

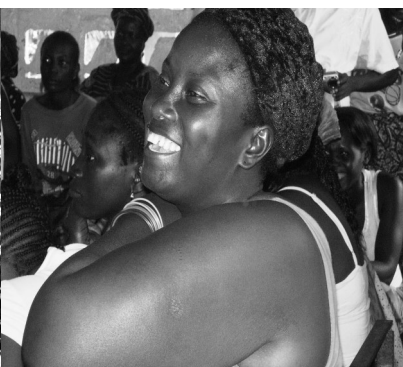
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Girl child education is key for country's progress



Country Director's Message



Korto Reeves Williams
Country Director

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ActionAid Core values

Mutual Respect
Equity and Justice
Honesty and Transparency
Solidarity with the poor
Courage of conviction
Independence
Quality and Excellence
Proximity
Respect for the rights of women and Children



A section of university students during a Safe Cities Campaign for Women and Girls

ActionAid Liberia is playing a strategic role on the Safe Cities Campaign with a focus on developing/strengthening of systems and structures for the protection and safety of female university students. Over the years, we have contributed towards building Safe Cities programme within ActionAid by participating in the pilot and scale-up activities. Key activities undertaken then included: Safety Audit, partnership development, trainings workshops for staff and awareness raising through consultative forums, parade, and launched of Women and City report I.

Based on findings from the Women and the City reports I & 2 highlighting different forms of violence ranging from sexual harassment, lack of adequate transportation services and poor wash-room services, to a lack of women-friendly services experienced

by female university students en route and on campus. Working on these issues, basic interventions made thus far are building the capacity of young women through trainings on women rights and formation of women forums on the six university campuses in Liberia that serve as a space for awareness raising and solidarity among women attending universities; advocacy through meetings and opened evening event with different stakeholder including university authorities, Women Legislative Caucus, Ministry of Education, Ministry of

ActionAid on Safe Cities Campaign for safety of young women and girls

Gender and development and the Commission on Higher Education. Others include building movement of youth including university authorities, Female Legislative Caucus, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender and development and the Commission on Higher Education. Others include building movement of youth in Liberia for social change through activists and media engagement by conducting talkshows on two major radio stations as well as production of anti-vaw messages.

To broaden the scope of the campaign focus that will satisfy issues relating to violence against women and girls accessing public services, a national level policy scoping will be done and the program design planning workshop was held during the month of May to identify key activities to support the safe cities campaign.



University students pose for a photograph with Chairperson of Women Legislative Caucus

Women Stand up for Girls' Education

Addressing issues that hinder school enrolment, retention and completion for girls have always been a tall order. Teen age pregnancy, transactional sex, harmful traditional practices – *including female genital mutilation* – have all worked against efforts at bringing girls' school enrolment and completion on par with boys'.

We have learned from experience that working with a multitude of stakeholders and at different levels is the most effective way of changing traditional norms and cultures which tend to have negative impact on girls' education.

On the basis of this experience, ActionAid Liberia in 2010 launched the Strengthening Communities' Capacity to Keep Girls in School project.

Funded by Rahiohjalpen of Sweden the SCCKG has been working directly with vulnerable girls and community structures including parent-teacher associations, school management committees, education officers, community leaders and women to militate against the vices that impede school attendance for girls in Gbarpolu County. Since its inception, the project has assisted in the enrolment of 120 girls in six primary schools in the county.

A key component of the project, which is tremendously impacting our objectives, is the mothers' clubs. There is one in each of the six project comm-

nities community economic empowerment for the mothers' clubs to bolster school attendance for, comprising eight members.

With the grant given to them, the women have formed cooperatives and established community savings clubs where members save some of the earnings and then have the opportunity to borrow when necessary. Interest is levied on such loans and some of the profit accrued from these creative ventures is used to help school girls who demonstrate the need for assistance. Also, the clubs work with the PTAs and SGVB committees to monitor the girls.

During a recent business management training MusuGobah, a club member said, "Apart from the



One of the Mothers' Club members, Musu Gobah, at her stall

money we give [the girls] we also teach how to take care of themselves and encourage them to stay in school. We sometimes go to their houses and talk to their parents and teachers to ensure they stay in school. We also encourage girls who have dropped from school to go back to school".

Access to Justice for Women Project makes remarkable change in the South East of Liberia

An internal evaluation of the UN-Women funded Access to Justice for Women Project, which was carried by ActionAid Liberia in April 2013, revealed a significant change on the status of women in South East of Liberia. ActionAid Liberia implemented the three years project in six communities; Zleh town, Putu Petrokon, Putu Penekon, Killepo Kanweaken, Jarkaken, & Geeken in Grand Gedeh & River Gee counties.

The evaluation process involved visits to the communities and having one on one discussion, to find out if the communities benefited. It was quite clear that the project had a great impact to the women. Before the project started, the women in the communities had no place and were not involved in community development processes. They were not given a chance to hold leadership positions and were also not consulted and involved in making decisions.

Cases of rape, wife beating and forced marriage were very high and the women did not know what to do or how to go about it, but the project brought a change to this. The STAR CIRCLE, Girls Forum and the Agriculture components created the most impact. The STAR CIRCLE created a forum where women could meet, discuss issues that affect them



A section of Women in Zleh Town, Grand Gedeh, speak out during the Internal Evaluation of the Access to Justice for Women Project



The community participating in one of the activities in the region

and try to suggest solutions. It created 'space' for reporting Violence cases and finding out ways to address them. Through this, the women have gained confidence and are able to speak without fear. 'Before this project came, I was not able to speak in public but through the STAR CIRCLE, I can stand before people, speak to them and even facilitate sessions on Violence Against Women.' These were sentiments from one of the women in Zleh Town.

The Agriculture component on the other hand brought about socio economic growth for the women. The women were trained on new farming methods and also trained on how to make fertilizers using locally available materials and proper use of insecticides. The town chief of Tiama Town thanked ActionAid and UN-Women on this. "Initially, it used to be from farm to mouth, but through the trainings on farming, we produce more and we are able to sell part of the harvest." She pointed out that through farming; some families have been able to send their children to school. Women were also taken through Financial Management trainings and are able to manage group funds.

Through the ActionAid initiatives, the communities were so much empowered and their voices were heard. In Fish Town and Jarkaken, there were poor health services and the available health facilities were insufficient for the population. During the project period, the communities were able to lobby and advocate for the government.....**Continue to pg. 8**

A new dawn for children in Varney Town, Montserrado County

Access to education and educational facilities is one of the major problems that affect the youth and children in both Rural and Urban areas in Liberia. According to the Urban Poverty Participatory Vulnerability Analysis carried out by Actionaid Liberia in September, 2012, the education sector is hampered by inadequate schools and supplies as well as lack of qualified teachers. Children are forced to walk or commute long distances to access schools.

Volunteers for International Development and Aid partnered with Action Aid Liberia in order to construct a new school with solar power in Varney Town, Montserrado County. Currently the school is made of bamboo sticks as the wall and rusted iron sheets for the roof.

During the assessment before the beginning of the project,

it was noted that many of the children in the area do not even attend the school because of the current poor conditions, especially during rainy season when water leaks through the makeshift roof. The current school has only one room so children from different grades are all taught together in the same room.

The school is awaiting completion and it is expected that the school will serve 10 villages, Varney Town and surrounding and 93 students from first to sixth grade. Work will be in progress by community partners to get local and government support for the new school, which includes better and qualified teachers and an operation and maintenance budget.




The current structure of the school



A photo of the children in the classroom along with one of the volunteer teachers (far right)



Varney Town School under construction



Did you know?

Two-thirds of the world's children who receive less than four years of education are girls. Girls represent nearly 60% of the children not in school.

Source: Fact Sheet/ Women & Girls

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to build hospitals, of which as at now, the hospital in Jarkaken is up and running, while the one in Fish Town is constructed and anticipating to be opened any time soon.

Recognizing the value of women

The Anti-VAW video that was produced is continuously changing the communities' attitudes and behavior towards Gender Based Violence. The video has been the talk of the communities because even the men have been able to change their perception towards women. They value women more than ever before. Through the video, the communities got to understand the laws on rape and inheritance. The video is still being shown in the community video clubs and some men are yearning to have copies of the video in their houses.

Under the same project, ActionAid Liberia constructed a safe home in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County. The facility is a four roomed house constructed on one acre of land. The safe home is expected to provide psychosocial and legal support to abused women and girls.

On the overall, the communities have more resource people with different skills, which they are able to pass across to the other community members who were not part of the project. Most of the communities now have women in leadership positions; like Tiama Town has a female Town Chief. The men have also been able to work with women on development issues and this has created a peaceful co-existence from the household level to the community level.

As the result of the trainings, traditional leaders in both counties have changed their behavior and attitudes towards women's rights. An example of this is the head of the traditional council in River Gee; he explains how they benefited from AJV program in River Gee. "AAL AJV program was actually a good one; it has helped us in changing our behavior towards women. At first we did not understand the effect of what

we were doing." The head of the council mentioned that the violation of women's rights sets a country backward. "We now have the idea and be-



cause we don't want our country to go backwards we have given women the space to participate and make decisions in the community. Women have seats in the council; we have given women land for themselves. "

He further mentioned that AAL has empowered them to extent that they can do training on the inheritance and rape. "We can now do training for people on the rape and inheritance laws. We are sharing information to other parts of the county. We are no longer giving marriage certificate for girls under 18. "

The honorable who was over satisfied with AAL's work said the council and other leaders in the county have agreed to certificate AAL for their good work in the county. "Actionaid is the first organization to do this kind of work and change things so we have planned to give them certificate. "

In his parting words he called to AAL to extend in other parts of the county as there are other women who need the support. The communities were thankful for the changes that were brought through this project and they still feel that the continuation of these interventions will promote more change and that women will have more space in the society.



The four bedroomed Safe home constructed by Actionaid in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

Unification Day Concert for unity and saying NO to Gender Based Violence

On the 14th of May, every year, Liberia celebrates Unification Day. This is a special day for preaching peace, love and unity, among other social values. Usually during this public holiday the Ministry of Culture organizes official programs, with very little involvement of the ordinary citizens. This has not been effective in terms of bringing people together for unification, reconciliation and the creation of mutual respect and understanding among Liberians.

This annual Unification Day celebration draws attention to one of the pressing issues that has been facing Liberians for quite a long time; the hostility between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous majority. The Unification Day came as a channel to campaign for national unity, irre-



spective of social, cultural or economic status.

ActionAid Liberia partnered with Lonestar cell - a mobile service provider, Medica Mundiale and the National Oil Company of Liberia to sponsor the Unification Day Concert. The event was organized by a well-known Senegal based Liberian Artist, Peter Bar-chue Cole together with other local musicians.

Rights abuses still a concern

This day brings a picture for Liberians to understand that putting aside their social, racial and other differences will put the country on track towards development and that respe

cting the rights of everyone, especially women and girls, will spearhead improved social lives of the people. Social conflicts and human rights abuses still remain a pertinent concern, especially the fact that the country is still in the struggle for stability and infrastructural development which was destroyed during the Civil war that also brought many deaths and displacements.

The choice of the venue, which was at Bernard's beach, was perfect. These beaches are places where different people; families, individuals, the young, old and even the children spend weekends and holidays and therefore the invitations for the event may not have been a constraint at all, though the Lonestar Cell send invitation through text messages to its subscribers. The place was packed even before the concert began. Music was playing all through ...*Continue to page 9*





One of the artists, Nasse Man performing his song on stage

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and some recorded jingles from ActionAid Liberia and Medica Mondiale.

The theme of the concert was 'Preaching Peace and saying No to Gender Based Violence.' When the MC started the show, the scattered crowd started converging and everyone was struggling to be close to the podium and by the time the first artist came on stage, the crowds were all together. The artists performed with enthusiasm and the reaction of the crowd brought an

indication that indeed the message was driven home. You could see them singing along, word for word, and at some point the artists would 'silence' and leave the crowds to sing the words.

Peter Cole, who was the main artist, points out that 'artists and creative people are an integral part of peace building and unification.'

Besides regular performances, the artists performed songs that revolved around corruption, sexual gender based violence, infrastructure, governance and leadership, among others. It was expected that after the concert, the public will understand their duties towards the fight against social injustices and participate in

peace building and reconciliation. 'Liberia should use its arts and culture to educate, reconcile and unite its people, something far from being realized by our Ministry of Culture,' Peter adds. He points out that the concert was the first of its kind and that he intends to organize more concerts around relevant themes to empower Liberians and uplift art and culture.

The use of youthful events like this helps mobilize the communities and it's a rich way to reach out to the people. It has the aspect of 'Edutainment', that is Educating and Entertaining. ActionAid Liberia is considering having such events among others, which are community friendly so that message of promoting equality, safe cities for women and girls, poverty alleviation and Human Rights protection, among others, can be conveyed.

Celebrating the Day of the African Child



One of the artists, Nasse Man performing his song on stage

The International Day of the African Child is celebrated each year in June 16. The day was initiated by the Organization of African Unity in 1991. It honors those who participated in the Soweto Uprising in 1976 on that very day.

The day is also marked to raise awareness of the need to improve services like education and health among others, to better the lives of African children.

This year's celebration in Liberia was held on June 17th because June 16 was on a Sunday. ActionAid Liberia in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Save the Children and the Grand Gedeh Children Representative Assembly partnered in organizing this year's event, which was held on 17th June, as 16th was on a Sunday. The event was held in Zwedru with a series of activities

including fundraising, parade, presentation of gift and an indoor program.

On Friday June 14, the children visited street corners, market places, business centers and offices to seek support in cash or kind for children admitted at the Martha Tubman Memorial Hospital in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County. The children were able to raise 4,500.00 Liberian Dollars and the money was used to buy some items.

As for the parade, the procession began from ActionAid LRP2 office through the streets of Zwedru to the Hospital, where a package containing assorted items was presented to the Nursing Director.

At the hospital, the children expressed their compassion to the sick children. "And as we celebrate this day, we the children of

Grand Gedeh County also want to think about the health condition of children in Grand Gedeh, especially children admitted at the Martha Tubman Memorial Hospital", these were sentiments from Princess Perry, of St. Philomena School.

"We thank you for the gift. It is not the size that matters, but the feeling that inspired it" the Nursing Director, Madam Giama Thomas responded, upon receiving the gift. The children were later taken round the children's ward.

An indoor program was also held as part of the celebrations. This was at the Zwedru City Hall. Speeches were made and Alex Deah, a student of Bishop JuwleHigh School was the speaker of the day's program.

In his speech he stated " We have**Continue to page 13**

Vox Pop?

How safe is your city and how can we make it safer for women and girls?



Chea Geegbe, Monrovia

"I can't really be safe where at 6 o'clock I must be rushing to go home in fear of the 'Don Bosco Boys' (thieves) who take people's bags, cell phones and other things, especially in Broad Street. As a woman, you need to live in a free and fair environment.

The government needs to put security all over. You can be going home at 7.30 and you don't even see a policeman on patrol; they should be there to protect the citizens especially the females."

Patricia Weah, Doe Community

"There are incidences of sexual harassment and some young girls are selling their bodies in the streets, for money. Our area is not safe because there is a lot of drug abuse and violence and the females are the most affected.

Area representative should see how best to tackle drug abuse. There should also be awareness programs and entrepreneurship support through micro loans for economic sustainability. Government should also see to it that community issues are addressed, in partnership with NGO's and INGO."



Urias Dayugar, Slipway Community

"Living in the city is not easy. There is a lot of criminal activities and insecurity, brought by illiteracy and unemployment, as most of the young people have no jobs. The females are more vulnerable, they are not free and safe. Sometimes they are sexually harassed and also some of them drop out of school engage in prostitution and even irresponsible sexual behaviors.

The government and other local and international NGOs should create awareness and help the girls access education. As for the men out there, they should stop rape and sexually exploiting the girls."

Jesleen D. Chea, West Point

"I feel fine living in Monrovia, but challenges are there. There are cases of sexual harassment and rape among others, and these cases sometimes go under the carpet. At times we are harassed by some criminals who steal our phones, bags and other things.

It is our responsibility as residents to make our society safe and also engaging the government through the Ministry of Justice to guarantee the enforcement of the laws."



Hawa Guzeh, Redlight

"Being in the city for me, I feel pleased because there is a lot of exposure to different things. However, there are a lot of challenges; for example getting home in the evening sometimes I feel insecure because there are guys out there that may take your phone, hold you in a corner and making you afraid.

The government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Gender should provide opportunities for girls; like trainings in soap making, tie and dye and even sawing to keep them off the streets and reduce their vulnerability."



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been denied our rights to peacefully demonstrate and raise our voices on the continuous raping and mysterious death of children in the County. We were stopped for what people referred to as “saving the name” of Grand Gedeh County- that is a harmful practice”.

During his speech Alex emphasized that all violations of children’s rights are considered as harmful practices, because some are based on tradition, culture, and religion and are perpetrated and actively condoned by some parents or family members. “Our collective responsibility in combating and eliminating harmful practices is to take action and not to only sing songs”.

ActionAid Liberia activities in Pictures

