young people are newly infected with HIV/AIDS. Young girls are the most vulnerable to this as a result of biological, cultural and socio-economic factors. 8.2% of Liberia youthful populations are infected with virus. Malaria also counts for most infant mortality. In Liberia, Malaria kills more children than HIV/AIDS.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Liberia is the only country in tropical Africa that possesses the largest remaining of the tropical Guinea forest rich in biodiversity and a diversity of natural resources such as gold, diamond, iron ore etc. One of the major factor that have disturbed the delicate balance of numerous ecosystems and losses to biodiversity is human activities such as logging, shifting cultivation, charcoal production, fire wood collection and bush meat consumption. The contamination of Liberia's ocean, rivers, streams, underground water, wetlands and air by gaseous and solid waste has a devastating effect on the environment. If not controlled, this could diminish Liberia's capacity to provide resources for future generation. A large percentage of Liberia lack sustainable access to livelihood (pipe borne water, sanitation, etc). Amidst an era of technological advancement 99.5% of Liberian still depends on traditional source of energy consumption that is charcoal, firewood and palm oil. Nearly all of Liberia's population

lives in what is termed as informal settlement-lacking basic social services. Most homes especially in the rural area were destroyed during the civil conflict causing the mass displacement of people erecting make-shift shelter in IDP camps. The lives of slums dwellers are yet to be improved.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

Young people constitute the core for the advancement of any nation and as such their development determine the yard stake for the development of a given nation.

The vast majority of people that risk unemployment are young people, in Liberia 88% of the young people are unemployed, to cope with this situation many are in the informal sector; that is petty trading. They have little or no marketable skills. Even though, Liberia economy is private sector driven, it lacks the conducive environment for business that is (electricity, water, communication and financial policies) majority of businesses are small-scale and cannot compete internationally, her market are flooded with poor, outdated substandard goods. It is the responsibility of the government of Liberia to integrate the goals into their policies, plans and budgets and translate them into services and benefit for the youths.

Good governance is the benchmark set for achieving the MDGs. Decision making and management of public resource must be participatory, transparent and accountable. Fighting corruption, respect for human right and sound sustainable economic development, are the bedrock for achieving the MDGs. Developed countries need to do more by offering debt relief to Liberia 3.9 billion debts, increase trade opportunities reducing subsidies and tariffs.

RECOMMENDATION

The MDGs represent a basic for action by community, youth or by individuals to take charge of their own lives and circumstance, to make their society better, for their children and themselves that focus on their health, education, employment, equality, environment and our children, etc. Therefore, if Liberia should build a concrete and secure future for the youths, the following recommendations should be considered for a progressive national youth policy of Liberia:

- **Advocacy & Awareness:** There should be a massive awareness about the MDGs among young people; they should be encouraged to participate in what affect them such as employment, conflict, sustainable development and as peer educators.
- Young people must be encouraged in the Agriculture sector by the provision of loans/subsidies, agro-technology so as to make Liberia sufficient in food production.
- Provision of basic social service such as electricity, housing, water, sanitation and communication
- **Policies:** Young people should form part of MDGs business; national government should have an up-to-date National Youth Policy and also support and facilitate young people to achieve the MDGs at all levels.
- Improve farm to market roads
- Provide better incentives/salaries so as to attract trained and qualified teachers
- Rehabilitation and equipment of teacher training institutions.
- **Gender Awareness:** Increase awareness among different cultural groups of the needs and importance of girls education.
- Compulsory free primary education for children of school going age
- Revitalization of primary health care delivery system
- Skills training for young girls and women to enhance their income generating capacity
- Good governance, respect for human rights management in public resource and to adherence to democratic tenants.
- **Networking and collaboration:** Support should be given to existing, successful youth initiatives and encouraging youth people to engage in discussion and action around the MDGs.

- Exposure of Liberian youths to international conferences, workshops, seminars and interacting with their international counterpart in youth development activities
- Building better and affordable housing units for slum dwelling youths.
- Improving local industry so as to enhance commerce and trade thus by reducing unemployment
- Actions: Young people should have more and simpler access to financing opportunities that will enable them to carry out MDGs-related projects or become entrepreneurs. Young people should get engage in monitoring the progress toward achieving the MDGs in Liberia.