



RESILIENCE

ACTIONAID LIBERIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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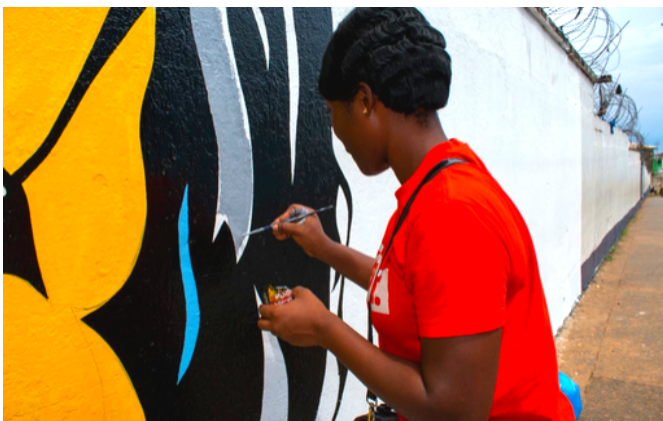
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THE ART OF AWARENESS: ADVANCING YOUTH ACTIVISM AMID A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Utilizing Street art to increase awareness around COVID-19 among young people across hot spots communities in urban areas in Liberia.

With a high urban population, many of whom are young people, Monrovia (Liberia's capital city) and its environments are once again the epicenter of a disease outbreak. Many of Liberian youth are experiencing inadequate access to public services like water, sanitation, transportation, decent housing, and high unemployment. Initial myths and disinformation regarding young people's susceptibility to COVID-19 have made adherence to safety measures and protocols quite the challenge. For many young people, COVID-19 is just another struggle in the daily hustle for food, their livelihoods, and survival. With increasing rate in community transmissions across Monrovia, a group of ACTIVISTA Youth Artists are using their talent to combat the pandemic through creative activism, specifically street and graffiti art.



With full support from ActionAid Liberia, six (6) graffiti artists (*Stephen N.A. Ellis II*, *Trokon O'neal Otto*, *George Gray*, *Agnes Kai*, *Angela Jallah*, and *Nathaniel T. Saah Jr.*) have taken up street graffiti as a medium to raise awareness on COVID-19. Equipped with oil paint, chalk, and artistic supplies, ACTIVISTA artists are focusing on hotspots in the city to engage with their peers on measures to protect their communities from contracting the virus. Including mask wearing, a critical mandate by the National Government to combat COVID-19. Artists are also using the mural to raise consciousness on social norms and behaviors around violence against women and girls, safe sex, and sexual and other reproductive health issues.

As the saying goes "charity begins at home, so why not start off from the communities we come from, and the places we often hang out" - (Edmond B. Cephas, ACTIVISTA Liberia)



We have been paying attention to our context, we are seeing the increased in cases, we see the inadequacy of our healthcare systems and gaps within the national response framework, and we want to ensure that the impact COVID-19 has on the youth population isn't lost and that is highlighted for all to be aware. We also know that access to timely information for our peers is a challenge, and we want to ensure that through visual art they can easily understand protection measures and take precautions to safeguard themselves and their communities, stated by (Stephen Ellis, Youth Artist- Team Leader).

Graffiti is a fairly new concept within Liberia, and gaining its grounds and attraction within this context. "I come from a small community called Stop Community in Barnesville, Liberia and I have been inspired by the street art seen in New York, with splashes of colors, out of the box images and murals, to graffiti-filled alleyways. Since my exposure to this, I felt this would be a meaningful expression by us the young people here to increase awareness and utilize it as an alternative space to amplify our voices"- (Stephen N.A. Ellis)

"For me, it has been exciting to be a part of this concept from designing the idea and bringing it to life. This visual art work has provided us with a blank canvas to be creative, express our artistic visions in a meaningful and impactful way, and we are doing our part to tackle the virus in Liberia. As a young woman, it has definitely been an empowering process for me" (Angel Jallah, Youth Artist).

As a young artist (Nathaniel T. Saah) states, I gravitated to graffiti mural art because it is liberating, it allows me to convey youth friendly messaging that our peers can easily understand and act on. This has been the perfect blend of awareness, education, and art.

ActionAid Liberia support to young artists is in line with our youth engagement plan which seeks to broadcast young people's leadership, innovation, and creative. We agree that living through this pandemic is going to take a lot of color, creativity, and information as we work collectively to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and build resilience across communities in Liberia.

"After all Liberia is our canvas, and the stroke of our brushes and paints has contributed to the current conversations on anti-SGBV services, SRHR, and COVID-19"- (Activista Youth Artists).



RURAL WOMEN TAKING LEAD TO CURTAIL THE VIRUS AND ADDRESS THE INCREASE IN SGBV IN GRAND GEDEH COUNTY

COVID-19 lockdown measures in Liberia have contributed to the exclusion rural women already face with Gender Based Violence in rural Liberia.

In Grand Gedeh County (ActionAid's Local Rights Program Areas II), members of the county's Rural Women Network are leading the charge to curb the virus within the county and addressing key issues around sexual and gender based violence amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Grand Gedeh, located in Southeastern part of Liberia, is the third largest County in Liberia and historically one of the most neglected counties. The county has high levels of poverty, poor physical infrastructure, weak government presence and institutions, and cultural attitudes and norms which marginalize and discriminate against women and girls. Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) is prevalent in Liberia with high impunity linked to high poverty, cultural beliefs, traditional practices, poor access to justice system, and low success in prosecuting perpetrators of SGBV. Although inheritance and rape laws were passed in 2003 and 2005, culturally entrenched patriarchal power structures and traditional laws prevent many women from accessing formal justice. Additionally, bad road conditions often leaves the southeastern part of the country disconnected from formal networks, communications, and vital services.

Although Grand Gedeh is yet to record a case of Covid-19, the county is highly vulnerable due to inter-county movements from Montserrado (currently epicenter of Virus outbreak in Liberia) and other neighboring counties. Grand Gedeh also borders Ivory Coast which has reported over 1,000 cases. In support of county's preparedness efforts, the Rural Women Network in Grand Gedeh carry out vital and timely awareness interventions across community and county entry points, on local farms, and at the local markets.



Recognizing that lockdown measures and the call to practice social distancing during this pandemic only further puts survivors into even tighter spaces with their abusers, limiting their access to pertinent protection mechanisms and anti-SGBV services. With this backdrop, Grand Gedeh's Rural Women Network has put SGBV awareness and advocacy at the front and center of their response efforts.

With support from ActionAid Liberia, The Rural Women Chapter in Grand Gedeh distributed prevention materials (Soap, Clorox, hand sanitizer, thermometer, etc) in addition to both food and nonfood items (i.e. rice, sanitary pads) to survivors of SGBV.

Their awareness messages also include information on gender based violence and safeguarding issues (including dissemination of ActionAid's safeguarding hotline 3636 for reporting of cases).

The Rural Women Network in Grand Gedeh are also conducting follow ups with cases currently at the police station and courts to prevent cases from being compromised and engaging with both local authorities and the County, in addition to lobbying the County Health Authorities for medical facilities to properly document medical evidence in rape incidents (a critical gap noted often with SGBV cases) and ensure they are not tempered with amid the pandemic. With technical and funding support from ActionAid, the network is also continuously engaging with traditional leaders around Harmful Traditional Practices. While Grand Gedeh is one of the few counties that do not practice FGM, other traditional practice such as early child marriage and trial by ordeal are prevalent. Understanding of what constitutes SGBV is low in rural counties and statutory legislation to protect women is often contradicted by local traditional laws and customary practices. With child marriage in particular, most often in such crises, families are more vulnerable to agreeing to marry off their girl child as aligned to both traditional beliefs but also as a means of income generation.



Furthermore, Liberian government recently reopened schools for 12th graders to enable them to prepare to take the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), a requirement for completion of secondary school. With schools reopening, a high school in the community issued a ban on pregnant students from taking the WASSCE exams. When Jesadeh and her network were informed, they mobilized representatives from the Independent National Human Rights Commission, ActionAid, and local Civil Society Organizations to engage with the school administration and local authorities. They are currently advocating for the students to be allowed to take the exam in order not to jeopardize their education and for local authorities to recognize the ban as violation of students' access to education, which is their fundamental human right.

By raising awareness of SGBV to help enhance women's ability and confidence to challenge and report incidences of SGBV and advocating for improved services and response for survivors, Rural Women are seeking to reduce incidences of SGBV and increase survivors' access to justice.



"COVID-19 has increased SGBV cases in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County. What I want see happening is to speed up SGBV cases trial because this [past] term of court, we had nine (9) SGBV cases that were not on trial; now we have [an] increase of five (5) more SGBV cases, making up the total of 14 cases that need trial because before August term of court opening, cases will increase. In order to speed up with SGBV cases, we will need a female lawyer to help carry on speedy trail of cases."
Jesadeh Barzon, Rural Women President





ActionAid Liberia National Policy Brief

Who Cares for the Future: Financing Gender Responsive Public Services in Liberia

READ FULL REPORT AT WWW.LIBERIA.ACTIONAID.ORG/PUBLICATIONS OR USE THIS LINK
([HTTPS://BIT.LY/2D8NP1A](https://bit.ly/2D8NP1A))

On June 23rd, ActionAid Liberia officially launched our “Who Cares For the Future: Financing Gender Responsive Public Services” report as part of Public Services Day. The report is part of ActionAid's global study done in approximately 25 countries including Liberia. The global report was published in April 2020 to coincide with the virtual IMF / World Bank Spring Meetings. The national report, forms part of our ongoing advocacy - nationally and globally- for increased public financing of basic services for sustainable development. The provision of gender responsive public services is critical to ensure the state as the duty bearer, upholds and meets the basics needs and conditions of people.



COVID-19 crisis has revealed the extent to which public services - from water, sanitation and health to education, transportation, and housing - underfunded for a generation across Africa are now inadequate to meet existing needs and support an effective response to the pandemic. Women in the poorest communities bear the brunt of the inadequacies of these services and often fill the gaps through unpaid care and domestic work. This crisis, however, presents an opportunity for some fundamental changes, with governments looking for structural solutions and new ways forward, in short to build back better.

We know through our previous engagement with the Government that the lack of adequate resources for competing priorities is often cited as the primary reason for limited investment in these services. Through the study, we believe that by taking a combination of actions on tax, debt, and addressing proposed austerity measures, the Government of Liberia could transform the quality of all public services and start shaping a sustainable economy and development.

Our analysis of Liberia's budget shows that Liberia is spending half as much on debt servicing as it spends on both health and education combined. Although there has been some temporary reprieve by IMF suspension, we are calling for this to be suspended through the end of 2021 to allow for a comprehensive response to COVID-19. We believe debt repayments should never be allowed to compromise the spending on public services. Also, to rebuild public finances, Liberia needs to rapidly and fairly expand its domestic tax revenue (from its very low base on 11.4% of GDP), aiming to increase by at least 5% in 5 years, which would allow an increased revenue that can be appropriately and transparently allocated to most public services.

With this as a backdrop, ActionAid is pushing back on IMF's current policy advice that has pressurized the Government in recent years to cut public sector wage bills, undermining the capacity to employ more teachers, doctors, nurses, care workers, and other essential frontline staff. We join the calls of public servants and workers' unions on this given that we know in many sectors - i.e. health, education, etc.- we already have limited staffing.

A graphic featuring a world map with various countries highlighted in different colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue). The map is set against a black background.

**READ FULL REPORT AT
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**COMMUNITY
SPOTLIGHT**



COMMUNITY DRIVEN SOLUTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL COVID-19 PROTECTIVE SUPPLIES

Through LIFE, Humphriatta Reids has been successful in producing over 150,000 masks to date, distributed to more than 60 communities across the country.

Amid the trying conditions within our context, we see the rise of youth leadership in response efforts. Less than 70% of Liberia's youth have access to secondary or tertiary education, or formal job training resulting into high unemployment. As such, many young people have resorted to working odd jobs, transportation services and or street vending to earn a living, pay for their education and or take care of their families amid the pandemic. Youth employment in informal sector is reportedly higher for young women than men, linked to gender related factors such as young women bearing higher responsibility at an earlier age for their family and or have lower education and skills level for formal sector than their male peers.

Masks are essential to prevention efforts for COVID-19. In April 2020, Liberian Government announced as part of its state of emergency, mandatory wearing of masks. However, over half of the population experiencing poverty, reported living on less than USD \$1.90 a day. This has become another hurdle for many people who already struggle with food insecurity and limited income to afford basics prevention materials.



Humphriatta Reids, who is a fashion designer in Monrovia, 25 years old, single with no children, along with her sister, own a local tailor shop in the city and are the founders of the Liberia Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), established in 2014, a Local women's advocacy organization that seeks to promote and protect the universal rights and the integrity of all women and girls in Liberia.



Through this organization, LIFE is helping to address the shortage of essential materials such as face masks to support communities and groups most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Masks made by Liberia Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) are environmentally friendly (reusable) and cost effective. The locally produced masks are made with African fabrics and produced at Humphriatta's Tailor shop on Camp Johnson road in central Monrovia. Henrietta trains other youth tailors in her shop to support this effort. She provides this mask free of charge to organizations and at risk communities across the country.

"Making face masks is one of the ways for me as a Liberian Youth to contribute to response efforts, finding strength to provide support amid the alarming and growing needs has proven to be effective. Also as demands have increased, my ultimate goal is to make about 4.5 million masks to be provided to vulnerable communities across Liberia ensuring that everyone regardless of their social economic background can have access to a mask" (Humphriatta Reids)

"I hope by sharing my skills and providing this essential material it can help slow the pace of new infections by increasing awareness through the usage of these face masks; especially for marginalized communities" (Humphriatta Reids).

FACING COVID-19 WITHOUT SIGHT OR SOUND: HOW YOUTH ACTIVIST ARE LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

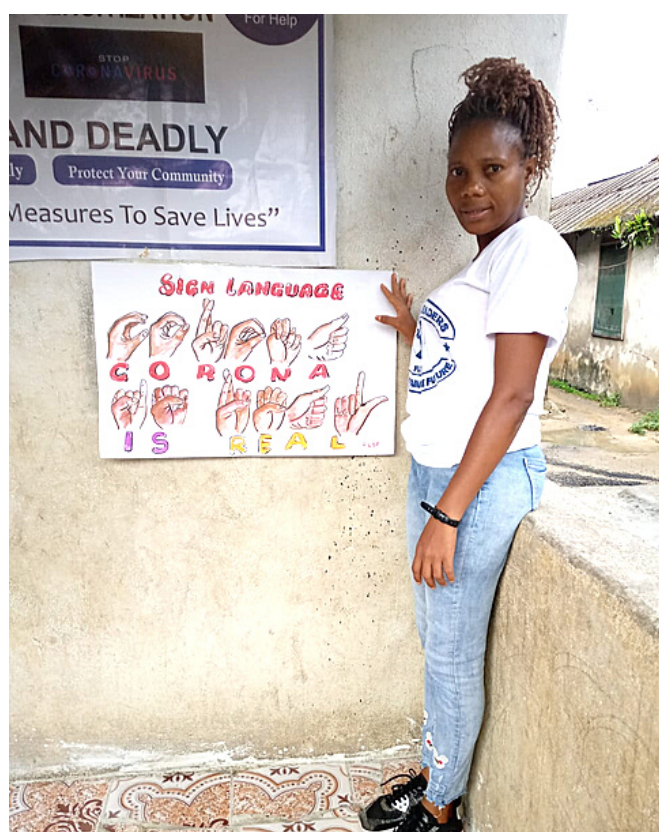
Thousands of Liberians who suffer from hearing and vision loss are having challenges with accessing critical health care services and information including COVID-19 testing amid the pandemic.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone living with a disability, and add a global pandemic to the challenges they already endure within their daily lives.

This has also created further isolation and loneliness within a community often subjected to feeling cut off by national response efforts and services.

AAL is partnering with young people living with disabilities to ensure that they have adequate and timely access to information and services to address their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with Potential Leaders for Sustainable Future (PLSF) a youth led organization working with persons living with disabilities, ActionAid supported the development of messages on COVID-19 to spread and sensitize communities on health information and messages.

“With support from ActionAid Liberia, we have been able to contribute positively to our community, by putting visually impaired and deaf youth at the center of response work and strengthening their resilience with access to tailored youth focused prevention messages” (Janet Reids, Director-PLSF).



An estimated 16 % of Liberian population live with some form of disability; of that percentage, 61 % struggle with mobility (UNICEF, 1997). In 2005, the National Commission on Disabilities was established to address the welfare, rights and education of persons with disabilities. However, Disabled People’s organizations (DPOs) report that 99% of people with disabilities in Liberia live in extreme poverty and many lack access to social services, jobs, and income generating activities.

“Nobody really thinks about this community, and we are working really hard to change that. Through support received from ActionAid Liberia, we have been able to develop jingles played across 12 radio airwaves especially in hard to reach remote areas to increase awareness, we have also developed printable sign language flyers ensuring access to timely information and services for PWDs. We are taking social media by storm by utilizing digital content such as signage video to instruct young people with disability on how and why to call 4455 hotline for testing on COVID-19 and more information” (Janet Ricks, PLSF).

Our health-care infrastructure, is extremely overwhelmed and under resourced, and while they are trying their best to respond, it is definitely not equipped or position to ensure inclusion for marginalized and vulnerable communities in Liberia

“It has been quite the sight to see young people utilizing their talents, skills, and passion to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against the virus within Liberia. We applaud their efforts and we will continue to support them in meeting and addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities”- (Patience Landford; Head of Programs and Policy; ActionAid

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The message is brought to you by
Activista Liberia with support from
ActionAid Liberia and partners

act:onaid

Stop AIDS in Liberia (SAIL)



act:vista
Liberia



Potential Leaders for Sustainable Future (PLSF), is a member of Activista Liberia Youth Network and also a participant within the "Empowering Youth Led Volunteering in Local Level Responses (YLVO)" Project, supported by ActionAid Denmark (January 2019-December 2020); which focuses on strengthening the capacity of 25 young people; specifically young women to lead on localized humanitarian actions across 4 communities in two counties within Liberia.

TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY AWARENESS AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the middle of COVID-19 crisis in Liberia, ActionAid Staff have been working from home as part of safety measures for the organization. However, noticing the critical gap in awareness and prevention measures in their communities, a number of staff are taking matters into their own hands to support their communities to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Within Bernard's Farm FDA junction, Jestina Kanneh, ActionAid Liberia SGBV Program Coordinator has observed the lack of robust and timely prevention information within her community, which has led to rumors and hoax about the virus; further contributing to the alarming rate of community transmission. With this in mind, Jestina has decided to take matters into her own hands in order to increase awareness and promote prevention in her community.

"Every evening before dinner time, Jestina places her radio and speaker system outside of her veranda to enable community members to receive timely and accurate prevention information including jingles developed by the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) and COVID-19 context updates. Through this simple act by Jestina, she has been able to change the course of her community actions, as now there are buckets placed at the entrance of the community ensuring that people are washing their hands frequently, also community members have begun wearing masks in crowded places and when engaging with each other.

ActionAid is currently supporting with the National Public Health Institute of Liberia airing of Covid-19 messages across 4 counties through funding support from Forum Syd. Messages are aired in all 15 languages across community radio stations.

"The only means of disseminating the information of COVID-19 was to play jingles on the Coronavirus and discussions pertaining to it through my music system , that is all I have " (Jestina Kanneh, SGBV Program Coordinator, ActionAid Liberia)

Similar to the story above, Susie Doe, ActionAid Procurement and Logistics Officer, recognizes that all hands are needed on deck to curb the virus across communities and within the country. Susie is taking matters into her own hands in her community on Old Road, Gaye Town; to increase awareness among her neighbors.



From the onset of the pandemic, she has been creating awareness on the importance of washing your hands by encouraging her neighbors to place buckets with water and soap outside of their homes. She has also made personal food and sanitary supplies donations to a few of her neighbors who are experiencing a bit of a challenge during this crises.

"Additionally, I have strategically placed my bucket in a communal space and location to provide access to passersbys and encouraged them to wash their hands" (Susie Doe; Procurement Officer; ActionAid)

**ACTIONAID LIBERIA COVID-19
RESPONSE SNAPSHOTS**



**SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AWARENESS
INITIATIVE IN MARGIBI COUNTY ON
COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES**



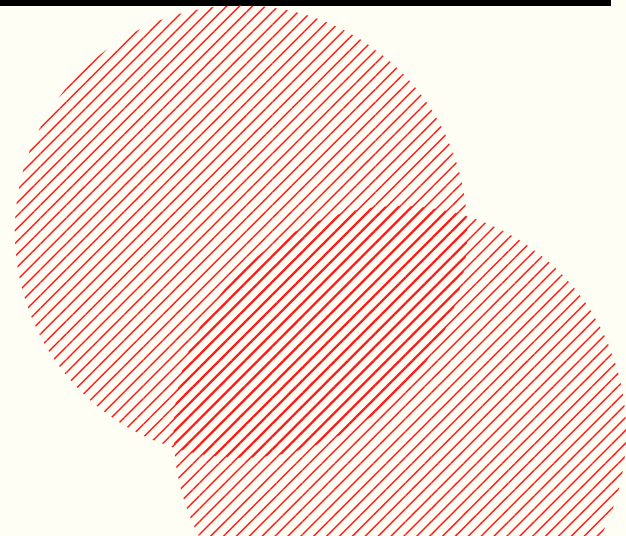
**DONATIONS TO SAFE HOMES TO
SUPPORT OPERATIONS AND COVID
AWARENESS**



**COMMUNITY MEETING ON COVID-19
AWARENESS AND SAFETY MEASURES
IN RURAL MONSTERRADO.**



**TRAINING OF MEDIA INSTITUTIONS
ON SGBV REPORTING AND COVID-19
MEASURES AND AWARENESS**



ABOUT ACTIONAID

ActionAid (AAL) is respected as a key human rights, development, and social justice organization in Liberia that works comprehensively to advance the rights of women, girls, young people, and excluded groups using our human rights-based approach (HRBA) and an intersectional feminist analysis across all programs, campaigns, policy, advocacy, and partnerships. In taking sides with the most excluded, this has meant that AAL is often present in rural and physically hard to reach communities. AAL's interventions and advocacy are aligned to our solidarity with the struggles of the communities and groups we work with. We are known for a non-negotiable stance on human rights, especially as it pertains to the rights of women and the most excluded in the Liberian society.

AAL is part of ActionAid International Federation headquartered in Johannesburg with member organizations present in 45 countries around the world, sharing common values and efforts to drive social change towards a more just and sustainable world.



ACTIONAID COVID-19 RESPONSE

Provision and Distribution of Infection and Prevention Controls

(IPC) Supplies (soap, disinfectants, etc) for Immediate Prevention: Focus will be on working with communities to reactivate community health structures and leverage existing resources

Support for Reproductive Health Facilities: AAL will focus on conducting refresher training on case management for county health teams to integrate SGBV response into their case management. This will also ensure the SRHR and related issues are addressed during the emergency period.

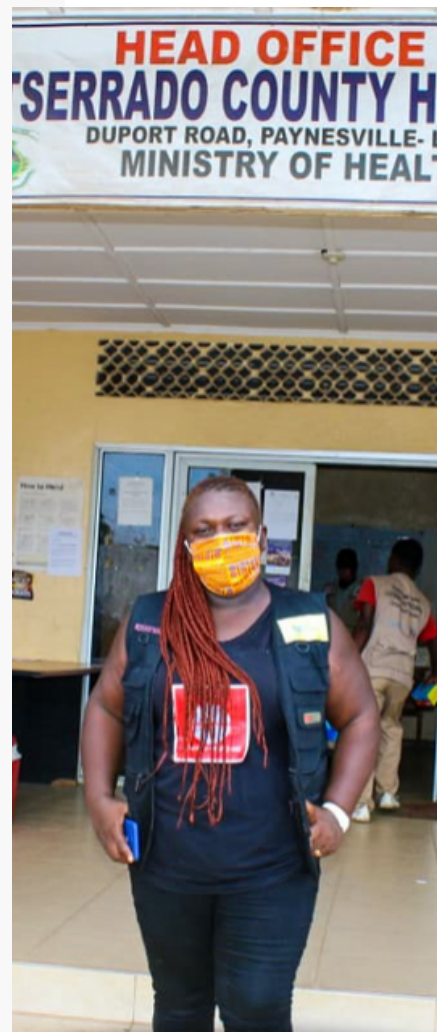
Direct emergency relief and assistance for quarantined families and high need communities: Food and sanitation supplies, including specific needs of women and children, for homes affected by quarantines and low-income communities; and support groups for women living with HIV

Social mobilization (Risk Communications) for awareness and adherence: Real time exchange of information to promote awareness and counter misinformation that evokes fear and harmful behaviors

Community Preparedness for COVID-19 and related socio-economic impact: Increase support to women and youth structures (rural women, girls and boys forums etc.) to enhance community preparedness.

Policy Advocacy: AAL will also use policy advocacy to promote best practices and highlight success stories from communities

Community Recovery and Resilience: Empowering communities' adaptive capacity to epidemics and other shocks and addressing development challenges.



Aisha K. Kolubah
Women's and Girls Rights
Manager
ActionAid Liberia

As a social justice organization, AAL recognizes the need to also enhance communities' access to quality, accessible and equitable health care and public services that reduce their vulnerability to socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and increase their ability to live healthy lives. As such, a comprehensive package of measures is needed to combat myths and misinformation to curtail further transmission, strengthen communities' prevention mechanisms and build resilience and sustainable communities.

ActionAid Liberia will work with community structures, youth and women groups and our allies to Provide support to people living in poverty especially those most vulnerable, women, and young people by enhancing their capacity to carryout localized response COVID-19 efforts and empower them to hold duty bearers to account; while claiming their rights.



7

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVID-19 Investing in Young People's Resilience

1 MEET YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE
Develop targeted awareness and education on COVID-19, including information to myths and youth-specific risks. Utilize mediums young people frequent – art, music, comedy, social media, popular radio programs – and influencers they follow. Ensure are, youth friendly and timely.

2 PROMOTE YOUNG LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS
Young people are the best representatives of their needs during humanitarian crises. Collaboration with young people and their organizations/movements enhances trust in response efforts. Ensure interventions are responsive to the diverse needs, constraints and aspirations of ALL young people across the country.

3 SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
Social protection can help tackle multiple disadvantages faced by young people, especially those experiencing poverty, disability, and or vulnerable to COVID-19 lockdown measures. Food distribution and or cash transfers can help meet food security, housing and medical needs, and mitigate income loss. Increase investment in the National Youth Policy for long term recovery.

4 PROTECT RIGHT TO EDUCATION
Ensure remote learning radio programs are accessible and provide alternatives. Institute clear directives on current academic year transition and free remedial/ accelerated learning programs. Also, monitor operations of traditional schools and prevent early marriage to protect girls' access to education and not further expand gender inequality gap. Reinroduce Safe School Protocols for schools' reopening.

5 INVEST IN YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COVID-19 present opportunity to revisit and revise current economic policies for sustainable development. Economic stimulus must include support to SMEs and investment in youth-led agriculture to help boost local food production and provide sustainable job opportunities for young people. Consider policies to increase young people's access land, storage, credit facilities, and relevant value addition.

6 COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH-FRIENDLY SRHR
Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services during COVID-19 including young friendly STI/HIV services and quality and timely maternity care. For long term, fully implement existing commitments – i.e. universal health coverage and the Maputo Plan of Action – to include Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools, reduction of unsafe abortion, and end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

7 SGBV PREVENTION & SUPPORT SURVIVORS
Prevention of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and response services for survivors are essential to COVID-19 response. This includes awareness, protocols for reporting and survivor-centered case management. Increase resources to one stop centers and safe homes for survivors and other vulnerable children. In addition, develop community-led interventions to address psychosocial needs of survivors and at risk youth.

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PRESS RELEASE: Investing in Young People for COVID-19 Resilience in Liberia

Press Release June 16, 2020 by Action Aid



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Opinion Commentaries

Investing in Young People for COVID-19 Resilience in Liberia

By Alvin Worzi - June 25, 2020
45 0



By ActionAid Liberia
In a context where 60% of the population is under 35, young people are critical to Liberia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's capacity to recover and build resilience post-outbreak. Like many of the general

ActionAid along with partners writes

Who Cares for the Future: National Report

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23 June 2020

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