Understanding Youth Violence: Cases from Liberia and Sierra Leone
UNDERSTANDING YOUTH VIOLENCE:
Cases from Liberia and Sierra Leone

June 2013
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..............................................................................................................................i

Acronyms ............................................................................................................................................ii

Executive Summary ...............................................................................................................................iv

Recommendations for Youth-Focused Policies and Projects ..................................................................v

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................1

II. Literature Review: What Do We Know About Exclusion and Youth Violence? ............................4

III. Methodology .....................................................................................................................................10

IV. Research Findings ..........................................................................................................................14

   A. Definition and Characteristics of Youth .....................................................................................14

   B. Youth Participation—Local Level ...............................................................................................17

   C. Youth Participation—National Level ...........................................................................................20

   D. Youth Employment and Livelihoods .........................................................................................22

   E. Defining Violence .......................................................................................................................25

   F. Causes of Violence ......................................................................................................................25

   G. Perpetrators of Violence .............................................................................................................28

   H. Attitudes Toward Violence .........................................................................................................29

   I. Responding to Violence ...............................................................................................................31

V. Conclusions ......................................................................................................................................34

VI. Recommendations ..........................................................................................................................36

   A. Policy Recommendations ..........................................................................................................36

   B. Program Recommendations: Targeting ....................................................................................38

   C. Program Recommendations: Youth Participation ...................................................................42

   D. Program Recommendations: Projects that Focus on Youth Education ..................................42

   E. Program Recommendations: Youth Employment and Livelihoods .........................................42

   F. Program Recommendations: Preventing Violence .................................................................43

References ................................................................................................................................................45

ANNEX A: Description of the Study Population ..................................................................................49

ANNEX B: Publications Used for Background Research .......................................................................51
Acknowledgements

This report is based on an analysis of a large sample of interviews and focus group discussions with communities around Liberia and Sierra Leone. The report aims to give structure and meaning to discussions about the role and status of youth, power and exclusion dynamics at the local level, and the acceptability of different types of violence. The work was completed under the leadership of Michelle Rebosio. Ekaterina Romanova served as the main researcher and analyst. Akiko Ishii provided initial guidance and set up this work. Crystal Corman provided important support in data coding and analysis. Roberta Kleekpo was key in coding data. Kirstin Broderick provided inputs for initial literature reviews and portfolio analyses. Lauri Scherer edited many iterations of the study and Danielle Christophe designed the report’s layout. Alexandre Marc and Bernard Harborne provided overall guidance.

Many others inside and outside of the World Bank provided comments, participated in review and consultation meetings, and made other contributions. We are particularly grateful to Peter Darvas, Peter Ganda, Kevin Hempel, Paula Lytle, Paula Rossiasco, John Van Dyck, Emily Weedon, and Giuseppe Zampaglione. Marc Sommers and Sam Gotomo were external reviewers for this work. Chris Blattman provided insights to the work’s initial design. The pictures in this report are courtesy of Danijel Dasic and Michelle Rebosio. The World Bank Sierra Leone and Liberia country offices provided crucial support in setting up the field research and validation and dissemination events. Inguna Dobrja, Coleen Littlejohn, and Francis Ato Brown were essential in ensuring that this work was relevant to the country context.

This study could not have been completed without the work of the two local research firms, Dalan Development Consultants in Sierra Leone and SPARK in Liberia. The research team is overwhelmingly grateful for the tireless work of the research firms’ staff, including researchers and transcribers. We would like to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Fatu Yumkella, Director of Dalan Development Consultants in Sierra Leone, and to Mr. Richard van Hoolwerff, SPARK Country Manager in Liberia. The team also thanks the men and women in Sierra Leone and Liberia who participated in interviews and focus groups. It is their perspectives and words that shaped the findings in this report.

Finally, the study team gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Trust Fund for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development.
## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>UK Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTZ</td>
<td>German Agency for Technical Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human immunodeficiency virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDI</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISGIS</td>
<td>Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-information Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYAD</td>
<td>Network of African Youth for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QSR</td>
<td>Qualitative Solutions and Research International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender-based violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>The U.S. Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR</td>
<td>World Development Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Addressing youth issues is essential to promoting stability and preventing violence in fragile and conflict-affected states. However, there is little evidence that youth programming and policies have helped reduce violence in these settings. This could reflect the lack of understanding about youth issues and how problems affecting them encourage their participation in violence.

This study set out to understand youth violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone, two countries in which there has historically been a great deal of youth participation in group violence, where the risk of youth mobilization into violence persists, and where interpersonal and gender-based violence are still a concern. In addition to having young populations, both countries have governments that have emphasized improving youths’ lives by both reducing poverty and preventing violence. In turn, programming and policies in these (and many other conflict-affected) countries tend to be focused on employment generation due to the assumption that youth become prone to violent behavior as the result of economic exclusion (their inability to achieve a stable source of livelihood). The study therefore tried to understand exclusion in these situations. Ultimately, the study hopes the findings will increase understanding of what causes youth violence while at the same time provide a wealth of information about youth issues that can be used to tailor broader youth programming and policies.

Several findings should be highlighted for policymakers and development practitioners:

1. “Youth” is not a term that defines a specific age group, but one that defines the status and role of a group of people. This clarifies why some groups of people over the official youth age ranges self-identify as youth and why some young people say they are adults or elders. Within the youth age range, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans point to different subcategories of youth, including older youth, younger youth, and idle youth.

2. “Idle” youth and youth over the age of 35 are viewed negatively and are often associated with violence and criminal behavior. It is important to note that an unemployed youth is not necessarily idle; the category of idle youth includes only those who have little or no responsibilities and are not perceived to be trying to make productive use of their time. The unemployed category is much broader, including those who work as daily, unskilled laborers, in agriculture, or who buy and sell goods. The category of youth over 35 can include those who are idle and in some cases members of minority groups, former combatants, or others who may have trouble earning status and respect in their communities. Despite their age, idle youth and youth over 35 are rarely able to transition to adulthood, and are often permanently excluded from decision making at the community level.

3. Regardless of their age, those considered youth have limited access to decision making, but are expected to implement the decisions made by elders, especially when it comes to carrying out community works projects. This could be considered a form of exclusion. However, most youth believe their lack of involvement in decision making is justified; they see this as temporary and believe they will be involved once they acquire age, knowledge, experience, status, and effectively transition to being adults or elders.

4. Even though youth do not want to be part of decision making, their exclusion from decision-making forums results in perceptions of unfairness. Youth often complain that community leaders, elders, and other decision
makers distribute resources unfairly. Although this may sometimes be caused by uneven allocation of resources, it could also be due to the lack of youth influence on decision making and the lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making forums.

5. Youth define a job as such only when it provides a sustained and sufficient source of income to support a family; they perceive jobs to be resources that are available but unfairly allocated. In most cases, jobs that require unskilled physical labor are not counted as jobs; neither are petty trading or agriculture. Although youth appreciate the opportunity to earn income from these activities, they do not meet youths’ employment expectations. Youth therefore easily misunderstand promises made by governments and donors to provide employment for them. They often believe that opportunities for long-term, stable income materialize for some, but they themselves have not had the chance to benefit because these opportunities are unfairly distributed.

6. Liberians and Sierra Leoneans believe they can respond violently to violence, and their definition of violence includes injustice and disrespect. Unfair decisions, inequitable resource distribution, disrespect, and not allowing someone to “save face” are regarded as forms of violence. It is considered acceptable to respond to one type of violence with another; for example, many stated that it is acceptable to respond to disrespect with beating. Similarly, riots are viewed as an acceptable response to the inequitable distribution of jobs; violence can also be justified in response to corruption.

7. Violence is widely perceived as negative and harmful, yet sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is widespread and normalized. When asked what kind of violence is common or exists in their communities, over 86.6 percent of Sierra Leoneans and 44.9 percent of Liberians reported incidents of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or rape. In these contexts, SGBV is not dominated by male violence against women, but includes violence by people of both sexes against people of both sexes. For example, a man’s two girlfriends may beat each other out of jealousy; a man may rape a young girl; a young woman may beat her boyfriend because of his inability to provide; or a man may assault his wife.

Recommendations for Youth-Focused Policies and Projects

Several policy recommendations follow from the study’s findings:

1. Remove the age-only definition of youth from youth policies and create targeted interventions for different groups within the cohort. The official youth age range is too broad and does not allow for proper targeting. Policymakers and development practitioners should therefore design interventions based on specific youth needs. These should focus specifically on older youth and idle youth if the objective is to reduce exclusion, and on idle youth if the objective is to reduce negative behaviors and potentially reduce violence.

2. Focus on improving communication between decision makers and youth to increase youth perceptions of justice. Efforts to include youth in decision-making forums are unlikely to work, since such public forums are not where important decisions are made. Increasing the accountability and transparency of decision making, however, is possible even if youth are not part of the decisions being made. It is possible, for example, for formal institutions to place a specific emphasis on communicating their decision-making outcomes, and the reasons for such decisions, to youth. It is also possible to work with youth leaders at the community level so that they learn how to gather and represent youth opinions and how to advocate for youth in decision-making forums. Sensitizing elders and other
decision makers about the need to communicate with and include youth can also help increase the transparency of community-level decisions.

3. Reduce the emphasis of youth policies and projects on employment creation. At the same time, increase the focus on allowing youth to access a source of livelihood that gives them status, respect, and the ability to raise a family. Although youth in both countries demand employment, governments should emphasize to youth the kinds of jobs that can and cannot be created, and also expand the understanding of livelihood options for youth. Creating the kinds of jobs that youth demand is difficult; policies should instead focus on raising youths’ productivity and increasing the reliability of their incomes. Youth livelihoods could be made more reliable by increasing the productivity of agriculture, supporting the addition of value to agricultural products, increasing access to finance, and working with micro-entrepreneurs to develop long-term business strategies. This could boost youths’ status, as communities recognize that youth are able to meet their obligations and raise their families.

4. Increase focus on SGBV issues. Policies should aim to better understand SGBV issues in order to address victims’ needs and reduce the probability that day-to-day disputes will turn violent.
I. Introduction

Young people are the source of radical change in society: they are at the heart of social movements, technological breakthroughs, and globalization. Youth are also at the center of most political changes, revolutions, violence, and war. Decision makers, on the other hand, are older individuals who frequently have more traditional views about the way a society functions. These people have often come into their positions by participating in a system that rewards adherence to conventions, or by belonging to groups with social or economic power. The interaction between older, traditional decision makers and younger individuals can become tense when one group feels their needs are not being met or that their priorities are not considered, or when one group promotes changes that significantly alter society’s power balance. In response, youth often express their grievances in terms of generational opposition (Abbink and van Kessel 2005).

In conflict-affected and fragile contexts, youth discontent is often equated with the risk of youth violence. Relative deprivation, grievance, and youth bulge arguments further popularized beliefs that young people threaten social stability and that the problem of violence is a problem of youth. Set against these assumptions, this study aimed to (1) explore potential links between youth exclusion and youth violence; and (2) understand youth grievances and expectations as related to community decision making, community participation, and access to employment opportunities. To better understand these issues, the study first looked at the local interpretations of the concepts under investigation—youth, exclusion, employment, and violence—before proceeding to analyze youth grievances and draw conclusions for policy recommendations and operational implications.

Failure to understand youth needs and priorities seems to be at the heart of the failure of initiatives intended to transform the lives of youth and to prevent youth violence. Governments and donors throughout the world try to address youth issues by doing their best to meet young people’s needs and help them fit better into their societies. Education, skills development, employment generation, and civic participation are some of the more traditional programs designed for youth. These programs are based on the hypothesis that young people will have fewer grievances if they fully participate in a community’s social, cultural, political, and economic life. Youth, however, are often critical of these initiatives; they question governments’ ability to meet their demands and understand their points of view. It is rare that youth strongly support a government or donor initiative that is implemented on their behalf.

Policies and programs would benefit from better understanding the definition of youth in each context, the needs and priorities of this group, their preferences for engaging with their society, and their reasons for participating in violent and other disruptive behaviors. Much of the existing research is concerned with the causes of violence that led to earlier conflicts or the challenges of post-conflict transition for youth. Increasingly, more young people in Liberia and Sierra Leone (who have come of age in the past decade) have limited or no experience or memory of conflict. It is safe to assume that the ways in which these youth view their roles, needs, and aspirations may have changed as well. This calls for new and innovative research on youth issues and on the attitudes that shape their behavior, as well as about the reasoning and norms that underlie violence in the present. Such information can guide policies and programs to transform societies and help them be more open to the transformative effect of the young while reducing vulnerability to violence in the future.

This study’s design, content, and scale bring new and important perspectives on youth issues in Liberia and Sierra
Leone. The design included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with young people across both countries that provided an opportunity to explore youths’ views in depth. The content is distinct based on its emic nature—that is, understanding and using local terminology and meanings for concepts pertinent to this study. The findings indicate local understandings for (1) “youth,” defined beyond age to also include physical appearance and abilities, types of activities, extent of responsibility and social status; (2) “violence,” expressed as a broad concept that includes both physical, structural, and cultural forms; and (3) local interpretations of when an individual is or is not excluded. The research explores how these local understandings of concepts differ from official conceptions that often shape policy and programming. Unlike other research that uses the term youth to refer only to young men, this study includes both female and male youth and seeks to understand their shared concerns. It is important to note that while the data emphasizes local meanings across diverse populations in the two countries, its analysis can be used to inform national policies due to the even distribution of study sites, scale of the sample, and representative demographics of participants. The findings from this study, therefore, will be useful to help governments (particularly of fragile and conflict-affected states) and donors better understand youth issues, design more effective interventions to address youth violence, and promote longer-term stability.

The report begins with a review of literature on existing theories of youth exclusion and drivers of youth violence, with a greater focus on history of violence in West Africa. It proceeds with an outline of the study methodology for data collection, sample selection, and analysis. The analysis follows, highlighting key findings. The report concludes with recommendations for policies and youth programming.
II. Literature Review: What Do We Know About Exclusion and Youth Violence?

The typology of violence and explanations of what drives youth to violence vary according to different theoretical perspectives. Economic arguments, or what are often referred to as "greed" theories, stress an individual or group's calculated decisions about what actions are more beneficial and rewarding. In this context, group violence reflects competition over valuable resources and a desire to gain control of these resources. The work of Paul Collier (1999, 2002 with Hoeffler) had a significant influence on advancing economic arguments in explaining causes of civil wars and other types of violence more broadly. In contrast to these economic arguments, the so-called grievance theories emphasize unmet basic needs, relative deprivation, or the desire for recognition and identity as motivations for violence (Gurr 1970, 1993; Stewart 2008). While the greed vs. grievance debate dominates the discussion of causes of violence, sociopolitical and psychosocial approaches also point to the importance of social interactions, networks, and social structures in shaping one's behavior. Focus on age-related psychosocial development peculiarities draw attention to youth-specific characteristics and factors that may drive young people to violence. A society's demographic composition also has some bearing on social cohesion and potential for violence. The "youth bulge" theory, for example, states that a disproportionately large youth cohort, and particularly a large concentration of young men, increases the risks of violence in a given community or country (Goldstone 1991, 2001; Fuller 1995; Kaplan 1994). In his seminal work, Henrik Urdal (2004) refines the "youth bulge" argument by emphasizing that a large youth population coupled with economic stagnation and lack of opportunities for migration make a country prone to violence.

The economic argument has dominated not only the discussion of causes of conflict but also shaped policies and interventions meant to curb youth violence in many fragile parts of the world. Employment generation programs are believed to provide meaningful activities for young people that are more appealing than joining a rebel group. However, in recent years, there has been an increasingly critical view on stand-alone employment generation activities as a way to mitigate youth grievances and promote social cohesion. In a 2009 World Bank publication, Pia Peeters and colleagues emphasized the importance of youth employment. However, they also pointed to limitations of employment-only youth programs. Marc Sommers (2007) critically assesses youth employment programs and provides an insightful analysis of their challenges and variations in needs between rural and urban youth in West African countries. He argues that rural-to-urban migration trends brought into the cities increasingly more young people who are disgruntled with traditional social structures and their marginalization in rural communities.

Research on conflicts in West Africa has also focused on issues of youth exclusion and marginalization. The influential work of Paul Richards (1996, 1998 with Peters) stated that the conflict in Sierra Leone was the manifestation of a crisis of exclusion of youth who were alienated and lacked opportunities. Manning (2009), Richards et al. (2005), and Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) asserted that youth exclusion and the weakening of agrarian social structures fueled civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where intergenerational tensions and resentment to patrimonial institutions and authority pushed young people into rebel groups.

The exclusion argument is closely linked to the categorization of youth and the perception of who belongs in that group. Along with the official age-based definition, specifically in Africa, there is another understanding of youth
as a social category. It comprises people who are between the stages of childhood and adulthood. Those who are unable to make a full transition to adulthood due to their marginalization and exclusion from traditional practices are often described as “social youth;” they are believed to be more susceptible to violence (Utas 2012, Sommers 2006). The term youth is more commonly applied exclusively to young men, since transition to adulthood is often linked to family, marriage, and parenthood. In this context, men and women go through different transition processes, as men are more likely to be denied an opportunity to marry (Richards 2006). Consequently, men are more likely to permanently remain in the youth category. As a result, some young excluded men, the argument goes, tend to engage in violence or join rebel groups as an alternative to gaining status, identity, and livelihood. Alex de Waal succinctly sums up the challenges of defining the category, which he describes as “problematic, intermediary and ambivalent.” It is “chiefly defined by what it is not: youths are not dependent children, but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults” (2002: 15).

Exclusion as a driver of violence has gained more recognition and attention, particularly in the context of fragile and conflict-affected states. Shildrick and MacDonald (2008) and Kramer (2000) identified social exclusion coupled with economic marginalization as predicting factors for youth engagement in violent behavior in nonfragile contexts. A 2010 German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) report also pointed to social exclusion and lack of prospects as driving forces for violence. McLean Hilker and McAslan Fraser authored a 2009 UK Department for International Development (DFID) report that investigated various factors of youth exclusion and violence in fragile states, pointing to a myriad of individual and structural factors that shape youths’ actions.

The challenge of establishing links between youth exclusion and violence lies in the multifaceted and complex nature of the concept of exclusion. A broader definition of exclusion describes it as “a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, cast, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live” (DFID 2005, 3). Exclusion can involve several distinct types, such as economic, political, social, and cultural (Stewart 2008).

Most scholars who link exclusion and violence have focused on economic exclusion. This type of work treats exclusion as poverty and economic marginalization. Persistent poverty, the argument goes, reinforces inequality and a sense of injustice, which further increases the chances for violence and radicalization (Bryant and Kappaz 2005). Bryant and Kappaz (2005) point to the fact that 97 percent of conflicts between 1989 and 1992 occurred in states that were poor. In surveys for the World Development Report 2011 conducted in areas affected by violence, unemployment and idleness were cited as the most important factors motivating young people to join rebel movements (WDR 2011, 79). Poverty is also thought to decrease the cost for individuals to participate in violence (Collier 1999; Hirshleifer 2001), while conflict provides an opportunity to make a living (Collier 1999). Hoffman’s ethnography (2011) with rebels in Sierra Leone and Liberia depicts violence as “work” and a source of livelihood. Young men who seek employment act as contractors who perform the work of war for a price.

The link between poverty and violence is also related in part to the reduced opportunities available to youth as well as failing safety nets, particularly in the context of rapid political, social, and economic changes. This is most likely the case in low-income countries with a “youth bulge,” that is, where more than fifty percent of the population is under the age of thirty. These contexts lack opportunities for a majority of people, but young people, who often have fewer skills and connections, are even less likely to benefit from the few opportunities that exist. This can be perceived as youth exclusion, which can lead to grievances and consequently violence (Goldstone 1991, 2001; McLean Hilker and McAslan Fraser 2009).
Many observers also believe that political and social exclusion are linked to violence. In 2005, DFID posited that social exclusion is the leading cause of conflict and insecurity. Numerous studies of youth violence and mobilization in Sierra Leone indicate that the structure of this country’s communities, where young people are expected to follow older people’s orders, pushed young people to fight (Abdullah 2004; McIntyre and Thusi 2003; Richards 1996; Manning 2009; Utas 2008; Bragg 2006). Utas (2008) echoed the idea that certain types of social structures can cause youth violence by arguing that youth marginalization and lack of participation in political processes (both at local and national levels) reinforces youths’ sense of betrayal and exclusion. In some contexts, the use of force to demand participation may
be seen by some youth as a legitimate expression of power (Moran 2006). For instance, intergenerational systems in southeast Liberia ensure collective rights by valuing “the creative tension which emerges from the conflict between generations” (155). Rapid social change can exacerbate intergenerational rifts where elders believe that the young still have to pay their dues and follow the rules, while young people demand change and may take action to put it into practice (Marc et al. 2013, 7). For example, if youths’ expectations regarding transition to adulthood are unmet due to rigid socialization processes, conflict can arise between youths and elders. Thus, it is possible that youth will seek alternate routes to adulthood, some of which can be highly disruptive to society (Marc et al. 2013, 128).

It has increasingly been emphasized that it is not one factor alone, but rather a combination of factors, that drive youth to violence. The nexus of economic, social, and political exclusion, along with other factors, create conditions where young people are more likely to resort to violence or join gangs or rebel groups. Greene (1993) and Kramer (2000) discuss inequality, exposure to violence, poverty, and social exclusion as predicting factors for youth violence in the United States. Shildrick and MacDonald (2008) stress that social capital, economic marginalization, and exclusion shape youth experience with violence in non-fragile contexts. Frances Stewart (2008) stated that when cultural differences coincide with economic and political inequalities, the chances of violence increase. Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) stressed that grievances, poverty, and economic deprivation, low levels of education, personal experience with violence, social marginalization, and political alienation, as well as rebel group recruitment tactics, served as strong predictors for whether young people were likely to join rebel groups in West Africa. Low levels of community and family acceptance also tend to be associated with violent behavior of youth (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004, 2007). Urdal and Hoelscher (2009) pointed to links between levels of formal and informal education, economic conditions and development, and ongoing conflict. In his 2010 mapping of programs aimed at reintegrating youth ex-combatants, Walton found that while “frustration at lack of livelihood opportunities can play a part in motivating youth violence, social and political grievances are usually more central” (Walton 2010).

Youth are particularly vulnerable to exclusion in all of its forms. In terms of development, youth are particularly prone to feeling isolated and separated, and may be less adept at recognizing or addressing such feelings. In her 2010 analysis of the dynamics between youth, gender, and fragility, Sabine Kurtenbach notes two forms of societal-level exclusion that may have the most significant effects on youth development: access to education and work, and acceptance from elders. In fact, youth themselves often cite exclusion as the source of their discontent (Abbink and van Kessel 2005). Analyzing evidence collected from Africa’s agro-pastoral societies, Kurtenbach also found that such exclusion was often based upon age and social status; that is, their problems stemmed from “generational opposition.” This is a significant issue for West African youth: a number of recent studies indicated that youth continue to have very limited voice in their communities and are often treated as a category of exclusion. Youth sometimes express anger and frustration over their marginalized position and limited participation in decision-making processes, that is, traditional practices that limit their engagement in community life or employment opportunities (Ginifer 2003). Many also express a lack of trust in elders and in institutional structures (Dale 2008; Dale et al. 2010).

Although this literature review shows that a wide range of academics have explored the links between exclusion and violence, most work has not been based on the perspective of youth themselves. Rather, many scholars have analyzed quantitative data, finding correlations between demographics and events, or interviewed small samples of youth. Most work has focused on youth who have participated in war and focused on why former combatants chose to fight. Many of the studies have overlooked the needs and attitudes of a broader youth category, particularly those youth who are not believed to be vulnerable or prone to violence. This study was designed to complement this literature by analyzing in more depth youth roles in society, their perspectives, and the norms and acceptability of
different types of violence. This should serve to gain a better perspective on drivers of youth violence and possible links between youth exclusion and violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone almost a decade after the conflicts in these countries ended. The assumption is that by better understanding youth and their communities, as well as understanding local perspectives on youth concerns, exclusion, and violence, we can better interpret the findings of previous youth studies. Moreover, we can at the same time make a significant contribution to understanding the links between exclusion and youth violence and find ways to move forward in youth-related policies and programming.
III. Methodology

This study aimed to increase the understanding of youth violence. It particularly focused on understanding whether exclusion was a factor in youth choices to engage in violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone. To achieve this goal, this work included several parts: (1) a literature review on youth, exclusion, and violence; (2) discussions with key stakeholders; and (3) collection of data in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

To address its objectives, the study employed an inductive approach in order to explore and understand nuances of local perceptions of (1) what qualities define a person as “youth;” (2) types and degrees of exclusion and violence; and (3) who experiences or participates in exclusion and violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone. A mixed methods approach was used to collect the data. Demographic data was first gathered from each participant and then semi-structured interviews were conducted. A pre-interview questionnaire collected general demographic information from participants, including their employment and economic status and whether they perceived themselves as youth or non-youth.

Individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) focused on three main issues—youth, exclusion, and violence, each with several subsections. Researchers asked about a community’s definition of youth, youth roles and activities, their participation in community activities, local and national level politics, and their access to resources and sources of livelihoods. Researchers also asked about perceptions of fairness around these issues. In a second part of each IDI or FGD, researchers discussed violence, whether it was acceptable, what kinds were common in communities, and asked about different community groups’ and individuals’ participation in violent activities.

The study’s design and its stronger emphasis on qualitative data provided an exceptional opportunity to gather local perceptions, meanings, and narratives regarding concepts of youth, violence, and exclusion. It also helped generate a stronger insight on youth issues that would not be possible with a different approach. Interviews and focus groups were designed to allow a semi-structured conversation to explore these three topics of interest and to ask follow-up questions that clarified the meaning and understanding behind participants’ answers. Fieldwork was conducted between August 2011 and March 2012 by two research firms that carried out a total of 872 IDIs and 133 FGDs in 49 communities across Liberia and Sierra Leone. Communities were randomly selected and included localities with different compositions, experience with conflict, and concentration of youth in order to gain a broader view on youth issues throughout both countries. The research was interested in issues pertinent to youth as a broad category, rather than at-risk youth such as former combatants or idle youth. The research sites included rural, peri-urban, and urban areas. To gain access to respondents, researchers followed local customary practices by first getting the local chief’s permission to conduct the study and asking him to select the initial respondents, most often youth leaders. From these initial contacts, the team used the snowball method to meet referrals. To manage selection bias, enumerators were instructed to gauge for a roughly balanced representation of gender, age, educational level, and ethnolinguistic background variation in the sample size.

The study population included two categories—those who self-identify as youth and those who self-identify as non-youth (for example, young adults, adults, and elders). About two-thirds of the sample identified as youth while one-
third identified as non-youth. Men and women are equally represented. The study population reflects each country’s ethnolinguistic and religious diversity. In addition to IDIs, three FGDs comprised of male youth, female youth, or a mixed-gender group of non-youth were conducted in each community.

To analyze the transcripts from the IDIs and FGDs, researchers employed coding based on themes pertinent to the research objective, such as definition of youth, youth activities, or types of violence, and then analyzed them using mixed methods. This approach allowed the research team to explore similarities and differences of the perception of issues under investigation. Each code produced an aggregate of statements from the sample, allowing the researchers to count references but more importantly, read for recurring themes, descriptive anecdotes, or contradictory perspectives. Quantitative data per respondent allowed the team to analyze qualitative codes by gender, age, self-identification, and location. Given the sample size and its demographic analysis, the sample is representative of the overall population in each country. These factors add validity and reliability to the qualitative findings and make it possible to identify trends, points of difference, and framing perceptions that can be used to inform policy priorities and project design.

While the study’s scale and the depth of collected data are impressive, there are several limitations. The choice of methodological approach reflected the study’s objectives and the need to gain better insight into youth perspectives that is often missing from discussions about youth issues. The flexibility of the interviews and focus groups generated rich information about a variety of youth issues, but yielded different levels of depth of content depending both on the interviewee’s willingness to talk and on the interviewer’s capacity to ask the right follow-up questions. This flexibility also makes it difficult to draw conclusions about similarities or differences between the two case

---

**Potential Further Use of the Collected Data**

The research’s scope and objectives have determined the focus and extent of the data used to prepare this report. The collected data is exceptionally rich, and unique in its size and scope. Given its emic nature focused on local perspectives, the research raised new questions beyond this report or asked by data collection instruments. The open-ended structure of IDIs and FGDs in both countries yielded rich information on issues beyond the study’s set scope. Respondents’ many examples and stories shed light on a number of issues of high relevance to youth that deserve further exploration. While this analysis covers only a portion of the available data to address the study’s initial objective, the data offers opportunity for further exploration that includes but is not limited to 1) closer analysis of SGBV and intimate partner violence data; 2) local conflict management systems; 3) attitudes about education systems, access, and the appropriate age of students; and 4) expectations and aspirations of or for youth. These topics can be also be analyzed using mixed methods to identify possible trends along demographic variables such as gender, place of residence, self-identified age category, and so forth.

---

4 Most demographic data about respondents is based on self-identification.
5 Descriptive analysis of the quantitative data was conducted in SPSS 20. The qualitative data was analyzed in Nvivo, as was the mixed-method analysis. The Nvivo 9 software is developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research International (QSR). The software program allows a researcher to transcribe, manage, code, and analyze various forms of qualitative data, as well as spreadsheets of quantitative data. When rows of quantitative data are linked to qualitative data sources, mixed-methods analysis can produce statistics and graphs. Qualitative data can be quantified by number of sources (for example, 1 interview = 1 source) or number of coding references (for example, 1 interview had 3 coding references for “male as perpetrator of violence”).
6 The Liberia sample includes 491 IDI and 73 FGDs. The Sierra Leone sample consists of 381 IDI and 60 FGDs.
7 See Annex A for a detailed description of the study population.
For example, it is unclear whether corruption came up more often as an issue in Sierra Leone because of the specific interests or skills of the research team or because corruption is a more important problem in that country.

Time and budget restrictions also limited the analysis of concepts to those immediately relevant to the study’s main objective. Analysis focused on key topics related to defining youth, descriptions of violence, and understanding exclusion without incorporating an immense amount of rich data covering other topics. While this research provides a unique perspective on a number of youth issues, it raises many more questions than it is able to answer. There is potential to further analyze this data, its more extensive disaggregation by different variables (that is, ethnicity, religion, locality, and so forth), to conduct a detailed comparative analysis of the two case studies, and follow up on the unanswered questions.
IV. Research Findings

A. Definition and Characteristics of Youth

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, “youth” is defined by a person’s age but also by their specific status and role in a community. The governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone use only age-based definitions of this category, however. The official definition of youth refers to individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years, which puts 30.8% and 33.5% percent of the population in each country respectively in the youth category. Such a broad age span includes people with a wide range of life experience. The study found that within the 15–35 age range, there are individuals who do not consider themselves youth, and there are also individuals older than 35 that categorize themselves as youth (see Figure 1). Participants in the study, both those who identified as youth and those who identified as non-youth, differentiated between “younger” youth and “older” youth, stating that those who are younger may still go to school, may not have started a family, and may not have many responsibilities. “Older” youth are not expected to go to school because they often have families and are expected to provide for them. They are perceived to be further along in the process of obtaining responsibilities important for adulthood. As a respondent in Liberia explained, “They [older youth] are considered old youth because they are involved in having children, getting married, some are out of school even out of university, well established, they have responsibility and know their rights.”

Figure 1: Self-Identified Category by Age Group, Liberia

Study participants also described youth as having a broad array of characteristics, activities, roles, responsibilities, and levels of achievement and community involvement. Many stated that youth are those who are able to perform activities that require physical strength. “[A]ge does not matter in this community, it all depends on the person,” a female respondent in Sewa Road, Sierra Leone, explained. “As long as someone is energetic and he/she is considered a youth. As long as you can do what you are capable of doing, what you should do; you are then considered a youth.”

Physical strength was also described as the characteristic that allowed or required youth to participate in “community work.” Community work includes cleaning community spaces; maintaining water pumps and drainage; fixing

---

8 According to the 2009 Liberia Youth Fragility Assessment, 75 percent of the Liberian population, or 2.6 million people by the 2007 Liberian census, was under the age of 35 in 2007. The census indicated that almost 60 percent of Liberians are urban, so it can be assumed that in 2007 approximately 1.56 million urban Liberians were less than 35 years of age.
9 International Data Base.
10 Big man, in-depth interview, Pipeline Road, Liberia. November 9, 2011.
11 Female youth, focus group discussion, Sewa Road, Sierra Leone, August 2011.
bridges, roads, soccer fields, and other commonly used facilities; building new structures, such as public latrines, clubs, palaver huts, and houses; and any other community activities that elders ask young people to do.

Eighty percent of respondents in Liberia and fifty-two percent of respondents in Sierra Leone emphasized that youth are defined as those who do community work and who “develop” their communities: “A youth is a person who engages in community work, organizes activities for the development of the community.” Although physical work on behalf of the community helps shape group identity and build stronger ties to the community, it is also fraught with potential for exclusion, marginalization, and negative labeling. Firstly, those who do not participate or are physically unable to partake in such youth-defining characteristics tend to be excluded and do not enjoy even the limited benefits that those “included” youth may have. Disabled youth, along with immigrant youth who settle in the community, are often excluded from community work and other youth activities, which in turn poses additional challenges to their successful progression through the social hierarchies and their ability to gain standing in their communities.

Secondly, those who continue participating in community work after reaching the upper limit of the age category—35 years old—remain youth. They continue to be part of youth organizations, and associate with youth and are described as youth. Conversely, once a youth starts to spend more time with elders or is invited to be with elders, he can transition out of the youth category.

---

**Categorizing “Youth”**

The governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone define “youth” as persons aged 15–35 years old. This is the same as the African Union’s African Youth Charter, which selected this range based on Africa’s development realities and after debates about defining youth in the African context. While age provides clear boundaries, the category of youth is ambivalent and not universal. This complicates cross-national data collection and analysis, which often informs policy and programming. As an example, data analysis for this sample could not be easily compared to data from the United Nations, which considers youths to be 15–24 years old.

This study sought to understand how Liberians and Sierra Leoneans view the youth category and who qualifies as youth. Each respondent shared their age, but also self-identified with an age category. During interviews, all respondents—regardless of age—were asked to describe youth. This format did not focus on an age range and prioritized local perspectives about youth. This descriptive qualitative data adds a deeper understanding for variances within the youth category. Local definitions of non-youth categories—big man/woman, youth man, adult, elder—were not explored extensively or consistently during interviews or focus groups.

The data on each respondent’s age and self-identified category allowed for analysis of outliers. Some youth were over 35 years old, while some people under 35 years did not consider themselves youth. It is important to analyze qualitative data and development indicators to understand how some people transition out of youth early and why others seem stuck in youthhood. This sample finds that primarily poor rural men lack the status and means to transition to adulthood.

This study used two broad categories based on self-identification—youth and non-youth. Non-youth constituted one-third of the study respondents and included smaller subcategories, such as youth man, youth woman, big man, or big woman. Given the study’s objectives, the analysis focused greatly on the category of youth and treated non-youth as one category.
Youth are also differentiated from non-youth by the amount and types of responsibilities they hold. Increased responsibilities—such as caring for other people and making independent decisions—allow a person to graduate from the category of youth to adult. Starting a family both categorizes a person as an adult and allows one to demonstrate that he or she can be responsible. The burden of childbirth and childcare impacts a female’s transition to adulthood differently than a male youth. Caring for a child imposes more responsibilities and thus makes one an adult.13

Economic status also informs whether an individual remains in the youth demographic. People who experience financial hardship will continue to be labeled “youth” regardless of their age. On the other hand, economic prosperity can help a young person transition earlier into adulthood by proving responsibility and reliability. Here is how a male youth explained the importance of financial standing for making the transition from youth to adulthood: “Those who are poor will love to remain as youth, unlike those who are fortunate in life. If you are fortunate in life, at the age of thirty or forty, you will no longer associate yourself with the youths because you have money. Those who are poor have no option other than to associate themselves with the youths in the community.”14

In sum, transitioning to the category of adult or elder allows a person to more fully participate in their community. To this end, the current division of labor and responsibilities for youth and non-youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone demarcates access to decision making and resources, therefore shaping perception of youth exclusion.

Overall, young people are described in positive terms, and youth is viewed as a stage of life when one learns about the world, builds stronger ties to the community, and acquires skills. Young people are characterized as being

13 In Sierra Leone, however, many respondents stated that the ability to have a child implies being young. “As long as you are giving birth to children, you are a youth.” Female youth, focus group discussion, Borbu, Sierra Leone, May 2012
14 Male youth, focus group discussion, Borbu, Sierra Leone, May 2012.
the backbone of the community, as is exemplified by their numbers, their community work, and other related responsibilities. They are physically strong, hardworking and energetic. The positive connotations diminish, however, once a person exceeds the appropriate age range for youth. Those stuck in the youth category are described as irresponsible, immature, or unsuccessful (except if they serve as youth advisors). This duality indicates a convoluted relationship between the age-based and activities-based conceptual understanding of the youth category. The upper age limit seems to be more significant in terms of describing status and future prospects in the community. Those able to transition to adulthood within the expected timeframe follow an expected pattern of life. It is those people who are unable to make the transition who become “trapped” in the category of youth. Such “overage youth” are the most vulnerable and excluded by their communities.

B. Youth Participation—Local Level

Traditional decision-making mechanisms remain largely in place at the community level in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Especially in rural communities, groups of adults and elders gather to make decisions and allocate resources (including land) and communicate decisions to youth. These local decision-making mechanisms affect youth far more than formal governance and justice institutions. Youth tend to participate in community meetings, but the extent of their participation and representation in decision-making processes varies. Seventy-five percent of all respondents in Liberia and ninety-one percent in Sierra Leone affirmed that youth participate in community meetings, though many described youth participation as limited. Women and men spoke about exclusion from decision making almost equally in Sierra Leone (71 percent male, 68.7 percent female) and equally in Liberia (21.6 percent for each). Even within urban and rural communities, gender differences remain equal (except in Liberia’s peri-urban areas in which 33 percent more males spoke about exclusion than females). Place of residence shows a larger difference in both countries. In Sierra Leone, respondents in rural communities spoke about exclusion more often than urban respondents. Youth in rural communities complained about exclusion more than non-youth. Similarly, in Liberia, rural youth talked more about exclusion than non-youth.

In both countries, several respondents reported that youth are often not allowed to speak during meetings, even if they are present throughout the deliberations. Here is how a male youth in Liberia described youths’ participation in the community decision-making process: “When they [elders] are making decisions, they sometimes invite us [youth], but we are only there to sit, listen and take instructions. We are not there to talk before our fathers.”

What is a Job?

The World Development Report 2013 acknowledges challenges in defining what constitutes a job. It distinguishes between formal and informal jobs, and points to the fact that not all work is considered a job. It defines jobs as “activities that generate actual or imputed income, monetary or in kind, formal or informal.” (49)

The local interpretation of what is a job reveals that many Liberian and Sierra Leonean youth consider jobs to be formal employment. Jobs are highly skilled positions such as office work, teaching, or medical professions that provide a sustained and sufficient source of income for a family. Unskilled physical labor, trading, commercial agriculture, or entrepreneurship do not qualify as jobs even though they yield an income. In this study, youth who had informal work described themselves as unemployed despite the fact that most of them “hustle” or do menial daily jobs to support themselves.

15 Male youth, focus group discussion, Borbu, Sierra Leone, May 2012.
Often, youth are represented in decision-making processes through a youth leader who is most often an elder or a youth chosen by community decision makers to inform youth of decisions. Although youth leaders in some communities are expected to represent the needs of youth, these leaders are often out of touch with their constituents’ needs. Youth are therefore most often unrepresented in key meetings where decisions are made that affect their lives.

It is essential to point out, however, that youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level may largely reflect youths’ standing in the community. Some youth are well integrated in the established hierarchies and social structures due to their family background or kinships; others are more marginalized and as a result may be dissatisfied and seek alternatives, or challenge the existing decision-making structures. Some young people may have leadership roles and wealth, while others may not participate in any decision-making processes and struggle to make a living. Some may have more access and exposure to opportunities, while others may only be familiar with local or immediately available opportunities, or none at all. Overall, however, youth as a category of community residents have more limited access to various community resources than adults or elders.

Elders’ unwillingness to actively engage youth in decision-making processes and other community management activities creates a sense of apathy among youth. Although youth organizations and youth leaders provide mechanisms for participation, several youth avoid taking part in decision making completely. A female youth in Liberia said, “I don’t attend community meetings because I along with some other youth are always excluded from most of the benefits and or opportunities as a result of these meetings.”

Some intentionally avoid community meetings because of other priorities, such as family or employment responsibilities. Youths’ lack of engagement and representation often results in poor understanding of how decisions are made, particularly regarding resource distribution, and was often cited by youth as a cause of significant grievances.

Regardless of their lack of participation in community decision-making processes, youth have a positive view of their roles, potential, and contribution to community activities. Male youth in Sierra Leone concluded: “It is very simple. They know that without us, there will be no development in the community, and we have a great role to play in this community.”

---

16 Female youth, in-depth interview, Neezoe, Liberia, November 19, 2011.
17 Male youth, focus group discussion, Rogbom Kasonga, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
integral part of their communities. Many believe they can participate in decision-making processes if they would like, or at least that youth leaders can participate and voice youth perspectives.

The majority of youth consistently deny feeling excluded from community decision making. For the most part, youth instead say that social and economic issues prevent them from fulfilling their responsibilities and contributing to their families and communities. They do not expect to be involved in most decision-making activities because they do not believe it is their role. They also stated that as youth they have not yet earned greater access to community institutions, resources, and decision-making mechanisms.

At the same time, youth in this study emphasize that some decisions, particularly those related to resource allocation, are unfair. Youth in both countries complain about a lack of transparency regarding how a community’s resources are distributed. These include long- and short-term jobs and skills training, which are considered resources that enter into a community. Perceived unfair access to benefits that come from other outside actors can also become a source of youth grievances. Youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone had similar accounts of perceived favoritism and corruption in their communities:

“Some of us do not participate because whenever there is a material benefits, [t] hose adults who are normally in charge of distribution secure them for their family members only. The only thing that I participated in during the elections was to vote and my vote is my secret.”

“Sometimes, when certain money comes to the town, the elders just want to use it for themselves. They can just take it and pay people to brush their farms. If the town receives money for development, it should be used for that, so at least people can see our fingerprint. But if you just take the money and put it in your pocket for private use, in that case, the youth can get vex. People should see what we do with the money but eating the money without result, it can make the youth feel bad.”

“I can remember vividly last year when money was given to us by one politician, who came for the very first time to canvass support in this community. In the process he gave money to the youths through the council of elders. To our dismay this money never reached us, and we did not see a dime; all of it was diverted to personal use by the elders.”

Failing to understand how and why decisions are made reinforces youths’ belief that personal connections and one’s status determine who gets access to community resources, including jobs. Young people describe frustration when new jobs are given to community leaders’ relatives, older or better-connected persons, or more qualified strangers, some of whom may come from outside the community. For many youth, the process of job application is a façade because many jobs are given to the family members and friends of those in power. One Liberian respondent explained the challenge of securing a job in the following way: “This is who knows you; for example if your family member or friend is the head, he or she will put his own people on the job.”

Indeed, personal connections, or what Sierra Leoneans refer to as sababu (influence), are often critical for securing a position. Twice as many urban residents cited the importance of sababu than those living in rural areas. Said one Sierra Leonean youth, “You can send millions
of applications, but if the sababu is absent, you will not get a job.” Such practices thus have a multitude of negative impacts on communities and especially on intergenerational relations.

C. Youth Participation—National Level

Young Liberians and Sierra Leoneans are rather enthusiastic about their national political process. They know about different political parties and are eager to discuss and participate in national politics, and often help to run campaigns and register voters. Youth also recognize the progress their countries have made since the civil war and talk passionately about their voting choices and political parties’ platforms.

"Those who are jobless do easily steal; they easily involve in violence and other problems.”

(Elder, focus group discussion, Sewa Road, Sierra Leone)

Idle Youth

Idle youth constitute a very small number of young people. In Sierra Leone, for example, 32 percent of respondents talked about idleness as one of the activities characterizing young people, and only 9.5 percent in Liberia. More rural respondents spoke about idleness in both countries, but in Liberia there were more than four times more citations compared to urban areas. Idle youth are described as youth that are not engaged in any activities. They are not in school, not employed, and often do not participate in community work. They are clearly distinguished from “good youth,” who occupy themselves with meaningful activities such as attending school or providing for themselves and their families. Idle youth, on the other hand, are described as lazy and of bad character. They often abuse drugs and alcohol. Here is how respondents in Liberia described idle youth: “I have some relatives, mostly male youths. Some do not want go to school and some engage into negative activities such as drinking alcohol, so we see them as unserious people.” (Male youth, in-depth interview, Bambala Town A, Liberia, November 29, 2011) “Those ones who do not respect people, who are not willing to learn, they do not want to do anything. Like for instance, you just passing in the community, having confusion with people, making confusion with people. You don’t do anything, you don’t want to go to school. No one will be willing to hear from you because you are already loose. I will not want my brothers or sisters to be loose, so I will not want them to even interact with you.” (Male youth, in-depth interview, Caldwell, Liberia, November 16, 2011)

Idle youth are blamed for violence and theft. Respondents attribute such unlawful and disruptive behavior to idle youths’ evil or bad nature or character, or to the fact that they have no other way to provide for themselves. As a male adult explained, “They are lazy people. They are people that can damage the town. Mostly you find these people with problems upon problems. This can lead to theft because, at the end of the day, they need to get something for themselves and are not doing anything. It leads into stealing.” (Male adult, in-depth interview, Bambala Town A, Liberia, November 30, 2011)

Negative behaviors and attitudes lead many to view youth idleness as a cause of conflict. Idle youth are vulnerable to abuse and manipulation, particularly during the election period. Respondents often referenced the fact that idle youth receive drugs and alcohol in exchange for supporting a candidate or causing a problem for an opponent.

Negative images are hard to overcome. Once labeled idle and a trouble-maker, it is very difficult for young people to break this stereotype, join “the ranks” of good youth, and rebuild networks and ties to the community. Communities have different mechanisms of protecting their residents from idle youths’ negative influence. They either marginalize idle youth, exclude them from community activities, or expel them in order to maintain stability and mitigate crime and violence. Without any safety net, ties to the community, or sources of livelihood, idle youth face not only daily challenges of providing for themselves, but also have fragile long-term life prospects. They are trapped in the stage of youth, which only further reinforces their vulnerability.

22 Female youth, in-depth interview, Kings Way, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
Youth seem to believe it is their constitutional right to access and participate in the political process. At the same time, youth join political parties because they seek useful connections or jobs, or if they have a particular family tradition or personal political aspirations. Youth believe that political party members may also enjoy certain benefits, such as access to educational scholarships or better employment opportunities. Youth also said they are interested in political participation and in voting because these are the rights of all citizens. Young people believe that both their participation in elections and their vote contribute to national development and affect their country’s political course.

Most political parties recognize the importance of youth votes and aim to incorporate their enthusiasm. As a result, youth groups affiliated with specific political parties have sprung up around the countries. Although campaign strategies have established a pattern of offering monetary and other gifts to potential voters, youth have become disillusioned by politics when gifts and other attention cease after the election. The perception is that politicians are only interested in youth during the elections or what respondents referred to as “politics time.” Youth claim that politicians employ manipulative tactics to secure their support. For example, politicians may lure young people to their party by promising them food, benefits, or even alcohol or drugs. Elders, too, concur that such practices take place: “The politicians are using us with food and drinks just because we are deprived. Only few youths can afford a bottle of Star beer and as such, when the politicians come, they come along with plenty of rum and food for the youths only because of their economic disadvantage. If we the youths are employed or engaged in trade, this will happen but is minimal. This issue of alcohol, rice, and marijuana needs to be stopped by the politicians and let them think good about the youths like their children.”

Respondents describe such practices as manipulative and exploitative, and complain they prey on people’s vulnerabilities and poverty. Youth think that once politicians are in office they forget about their campaign promises, and as a result feel abandoned and cheated. Youth also expressed disappointment that participating in election campaigns rarely results in youth-held government positions or more employment opportunities for young people.

Young people resent what they perceive as unfair and exploitative treatment either on the community or the national level. The perceived favoritism, nepotism, and tribalism that penetrate political processes on both the local and national levels breed frustration among youth. These grievances cause profound frustration and can serve as triggers

What is Violence?

Formal definitions of violence vary to reflect different types of violence. A more common use of the term violence refers to the use of physical force. Violence can also include structural and cultural types. The former refers to social injustice embedded and perpetrated by structures and institutions; the latter points to the cultural justification of structural violence.

The local interpretation and use of the concept of violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone varies broadly from commotion to group violence. It also includes structural and cultural forms of violence that are often described through perception of fairness and justice. Normatively, violence is perceived as bad and unacceptable. “Violence is not good, not acceptable, it is a danger. People do not accept it. Violence breeds violence. It can lead to damages of life and property. It’s in its name. Can lead to shedding blood. No it is not good, fighting brings poverty to a town.” (Female youth, focus group discussion, Mayela, Sierra Leone)

23 Elder, focus group discussion, Koidu Town, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
for potential social instability. They also discourage youth from further engaging with their communities or political institutions, which makes it harder for them to transition beyond the youth stage or advance through community ranks.

D. Youth Employment and Livelihoods

Liberia and Sierra Leone have high numbers of unemployed youth.\textsuperscript{24,25} The perception of youth unemployment and unavailability of jobs is high among the population as well. “I would say that 80 percent of the youths here don’t have jobs; it is a very serious problem,” said one Sierra Leonean male youth.\textsuperscript{26} Respondents consistently complained about the lack of jobs and difficulties youth endure from unemployment—75.5 percent of respondents in Sierra Leone stated that unemployment is a main problem for young people. Different genders in each country reported higher numbers of exclusion from employment. In Liberia, 50 percent more males than females spoke about exclusion. In Sierra Leone, nearly twice as many female youth spoke about exclusion compared to their male counterparts. Urban residents also spoke about the issue more than rural or peri-urban respondents (37.4 percent in urban areas vs. 28.4 percent in rural in Sierra Leone, and 10.2 percent vs. 6.7 percent respectively in Liberia). Both youth and non-youth feel similarly about the negative impact unemployment has on youth and overall community development. “It is really serious. They are suffering, and they need help,” said one person from Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{27}

While youth complained about the lack of job opportunities available to them, most youth actually engage in a broad range of activities to provide for themselves. It is a very small group of young people that are truly idle—that is, who do not engage in any social activities, schooling, or self-provision. The overwhelming majority of young people in Liberia and Sierra Leone “hustle,” trade, or “do business” to support themselves and their families. Many of these activities involve menial low-skilled or unskilled jobs that youth do for very little money. Respondents said, “If you don’t have work or are not engaged with company, you go and fetch fire wood and sell it for two thousand Leones, which cannot help you in any situation. There are people who are not working but can go to the bush and provide sticks to those who want to build houses and pay them. But every able body person is now engaged in this community.”\textsuperscript{28} Many others are engaged in agriculture. Because their activities do not provide stable salaries and often require menial physical labor, young people do not consider what they do a job, indicating a very limited perception of what constitutes a job.

Many consider jobs to be positions that provide a sustained and sufficient source of income for a family. Youth associate employment with highly skilled office work, teaching, or medical professions. “Englishman jobs,” as they are labeled in Sierra Leone, are held in high regard. Unskilled physical labor, trading, commercial agriculture, or entrepreneurship do not qualify as jobs. In this study, youth who had informal work described themselves as unemployed.

Such a narrow understanding of what constitutes a job poses many challenges in providing employment opportunities to young people. Youth in both Liberia and Sierra Leone not only state that they need a job, but that they would

\textsuperscript{24} The Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007 indicated that unemployment is two times higher in urban than rural areas and among female youth. Officially, 48 percent of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, while 30 percent between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed. The unemployment rate for the officially defined youth category (15-35 years old) is 26.6 percent, considering a broad definition of unemployment which takes into account people who are not working for a reason other than inactivity (student, disabled, and retired) regardless of whether looking for a job. It is only 5.9 percent if one adheres to a narrow definition of unemployment that counts only those inactive individuals who actively look for employment (Report on the Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010).

\textsuperscript{25} It is important to note, however, that youth employment statistics may also be skewed because youth constitute a significant part of an informal economy that sustains many people in Liberia.

\textsuperscript{26} Male youth, in-depth interview, Yeli Sanda Road, Sierra Leone, October 2011.

\textsuperscript{27} Elder, focus group discussion, Kingharman Road-Brookfields, Sierra Leone, May 2012.

\textsuperscript{28} Male adult, in-depth interview, Sahn Malen, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
like the government to provide one for them. Young people do not consider self-initiatives, commercial agriculture, or entrepreneurship to be employment. They admit that they often lack the skills and qualifications for the jobs they desire. Youth noted a discrepancy between available jobs, or jobs they would like to have, and their skills and capabilities. Uneducated youth typically can only access unskilled or low-skilled jobs, which are often described as “doing business” (petty trading) and “hustling.” These youth are ineligible for white-collar office jobs and many manual low-skilled positions. Furthermore, employers often require at least minimal literacy skills and sometimes a high school diploma. Such undereducated and unemployed youth lose self-confidence and are viewed poorly by their community.

A limited view of employment, combined with a lack of understanding of how to gain access to jobs, creates a strong sense of frustration in young people. Without steady employment, youth are left with livelihood options that provide neither economic stability nor status in the community, thus making it harder for them to transition beyond the category of youth and consequently gain more access to resources.

“Young people recognize that their lack of skills and education is a main obstacle to employment. “One big challenge here is that most of us are not educated enough to access jobs,” admitted a male youth in Sierra Leone. “Most of us cannot go out there to look for jobs because we are not qualified for certain jobs that demand academic qualifications.”

Educated youth, however, particularly in Sierra Leone, also expressed frustration with the country’s lack of employment opportunities. They reported that even youth who have completed high school or college have difficulties finding a job. Educated young people become disillusioned with the education system and their life prospects because of their inability to secure a job they consider appropriate for their level of education and experience. This in turn breeds resentment among those who have invested in their education.

In addition, sababu,31 nepotism, and the presence of workers from outside the community, pose obstacles to employment for both educated and uneducated youth. Some Sierra Leonean youth reported the need to exploit connections and sometimes bribe others to get a position. Said one female youth from Sierra Leone, “You might be

---

30 Male youth, in-depth interview, Rogbom Kasonga, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
31 A term used in Sierra Leone to describe personal connections and influence.
highly educated but if you do not have the money to bribe those who offer the job and you do not know any member of the board or interviewing committee, your chances for gaining employment are very minute.”

Outside workers pose another barrier to employment. Youth complained that companies that come to the community often bring employees with them, negating the need to hire locally. This practice frustrates locals who expect new employment opportunities. “Take a look at the community bank, all the staff are from outside this community,” said

32 Female youth, in-depth interview, Kings Way, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
one respondent from Sierra Leone. Indeed, a main point of dissatisfaction is the view that many jobs are given to strangers; that is, those who come into the community from elsewhere. They reap the benefits of working in the community without contributing to it, while the local population suffers from chronic unemployment.

E. Defining Violence

The term “violence” is broadly interpreted in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. One of its broader definitions is “trouble,” which refers to a break in established community norms. Said one respondent from Sierra Leone, “violence is anything that you do to disturb the peace of others.”

Abuse of power (such as unfair access to or distribution of benefits and resources, including water, land, employment, or educational scholarships) is clearly and consistently referred to as violence. “Violence is to steal power from a person or to seize a man or a woman, or to seize a person's freedom unnecessarily,” said one Sierra Leonean.

Many people generally defined violence as forcing one's will upon another or taking advantage of a less powerful person. Another frequent generalization of violence was lawlessness, when an individual takes liberty to act on personal desires regardless of social norms or laws. Verbal violence was also a commonly cited form of violence.

Physical violence was described as ranging on a spectrum from minor confrontations to brutal attacks. Physical violence may or may not include the use of weapons and mostly occurs between individuals. Overall, violence is described in negative terms.

F. Causes of Violence

Causes of violence, as well as reasons for its extent and severity, vary from financial disputes to domestic violence to theft. The most commonly cited cause of conflict that can transform into a violent confrontation (as reported by 86.6 percent of respondents in Sierra Leone and 44.5 percent in Liberia) is conflict within romantic relationships, also referred to as “love relations.” Residents of rural areas both in Liberia and Sierra Leone discussed this cause of violence more than residents of urban areas (91.8 percent vs. 80.7 percent in Sierra Leone and 43.5 percent vs. 36.4 percent in Liberia). These conflicts include forms of verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual violence that stem from infidelity, jealousy, or competition for attention. This type of violence is not necessarily dominated by male violence against women, but includes violence by people of both sexes against people of both sexes. More male youth than female youth raised this topic in Liberia, but in Sierra Leone 50 percent more female youth spoke of it compared to male youth. This type of violence can happen within a household or between people living separately in the same community. During an FGD with female youth in Sierra Leone, the participants explained, “Jealousy is the major cause of violence in this community. It is on both sides, men and women are involved in adultery. And this sometimes causes violence in the community. Sometimes they use abusive language among themselves.”

Because of its frequency and cultural acceptance, domestic or intimate partner violence is normalized in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is described as part of human interaction and family life. It only requires intervention from other community members when at its most extreme, such as when it results in injuries that require medical intervention. Assaults or regular beatings were described for the most part as a normal feature of relationships, or as a normal consequence of

33 Male youth, focus group discussion, Kangama Kono, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
34 Male youth, in-depth interview, Lambayama, Sierra Leone, March 2012.
35 Male youth, in-depth interview, Kangama Kono, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
36 Female youth, focus group discussion, Luttie, Sierra Leone, March 2012.
jealousy, frustration, or rejection. Women are often instructed by their parents to tolerate and hide domestic violence, because fighting or disclosing it could cause their children even more trouble. Although less cited, respondents also spoke about sexual violence such as rape.

The extent of intimate partner violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone was an unexpected finding of the study. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is also highly prevalent in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Because it was beyond the scope of the study, the research falls short in differentiating all these types of violence and has coded all related information under the label SGBV. The report does not explore the reasons for and mechanisms of dealing with this type of violence and calls for more research into the matter.

Social events are often the scene of confrontations between young people and were therefore viewed as causes of violence. As diverse social groups interact in social gatherings, distrustful group dynamics and underlying tensions can be exposed or trigger violence. Athletic events, for example, are one type of social gathering that leads to violence: 52.6 percent of respondents in Sierra Leone and 18.5 percent in Liberia indicated sports are a cause of violence.
Other common causes for violence included disputes over money and theft. “Money issues” are a prevalent cause of violence between individuals: 50 percent and 21 percent of respondents in Sierra Leone and Liberia respectively indicated it as a cause of violence. Theft is another form of violence. Armed robbery, primarily a problem in urban communities, is itself a violent act. Respondents described armed robberies that resulted in severe injuries or death.

Respondents also reported that some violence is caused by inequitable distribution of or access to resources. In some communities, access to public resources is a source of daily skirmishes and low-intensity interpersonal violence. A consistent example across communities is arguments and fights at community pumps when people come to fetch water (especially in communities that suffer from water shortages during dry seasons).

People can also become violent if they feel ignored or unheard. Respondents gave examples of persons attempting to channel grievances through traditional or formal channels, yet feeling ignored and frustrated when doing so. As one male youth from Liberia said, “When another youth wrong me and nobody seem to pay attention to my complaint twice, for the third time I will use force to react.” In sum, unfair decisions, inequitable resource distribution, disrespect, and not allowing someone to “save face” were mentioned as forms of violence that justify a violent physical response.

Yet another cited cause of violence is idleness and joblessness. Lack of employment and how it affects violence is a major concern for both urban and rural residents in both countries. In Sierra Leone, for example, 76 percent of all respondents spoke about youth unemployment in the country, and 50.1 percent identified idleness as a cause of violence. Idleness is also associated with gambling, prostitution, substance abuse, and other negative behaviors that can further contribute to instability and violence. Idle youth tend to congregate in bars, gambling houses, or areas that are deemed violent and unsafe. Since idleness is linked to violence, employing youth is seen as a way to curb violence. Creating employment opportunities for young people is viewed as a panacea for all social ills both in rural and urban areas. Said one respondent from Sierra Leone, “If people have a job, they are hopeful and the crime rate will [be] reduced.”

A respondent in Liberia explained more: “In most cases the youth are people who are always in violence. This is because the young people always into activities; because of that they are the ones that always into violence. Another thing is that most young people are not working; and this is real, you will always find violence possible in every community due to the fact that the young people are less busy. Let’s assume that you are working and I am working, the possibility of both of us engaging into violence will be very hard.”

Prostitution, alcohol consumption, and drug use are often associated with bad or violent behavior: 19.5 percent of all respondents in Liberia and 39.9 percent of respondents in Sierra Leone stated that consumption of alcohol and drugs causes violence. Youths’ substance abuse is also thought to make them prone to conflict or manipulation. Respondents from various communities claimed that political candidates have supplied youth with drugs and alcohol to garner their support or to recruit them to their campaign. Others stated that addicted youth are used against political opponents or to cause disturbances in the communities. If candidates incite these idle youth to violence, they reinforce the stereotype that youth are violent and deserve to be marginalized.

Even without the manipulation of addicted youths, political campaigns and elections on the community and national levels are described as periods of heightened tensions and social instability. Political parties often raise topics that uncomfortably spotlight existing grievances, which cause heated debates and violence among voters. Candidates can also cause violence as they visit communities and bring gifts to recruit supporters. Unfair distribution of these goods can upset a population that is already prone to violence. Politicians may also manipulate vulnerable populations and exploit preexisting divisions in society. Said one respondent from Sierra Leone, “The politicians are using tribalism to pull this country apart for their selfish needs.”

G. Perpetrators of Violence

Youth, both male and female, were most often cited as perpetrators of violence. In fact, 57.9 percent of all respondents in Liberia and 66.4 percent in Sierra Leone pointed to youth as those who carry out violent acts (see Figures 2 and 3). The most cited external driver for youth violence was lack of livelihood opportunities. With few or no positive ways to provide for themselves, many youth challenge community norms and regulations, disrespect elders, and resort to illicit activity.

It is not just age and strength that characterize who is more likely to engage in violence. According to respondents, some occupations are associated with violence. For example, okada riders (in Sierra Leone) and miners (the majority of whom are youth) are often described at the center of violence in various communities throughout the country.

38 Male youth, in-depth interview, Baoma Station, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
39 Male youth, in-depth interview, Sahn Malen, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
40 Male youth, in-depth interview, Lagoon East, Liberia, November 29, 2011.
41 Male youth, in-depth interview, Lambayama, Sierra Leone, March 2012.
Respondents were hesitant to admit and discuss incidences of group violence; they instead indicated that most violence occurs between individuals. This is because group violence is associated with the civil wars. Respondents described the horrors of war and remembered the death and destruction it brought to the country. Consequently, questions regarding group violence were not well received. Follow-up questions revealed, however, that group violence, while rare, does occur.

H. Attitudes Toward Violence

Respondents both in rural and urban areas clearly and consistently stated that violence is bad: 87 percent of male youth and 79 percent of female youth in Sierra Leone, and 52.5 and 48 percent respectively in Liberia, indicated violence is unacceptable. In their view, violence brings only pain and destruction. It disrupts the flow of life and undermines development. Said one respondent from Sierra Leone, “Violence is not good, not acceptable, it is a danger. People do not accept it. Violence breeds violence. It can lead to damages of life and property. . . . Fighting brings poverty to a town.”42 Said another: “No sensible person likes violence.”43 Elders agreed with youth on this issue: “Wherever there is violence, there will be no peace. It is not acceptable at anytime. Wherever there is peace, the spirit will be there. But if you are only there to be violent, people will be afraid of you. People will not go closer to you.”44

Others recognized the personal impact of violence on their lives. “I stopped going to school as a result of violence,” said one respondent. “If it were not for violence I would have been in college by now.”45 Group violence, though prevalent in various stages of the civil war, is less common today and also carries a stigma. In fact, many respondents denied group violence being a problem in their communities. Those who reported group violence said it tends to emerge during social events, in bars, or during sports activities.

Despite the fact that respondents describe violence as bad, they reveal some forms of it are fairly common and thus seem more acceptable. For example, violence between spouses or intimate partners is accepted, partially due to its frequency and customary justifications. The most commonly cited justifiable reason to use violence is self-defense. One has a right to respond to aggression, insult, or violence with force. Another justification for physical aggression is defending one’s honor or family dignity. Saving face or preserving family honor carries significant cultural value that is shaped largely by existing normative social practices. This reinforces the responsibility to protect family honor, even if by violent means.

Violence can also be justified to protect one’s possessions and property. Personal status is largely determined by possessions and access to resources; threats to these constitute both a violation of rights and a personal attack. Respondents therefore viewed theft as an extreme form of violence and said it is appropriate to respond to it with violence, because thieves bring violence upon themselves when they decide to steal. Thieves caught in the act by community members are brutally punished. Similarly, disputes over inheritance and land rights can warrant violence. Respondents said that people who seize land or property, or who abuse their position of power, deserve a violent response.

Respondents indicated that violence is justifiable in response to the violation of political rights. Violence was cited as acceptable if people’s ability to participate in political process was restricted or eliminated. Violently responding

42 Female youth, focus group discussion, Mayela Village, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
43 Female elder, in-depth interview, Koidu Town, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
44 Elder, focus group discussion, Sewa Road, Sierra Leone, July 2011.
45 Male youth, focus group discussion, Koidu Town, Sierra Leone, February 2012.
to broken political promises is also considered just, because such broken responses are themselves considered a form of injustice and violence. Said one Sierra Leonean respondent, “Any violence that occurred from fighting for your rights is acceptable, as there will be no one to fight for you unless you have to.”

Overall, respondents repeatedly pointed to the integral role justice and fairness play in forming how Liberians and Sierra Leoneans understand and respond to violence. Any deprivation or violation of one’s rights is treated as violence. Other acceptable grounds for violent retaliation include the unfair distribution of resources and benefits, inability to access employment, and unfair treatment by the leadership.

46 Male adult, in-depth interview, Geima, Sierra Leone, March 2012.
I. Responding to Violence

Communities have established various mechanisms to manage violence. These range from formal to informal and institutional to traditional. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are most common and widely used. Respondents in this study talked about local chiefs, elders, and youth leaders solving their conflicts. People demonstrated they are familiar with these systems, use them often, and, for the most part, trust them. A common punishment for violent behavior includes fines. Cultural practices may inform punishment, such as being publicly shamed or being referred to a cultural organization for retribution. Violent individuals may also be socially excluded or expelled from the community.

Young people turn to their youth leader with questions or problems. A respondent in Liberia said, “Sometimes when there is confusion, the elderly people are the one to settle it. We don’t go to police always. The only time police get involve is when a fight become brutal.” In cases when a youth leader is unable to resolve the issue, it is passed on to community elders. The challenge, however, lies in the fact that once the matter is in the hands of elders, young people may be excluded from the decision on its resolution. That, in turn, may create misunderstanding or lack of understanding on how and why a particular decision was adopted, reinforcing mistrust in the traditional structures and perception of injustice and unfairness.

When it comes to formal institutional mechanisms of conflict resolution, respondents pointed to community rules or laws that dictate when an authority should intervene in deviant behavior cases. At the most formal level, respondents spoke about calling the police to arrest criminals or suing people in court. Much has been done to strengthen domestic law and ensure it meets basic conditions, such as guaranteeing human rights and creating a sense of order and predictability. The fact that respondents frequently talked about formal judicial and security institutions as a way to solve their disputes or violent problems indicates solidification of their roles and functions. As with traditional conflict resolutions structures, similar problems remain. There is limited knowledge about formal judicial mechanisms and police functions, which contributes to a lack of trust, perceptions of injustice, and corruption. Where police presence is limited, youth reported forming groups to protect their communities and curb rates of violence. When institutions and individuals responsible for carrying out justice are weak, efforts to build the capacity of formal systems are also complicated and citizens may increasingly take on some of the responsibilities. This in turn only further weakens public trust and institutional capacity. Improving transparency and accountability of security and judicial institutions can help build trust, capacity, and promote positive citizenship.

47 Big man, in-depth interview, Lagoon East, Liberia, November 28, 2011.
V. Conclusions

This study set out to understand youth violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with a particular focus on understanding whether exclusion was a factor in youth choices to engage in violence. Although the study has led to a far greater understanding about choices to engage in violence, many of the findings also serve to better understand the lives and perspectives of youth, and can inform broader youth programming.

First, “youth” is not solely an age category, but rather a definition of the specific status and role of a group of people. Although this is widely known by experts on youth in these countries, this information is rarely used to inform policies and projects. Perhaps understanding local definitions of youth can help change the focus of youth initiatives and address the real needs and concerns of those labeled as youth.

Second, youth implement the decisions of community leaders, who are adults and elders. Implementing community projects and doing community work is a main responsibility of youth. In particular, youth are expected to carry out community works projects and other activities that require physical labor. Although for the most part youth are proud of their contributions to activities, this arrangement can be abusive: youth are required to participate in these activities regardless whether this means giving up sources of income or other responsibilities. This has policy implications for those working on ensuring the overall respect of individual rights, as well as for those working on projects that require community contributions, especially if these contributions are expected to include unskilled labor.

Third, youth surprisingly do not consider themselves to be socially or politically excluded. Most believe their lack of involvement in decision making is justified: they see this as temporary and believe they will be involved in decision making once they acquire the age, knowledge, and experience to become elders or adults. However, youth often consider the decisions made by others to be unfair: this is particularly the case for decisions regarding resource allocation. Unfairness, including corruption, is considered a type of violence and could elicit violent responses in return. This finding signals the importance of addressing perceptions of fairness and including youth in decision making. Regardless of whether youth believe they should be included in decision making, their lack of participation in such processes only increases their sense of injustice, which can have implications for both the legitimacy of leadership and governance and for youth engagement in violence.

Fourth, youth perceive themselves to be economically excluded. Jobs are a high priority for youth, as jobs are expected to improve their livelihoods and increase their status in their communities. Higher status is expected to facilitate an easier transition into adulthood, which affords respect, an increased role in decision making, and a greater say in resource distribution. Not all jobs come with these benefits, however, and not all jobs are considered real jobs. Only jobs that provide a sustained and sufficient source of income or demonstrate significant responsibility have this effect. In most cases, youths do not count as jobs those that require unskilled physical labor, petty trading, or agriculture. Although youth appreciate the opportunity to earn income from these activities (which are often the only opportunities available for making a living), they do not meet youth expectations for proper employment. While the majority of youth are engaged in different types of activities to provide for themselves and their families, and only a small minority are truly idle, many youth consider themselves unemployed.

Education and lack of skills are blamed for the inability to secure employment. However, scaling up educational and skills programs that do not lead to employment contributes to youth grievances by further increasing expectations that cannot be met.
Fifth, youth are blamed for much of the violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Idle youth, a group that is not only unemployed but has few responsibilities and does not try to engage in productive activities, are particularly singled out as perpetrators of violence. These young people are considered to be immature, irresponsible, and have little chance of transitioning to adulthood or to ever be fully included in their communities’ economic or social structures.

Finally, the majority of respondents described violence as undesirable and unacceptable. Most stated there was no justification for violence. However, after probing whether individuals had participated in or witnessed violence, participants described a wide range of violence. Beatings, rapes, and fights were commonly mentioned. Forms of violence included unfair decisions, inequitable resource distribution, disrespect, and not allowing someone to “save face.” Interestingly, many participants stated it is acceptable to respond to one type of violence with another; for example, it could be acceptable to respond to disrespect with beating. This has broad implications for programs and policies on security and justice: addressing physical violence without understanding that it may have occurred in response to injustice or disrespect can lead to widespread lack of legitimacy of security and justice institutions.

This study did not set out to look at specific types of violence, and asked participants to describe the violence in their communities and the violence that had affected them. Unexpectedly, the most common type of violence that was cited was intimate partner violence. Over 86.6 percent of Sierra Leoneans and 44.9 percent of Liberians reported incidents of SGBV when asked what kind of violence is common or has been seen in their communities. This finding deserves further investigation given the widespread impact this kind of violence may have on the lives of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans.
VI. Recommendations

This study has important implications for policies, programs, and projects in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, and can also be relevant for youth programming worldwide. This section describes the main implications of this work for governments, donors, and on-the-ground implementers, as well as for youth and their leaders.

A. Policy Recommendations

Redefine the category of youth to reflect factors other than age. Policies in both Liberia and Sierra Leone define the youth category as encompassing individuals between 15 and 35 years old. In doing so, these policies place 35 percent (Liberia) (LISGIS 2008) and 33.5 percent (Sierra Leone) (NYAD 2013, World Bank data48) of their population within a single category. Most donor agencies and implementers follow the youth policies and also define youth by age.

The age-based definition of youth implies that a single policy could address the needs of all the different kinds of individuals classified within a single, broad age range. However, youths’ needs vary widely depending on whether they fall on the younger or older ends of the spectrum; whether they are male or female; whether they are more or less wealthy, skilled, or educated; and whether they live in urban or rural areas. To improve their impact, policies should be informed by the multiple characteristics, roles, and expectations of all the different kinds of youth both within the official 15–35 age range and outside of it.

Design more effective mechanisms to inform youth about policies and opportunities that affect them. Youth policies should, in clearly differentiated ways, help disparate groups of youth learn about opportunities available to them. They should also help young people negotiate and work towards ways of taking advantage of these opportunities. That, however, should be done with great caution so as not to create or deepen intergenerational gaps, since young people may strive to achieve goals that traditional decision makers, adults, or elders either do not understand or support. This would be particularly true if youth decided to take on bigger roles in local decision making, conflict resolution, and resource allocation—areas in which they are expected to defer to elders. Youth policies should understand these challenges and help navigate a process of change that lifts limitations imposed on youth by traditional rules and prescriptions but at the same time facilitates positive relationships between all parties.

Encourage greater engagement of youth in decision-making processes. Youth policies should focus on what is perhaps the greatest youth problem: their lack of participation in community decisions. It is important to note that youth in the official age range in both Liberia and Sierra Leone are mostly older than 18, and that these younger adults are in no way equal participants in their communities. As democracies that aim to impart equal rights to all citizens, both Liberia and Sierra Leone must address youths’ lower status and lack of power at the local level, especially because decisions made at this level are the ones that affect youth the most. It is essential to work with local leaders to find ways for them to communicate clearly to youth about decision-making processes and outcomes in order to prevent violence and promote youths’ sense of justice.

In addition, youth policies will benefit significantly from a deeper understanding of youth perspectives and needs.

Although youth policies are formally consulted, consultations are often superficial and try to determine youth priorities within pre-established areas. Only a small group of youth leaders and urban youth—many of whom are out of touch with the vast majority of youth in their countries—are consulted in policy implementation. Better youth policies would emerge if youths’ realities were at the forefront of establishing policies’ priorities and implementation mechanisms.

**Strengthen transparency and accountability of decision-making bodies on community levels.** Youth policies could emphasize a drastic increase in the transparency and accountability of local decision making as a way to empower youth, in effect directly improving governance for the majority of citizens. This could be done by encouraging actors at the local level to establish forums to communicate with youth about the outcome of decisions and to explain why decisions were made. Youth could be given the opportunity to voice grievances at these forums and leaders would have the opportunity to respond or reconsider.
**Expand the focus of youth policies beyond employment generation.** Most youth policies tend to focus narrowly on youth employment generation. This study clearly shows that although employment is one of youths’ greatest concerns, it is not the main challenge they face in their communities. Most youth do in fact have a source of livelihood, yet describe themselves as unemployed because they do not consider what they do as jobs.

Youth employment policies tend to overestimate the lack of existing youth livelihoods because such a large number of youth categorize themselves as unemployed. Youth policies fail to consider the fact that the kinds of jobs youth want—salaried, highly skilled, stable jobs—are particularly difficult to create in low-income and fragile contexts. Government promises regarding job creation and provision are fraught with numerous problems. First, there are significant challenges in creating enough employment opportunities for a growing cohort of youth entering labor markets. Second, the mismatch in understanding what constitutes a job narrows views on what employment options are available. Such a scenario falsely raises youths’ expectations and decreases their trust in the government.

A more effective approach would be to: (1) engage youth in the policy discussion; (2) improve the recognition of youth activities and contribution to their communities, which in turn can positively advance their status among community members; and (3) manage expectations of what can be accomplished in terms of employment generation through carefully planned information dissemination and communications activities.

**Encourage greater youth civil participation and sense of citizenship.** The key focus of youth policies in Liberia and Sierra Leone should be to foster the sense of citizenship among youth. This may involve: (1) encouraging youth participation in policy and program development, taking into consideration youth expectations and priorities when designing both national and local policies and programs; and (2) clearly communicating the activities of decision makers to maximize accountability and reduce perceptions of injustice. In doing so, policies may also encourage national and local decision makers to be more open to youth involvement and more fairly solve conflicts, make decisions, and allocate resources. This could also indirectly help youths learn about economic opportunities and issues that affect them and their communities as a whole.

**B. Program Recommendations: Targeting**

**Distinguish between younger and older youth.** Addressing youth concerns involves understanding the needs of specific types of youth. Work with younger youth should involve prioritizing their continued education. Such youth still feel comfortable attending lower grade levels and are still at an age at which their communities expect them to attend school. It is essential and possible that younger youth “catch up” so they can quickly acquire literacy and technical skills that facilitate full inclusion. It is essential that schools, curricula, and teachers have the capacity to help those who have received little or inadequate education.

Younger youth are also at an age where they have fewer children and other obligations. This means that projects can engage youth for longer periods of the day. This is the right age group to engage in activities meant to promote sexual and reproductive health, sexual rights, SGBV services, and family planning, which could indirectly help these youth have fewer economic difficulties in the future (see also World Bank 2013).

Programming for older youth should consider that this group often has significant responsibilities that include supporting a family and raising children. Activities meant to engage these youth should therefore conform to their schedule. It is important to be aware that skill- or capacity-building initiatives may require more time than these
groups can spare. Although many in this group are unskilled and illiterate, they also feel they are too old to return to school, which is a main impediment to finding stable sources of income, increasing their income, and earning status and respect from their communities. Therefore, finding ways to bolster skill levels among these youth and increase their levels of income may be essential to the long-term economic well-being of Liberia and Sierra Leone, since these are the young adults currently raising children.

Employment generation activities should also be tailored for younger, older, idle, male, and female youth. Younger youth can benefit from basic skills, including greater literacy and information about how to get a first job without experience. Older youth, on the other hand, could benefit more from increasing their productivity and learning how to manage resources when they have competing demands (family, self-improvement, community responsibilities, and so on). Female youth also tend to have different needs and schedules in employment generation, and activities for them should include provisions for childcare, information to prevent sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, and should be tailored so that activities fit within existing schedules and obligations. Activities for idle youth could consider this group’s status, and include life skills, the ability to behave appropriately in a work environment, and how to negotiate with others.

**Increase the effective engagement of idle youth.** Regardless of their age, idle youth are a vulnerable group that deserves a great deal of focus. These youth are vulnerable because of the poverty and discrimination that accompanies their status and reputation. These youth are not expected to achieve much in life, and are often blamed for their communities’ problems. Addressing their needs therefore involves multiple steps: (1) understanding how idle youth became idle, how they perceive their lives, expectations, and potential; (2) separating perceptions about these youth from the activities they are actually engaged in; and (3) finding ways to productively engage and include youth in their communities. Understanding these youths’ perceptions and expectations can help design projects of interest for this specific group. Separating perceptions about these youth from their reality can also help identify which activities to prioritize. Engaging communities in the process of working with idle youth can create a sense among community members that they have a stake in improving such youths’ lives, and can help shape activities to improve idle youths’ status and reputation.

**Focus more on youth over the age of 35.** Youth older than 35 are another particularly vulnerable group. Youth programs and projects often ignore them since they are outside the official youth age, so there is little information available about them. What we do know, however, is that this group tends to consist mostly of males and that they are poorer than other youth. A first step in addressing their needs would be to include them in programming meant to build the skills and employability within the official youth age ranges.

**Consider gender.** Youth needs, roles, responsibilities, and expectations vary greatly by gender, which consequently requires varying approaches. First, it is necessary to understand the childrearing responsibilities of female youth. Activities designed for female youth should consider and support a young woman’s need to take care of her family. It may also be necessary to arrange childcare and adjust timing to accommodate domestic duties so female youth can participate in activities. Second, female youths’ unique obligations and roles also mean that employment and skills development activities need to be adjusted for them. A good approach would be to select the type of employment and skills development activities together with female youth so that jobs are suitable to their realities.

Third, female youth have a different process for transitioning to adulthood, one that is largely dependent upon motherhood, childcare, family responsibilities, and being an appropriate age. It has less to do with having a source of
income or participating in decision making, as is the case for young men. Gendered youth programming could aim to empower women as a whole by providing female youth with avenues to make decisions and negotiate with male youth, older men, and other women.

Fourth, it is also essential to consider the needs of male youth when designing youth programming. This work shows that men have a harder time transitioning to adulthood and accumulate grievances in part because of this. Young men need to be considered responsible by their communities in order to transition, and this only happens if they have a source of livelihood that allows them to support themselves and a family. It is increasingly difficult for most youth to obtain a stable source of income given the harsh economic conditions they face. In this context, it is important to design programming that helps young men negotiate access to decision making and resources with adults and elders in their communities despite their lack of stable income.
Consider disabled youth. The disabled are perhaps the most vulnerable group of youth and are often ignored in youth programming. Physically disabled people are typically unable to fulfill the tasks of youth, which require physical strength. They are also unlikely to benefit from short-term job opportunities that are available to most youth, since these also require physical labor. Mentally disabled youth have different problems that lead to a similar outcome. Given both countries’ poor mental health infrastructure and capacity, the mentally disabled rarely get treatment and are often misunderstood and excluded. Working with communities to understand the needs and potential of those who are disabled is essential for helping them lead a dignified life. In addition, all youth interventions should require youth activities to be adjusted so the disabled can participate to the best of their ability.
C. Program Recommendations: Youth Participation

Increase engagement of youth in all stages of project implementation. All youth-focused projects should consider involving youth from the beginning, including the design, implementation, and evaluation of activities. This will help youth tailor these projects to their specific needs and also understand the reasons for an activity’s particular design. It is also essential for projects to launch clear communications campaigns to prevent youth who are not part of a project from reacting negatively to it. Doing so will help communicate: (1) the reasoning behind youth activities; (2) how to participate in them; (3) the ways resources become available and are distributed; and (4) the activities’ intended impact. Grievance redress and other feedback mechanisms should be included in projects and be clearly accessible by different groups of youth and be able to respond to youth requests, priorities, opinions, and grievances.

Carefully consider intergenerational relations. The findings of this study indicate that community participation mechanisms should consider the specific role of groups of youth within the community, as well as the relationship between these groups and elders. A commonly used method for selecting beneficiaries for youth projects together with or through community leadership fails to consider how various groups of youth in a community relate to their leaders. Groups that are close to community leaders, either because they share values, kinship, or ethnic bonds, are more likely to benefit from youth-focused project resources. Other groups, such as youth from ethnic minorities, idle youth, or youth without connections to elders may not be considered for participation. Projects therefore need to verify the accuracy of community leaders’ recommendations by consulting with different types of youth.

D. Program Recommendations: Projects that Focus on Youth Education

Increase more focused skills-training education programs. Education sector projects often target individuals within the official youth category by offering them opportunities to “catch up” on schooling. It is important to remember, however, that young people see education predominantly as a way to learn skills that can lead to work. The education system should therefore be tailored to serving this purpose, and perhaps could de-emphasize more general learning, which is likely to benefit only wealthier students.

Design more effective mechanisms to retain students in schools. Students tend to drop out of school because of financial reasons, early marriage, or pregnancy. Decreasing the dropout rate involves finding ways to avoid these issues earlier in students’ careers. This could mean adding programs that offer information about how to avoid pregnancy. Programs should also identify and minimize the hidden costs of education, such as transportation, textbook, and uniform fees, and the required community contributions that supplement teacher salaries. It could be useful to establish scholarships for lower-income students who have done well in school. While education is clearly recognized by youth as a way to access better jobs and increased status, it is also important to clearly communicate the employment potential of certain types of education, particularly at the tertiary level.

E. Program Recommendations: Youth Employment and Livelihoods

De-emphasize public works schemes as a long-term employment opportunity. Short-term, labor-intensive works are not considered jobs by most youth. When Liberian and Sierra Leonean youth demand jobs from their leaders, they mean long-term, salaried employment that allows one to continuously contribute to a community and successfully support a family. Because public works programs usually feature unskilled, low-wage, short-term employment, youth do not consider these to be legitimate jobs.
Secondly, communities expect youth to undertake basic, unskilled work for free. Youth participation in these areas is both a part of the social contract—youth contribute to their communities through their work—and a way for youth to show leadership and responsibility. Because of this, paying young people to do this kind of work is disruptive and can create divisions.

Public works schemes would be significantly improved by: (1) clarity regarding the opportunities that are being provided and their limitations; and (2) finding ways to engage youth that do not involve paying them for work they are expected to do for free.

**Balance youth expectation and employment prospects in the context of skills-development initiatives.** Skills-development projects must consider that participants will expect to obtain a job after completing training. Unfulfilled expectations can become a source of grievance, or fuel perceptions of being misled or cheated. Avoiding this requires that the initiative be carefully set up to maximize the chance that skills training leads to jobs. It also requires a communication plan to let youth know what they can and cannot expect. One solution could be to work with the private sector so that businesses that need the skills youth are developing will hire project participants. However, projects should avoid agreements that allow businesses to hire program participants at lower rates.

**F. Program Recommendations: Preventing Violence**

**Increase focus on perceptions of justice and fairness.** This report shows that the links between youth and violence are not as clear as youth initiatives often assume. Youth policies and programs that aim to prevent violence need to be much more focused on issues that trigger violent behavior, one of which is perception of justice and fairness. Liberians and Sierra Leoneans believe violence is unacceptable *except as a response to violence*. At the same time, young people believe that injustice and unfairness are forms of violence, which justifies a violent response.

**Increase trust in legal mechanisms and institutions.** The greatest challenge to strengthening the capacity of formal systems of justice is the lack of trust citizens have in these systems. In this study, people often mentioned formal justice institutions such as the courts and the police as sources of corruption and violence. Addressing the lack of trust in these institutions is therefore key to developing their ability to play a role in violence prevention. Initiatives should aim to raise citizens’ awareness of these institutions’ roles and the limits of their power, and how complaints can be raised when abuse of power or corruption occurs. Part of these institutions’ key capacities should be to ensure equal treatment of people who have varying levels of wealth and social and political power. The process for making decisions should be fair and be communicated to all parties before the start of any process. Efforts should be made to minimize transportation costs or legal fees that can give an unfair advantage to one party. There should also be processes to ensure that the formal system takes into consideration some individuals’ limited level of education, and potentially limited knowledge of national languages, and makes sure that all documents and hearings are carefully explained.

**Increase engagement of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms.** This study also indicates that many if not most individuals rely on local conflict-resolution mechanisms to solve everyday conflicts. However, these systems are often exclusive of certain groups and biased towards others. Trying to change traditional systems of conflict resolution is not the right approach, since these systems are rooted in history and traditional beliefs and seem to be widely accepted and legitimate. It is important to work with elders and other community-level decision makers to increase the amount of information available to parties in conflict about decision-making processes. This could significantly improve perceptions of fairness around the decisions that result from these systems.
**Increase capacity of youth leadership.** Youth leaders are essential for mediating between different community groups. Building their capacity, therefore, could substantially improve relations between youth and other groups and also increase youth perceptions of fairness. Communities could be gathered to discuss the role of the youth leader, their necessary characteristics, and their mandate. Youth leaders could be trained to gather the opinions of a wide variety of youth, including young women, the disabled, idle youth, and others, and ensure that decision makers are aware of the varying points of view among youth in their community.

**Address the normalization of violence.** Although violence is not considered acceptable, it is common throughout Liberia and Sierra Leone. There are clear indications that some types of violence are considered normal or acceptable, and are not even classified as violence, such as intimate partner violence. It is essential to better understand why this type of violence is considered normal to design effective interventions and life skills programs. It is advisable to engage community leaders and ask them to exercise their influence to mediate community conversations about how to de-normalize this type of violence. This can include creating a space for victims to express their concerns to leaders and advocating for new systems to manage domestic disputes. Intimate partner violence can also be prevented through programming that includes conversations about gender relations, nonviolent alternatives for resolving domestic disputes, expressing masculinity, and negotiating power in the household. Victims should also be aware of their rights and know how to access support services, including medical and psychological treatment for trauma.

**Incorporate conflict-resolution training in life skills programs.** Helping people develop skills to deal with stressful situations nonviolently is complicated. A variety of projects have attempted to teach young people these skills, but these rarely put in place mechanisms that allow their success to be evaluated. Projects should be implemented in ways that aim to teach youth to deal with anger, jealousy, disrespect, and injustice in ways that avoid physical violence. Mentoring programs that pair successful individuals with younger ones could be useful. Governments and implementing agencies could pilot more creative initiatives, such as radio soap operas or life-skill-building through sports, and carefully evaluate them. Community leaders could be trained to deal with these issues so they could mentor and advise these youth.
References


United Nations, German Technical Cooperation, and World Bank. 2010. “Joint Response to Youth Employment in


### ANNEX A: Description of the Study Population

#### INTERVIEW SAMPLE POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LIBERIA</th>
<th>SIERRA LEONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>• Male (52.7%)</td>
<td>• Male (48.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Female (47.3%)</td>
<td>• Female (51.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>• 15–24 years (33%)</td>
<td>• 15–24 years (27.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 25–35 years (37.5%)</td>
<td>• 25–35 years (43.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 36–50 years (21.6%)</td>
<td>• 36–50 years (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 51–65 years (6.7%)</td>
<td>• 51–65 years (11.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 65+ years (1.2%)</td>
<td>• 65+ years (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officially defined youth, 15–35 years: 70.5%</td>
<td>Officially defined youth, 15–35 years: 70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age category, self-identified</td>
<td>• Youth (61.3%)</td>
<td>• Youth (57.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Big woman/big man (13.6%)</td>
<td>• Big woman/big man (19.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Youth man (1%)</td>
<td>• Youth man (3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adult (16.7%)</td>
<td>• Adult (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Elder (7.3%)</td>
<td>• Elder (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation in self-identification as youth and age: 92.6% of “younger youth” (15–24) describe their age status as youth. “Older youth” (25–35) sometimes described themselves as big women/big men (20.7%) or as youth men (1.1%). 11% of respondents older than 35 described themselves as youth.</td>
<td>Variation in self-identification as youth and age: 76.8% of respondents aged 15–35 years old described themselves as youth. 9.3% of respondents older than 35 years described themselves as youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicap</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>• Christian—82.9%</td>
<td>• Christian—27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Muslim—14.9%</td>
<td>• Muslim—72.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional Religion—1.2%</td>
<td>• Traditional Religion—0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Sample includes 14 ethnic groups. The top four include:</td>
<td>Sample includes 12 ethnic groups. The top four include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Kpelle (20.4%)</td>
<td>• Mende (30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bassa (17.3%)</td>
<td>• Temne (26.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Kru (11%)</td>
<td>• Limba (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Grebo (9%)</td>
<td>• Kono (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

49 2011 World Bank Data for Liberia: population, female (percent of total): 49.7 percent.
50 2011 World Bank Data for Sierra Leone: population, female (percent of total): 51.1 percent.
51 The study sample does not include 0–14 year olds, which accounted for 43.5 percent of Liberia’s population in 2010, according to the UN Population Division data. This data set also reports that in 2010, 15–24 year olds comprised 19.5 percent of the national population; 15–64 year olds were 53.7 percent.
52 According to the LISGIS 2008 National Population and Housing Census, 15–35 year olds comprise 35 percent of Liberia’s population.
53 The study sample does not include 0–14 year olds, which accounted for 43 percent of Sierra Leone’s population in 2010, according to the UN Population Division data. This data set also reports that in 2010, 15–24 year olds comprised 19.4 percent of the national population; 15–64 year olds were 55.1 percent.
54 The percentage of handicapped respondents in the study corresponds with the national average.
55 2010 World Bank Data for Liberia: Literacy rate, adult female (percent of females ages 15 and above): 56.8 percent.
56 2010 World Bank Data for Sierra Leone: Literacy rate, adult female (percent of females ages 15 and above): 31.4 percent.
57 According to the 2008 Census, the ethnic composition of the population includes Kpelle (20.3 percent), Bassa (13.4 percent), Grebo (10 percent), Gio (8 percent), Mano (7.9 percent), Kru (6 percent), Lorma (5.1 percent), Kissi (4.8 percent), Gola (4.4 percent), other (20.1 percent).
58 According to the 2004 Sierra Leone census, the three largest ethnic groups are Mende (32.4 percent), Temne (32.1 percent), and Limba (8.3 percent).
### INTRODUCTION

#### INTERVIEW SAMPLE POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>LIBERIA</th>
<th>SIERRA LEONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rural (54.8%)69</td>
<td>• Rural (54.7%)60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Urban (24%)</td>
<td>• Urban (45.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peri-urban (20.8%)</td>
<td>• Peri-urban (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>• Single/never married (38.9%)</td>
<td>• Single/never married (33.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Married monogamous (41.5%)</td>
<td>• Married monogamous (32.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Married polygamous (2.4%)</td>
<td>• Married polygamous (19.2%)61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cohabitation (14.3%)</td>
<td>• Cohabitation (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Separated/divorced (0.8%)</td>
<td>• Separated/divorced (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Widowed (2%)</td>
<td>• Widowed (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children/dependents</td>
<td>One or more child/dependent (78%)</td>
<td>One or more child/dependent (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Mean years of schooling: 6.96 years</td>
<td>Mean years of schooling: 6.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never attended school (20.2%)</td>
<td>Never attended school (26.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completed secondary education (16.9%)</td>
<td>Completed secondary education (19.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than women complete secondary education</td>
<td>More than women complete secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reason for dropping out of school (N=311): Lack of financial means (84.2%)</td>
<td>Reason for dropping out of school (N=154): Lack of financial means (64.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage/family (7.7%)</td>
<td>Marriage/family (15.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic status, self-identified</td>
<td>• Not poor and not rich (43.4%)</td>
<td>• Not poor and not rich (63.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor (39.7%)</td>
<td>• Poor (33.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Very poor (16.3%)</td>
<td>• Very poor (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TOTAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIBERIA</th>
<th>491 interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIERRA LEONE</td>
<td>381 interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

59 2011 World Bank Data for Liberia: rural population (percent of total population): 51.8 percent; urban population (percent of total) 48.1 percent.
60 2011 World Bank Data for Sierra Leone: rural population (percent of total population): 60.1 percent; urban population (percent of total) 39.3 percent.
61 The rate of polygamous marriages is higher among Sierra Leone’s Muslim population.
62 2010 World Bank Data for Liberia: literacy rate, adult female (percent of females ages 15 and above): 56.8 percent.
63 2010 World Bank Data for Sierra Leone: literacy rate, adult female (percent of females ages 15 and above): 31.4 percent.
ANNEX B: Publications Used for Background Research


Hickey, Sam, and Andries du Toit. 2007. “Adverse Incorporation, Social Exclusion and Chronic Poverty.” Working Paper #81, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.


Lahai, Charles. “Promoting Youth Participation in Key Decision Making Processes in Sierra Leone.” EPU Research Paper #11/08, European Peace University, Stadtschlaining, Austria.


