

Special Edition
(Oct 2013 – Mar 2014)

Cianehdeh

ActionAid Liberia quarterly Newsletter

From peace in the house to peace
in the world (pg. 2)

ActionAid Liberia popular during
NGO fair (pg. 4)

Taking in the Youths perspective
(pg. 5)

The threat surrounding our
communities (pg. 7)

.....and more

COVER STORY

Country Strategy 2013-2017 finally launched! (pg. 3)

act:onaid

A word from the AAL Country Director

Welcome to our special edition of 'Cianahdeh' which covers the last quarter of 2013 and our first quarter for 2014.

One of the most significant achievements of ActionAid Liberia in its 16 years of operations in Liberia is the official launch of our country strategy paper. The document provides a direction for our team for a five-year period-2013-2017. The title: **People Engaging Power for Transformative Development** is even more aligned to the current national context and ActionAid role and obligation as a key member of civil society in Liberia. As staff members, we should be proud of AAL contribution to Liberia's development process and our new perspective on engagement with diverse stakeholders through a human rights prism to promote equality and social change.

Additionally, the year also started on a high note, with respect to fundraising and relationship development with institutional donors. In relation to the country strategy paper, ActionAid Liberia, by the end of December 2013, had confirmation from the EU Delegation in Liberia and Sida through the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia of funding estimated at US\$3.3 million. The Sida supported programme will cover 45 communities in 4 counties, working with 5,000 persons and 4 partner organizations. The programme is a 5 year one and target counties are Montserrado, Gbarpolu, Bong and Grand Gedeh.

ActionAid Liberia in partnership with People for Change has escalated our staff and partner development activities with trainings to close to 35 persons on the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to promote a consistent approach and understanding of the values of equality, sustainable transformation and development in Liberia. Our value of mutual accountability is consistently highlighted in all trainings.

We congratulate all AA Liberia staff that went beyond the call of duty to meet our federation related obligation-in the finalization and launch of the CSP. We also extend this appreciation to the Government of Liberia and the West Africa CoCo team for their advice and participation in this process. We also thank all our target communities, partners and friends of ActionAid Liberia for your continuous support and involvement in our work.

- Power in People -



*Korto Reeves Williams
Actionaid Liberia
Country Director*



March through Monrovia, highlighting women's lack of safety in public areas.

"From peace in the home to peace in the World"

Between 25 November and 10 December the 16 days of activism was celebrated around the world and of course in Liberia. The theme of this year's campaign was: "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's challenge militarism and end violence against women". The idea with the 16 days of activism is to raise awareness about gender-based violence (GBV) occurring everywhere, all the time, across the globe. The international campaign was launched by Centre for Women's Leadership in 1991. This year, 130 countries participated in the campaign globally.

ActionAid Liberia participated in the worldwide campaign by hosting a National Conference against Harmful Traditional Practices in Mama Toma's Peace Village, and re-launching our Safe Cities Campaign by marching through Monrovia demanding action be taken against women's lack of safety in public spaces. We also hosted a radio show discussing the gender equity bill, which is pushing for gender equity in the Liberian politics with the goal of 30% female representatives in the parliament.

In our local rights program in Grand Gedeh and River Cess the 16 days of activism was celebrated with a series of community outreach activities. In Dougee Town and Zai Town, Grand Gedeh county, community members, traditional leaders and students were gathered to participate in an awareness rising session about women's rights and GBV. In Fish Town, River Cess County, ActionAid Liberia organized a one-day advocacy training session for the girl's forum, who we work with in the community.

Although the 16 days of activism campaign has ended this time around, we at ActionAid Liberia continue to work with these issues every day. GBV is a violation against human rights, something that is too often neglected.



Dougee Town: awareness-raising about women's rights and GBV.



Official CSP Launch: Korto Reeves Williams, Country Director of ActionAid Liberia, presenting the CSP at the official launch.

Country Strategy 2013-2017 finally launched!

One of the most important events for ActionAid Liberia during the final quarter of 2013 was the launch of our Country Strategy Paper (CSP) 2013-2017 with the title: People Engaging Power for Transformative Development.

The launch was spread out over four separate days each focusing on it's a different target. On November 11th the internal launch was held with staff from ActionAid Liberia, inspirators and interns. The following day the CSP was launched to government ministries and other NGOs at SKD. Among those present during this launch was the Minister of the Ministry of Gender and Development and the Minister of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. On November 18th our CSP was launched to the press at the ActionAid Liberia office and finally, the main event when the CSP was officially launched was November 19th at the Golden Gate Hotel in Monrovia. During this launch it was Mr Len Eugene Nagbe, Minister of Youth and Development and Ms Edith Mulbah, Program Manager of the Liberian Women Empowerment Network (LIWEN) that officially claimed the Country Strategy to be launched.

ActionAid Liberia's CSP sets the basis for our work during the coming five years. Three major themes are covered: Women's and Girl's Rights, Youth and Urban Poverty, and Governance. These are in turn linked to our three



Second day of the CSP Launch: The Minister of Youth and Sports, the Minister of Gender and Development amongst others, sharing laughs during the CSP launch with NGOs and government ministries.

Strategic Objectives (SOs) namely:

SO 1: Promote full recognition, realization and protection of the rights of women and girls.

SO 2: Support the urban poor and communities especially youth and children to reduce their vulnerability for the attainment of a conflict free environment.

SO 3: Advance the inclusion of the poor and excluded in decisions and policy-making processes.

With a basis in our thematic fields and Strategic Objectives, eleven Promises have been made that each sets a target for how many participant beneficiaries that we will have worked with in 2017.

Our CSP is important as it is ActionAid Liberia's first strategy paper and as it sets up specific objectives and targets for our work. It is also a display of our commitment to fighting poverty with a strong belief in the Power in People. ActionAid Liberia has for the past 15 years worked comprehensively to promote the rights of women, children, youth and people living in poverty by engaging duty-bearers. We work to shift the development paradigm from one that is internationally driven to one that is people-centered. This CSP sets the tone to continue working along the same lines in the near and long-term future.



Internal CSP Launch: Happy ActionAid Liberia team members at our office, following the internal launch.



ActionAid Liberia booth: Anna Sjögren, one of the ActionAid Liberia interns, standing ready at our booth during the LINGO forum.

ActionAid popular during NGO fair

In the beginning of December we at ActionAid Liberia were represented at the first annual Liberia International NGO Forum (LINGO Forum) fair. The fair is organized as one strategy to counter the view that NGOs in Liberia are sometimes perceived as competitors rather than partners, also in terms of pursuing funds. The day was divided into two parts where the second half was open to the public.

Our booth was decorated with the typical ActionAid red and white colors along with banners and posters. The booth also proved to be popular as we had a raffle with prizes. This was perfect for us to make people reflect in terms of what is at the heart of ActionAid work and thinking, because each participant needed to submit a slip of paper where they were to define what “Power in People” means to them. Each person was also given a fact sheet about what we do and how we work.



Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender and Development, taking part in our raffle at the ActionAid booth. Photo credit: Markku Vesikko

Amongst those who took part in the raffle was the Minister of the Ministry of Gender of Development, Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell.

Many others were of course also interested and we ended up getting a total of 73 participants. 19 lucky winners were present at the forum.

Did you know?



Did you know that “Power in People” is the essence of the ActionAid International brand? It is about the force that people in poverty have, whether individuals or collectives, to create change for themselves and to benefit their community. Power in people is also about Partners, Staff and Supporters who all play important roles in creating action for development and justice.

Celebrating 2013

During the last week of the work year, ActionAid Liberia staff and friends gathered at Myrtle Beach for an afternoon of good food, fun and relaxation.

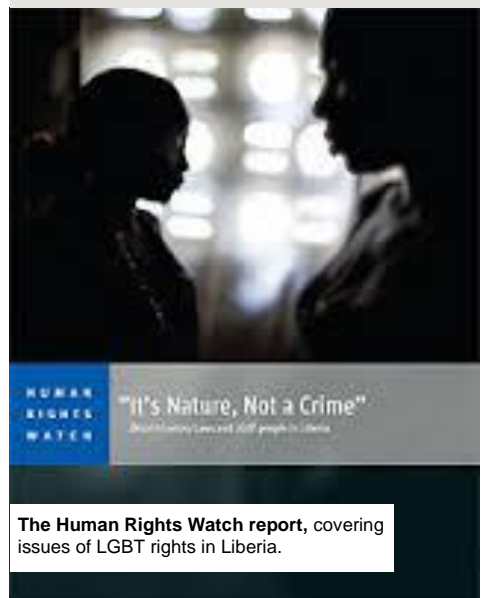
Above all the past work year was looked back at with a feeling of positivity and accomplishment. It has indeed been a challenging year but we at ActionAid Liberia have worked together as a team to surpass some, and learn from others.

Games were also played that was organized by the interns. Five teams competed against each other within five different games, doing anything from running with an egg on a spoon without dropping it, and managing to pick as many clothes pins with hand as possible. Points from each game were summed up, and the team with the most points won. Team: “Da Winners” went out as the winning team. All teams however received a prize for their efforts.

LGBT rights in Liberia?

We believe and know that human rights are universal; they are there to protect all humans independently of religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. However often this is not the case and people from minority groups face discrimination and even direct violence every day.

In December 2013 Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report about the situation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) people in Liberia, in collaboration with the ActionAid Liberia partner Stop Aids in Liberia (SAIL). The report is titled *"It's Nature not a Crime: Discriminatory Laws and LGBT People in Liberia"*. We attended the emotional release and can note that while the report and mapping can serve as an important step towards public debate and awareness much remains to be done to stop the discrimination of LGBT-people in Liberia, both in terms of revising the legal framework and people's perceptions.



Panel debate during the AIESEC conference.

Taking in the youth's perspective

On the November 1, ActionAid Liberia partnered with AIESEC Liberia to host a panel debate about youth and the post-2015 millennium development goals (MDGs), at the Golden Gate Hotel in Monrovia. This debate was part of an annual AIESEC conference, this year hosted in Liberia. 200 youths from the ECOWAS area, Southern Africa and Europe had travelled to Monrovia to participate.

As the post-2015 MDGs are to be formulated by the international community, it is important that young people around the world are heard and that the issues concerning them are accounted for. During the conference, the Liberian Ministry of Youth and Sports, Eugene Nagbe, highlighted that "the future for Africa is bright".

AIESEC is the world's largest student-run organization, active in 113 countries around the world. In many developing countries the youth represent the largest proportion of the population, but their voices are often not heard and they tend to be portrayed as victims. During the panel debate with representatives from the Liberian government, UNFPA, youth groups, AIESEC and ActionAid; topics about the youth being agents for change were raised: "Youths are not victims, we are resources" said the President of AIESEC, Rolf Schmachtenberg. We at ActionAid Liberia are committed to working with the young in Liberia, and ensuring that their voices are heard, the West African AIESEC conference was one part of that work.



Group photo of the members of the AIESEC conference.

Child Sponsorship corner

Practice makes perfect

Little Elijah won the race with wide margin (20 feet away from his opponents). AAL and its partners organized a one day competition involving 25 children from Gbarngay. The competition sought to prepare children for message collection and promote interaction between them. The event involved 4 activities including Spoon & Egg race, Needle and Thread game, and Track and Field for both boys and girls.

Elijah Wilson, a 7 year old Kindergarten pupil of the Gbarngay Primary School won the "Spoon and Egg." After winning he said, "When I heard of the competition, I practiced for over one week using rock (rock as egg) and spoon. All my friends used to laugh at me but I did not pay attention to them. I always remember what my mother told me that a person needs to work hard if they want to succeed in life. I am happy that my practice did not go in vain. Thank you ActionAid."



".....When I heard of the competition, I practiced for over one week using rock (rock as egg) and spoon"

Elijah Wilson

Education; still a primary need in communities.

The quality of life for the children is challenging for many rural communities such as Bokomu District. Basic services such as education, health, protection, and nutrition are either limited or lacking.

Although primary school is free and compulsory, access to quality education remains hampered by the inadequacy of learning spaces, teaching materials and qualified teachers. Many communities also lack nurseries or early childhood development support and programs. In our 2013 assessment with communities, education ranked high in communities as a primary need.

In this light, ActionAid Liberia is piloting an Early Childhood Education Program to address this need. The pilot has been implemented in four communities in Bokomu including Morlakwelleh, Gungbeta, Gbangay and Forkpata. The clubs were launch in November 2013 and provide a space for children to learn, play and develop their social, creative, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Tutorials are provided to help children improve their basic math, reading, and spelling skills. The reading clubs target children ages 0-5 years old and children in grades 1-4.

The pilot is expected to run through April 2014 and based on evaluation results, it will be expanded to other communities in Bokomu. Two community volunteers mainly volunteer teachers were per community (a total of 8) recruited and underwent a five day training per community to undergo an Early childhood development curriculum training with a consultant from the Early Childhood Development Program division of the Ministry of Education.

For the pilot, a minimum of 50 children per each community are participating although in some communities this number is gradually increasing with community showing strong support and enthusiasm for the project.

Shared goals

The 2012 edition of the EFA Global Monitoring Report follows the recent launch "Education First," an initiative driven by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to raise the political profile of education, strengthen the global movement to achieve quality education and generate additional and sufficient funding through sustained advocacy efforts. On the occasion, Mr. Ban said: "Our shared goals are simple: We want all children to attend primary school and to progress to secondary school and relevant higher education that will help them to succeed in life and live as engaged and productive global citizens."

(Source; <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/>)



Damowa Biah of Actionaid having a session with the women during the conference at Browerville



Director of culture, Mr. Jallah William receives recommendations from National Traditional Council Secretary, Mr. Kpanah Kromah

'The threat surrounding our community'

Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) continues to be an impediment to development and more so to women and girls' rights protection in Liberia. The practices continue to expose women and girls to abuses of different kinds; forced prostitution for young girls, school dropouts, forced marriage, rape and female genital mutilation are some examples.

On December 7 and 10, 2013, ActionAid Liberia and partners organized a National Conference on Harmful Traditional Practices at the Peace Village, Jarton Town, Browerville in Montserrado County. The event brought together partners, community members and most significantly traditional leaders. The traditional leaders are critical in this since they are the custodians of the traditions.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs was represented by Mr. Jallah Wilson, who is the Director of Culture. He was giving insights on development of the National Policy on Harmful Traditional Practices and cited that the Ministry will get views from key stakeholders in all the counties, on the content of the National Policy on HTPs that will promote harmony among diverse cultures and reduce abuse cases.

As the director mentioned; *'the essence is not to snatch away traditional beliefs, but to bring peace.'* He thanked the organizers and expressed the need to have more forums for communities to understand their cultures and ensure that women and girls are not exposed to the harmful.

Patricia Jallah from UNFPA said that the conference should yield concrete sanctions in order to hold the government liable. She said that UNFPA is looking forward to work with women and partners to address the harmful practices facing women and girls in Liberia.

The recommendations were forwarded to the Director of Culture, Mr. Jallah Wilson. One of the main recommendations that came out was providing economic empowerment programs for the traditional leaders and also to provide alternative employment opportunities for them.

People4Change at AAL

In addition to the inspirators, Actionaid Liberia has also received advisors in Women Rights, Communications, Youth and HRBA (Human Rights Based Approach). People4Change is the capacity development support of MS-Actionaid Denmark through deployment of the Inspirators and Advisors.

Based on successful support by the inspirators during the first placement in 2012-2013, the respective partners proposed a renewal of their placement so that they can continue to provide support and mentorship to ActionAid Liberia partners in specific areas.

They are assigned to provide capacity building support to the partner organizations, both in terms of personnel and capacity. The placement provides a cross-cultural learning and sharing experience about issues of social development, as the Advisors and the Inspirators are from different countries.

The Advisors and inspirators have been providing support to AAL and partners and the impact has been overwhelming. Adam Muchangwe, one of the inspirators working with NATPAH, points out; *'It's a great opportunity for me to be back at and this time it's all about developing or building on past experience with a different focus.'*



Adam Mulubakwamba doing a presentation at a workshop

Celebrating Women Achievements during the International Women's Day March 2014



Women in Gbole Town during a community level discussion to mark the International Women's Day 2014

International Women's Day is annually held on March 8; this year's national celebration was organized and celebrated under the theme 'Mentoring for Transformation.' Celebrations at Actionaid Liberia in Grand Gedeh County were marked with a range of activities at the county and community level connecting a wide range of women and implementing partners. At the Local Rights Program the activities captured Rural Women's Empowerment discussions, Radio talk shows, Community Awareness in four communities of Giblo, Gbole, Senewen and Tian Towns.

The objective of the celebration was to reach out with awareness campaigns at the community level in furtherance of the yearly trends of celebration at the county level. The celebration was applauded with a commending remark from the Clan Chief in Giblo Town who stated that since the Town was established in 1894, this was the first time such an awareness program or celebration has reached their community.

It was as well a great time to note that this specific community in Giblo has a number of women town chiefs; and this could be a rallying point, which can bolster our drive as we go along in the advancement of women empowerment campaigns at the county level.

The occasion also brought together a cross-section of representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Rural Women and our partner organization, Children Assistance Program (CAP). A total number of 156 people were reached directly during the community awareness sessions and approximately 500 reached indirectly through the radio programs.



Women empowerment discussion at the LRP

Inspiring Safe Cities Night

In Monrovia, the Women Forum, with funding from AA Liberia organized an evening event to mark the International Women's Day. The event held at the Y.W.C.A, featured the University students, university authorities and partner organizations. Discussions revolved around Safe Cities for women and girls.

The keynote speaker, Mrs. Florence Koroma, Girls Mentor at Stella Maris pointed out that to keep safety for our girls; we should prepare them to take competitive careers. She added, "At the end of the day the economy will be very strong because the girls have taken professions that are competitive or in demand with the men. Welfare of women and girls will improve because they are into those areas"

We also had a Representative from the Women Legislative Caucus, who also mentioned that it's a great step that girls are coming up with such forums.

She said, "We need to make that change gradual and not just an event" She added, "Women go through a lot of changes that men don't go through. Only women will be at best to discuss their own issues"

Actionaid Liberia, being the main sponsors of the event, was also represented. The Youth advisor, Luckmore Jalisi mentioned that AAL will continue to work with the institutions of higher learning and other stakeholders to continue advocating for safety of women and girls in the cities.



Luckmore Jalisi of AAL giving a special remark during the event

Did you know?

That the title of ActionAid Liberia's newsletter "Cianehdeh" means "Change" in the Krahn language.



Entrance to the museum.
Source: BBC

Showcasing Liberian history

If you have a few moments over and find yourself in Monrovia close to Broad Street, why not stop by the Liberian National Museum?

For a cover charge of 5 USD you will get a guided tour around the artifacts broadcasting Liberian culture. You can see the traditional masks from the different tribes and counties, see drums, paintings and symbols related to Liberian history and culture, and get an idea about how people used to live.

Even the original Liberian flag from 1847 is on display, along with former president Prince Johnson's boot.

When making it up the stairs to the second floor, you will see the dining table of Liberia's first president Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a gift from the British Queen Victoria. On the top floor the passionate curators have created a photo exhibition of past and current African leaders.

The guide will give you an honest story about the difficulties many African countries have had with their leaders, including Liberia. Some of the pictures also portray some of the terrible events taking place during the Liberian civil war.

Over 5000 of the artifacts in the museum were destroyed or stolen during the war and only about 100 remain, but the museum staff is trying hard to rebuild and restore it. The passion of the guides will surely make your visit interesting.

May I introduce?

Aisha Kolubah

LRP 1 Project Coordinator

How did you come to work with AAL?

I was with a partner organization to AAL before I began working here. I was the focal person for that partner organization to AAL. I saw an advertisement for a project coordinator post in AAL and decided to apply to be part of that success.

What do you like the most about working with AAL?

AAL is a space where everyone is equal. You are free to express yourself and you get to learn many things. It is a place where people are willing to support you. Even if you are not very qualified, you have the space and time to grow. It is an organization that is interested in results. It is also an organization where you see the work that you are doing in the communities.

Within what areas of work do you think AAL could improve?

Something that keeps coming up is around documentation. We do a lot of work in the communities but how do you reflect that in reports? We need to work on that. But once you know your weakness you can overcome it. We have made significant progress in documentation. But still I feel that we need to do more.

How do you think the CSP launch went and why?

I think it went ok and I am proud to be part of it. It is a document that you can read and clearly understand and know what AAL does. I see it as something that will guide the progress to do quality work. It is like our second bible. Whatever you do you refer to the CSP. If someone asks what does AAL do you can clearly look at the CSP, and refer to it.

Photography:

If nothing else is stated in the photo, all pictures are taken by staff from ActionAid Liberia.

Texts and editing:

Benjamin S. Ombiri, P4C Inspirator
Tete Pennoh, Programs Assistant
Charlotte Dorph, Intern
Anna Sjögren, Intern

Contact:

Email: info.liberia@actionaid.org
Web: www.actionaid.org/liberia
Facebook: facebook.com/actionaid.liberia
Twitter: AALiberia