

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN POST-WAR LIBERIA: A CRITICAL
ASSESSMENT, 1989 - 2012**

BY

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been submitted for another degree in any other University

Signature Date.....

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This project has been submitted for examination with my permission as University supervisor

Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Ibrahim Farah

DEDICATION

To my wife Mrs. Cecelia S. Morlue, my children Ballayan, Sylvestine, and Moses allowed me to take up the invaluable time that I should have spent with them, to take up this challenge of studying while also working full time. I am sure you are proud to see me go through to this end. Thank you for allowing me to be the father you want me to be.

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The decision to pursue higher education especially in the midst of heavy work demands is one that many people would not want to venture into; taking the bold step to pursue this Master Degree in International Studies is in no way my own my own decision, but God's. Therefore, I would like to give thanks and praises to Almighty God for endowing me with the life, wisdom knowledge and understanding to go through my studies. Posterity will judge me harshly, if I do not appreciate the tireless efforts of my humble supervisor Dr. Ibrahim Farah. I could call upon him when in doubt of something, and could rely on his understanding, when I could not make it in time to submit a part of my research because of work commitment. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to my beloved wife, children, relatives and friends who prayed for me and gave me the motivation and support to embark on this journey; they gave me words of motivation and courage. I am very humbled.

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an overview of youth empowerment in Liberia which has a very youthful population of which almost all were affected by the civil crisis. The study investigates the extent to which youth empowerment in developing countries can be a strategy for fostering sustainable international relations. It analyzes the role of youth empowerment in the socio-economic development of post-war countries and explores empirical findings on youth empowerment in Liberia and beyond. As a way of getting an in-depth understanding of how youth empowerment in Liberia can contribute to the socioeconomic and cultural development of country, using a qualitative method, the study sampled the views of selected government officials, adult community members, and youth in Montserrado and Margibi counties. The study established that youth themselves need to understand what youth empowerment is all about and the policies that are in place for youth empowerment are being implemented, The study concludes that despite the little efforts made by the Government of Liberia, the issue of youth empowerment still needs to be given keen attention and that preventive mechanisms be put in place to avoid youth-led violence.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background

Liberia has a history of a prolonged and devastated civil conflict. The conflict was marred by the recruitment and use of children as fighters. The then children are now youth whom the county will depend on for future growth and development.

Liberia has a population of less than four million people with about 70 percent being youth; also the country has many natural resources including rubber, timber, gold, diamond, iron ore and the newly discovered oil. Despite the presence of all of those resources, there is still an alarming figure of unemployed youth in the country, a situation that may be attributed to the lack of laws and policies to oblige relevant partners doing business in the country to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to empower the youth in the form of capacity building in appropriate skill areas to prepare the youth for future income generation.

The government has a huge burden of how she can promote public, private partnership; including instituting new policies and laws including obliging extractive industry and companies to create employment opportunities for youth by turning about 50-60% of their raw materials into finished products in the country. Liberia's 18 percent unemployment rate may be high because of the definition given for employment and unemployment. It is said that 10.4 percent of the labour force in Liberia are mainly youth (15-34 years of age) of which the youngest are the ones that are mostly educated but yet unemployed.

Since the end of the civil conflict and the inauguration of a democratically elected president seven years ago, many countries and multinational corporations have started investing into the rich natural resources of Liberia with the aim of

improving trade, socio-economic and international relations with that state. China, the United States, Japan, United Kingdom, Libya just to name but few have worked to improve their international relations with Liberia because of it has enormous natural resources that can be extracted. Also, China in a special way wants to improve her image in Liberia and other parts of Africa, a situation that will make her (China) to be seen as influential over rival Taiwan, and she can use aid and public diplomacy to decrease the threat that China poses to other African states as competitors¹ In recent times, two high level Chinese (China Union) special purpose vehicle companies have invested more than 3 billion USD into the iron ore industry in Liberia. However, it is difficult to determine the impact of this and other investment in regards to statistic showing that most of the youth are languishing on the streets, and those that are said to be employed are doing so in some form of economic activities which are mainly in the informal sectors².

In recent times, Liberia has benefited from good gestures from some key countries as a result of improved international relations. The United States of America has been Liberia's long time traditional friend, and that relationship has translated into somehow a mother and child relationship; practically everything including flag, constitutions and other significance holidays as well as mode of education of Liberia have all been modeled on the ones of the USA. The USA has supported the rehabilitation of war ravished Liberia through enormous aids and grants.

Also, China has been one of the countries that over the years has provided development aid to Liberia that is aimed at rebuilding the Liberian economy and infrastructure, and has also provided scholarships for Liberian students to study in China. These and many initiatives are part of China's strategy towards strengthening

¹Kurlantzick J. et al; (2006) China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy? Washington, D C.

²Ministry of Labour, Liberia Labour Force Survey 2010, Monrovia, Liberia.

international relations and becoming a strong political influence in the region. The sustainability of these strategies may be an illusion if they are not perceived by the various stakeholders or beneficiaries to be a greater opportunity. China has been criticized for the kind of aid provided to developing countries. In Liberia, China provided aid for the revamping of roads in the capital. Recently, most of the roads constructed by Chinese engineers lasted for less than a year thereby prompting the users to nick-name the roads “made in China roads³”.

According to Reeves et al⁴, Liberia needs to learn from past history that saw the nation accumulating lot of high currencies for the exports of her natural resources; they argued that the miraculous economic growth that took place in Liberia between 1960-1970 was not translated into inclusive economic development which further plunged the country into economic and social instability suggesting that economy was grossly mismanaged. This situation can be alluded to what Professor Joseph Stiglitz referred to as Resource Curse⁵

With the country still trying to recover from the many years of political, social and economic instability coupled with the quest of many foreign investors to invest in the country’s enormous discovered and undiscovered natural resources, many Liberians would imagine that it is about time that the government sees reason to avert what was done and experienced in the past. If the investments are to be translated into sustainable economic and social development, the nation needs to prepare itself by developing her human resources mainly the youth for the opportunities and challenges that may accompany the investments. There will be even more investors with good intentions coming in when there are capacities to support them in country instead of

³ Stated by many residence of the AB Tolbert Road and SKD Boulevard communities in Monrovia

⁴Wilmot A. Reeves, “Liberia’s Historic Struggle To Escape The Resource Curse” Economic Watch, November 23, 2012, accessed June 2013.

⁵Ibid.

paying high cost for expatriate staff. Another key element that needs to be put in place to boost the investment climate is the improvement of the infrastructures including power electricity, roads, housing and roads.

In a further attempt to improve the economic, lives of the youth and international relations, Reeves et al accepted the framework that was advanced by Stiglitz at it relates to the effect of the curse; they pointed out three specific symptoms and their effects on the economic development of the nation. They named Corruption & Rent-Seeking by Officials, volatility of price of resources on the international market, the Dutch Disease and I will add low human capital. I will further argue that despite the proliferation of the first two symptoms, Liberia can still replace the years that the locust has eaten by intentionally developing her human capital, which will then in fact lead to minimizing the effect of the Dutch Disease. The disease has existed and will continue to exist because, investors have seen that the nation does not have the human capacity that will enable them to open, and effectively operate firms that will produce and export quality goods and services, that being the case, China has over the years provided scholarships to Liberian students to study in various fields in Chinese universities. By 2008, an estimated 120,000 students including Liberians and other Africans will travel from abroad to go to college at a Chinese university, up from 8,000 less than a decade before⁶.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

Liberia has a population of less than 4 million with more than 70 percent being youth who are mostly employed in the informal setting. The prolonged and intermittent civil from 1989 to 2003 in Liberia left many young people missing out on formal and

⁶Kurlantzick J. et al: China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy December 12, 2006 Washington, D.C.

informal education with more than 20,000 of them associated with armed forces/groups⁷. Because of that and many other factors, many of the youth in Liberia do not have marketable skills to enhance their empowerment; though Liberia has enormous natural resources that have attracted many multinational corporation and nations, but the country is not able to leverage on such a gift to empower the youth through the creation of employment opportunity. Therefore, the Government of Liberia will always be pushed to try to find some means of income generation for the youth to avert the possibilities of them (youth) getting involved in further crime or used to destabilize the already fragile peace. With the increased number of youth that are currently being enrolled and graduated from higher institutions of learning, and with the launch of the Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)⁸, issues concerning the youth were highlighted in the PRS; one key one has to do with the growing incidence of youth led violence as a potentially volatile security challenge⁹. Those uncivilized behaviors have been attributed to the idleness of the youth, and it has the propensity to hold back potential investors¹⁰. The strategy has outlined some key areas to be considered in the creation of job for the youth; this included engaging youth in the formal agriculture sectors and provision of loans to small businesses. With these and many more, it is important to establish how the empowerment of youth can contribute to creating sustainable international relations between or among states.

The sustainable empowerment of youth is very critical to the growth and development of any nations; that is why many leaders are very categorical about including it as a part of their development agenda. But the attainment of that agenda

⁷UNICEF; Specht, I.&Tefferi, H.. Impact Evaluation of Programme for Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) in Liberia. 2007, Monrovia, Liberia.

⁸Government of Liberia Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008, Monrovia, Liberia.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid

may become another debacle. If it is going to be achieved, several factors amongst which are the human capital development, improved international relations, improved security and investment environments, and the diversification of products and availability of infrastructure need to be taken into consideration.

Many studies (Beacon¹¹, the Common Wealth Youth Empowerment, Berger 2007) have all lamented heavily on the relations between youth empowerment and international relations particularly looking at sports and vocational skills. However, there is limited evidence of such a study in Africa especially in post war countries. In the case of Liberia, there is no evidence on how empowerment of youth has led to improving diplomatic relations. Understanding how youth empowerment can contribute to sustainable international relations will help nation states to better plan youth empowerment program skewed towards strengthening international relations. Moreover, this study will seek to contribute to current body of knowledge on youth empowerment as it links to international relations. The above mentioned problem presents several conceptual and policy issues that the study will need to find out. To what extent does training in formal and informal education influence the empowerment of youth? How are government policies and laws on the empowerment of youth developed to strengthen international relations? What is the role of a supportive environment in attaining sustainable youth empowerment? To what extent does peace and security promote international relations to enhance youth empowerment? These questions will be the driving force behind this study.

¹¹Beacon, Aaron; Sports in International Relations; A Case for Cross-Disciplinary Investigation

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to examine the significance of youth empowerment to the realization of sustainable international relations to post-war Liberia. More specially, the study intends to:

- i) Provide an overview of youth empowerment in post-war Liberia
- ii) Investigate the extent to which youth empowerment in developing countries can be a strategy for fostering sustainable international relations
- iii) Analyze role of youth empowerment to the economic and social development of a post-war Liberia

1.4 Literature review

This section will focus mainly on three key categories, the concept of empowerment; youth empowerment and international relations; empowerment as an element of youth empowerment.

1.4.1 The concept of empowerment

Empowerment may be viewed from several angles, depending on the context and who is involved. In management, empowerment may take the form of delegation; in the academic setting, it would mean giving the learner skills to enable them take up their responsibility in the society. Empowerment means having the ability for supporting enabling conditions under which one can act on their own without much instruction from others¹². But to some extent, there exist a very thick correlation between empowerment and development; in fact, empowerment can be seen as the independent variable to development from multiple dimensions. There is no way one

¹²African Union. African Youth Decade 2009–2018 Plan of Action. (2011) [Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development, Road Map towards the Implementation of the African Youth Charter.](#)

can be empowered without the requisite resources, structure or environment for development; empowerment will mean the capacity to implement. Some other scholars have mentioned their own thoughts on what empowerment is; Empowerment is a process of transitioning from a state of powerlessness to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny, and environment.

Today, saying of youth empowerment is on the lips of every young person in Africa; but they never want to endure the pains for the gains, but rather want to attain the gains on a silver platter; even if one gets empowered at the expense of another, she/he still needs the relevant knowledge and skills to sustain such empowerment. Therefore empowerment without sustainability is empowerment in vain. Also, it is worth mentioning that there is a difference between the ability to act because there is no other alternative and lack of ability to act. In economics, empowerment could mean provision of loan services to the needy. According to Rappoport it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts¹³.

1.4.2 Youth empowerment and international relations

In an effort to meet Millennium Development Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development, developed countries are building partnerships with developing countries to strengthen institutions that are very fundamental to the sustainable development of their alias.

The phenomenon of youth empowerment has taken center stage at national, regional, continental and global forums where players in international relations have found it impossible to progress with development, trade, and other social services

¹³ J. Rappoport: Paper titled, "Terms of empowerment people. program. policy professional" presented at the American Psychological Association, August 1986

without the empowerment of the youth. Towards this end, continental, and global institutions/bodies have begun formulating laws and policies that will foster youth empowerment programme. In Africa, the African Union has established and passed the African Youth Charter which recognized youth as partners, assets, and prerequisite for sustainable development, and peace of African in the present and future; the charter is also guided by the New Partnership for Africa's Development Strategic Framework for Youth Programme of 2004 that is working towards youth empowerment and development¹⁴.

In the Common Wealth, there is the Common Wealth Youth Programme (CYP) launched the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) in 2000. It is a framework document for governmental, inter-governmental and civil society action for and with young people in the Commonwealth¹⁵.

Globally several protocols, resolutions, and institutions have been established to tackle the growing calls for the empowerment of youth; The Millennium Development Goals (Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger) and other key documents have stressed the need for the United Nations and its member states to take significant steps toward improving the situation of youths in their respective continents and countries. But one may argue that all of those plans and documents may not serve the ultimate goal of empowering youth when the participation of the youth themselves in decision making is minimal; youth should be viewed as valued partners in their own empowerment. According to Kirby & Bryson and as quoted by Morton and Montgomery, the participation of youth aim to improve young people's belief in their own worth as well as in their ability to shape their lives and

¹⁴African Union. African Youth Charter, adopted 2 July 2006. African Union Commission, Addis Ababa.

¹⁵Common Wealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015.

environments¹⁶. Youth empowerment programmes must ensure that the concepts of self-efficacy and self-esteem of the youth is enhanced if the programmes are going to yield success.

Sport is one of the growing phenomenon through which youth are being empowered and it is improving international relations among nations. Today, we see African athletes/players are among the best and highly paid in the global sporting arena; most of them have uses their incomes to establish business that have created further employment opportunity for their countrymen; also the popularity of those athletes has helped to improve the image of African countries among the committee of nations; some countries in Africa are only know by the names of their sporting legends. Because of the level of superb performance good sportsmanship exhibited by those athletes, UN agencies are engaging them to serve as “Good Will Ambassadors” for highlighting the significance of certain initiative. According to Thomas Kuhn and as quoted in¹⁷, a Case for Cross-Disciplinary Investigation, because of the high area of specializations, a man would feel more fulfilled if he masters in a particular area and has some working knowledge in other areas, meaning it is becoming difficult to negate the fact that many social problems cannot be resolved through one area of academic specialization¹⁸.

Beacon also argued that the trend which sport has taken in international relations may be worthy of recognition in international relations or diplomatic circles. He gave concrete examples of how participation in international sporting events has had some diplomatic or international relations concerns. He mentioned the case of the withdrawal of the invitation extended to the then Rhodesia to the 1968 Mexico

¹⁶ See Protocol for a systematic review Youth empowerment programs for improving self-efficacy and self-esteem of adolescents, approved 2010.

¹⁷ Aaron Beacon, Sports in International Relations: A Case for Cross-Disciplinary Investigation P.2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Olympics, because of attempts by the white dominated government to unilateral declaration of independence from the UK¹⁹. Similarly, it can be recalled how Nigeria's Super Eagle Team was withdrew from the 1996 African Cup of Nations in South Africa due to international pressure on the Nigerian Government for the killing of a renounced political giant; but the Nigerian government said the withdrawal; of the team was drew to security concerns.

1.4.3 Employment as an element of youth empowerment

In post conflict countries, the empowerment of youth in the form of employment is fundamental to the growth and development of those countries but their social empowerment is also very important. Most of the civil wars in sub-Sahara Africa have seen children and young people being exploited as fighters to meet the goal of greedy politicians or warlords; the reasons for the recruitment of those youth can be attributed to the lower enrolment and retention of mainly males in secondary education or vocational education this was according to Collier and Hoeffler²⁰ and as quoted by Francis Teal. Collier and Hoeffler further argued that civil conflicts are driven by economic interest rather than economic grievance suggest that the costs of war may be reduced by the opportunity cost of the labour of young men, this will increase the probability of conflict²¹. At this juncture, it is eminent that there is a correlation between youth empowerment through employment and development of a nation state, and their international relations.

Income and employment have been seen to reduce conflict; many empirical findings have tried to associate the lack of income to the cause of conflicts, while

¹⁹ Common Wealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015.

²⁰ P. Collier, Hoeffler, A.: Greed and Grievance in Civil War CSAE WPS/2002-01.

²¹ Francis Teal: World Bank Headline Seminar: Promoting Inclusive Growth and Employment in Fragile Situations Background Paper on Growth and Employment in Conflict-afflicted States.

others have vehemently rejected those findings²². Though, those that opposed the view that no or low income or employment can induce civil conflict may be right to some extent, but, research has found reasons to go with the views of those in favor; often times, the youths are referred to as the future of a nation; if this statement is anything to rely on, then society must make intrinsic and extrinsic efforts to prepare the youth to take up the future responsibilities.. If governments in conflict affected states like Liberia do not want to return to civil crisis anymore, there is a need to put words into actions by ensuring that the young people are engaged in meaningful and participatory initiatives that do not give them the time to engage into negative coping mechanisms as a means of income generation. Laws and policies need to be formulated, implemented and evaluated with the participation of those very youth into youth-led programmes that may even enhance their opportunities for future development.

1.4.4 Literature gap

There are many literatures on youth empowerment both at national and international levels; they have all presented great thoughts and ideas on how youth unempowerment has the propensity of running the world into future crisis. The gap in the literatures has to do with the limitation on how youth can be supported to develop the perception of themselves when it comes to their empowerment on one hand, and how the community or adult perceive the youth in their empowerment on the other hand. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are critical concepts that may have to be considered. Another gap that is yet to be filled is how youth empowerment can promote international relations? Does youth empowerment form part of the grand

²² Francis Teal: World Bank Headline Seminar: Promoting Inclusive Growth and Employment in Fragile Situations Background Paper on Growth and Employment in Conflict-afflicted States.

strategy and/or foreign policy of a nation? This study would like to fill some of these gaps through this study.

1.5 Justification of the study

This study is driven by the need to fully measure and understand the extent to which youth empowerment can promote sustainable international relations between nation states. The fact that there are limited scholastic analyses on how youth empowerment can influence sustainable international relations, this study shall therefore seek to contribute to the academic writings that are geared towards youth empowerment, with specific emphasis on influencing international relations between nation states using youth as a model. In terms of policy development, the findings from this paper are expected to contribute immensely to governments' efforts in the development of youth empowerment policies thereby reducing mistakes made by decision makers in the past. The findings from this study will also be used in future research on the same area. It is also hoped that the findings from this study will contribute to the information of stakeholders in youth empowerment programmes of the significance of developing a contextual and targeted youth empowerment programme and lastly to contribute to the growth of knowledge in the subject area by shedding more light on the intricacy involved in the empowerment and development of youth.

1.6 Hypotheses

The study will test the following hypotheses:

- i) Youth empowerment can be a good strategy to foster international relations;
- ii) Youth employment is a prerequisite for empowerment;

- iii) Youth empowerment can lead to sustainable socio-economic and cultural development of a nation.

1.7 Conceptual framework

Youth empowerment is meant to prepare the youth to take up the uphill task of developing their country. This empowerment will require diversified approaches and variables that will bring together a combination of actors and factors including the youth. In their commitment to developing laws and policies, the African Union stated *“that Africa’s greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation; Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead”*²³. This is a clear manifestation of the commitment of African leaders toward a sustainable future for the countries. This cannot go without stating the contribution of the local and national duty bearers; governments need to develop, implement and monitor policies that will go a long way ensuring that the youth do not become idled and engage in illegal activities. When it comes to the variable of supportive environment, the perception of adults towards youth is still fluid, Alex de Waal asserted that *“youth is a problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category, chiefly defined by what it is not: youth are not dependent children, nor are they independent, socially responsible adults”*²⁴. And unless this notation is eradicated, the process of youth empowerment will have a daunting effect; youth should not be seen as passive but rather active participants in the development of their community, nations and their own empowerment. According to some social scientists (Fuller, Pitts and Jack

²³African Union. African Youth Charter, July 2006. African Union Commission, Addis Ababa.

²⁴De Waal, A. (2002) *Realizing child rights in Africa: children, young people and leadership*. In De Waal, A. and Argenti, N. (eds) *Young Africa: realizing the rights of children and youth*. Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press.

Goldstone) developing countries whose populations are ‘youth heavy’ are especially vulnerable to civil conflict²⁵.

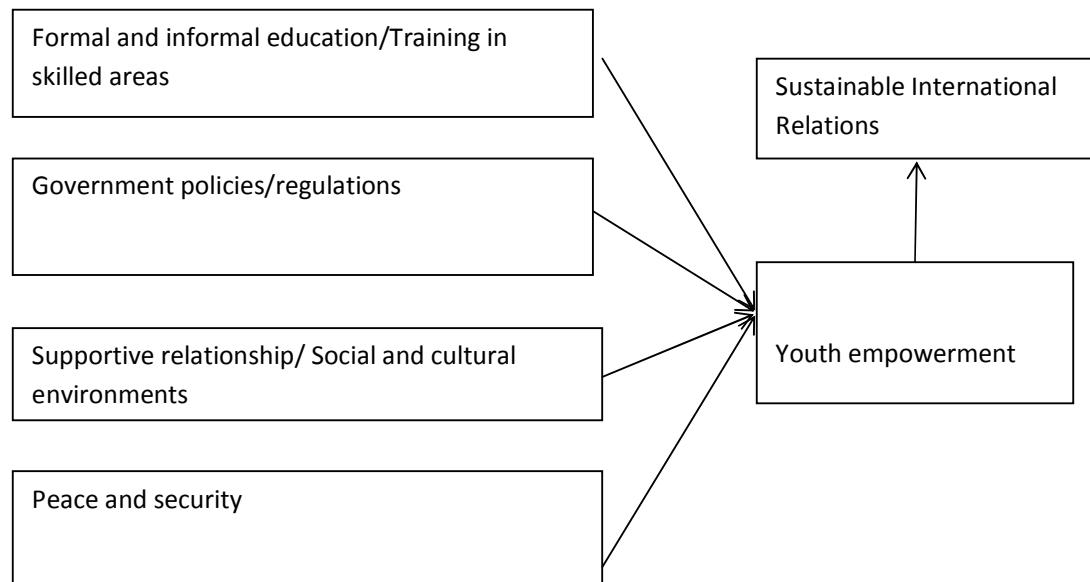
The enabling environment, in this case, peer group, family members, community members, infrastructures or services will contribute immensely to those initiatives. According to Aaron Beacon, sport is one of the means through which the empowerment of youth can be enhanced²⁶. But that can only be achieved based on the environment in which youth find themselves and the perception of the adults about youth empowerment. In the same vein, other proponents of youth empowerment have seen the empowerment of youth as call to action; *“CYP works to engage and empower young people to enhance their contribution to development. We do this in partnership with young people, governments and other key stakeholders. Our mission is grounded within a rights-based approach, guided by the realities facing young people in the Commonwealth, and anchored in the belief that young people are: A force for peace, democracy, equality and good governance a catalyst for global consensus building; and an essential resource for sustainable development and poverty eradication”*²⁷.

²⁵ See Mutisi Martha, Interrogating traditional youth theory: Youth peace building and engagement in post-conflict Liberia/

²⁶ Beacon, Aaron; Sports in International Relations; A Case for Cross-Disciplinary Investigation.

²⁷ Common Wealth Plan of Action for youth empowerment 2007-2015.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework



1.8 Research methodology

This research was conducted using qualitative research methods and used case studies as its main strategy. Primary data was collected through formal interviews with key actors in the empowerment programme and international relations arena. Secondary data was collected from published and unpublished materials concerning the disarmament, empowerment of Youth to strengthen international relations as written by other researchers, and agencies staff.

Snowball sampling was used by the researcher because most of the respondents were very difficult to meet in specific locations. A review of secondary data/information on the study topic was carried out to synthesize what past researches, reports or studies have found out and produced on the topic and their key recommendations. In view of the above, this study reviewed evaluation reports from training and vocational education institutions, Ministries of Youth and Sports, Labour, education as well as literature from various researchers.

1.9 Chapter outline

This study is structured around five chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction to the study

Chapter Two: Empowerment of Youth in Developing Countries, A Strategy for Fostering Sustainable International Relations: An Overview

Chapter Three: Youth Empowerment in Post-War Liberia: A Critical Assessment 1989 - 2012

Chapter Four: Youth Empowerment in Post-War Liberia: A Critical Analysis

Chapter Five: Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN POST-WAR LIBERIA: AN OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has introduced the youth empowerment, and stated reasons why youth empowerment should be considered critically in the development agenda of all nations, be it developed or developing. The empowerment of youth in Africa like other continents of the world continues to ring bells in the ears of global, continental and national leaders, parents and youth themselves. Policy papers upon policy papers have been developed, conferences held in all of the continents with limited substantial commitment.

This chapter will present a historical analysis of youth empowerment at the global, continental, regional and national levels. The historical background will take into consideration the existing framework, policy development, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the roles of government, community, and the youth themselves in the process of youth empowerment. At the various levels, this paper will look at those key documents and players that are involved in youth empowerment; at the global level, some of the key documents and players will include, the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, the International Convent on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976) Millennium Development Goals; the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, and the Commonwealth Youth empowerment programme; at the continental level, the African Youth Charter, the Pan African Youth Forum; at the regional, the ECOWAS Youth Policy, and other key documents will be reviewed.

Lastly, the national documents will include the national Youth policy, institutions and programmes that are in place for the empowerment of youth, strength, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges will be highly considered.

2.2 Youth empowerment at international level

2.2.1 Existing framework for youth empowerment

Often times, global leaders at the continental and United Nations levels have always highlighted the need for the empowerment of young people around the world if the youths are to up keep the positive societal values that have been created; the increased interest has also led to a high priority in youth related activities in United Nations Systems. The United Nations Programme on Youth Development established at the United Nations Headquarters. In furtherance of its effort to promote your development, in 2010, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development as a global entity which is composed of UN entities represented at Headquarters levels was established to concentrate on youth matters; the aim of the Network is to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all relevant UN entities, while respecting and harnessing the benefits of their individual strengths and unique approaches and mandates²⁸. The United Nations General Assembly issued resolution (A/RES/64/130) welcoming the efforts of the network, and requested the UN Secretary General to provide the General Assembly in its sixty-sixth session through the Commission on Social Development with a progress report on the coordination amongst UN entities. These are but few of the initiatives undertaken by the global body to harness youth empowerment.

²⁸ United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development

Young people are viewed as the future leaders, hence, their capacities must be built to enable them take up the responsibilities that shall come before them as responsible adults. There are very high expectations of youth from adults in the world, regions and nations, therefore working to ensure the full socio-economic, cultural and political empowerments of youth have taken a center stage at every global forum. Commissions, committees, and conventions have all been adopted to ensure the smooth and successful implementation of such. The United Nations through the General Assembly has been very categorical about the necessity associated with the empowerment of youth the world over; the establishment of a programme on youth development and the declaration of August 2010-2011 as International Year of Youth are a clear manifestation of the UN's commitment to prioritizing youth development.

2.2.2 Agencies responsible for youth empowerment

The United Nations and other intergovernmental entities have established departments that are to focus on the development and empowerment of youth. At the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Youth Development Programme, and International Labour Organization (ILO) and at the level of continental intergovernmental organizations, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the World Bank as well as other relevant commissions have been mandated to work in promoting youth development and empowerment. These agencies coordinate with regional groupings and national governments as well as youth bodies to highlight and implement youth empowerment or development initiatives. The various entities provide specialized support to the youth as per their mandate. UNESCO has taken major steps in empowering youth for peace and sustainable development programme using complementary, transversal and interlinked axes; Axis 1, Policy formulation with the

participation of youth; Axis 2, Capacity development for the transition to adulthood and Axis 3, Civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation²⁹. These axes will help in promoting and unleashing the potential of youth especially the most marginalized in their empowerment, and to eradicate the challenges posed to their empowerment.

2.2.3 Policies and strategies on youth empowerment

In an effort to promote the development and empowerment of youth the world over, the ILO, UN Programme on Youth, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, Commonwealth, AU, and various continental bodies have worked collaboratively to improve the lives of the growing youthful population through sustainable development and or empowerment programme. With that in mind, there exist a need to develop appropriate policies that will guide the process. In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed and subsequently ratified by all but two Members States; Article 12 of that convention states that states parties shall respect the views of children in matter of concern to them, and Article 13 calls for the children to be allowed to express themselves feely on issues of concern to them³⁰. In the same way, the ILO and her partners in an effort to protect children that are at risk of exploitative labour pushed for the passage of conventions 182 (1999) on the worst form of child labour, and 138 (1973) on the minimum age of employment of children. Those conventions serve a guide for the recruitment, empowerment and use of children in various industries. In similar vein, the Commonwealth states established the Commonwealth Youth Programme that later adopted the Commonwealth Plan of

²⁹ United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization; Consultations of the Director-General with Member States Youth as CHANGE-MAKERS for Peace and Sustainable Development Youth as Beneficiaries Youth as Actors Youth as Partners, 21 November 2012

³⁰United Nations United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, December 1989, New York

Action for Youth Empowerment(PAYE) 2007-2015; the AU also came up with the African Youth Charter in 2006.

At their meeting in Edinburg in 1997, Commonwealth Heads of Government recognized the needs to empower youth for sustainable development and peace, so they endorsed the youth empowerment plan. Subsequently in 2005, the first plan of action was approved thereby giving birth to the Youth action plan. The Commonwealth Youth Programme having launched the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, it was indicated that the action plan would be implemented by national government in all youth empowerment initiatives, and that ministers of youth affairs will be requested to make report on progress made on the action plan.

2.2.4 Policy and strategy implementation

The implementation of any policy will fall into the docket of the participating members; in this case, intergovernmental organizations, continental or regional bodies, national governments, and youth related organizations. But the successful implementation will be highly dependent on the ownership of the document; It is expected that upon adoption of the policy, strategies are developed for the effective implementation and monitoring of such policy at all levels. The successful implementation of the policies and strategies will require a sound institutional framework and active political, administrative and technical support for the translation of goals, objectives, policies and strategies into actual programmes at all levels of UN, EU AU, sub regional bodies, parliamentary groupings, national governments and youth groups; and taking into consideration that addressing youth concerns requires a multi-sectoral approach, therefore concerted efforts from the

private, public sectors, religious groupings, and families are required. In the situation of youth, many times the policies do not sink down well because there are inconsistencies between the need of the youth who are both duty bearers, and rights holders on one hand and those that formed the policies on the other hand. This may be a result of the lack of participation of the youth during the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process.

2.2.5 Role of youth in their own empowerment

In December 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child was adopted by Members States of the UN; in that convention, article 12 emphasizes the freedom of participation of all young people in decisions affecting their lives and state parties shall respect those views. Towards that end, the involvement of youth in all aspects of society is very fundamental to their empowerment and sustainability. The youth are the main drivers of change, they should be seen as partners and participants to their cause, and to achieve this change, they (youth) need to be supported by all spectrums of society; claiming respect for fundamental freedoms and rights, improved conditions for them and their communities, together with opportunities to learn, work and participate in decisions that affect them³¹. The enabling environment must be created to ensure that the role of youth in their own empowerment is not compromised. In some culture, and traditions, this may be seen as a taboo; this is where the work in essence should begin. Intergovernmental bodies should design strategies that will sensitize the youth and adults on the roles and responsibilities of youth in decision making, given that they are perceived as the future leaders. Despite the increasing calls for youth to be participants in their empowerment, very little

³¹ United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization; Consultations of the Director-General with Member States Youth as CHANGE-MAKERS for Peace and Sustainable Development Youth as Beneficiaries Youth as Actors Youth as Partners, 21 November 2012

empirical evidence is being provided on the extent to which the “participation” is yielding the right results. The participation should not be sporadic but rather structured so as to provide the scene for real influence of youth in the running and decision making of the programme. The UN, AU, EU, and World Bank have developed strategies on youth participation, but to some extent, the fruits of genuine participations are still be gathered.

2.3 Youth empowerment at regional and sub-regional level

2.3.1 Frameworks for youth empowerment in Africa

The then Organization of African Unity and now the African Union has taken all measure to ensure the sustainable empowerment of African youth; the preamble of the African Youth Charter, it is emphatically stated that the youth is an asset, partners, and their invaluable role in all spectrum of the continent, therefore, their empowerment should not be underestimated³². In July 2006, the Seventh Ordinary Session of the assembly of heads of state and governments adopted the African Youth Charter a part of the framework for the empowerment of youth. In the charter several articles have been highlighted to bring to fulfillment the dreams of the African leaders. Among the articles that are worth mentioning in here are: Article 13 and its various sub-sections which highlight the promotion of Education and skills development of youth to prepare them for the future responsibilities in society, the development of the youth needs to be holistic; the charter also encourages all members state to formulate appropriate national Youth Policy that is comprehensive and coherent for the attainment of youth empowerment. The African Youth Charter is known as a social contract between states and youth which response to the priority

³² African Union. African Youth Charter, July 2006. African Union Commission, Addis Ababa

needs regarding their empowerment and development³³. In Africa, the youth constitutes more than 20 percent of the total population and 36.8 percent of the workforce³⁴.

Towards the realization of the objectives of the African Youth Charter, the African Youth decade 2009-2019 was declared in January 2009, and the accompanying plan of actions were adopted as a roadmap that will support the development of national and regional plans of action. The document is a framework that is meant to accelerate the process of youth empowerment and development. The roadmap calls for a concerted efforts on the parts of all stakeholders to establish framework at the country levels to promote the empowerment of youth.

2.3.2 Policies and strategy on youth empowerment

African Heads of State and governments recognizing the enormous task of empowering the alarming youthful population and cognizant of the fact that Africa's greatest resources was its youthful population, the African leaders saw the need to develop policies and strategies that will help them design and run programme aim at empowering the youth to actively and fully participate in making decision affecting their lives thereby preparing them to meet the growing global challenges. In July 2006 at the meeting of Heads of State and governments in Banjul, The Gambia, the African Youth Charter was adopted; though the document is yet to be signed by all of the member states but it manifests the willingness of African leaders to promote the empowerment of youth. Also, the AU has initiated many other programmes that would promote the development and empowerment of youth; the launched of a Youth

³³ African Union. African Youth Charter, July 2006. African Union Commission, Addis Ababa.

³⁴ Regional Overview of Youth in Africa; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth; facts sheets December 2011.

Desk by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), that will give the youth the platform to make their voices heard in decisions making; the adoption of the ten year plan of action 2009-2018 for youth empowerment and development, the AU Youth Volunteer Corps, the International Year of Youth in November 2010 and the adoption of the African Union's Second Education Plan of Action (2006-2015) among others are some of the strategies that the AU has designed to empower the youth in Africa³⁵. These gains can only be concretized by the unwavering commitment of national governments.

The Millennium Development Goals is one of the strategies adopted by African leaders in promoting the empowerment of youth. Tremendous efforts have been made to meet the goals as reported by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; school enrolment has increased, the prevalence mortality rates of HIV/AIDS infections has fallen, and youth unemployment is reducing.

2.3.3 Challenges

The dream of fully empowering youth in Africa has faced many challenges some of which are very much above the control of the regional and national governments. Education, health, conflicts, and full participation in youth formulation and implementation of youth related policies may be viewed as some of the major challenges to the sustainable empowerment of youth.

Education at all levels is very critical for the sustainable empowerment of youth in Africa. The enrolment and retention of African youth in primary, secondary and tertiary education system has been encouraging courtesy of the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs). According to the Africa's report on the MGDs as

³⁵ Regional Overview of Youth in Africa United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth; facts sheets December 2011.

reported by United Nations MGD 2010 report, school enrolment in West, East and southern African increased from 58% in 1999 to 76% in 2008, while North Africa saw a huge enrolment of 78% in 1999 to 94% in 2008 with Algeria and Mauritius having the highest enrolment in tertiary education at 31% and 26% respectively³⁶. The extent to which the attainment of this formal education will contribute to the effective empowerment of the youth in the face of the challenge of the global economic market will remain to be seen. In May 2012 at the National Conference on the theme “Towards a New Growth Strategy for Employment, Decent Work and Development in Zambia”, one of the presenters (Mr. Mwaka Kopakopa, Youth Entrepreneur) called for the need to include skills in entrepreneurship and small business management for learners at the very early age to enable them establish and run their own business to cut down the dependency on government and other private sectors for empowerment³⁷.

Health is another critical challenge encountered by initiatives towards empowerment of youth; in Africa, structural challenges and lack of adequate budgetary allocations for quality health care services can be classified as one of the stumbling blocks to youth empowerment. HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and violence are said to be the major killers of young people in Africa thereby reducing the workforce of the continent. Poverty has led to increased prostitution among young boys and girls in order to access basic livelihood or income generation. It is however worth noting that since the coming of the MGDs, there has been a reduction in number of deaths. In 2007, an estimated 3.2 million young people were living with

³⁶ Regional Overview of Youth in Africa United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth; facts sheets, December 2011.

³⁷ 2012 National Conference: Towards A New Growth Strategy for Employment, Decent Work And Development In Zambia 21 – 22 May, 2012 New Government Complex, Lusaka

HIV in sub-Saharan Africa alone. More than one out of two deaths among young African females is as a result of AIDS or AIDS- related illnesses³⁸.

Conflicts and other civil unrests in Africa have contributed immensely to the poor empowerment of youth on the continent. The last twenty years have seen many African countries plunged into civil crises or political uprisings which have even led to the proliferations of small arms and light weapons on the continent. The unrests caused enormous destruction of education, medical, and other employment institutions consequently rendering the youth people unemployed. Rehabilitation services available for youth affected by the conflicts may not be adequately equipped to provide the requisite knowledge and skills to empower the youth for sustainable reintegration into the larger society.

Also, the participation of youth in decision affecting their lives is one of the ways of promoting the empowerment of youth. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stressed the participation of children in decision affecting their lives in accordance with their and maturity³⁹ In Africa, children or young people's voices in issues affecting their lives are not prioritized by the adults, therefore the participation of youth in policy development and implementation is but a mere show off. Therefore issues affecting young people are often times designed and implemented by leaders; the only role for the youth is to abide by those laws and policies.

³⁸ Regional Overview of Youth in Africa United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth; facts sheets December 2011

³⁹United Nations. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Article 12, December 1989, New York

2.4. Youth empowerment at the national level

2.4.1 Review and analysis of national youth empowerment policies and related documents

The 14 years of civil war in Liberia saw most of the youth in the country being adversely affected either as perpetrators or victims. The rehabilitation of those affected youth to take up meaningful roles in development of the society is very critical to the social and economic development of the war ravished nation. Notwithstanding, the Government of Liberia and her development partners have been working tirelessly to promote the empowerment of the Liberian youth. The Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy, the national Youth Policy, the African Youth Charter, the Liberian Youth Employment and Economic Empowerment Strategy are but few of the policy frameworks put in place to institutionalize youth empowerment. The national youth policy is guided by the Liberian constitution and the African Youth Charter, Yet, the realization of those objectives will remain a mere fantasy without the fullest commitment, and the involvement of the youth at all stages of the process. Various arms of government must be selfless in developing and passing bills that will promote the empowerment of youth to be capable of taking up the mantle of responsibilities for running the affairs of the country.

In 2008, the Liberian Government developed and adopted her poverty reduction strategies; and later launched the 20-30 Vision, and a national youth policy. In the poverty reduction strategies, the government has mentioned the development of policy such as Liberia National Youth Employment Action Plan which will be implemented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and monitored by the ministry of Labour; there is no semblance of how the youth will be a partner and participant in this endeavor; in the same strategy, the government plans to develop a Children's Act

and establish national and community-based mechanisms to enhance children and youth participation; the revitalization and establishment of technical and Vocational Education Programme to provide youth with marketable skills; the participation of children and youth in legislative sittings are amongst some of the initiatives planned for the empowerment of youth in Liberia⁴⁰. The reality of some of these plans will be reviewed by this research.

The Liberian National Youth Policy was revised in 2012 with the goal of promoting youth participation in national decision making. The realization of the objectives will require deliberate and concerted efforts from all stakeholders including national legislature, public and private sectors and the youth themselves. The national Youth Policy has set key objectives, targets, implementation and monitoring mechanisms so as to effectively achieve the set objectives. There are some loopholes in some of the mechanisms that were established. If youth are going to take over as future leaders, the mentoring process should begin now; there must be programmes developed to promote national youth service at which time, the youth will get to understand what volunteerism is about and their obligation to national development; this was not among the priority themes presented in the youth policy; also, the monitoring of impacts made against the policy should not be done by those responsible for the implementation as indicated in the monitoring and evaluation plan; to effectively gather gains made and to effect accountability, there is a need to established a neutral body to conduct the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the policy.

⁴⁰Government of Liberia, Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008, Monrovia, Liberia

2.4.2 Coordination among government agencies on youth empowerment

The Government of Liberia through the Acts of national Legislature has established several ministries and agencies that coordinate youth empowerment programmes; the principal ministry is the Ministry of Youth and Sports; the Ministries of Education, Labour, Health and Social Welfare and Gender are all part. They all have specific functions when it comes to youth empowerment programmes and such programmes are to be well coordinated in collaboration with relevant INGOs and NGOs to achieve the objectives of the programmes.

Roles of each ministry

Ministry of Youth and Sports

Coordinates all youth related programme through various departments within the ministry, and youth led organizations. The ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Education plan and execute technical and vocational education.

Develop vocational training opportunities for youth linked to labor market projections and other youth livelihood schemes

Establish agricultural and MSME programs such as management training and skills development to create employment opportunities for youth, women and the vulnerable

Ministry of Education

Strengthening the accessibility, quality, and curriculum of skills and vocational training institution

Establish agricultural and MSME programs such as management training and skills development to create employment opportunities for youth, women and the vulnerable

Provide skills training for MSMEs to promote the transition from the informal to the formal economy

Ministry of Labour

Establish an institutional framework for the Liberia Employment Action Program (LEAP)

Decentralize LEAP activities and train regional office staff

Promote community-based job creation through labor-intensive public works projects

Establish agricultural and MSME programs such as management training and skills development to create employment opportunities for youth, women and the vulnerable.

2.4.3 Review of existing institutions responsible for youth empowerment

Since the end of the Liberian civil war in 2003, the need for institutions responsible for the development and empowerment of youth has increased; 55 percent of Liberia's population is children and youth; more 50 percent of that population saw their lives devastated by the 14 year civil crisis. Getting them to rebuild their lives and take their rightful place in society in the absence of fully refurbished and operational institutions will be an up-hill task. The Government of Liberia through her various arms proposed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008 paper, the revitalization and establishment of formal educational and vocational and training institutions that will train the Liberian youth in various skills to enable them meet the global challenges. The improved international relation between Liberia and China has seen a Government of China's grant for the renovation, expansion and equipping of one of the nation's biggest vocational training centers, the Monrovia Vocational Training Center.

In order to reduce the rural urban migration of youth in search of better education or vocational education and to meet the needs of the growing youth population, the Government of Liberia needs to construct such institutions in the 15 counties of the country. Currently, there are four government owned multi-lateral high school and three vocational training institutions that are operating in the country⁴¹.

2.4.4 The role of public private partnership in enhancing youth empowerment

Governments the world over cannot are not able to single-handedly run the affairs of providing basic social services to her citizens; they will always need the involvement of a vibrant private sector to back them up. Liberia is no exception to such an initiative; but with the country trying to recover from the spillover of the long years of civil crisis, the private sector is still very slow in responding to the loud calls for investment; even those that have responded to some extent, they are still watching carefully. The government does not have the capacity to fully accommodate the huge number of youth onto her already overloaded wage bill. Since the end of the civil crisis in 2003, there has been a significant rise in the number of informal businesses operating in the country. Those informal businesses are vital to the improvement of the private sectors that will in turn support the empowerment of youth.

According to Tarway-Twalla, *“all IBs owners or persons in informal businesses (PIBs) paid for health services of household and extended family members; 61% in-school PIBs were supported by IBs, while 90% of PIBs financed in-school children/dependents through IBs. Further, IBs provided food security for 92% of PIBs and family member. Aside from the fact IBs are job opportunities, 5% of PIBs provided employment for other job seekers; majority of PIBs supported the housing*

⁴¹Government of Liberia, Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008, Monrovia, Liberia

needs of households; with 39% living in their own constructed houses through IBs; most of the PIBs who are renting pay rentage from IBs; 62% of IBs contributed to community projects; and 20% contributed to county development projects. Findings further indicated that IBs contributed to PSD because they created investment in CRL in post-conflict Liberia as compared to prior to the war.”⁴² It is assumed that there increased in the number of informal business in Liberia during and after the civil war has lessen some of the burdens that the government endured in the past. Those informal businesses have provided job opportunities for many youth thereby enhancing their empowerment. Tarway-Twalla’s findings further revealed that majority of those running the informal businesses were young adult who said they joined the business because it was the only means of livelihood available to them.

To further buttress the efforts of those youth that are involved in informal businesses, government may want to look into ways creating the enabling environment that will see multinational corporations creating more job opportunities for youth as per their qualification/skills; also government may need to look into formulating policies and laws that will see youth accessing loans from commercial banks to run their business.

2.4.5 The role of youth in their empowerment

The role of youth in their own empowerment is and will be the same across the African continent and to some extent in other continents. But for those proclaimed or acclaimed roles to be manifested, the relevant government and youth led organizations must very deliberate in sensitizing the young people of their rights and responsibilities through formal or informal medium; also, for the youth to effectively

⁴²Tarway-Twalla, Alfred K: Contribution of Informal Businesses (IBs) To Basic Social Services in the Central Region of Liberia: A Major Step Toward Post-Conflict Private Sectors Capacity Building and Development; Journal of Small Business Management 2008

claim those rights, their capacities must be developed in line with their age and maturity. The youth must be at the center of all youth oriented and other youth related programme to ensure that the intended objectives are achieved and sustainable; they should take the lead in developing, implementing and reviewing their projects.

2.4.6 Challenges

Liberia is just recovering from the nightmare of a 14 year civil crisis that led all of her all aspects of the social fabrics in ruins; limited health services and service provider, limited formal and informal education facilities, limited private sectors, breakdown of cultural and social norms, high rural urban migration in search of better living conditions, just to name but few. All the above mentioned have posed serious challenges in way of sustainable youth empowerment initiatives. The country has a literacy rate of 57 percent with male accounting for 66 percent and female 49 percent; also 255,000 representing 14.2% of the total population age 15+ years are said to have attended vocational training institutions⁴³; but the questions that stand are, to what extent do they master the skills to enable them compute in the market and to how many of them are now using the skills for income generations.

In Liberia, like in some other African countries, there are mismatch between the education/vocational training and the demand on the market; therefore, many of the skills/training acquired is not properly used. Also, many youth do not want to work in the informal setting where they will be self-employed, but rather, they want to perform work in offices or other white collar jobs. Finally, many adult or heads of institutions have the prejudice against youth leaving school, they have the mindset that the youth don not have experience, so they do not hire them. If the youth are not

⁴³Liberia, Ministry of Labour, *Liberian Labor Force Survey Report 2010*; Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), Monrovia, Liberia

given the opportunity to experience the job market, when and how will they ever be experienced? These are some of the common areas that the youth related ministries should try to galvanize their support through legislations to promote summer job opportunities for higher level students. These can all be classified as the major challenges that the youth face in their empowerment

2.5 Conclusion

Historical background on youth empowerment is more or less the same from the global, continental, sub-regional and national levels. They all emerged from the background of human rights involving various international instruments that are gear toward helping the young people attain their dreams of becoming useful citizens of the world; and also to prepare them to surmount the daunting task of future leadership. The UN, EU, AU, World Bank and other non-governmental institutions have worked endlessly to make that dream a reality. Laws, policies, legislative bills have all been highlighted the immeasurable values of the youth to this world. But if the laws, policies and legislations are to attain realization, it will require sound institutional framework and unwavering political, administrative and technical support for the translation of goals, objectives and strategies for youth empowerment programmes at all levels of society and taking into consideration youth as both partners and participants.

CHAPTER THREE

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN POST-WAR LIBERIA

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the historical analysis of youth empowerment at the global, continental, regional and national levels. The historical background will take into consideration the existing framework, policy development and implementation, the roles of government, community, and the youth themselves in the process of youth empowerment.

Counting on the qualitative research that was conducted in Monrovia, Montserrado County and Kakata, Margibi County all in Liberia, this chapter will try to link the results gathered from case studies of other secondary sources to come up with a comprehensive analysis of how youth empowerment can serve as a strategy for improved international relations. The research was conducted through key informant interviews of youth, and adults in and out of national and private leadership; and some observation. This chapter explains in-depth how key findings in this research will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area. There may be arguments of youth empowerment gaining some momentum in the country through seasonal or political initiatives aimed at highlighting youth empowerment, but this research goes deeper into investigating how those alleged “youth empowerment programmes” are contributing to Liberia’s international relations conversely, to what extent does Liberia’s international relationship with countries in the region or others regions of the world impact on the empowerment of youth. The Government of Liberia and her development partners have contributed significantly to the empowerment of youth especially the former combatants. Many individuals and institutions (Search for

Common Ground⁴⁴, Martha Mutisi⁴⁵, Christopher Maclay and AlpaslanÖzerdem⁴⁶ have done case studies and research on this subject. Several key factors in the development and empowerment of youth in various countries the world over and in particular those that Liberia has strong international relations with will be reviewed to respond to the research questions and the research topic.

This chapter also emphasizes the self-help initiatives which may not be the only means undertaken by youth in their own empowerment.

3.2 Government's mechanisms to empower the youth in post-war Liberia

Ever since the 14 years of civil war ended in Liberia in 2003, immense efforts have been made to empower the youth of Liberia, this stance from the fact that the youth of Liberia were the ones that were mostly affected by the civic crisis; they were part of those then children that associated with the fighting forces or groups in Liberia. The President of Liberia in her inaugural speech in 2006 emphasized the empowerment of youth as one of the key priorities of her government⁴⁷. To gauge the extent to which this priority has been achieved can only be assessed by the youth themselves. However, the GOL has been making frantic efforts to improve her foreign relations with many developed and developing countries that would be very influential in the empowerment of youth. According to one senior government official in charge of youth affairs interviewed during the research, “the Liberian government has received millions of dollars from the governments of China, and Sweden to promote youth empowerment, and also the GOL herself has taken initiatives to send Liberian youth

⁴⁴ Youth to Youth: Measuring Youth Engagement in Liberia 2012: Search for Common Ground, Ministry of Youth and sports, and American University

⁴⁵ Martha Mutisi. Interrogating traditional youth theory: [Youth peace building and engagement in post-conflict Liberia](#); 2012 African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).

⁴⁶ Maclay, C. and Ozerdem, A. (2010). [Use them or Lose Them](#). Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth through Socio-political Integration, International Peacekeeping

⁴⁷Inaugural speech: <http://www.emansion.gol.lr/doc> accessed on July 20, 2013

to Kenya, China, Tanzania, Ghana, USA for further studies”. The official further asserted that all of these are being done to fulfill the promise made by the president during her inaugural speech. The GOL has encouraged multinational corporations and other public corporations to initiate the vacation jobs programme to incorporate youth during their long vacation. All of these initiatives will need to be properly analyzed to see the degree to which they are impacting on the desired beneficiaries. Against this background, this research undertook to review the empowerment from two aspects; the depth, and breadth of the youth empowerment. The depth would look at the extent to which the empowerment programme is impacting on the economic development of youth, while the breadth will look at the social and political aspects of youth empowerment.

Similar analysis was carried out by Christopher Maclay and Alpaslan Özerdem in their writing ‘Use’ Them or ‘Lose’ Them: Engaging Liberia’s Disconnected Youth when they looked at the vertical and horizontal youth empowerment of youth in Liberia after the disarmament, demobilization and youth empowerment of ex-combatants⁴⁸. For this research, the vertical youth empowerment concentrated on how the government has been able to provide sustainable income generation activities for youth to enable them look after themselves and their dependents; the horizontal empowerment will look at the extent to which government is capacity or providing the enabling environments for youth to have their inputs in political and social developments in their communities and the country. Towards his end, the research sampled the views of some 240 youths and 30 adults including government officials from Margibi and Montserrado Counties. About 70 percent of the youth that were interviewed felt that government has not done much to empower the youth of the

⁴⁸Maclay, Christopher. and Ozerdem, A. (2010). Use them or Lose Them. Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth through Socio-political Integration, International Peacekeeping

country despite all of the support they the government is getting form foreign governments, the youth looked at their empowerment from the vertical aspects, they saw their empowerment as the provision of employment or loans from banks to enable them make business to earn income, which according to them will make them part of the society. As for the government official, they gauged their success in youth empowerment from the point where government has built institutions that are providing skills for the youth. But is the provision of skills enough to empower youth? Are the markets to absorb the skills that are available on the market? These are some of the reasons that have left to most of the ex-combatants that participated in the youth empowerment programme in Liberia to say, that “the UN's skill training youth empowerment programme had provided little alternative to the combatant lifestyle: 'The programme was fine, but after the programme, what was the impact so that they don't go back to where they were before?'⁴⁹

According to Morlue 2011, Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) equals, market survey (MS) plus Skills training (ST), divided by startup package (SP) plus small business management skills (SBMS) times community involvement (CI) thus: $SL=MS+ST/SP+SBMSXC$ ⁵⁰. Ozerdem and Maclay further argued that “the economic youth empowerment programmes have not addressed issues of youth empowerment directly enough, and that targeted political and social engagement strategies from a vertical and horizontal integration perspective would be more effective in the re-engagement of youth in civilian life”⁵¹. The GOL Poverty

⁴⁹Christopher Maclay, C. and A. Ozerdem, (2010). Use them or Lose Them. Engaging Liberia's Disconnected, in International peacekeeping 2010 17 (3), 343-360

⁵⁰ Sylvester M.N. Morlue: (2011); Influence Of Survival Strategies On Youth empowerment Of War affected children/youth In Monrovia, Liberia; A Research Project Report at the University Of Nairobi 2011

⁵¹Christopher Maclay and A Ozerdem. (2010). Use them or Lose Them. Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth through Socio-political Integration, International Peacekeeping 2010 p. 17 (3), 343-360

Reduction Strategy and they statement by the Liberian president on youth empowerment will need to go from mere strategy or political statements to actions. The GOL and her development partners need to see reasons of moral obligations to developed youth led and adult guided empowerment programme that will not only look at the vertical empowerment but also the horizontal concept as well. The Liberian Poverty Reduction Strategy mentioned severally *“that the marginalization of youth and women and the mismanagement of national resources were widespread, which contributed to stark inequalities in the distribution of benefits also, the situation of Liberian youth was another major concern expressed at the county level; the prevailing increasing the risk of a return to violence. Coupled with the breakdown of traditional values and norms as a result of the war, the situation of youth is a potentially volatile security challenge.”*⁵²

This is a clear indication of the concern for youth empowerment to be highlighted, but again, the actuality need to be seen. The post war country has many challenges of restoring the basic social service, addressing unemployment, reducing poverty of her less than four million population and strengthening state institutions to handle the many challenges; also more has to be done to avert issues of youth that have to be addressed to mitigate the discontentment of youth who make up more than 60 percent of the country’s population. The vertical and horizontal empowerment are connected in many way, hence they should be carried out together.

3.3 The influence of training on the empowerment of youth

Training in formal or informal education has been seen in many circles as a means of empowering youth to achieve social status in their societies especially those in post

⁵²Government of Liberia, .Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008), Monrovia, Liberia, Government of Liberia

conflict countries like Liberia; but the sustainability of the empowerment of those youth is very critical. Williamson (2005); in his review of the DDR programme in Liberia said that war affected children/youth in Liberia placed high value on education because it enhances future employment prospects, because being a student changes the way one is perceived in the community, consequently enhances community acceptances.

Surveys on the children that have been recruited into fighting forces has shown that the majority of them have been children that live and or work in the streets, girls that have suffered abuses, children out of school and separated. According to Lloyd Feinberg of DCOF, significant unemployment and lack of educational opportunities can fuel political dissatisfaction among youths who resort to violence⁵³. Williamson also urged that, ensuring opportunities for children to return to school or receive skills training is a major factor in successful youth empowerment. He said, “The provision of these skills will not only help children to establish a new identity, it also increased their acceptance by family, community members and peers.” However, it is worth noting that what-so-ever skills training or education that was offered to the child must bring about a long term impact to the child taking into consideration the demand on the market. Nicolai, and Tripplehorn pointed out that war and education can impact on the lives of war affected youth in different ways and environments⁵⁴.

The empowerment of war affected children/youth especially those that were active in the civil crisis is a complete nightmare because some of them may have taken up adult responsibilities expected of them within the communalities without the

⁵³ [www.http\America.gov](http://www.America.gov) archive 2011 accessed 2011

⁵⁴ Nicolai, and CarlTripplehorn(2003): The role of education in protecting children in conflict, Humanitarian practice network paper accessed June 2013, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs>
Susan

necessary support to sustain them. As a result, they get involved in anti-social activities to meet the demand, hence, perpetual the stigma of their association with the fighting forces. On the other hand, there are war affected children/youth who were not well prepared to take up such a responsibility, therefore, they have to look up to other for assistance for their survival. In Liberia, UNICEF reported that about 70% of the war affected children/youth that are youth said that they are supporting themselves while some still get support from their parents and from other relatives⁵⁵.

The lack of well-designed and acceptable standards/principles for carrying out sustainable programme for youth empowerment of war affected children/youth really brought confusion amongst key actors in disarmament, demobilization, and youth empowerment programme and this is still the case. Many youth empowerment programmes is not based on scientific findings, but rather based on the whims and believes of the leaders of the programme hence, the impacts are not felt. The confusion was built around what are the key factors to be considered in the design and implementation of a sustainable youth empowerment program and who to benefit from special programme⁵⁶.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has found out that the social youth empowerment of war affected children/youth is more complicated than for adults because it must address not only the usual programmes of education, vocational training and employment but it should take into consideration special psychosocial (horizontal) and educational activities to help the youth empowerment⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ UNICEF;Specht, I.&Tefferi, H.. Impact Evaluation of Programme forChildren Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) in Liberia. 2007, Monrovia, Liberia

⁵⁶ Sylvester M.N. Morlue; (2011) Influence Of Survival Strategies On Youth empowerment Of War affected children/youth In Monrovia, Liberia; A Research Project Report at he University Of Nairobi 2011

⁵⁷ International Labour Organization , ILO Manual on Training and Employment Options for Ex-Combatants 2007

Skills/apprenticeship/vocational training has been another youth empowerment initiative that has been provided to war affected children/youth in countries returning from war. In Mozambique, it was reported that skills/apprenticeship and vocational training proved successful in providing livelihood for war affected youth particularly those that were took active part in the fighting. Boothby stated that children that went through the training said that the opportunities have offered the means of obtaining money which has ease their transition to civilian life⁵⁸.

3.4 Youth empowerment and Liberia's international relations

Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world, coupled with the fact that it is just returning from a civil crisis that lasted more than a decade. The country has a population of less than four million of which 70 percent is youth. The empowerment of youth in Liberia will go a long way in the improving the country's international relations with her developed and developing countries. Liberia has made history for being the only African country that has produced one of the world's best footballers despite the country's failure to participate in high profile international football tournament like the World Cup. The civil war in the country brought about increased suffering to the people especially the youth; social economic and cultural infrastructures broke down, brain drain and destruction of many other fabrics in the country.

The post war youth population of Liberia have longed for time when they will be counted as some of those youth with great talents and skills that other countries will be in demand of, these were the words of one of youth leader in Liberia. This and

⁵⁸Boothby Neal et al. Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study. Global Public Health, 2006

other dream can only come to reality when the GOL create the enabling environment for the youth to show case the skills and talent that they possess, the youth continued. During the study the researcher too interest in most of the responses provided by youth as respondents; the researchers tried to link the relationships that Liberia has with other countries outside of Africa, and how those relations have affected youth empowerment in both positive and negative way, to this end, both youth and adult respondents pointed to a strong relationship that Liberia has with China and the United States of America; these relationships especially the one with USA dated as far back as the 17th Century when freed slaves from the USA landed on the soil of Liberia.

Liberia and the USA are said to be long time traditional allies; as for China-Liberia's relationship, it has grown over the years after the Liberian civil crisis with China being very supportive of the post-war development programme of Liberia. 73 percent of the respondents said that Liberians turn to USA and China when it comes to development; 40 percent of the youth respondents said that they would turned to China for skills and education because of what they have watched Chinese youth do especially when it comes to the proficiency in the production of electronic and electrical materials, while 35 percent stated that they would turn to USA because youth there are very free in what-so-ever thing they want to engage in; these responses again take us back to the concepts of vertical and horizontal empowerment, the youth that prefer to turn to China are looking at the vertical aspects of their empowerment where they will be able to acquire skills and knowledge in producing items that will earn them a lot of income, while the ones that prefer to turn to the USA are looking at the horizontal empowerment where they will be free to say what they

feel is affecting them. Also, negative sentiments about how youth in America indulged in activities that would not be permitted in the culture of Liberia.

Recently there have been several youth empowerment initiatives undertaken by youth from Ghana and Nigeria; they are engaged in the promotion of ecommerce business with individuals in the diaspora, and also the creativity of a youth from Nigeria to an African version of batman⁵⁹.

The empowerment of youth in Liberia can go a long way when there is an increase in the private public partnership in the country. Globally, MicroSoft is supporting youth empowerment initiatives that will help bridge the gaps between unemployed youth and those of the adults. Also, in China, Nike and China Youth Development Foundation Partner to Empower Chinese Youth. This project aimed to empower Chinese youth to make a difference in their communities through sports⁶⁰. This project succeeded two other youth empowerment project that took place in China which saw Chinese youth being trained as coaches in their communities. The youth in Liberia asserted that they are looking forward to their government to open the market or establish relationship with multinational corporations that will provided them with the relevant skills that will enhance their strive from sustainable empowerment. During the research, 60 percent of the youth and adults interviewed said they are looking up to government to build the capacity of youth and enact laws that will improve the investment climates that will see many institutions coming to work with youth while 28 percent opted for the improvement in the private public partnership like what is mentioned above. “The postwar student exchange programme that existed between Liberia and other countries was one of the medium through which Liberia

⁵⁹ BBC Focus on Africa TV News, African youth involvement in innovative initiatives August 21 & 22, 2013

⁶⁰ BSR | CiYuan Case Study: Nike and China Youth Development Foundation Partner to Empower Chinese Youth 2012

strengthened her international relations with other countries” says one of the government officials interviewed.

3.5 The significance of international relations on the socio-economic and cultural development of Liberia

Cultural exchange, man power and infrastructure development, public private partnership, vigorous rule of laws and judiciary system are but the key areas that when strengthened can contributing factors to the social economic and cultural development of Liberia. Liberia being one of the oldest countries in Africa and yet one of the poorest “*For example, the country rose to 169th place out of 182 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) in 2009, moving from near the bottom in just six years after civil conflicts*”⁶¹

it is making significant strides to improve the lives of her citizens through the provision of basic social services, and improved relations with developed countries says one of government officials interviewed. However, the gains made against the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) and pledges made by the Liberian leaders during political campaigns and inaugural speeches may be very nominal as the effects are not being felt by those at the grassroots mainly the youth. The research found out that most of the reported gains or developments are centered on Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Majority of youth interviewed outlined their following as some of the key challenges affected the social and economic development of the country despite the many grants given by Liberia’s development partners: Lack of adequate health facilities (there are only two semi-equipped government referral hospitals and few trained doctors operating in the country); low access to quality education, youth

⁶¹ Government of Liberia: Millennium Development Goals report 2004. Monrovia, Liberia, Government of Liberia

unemployment among others. These assertions by the youth were echoed in a research under the theme Youth to Youth: Measuring Youth Engagement conducted by a pull of researchers including Liberian youth supported by Search for Common Ground, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the American University. The objective of that research was to gauge the varying priorities that donors and youth have when it comes to investing in youth policy and development⁶². This study has brought to light some of the key issues that need to be examined on how the above mentioned variables can contribute the economic and social development of the country; the youth are said to be the future leaders of the country, hence the development of their capacities to effectively undertake such an uphill task must be prioritized.

Over the years, cultural exchanges between Liberia and some of her closed international allies like United States of America and China have increased tremendously with Chinese Government providing huge number of scholarships to Liberian youth to study in at undergraduate and graduate universities in China, it is worth noting that, those studies do not go without learning the Chinese language thereby spreading the use of Chinese language widely abroad. This is among some of the strategies that the Chinese government is using to increase her presence in particularly Liberia and the African continent at large.⁶³ On the other hand, Liberia and America have more than 150 years of friendly ties that saw Liberians including military and para-military men and women, teachers, doctors and other professionals being trained in America, more 3000 American Peace Corp volunteers sent to Liberia where they served as teachers, and other professionals while at the same time learning

⁶² Youth to Youth: Measuring Youth Engagement in Liberia (2012): Search for Common Ground, Ministry of Youth and sports, and American University

⁶³ Kurlantzick, J. et al.: China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy? December 12, 2006 Washington, D.C.

Liberian language and cultures. The exchanges have seen Liberia and her partners make significant gains in sustaining their international relations.

Also, can has doubled aid to Liberia since the end of the 14 years civil crisis; the aid which came in the form of provision of skilled man power and equipment to support in the reconstruction of road and other infrastructures in post-war Liberia. The aid is provided to Liberia without any attachment of political reform as outlined by Kurlantzick, J., Shinn D., and Pei M. in their presentation. The strategy is further gear towards empowering Chinese companies to invest in Liberia, which in itself will provide more employment opportunities for unemployed Chinese and Liberians especially the youth, and since in fact Chinese companies are better placed to deal with the security and political risks that may be present in some of the hard-to-work countries like Liberia.⁶⁴

3.6 The role of the Liberian youth in their own empowerment programmes

The issue of the empowerment of youth is continuously taking lead ways in much international discourse, to date, the African Union, European Union, United Nations, World Bank, Faith Based Organizations, and national governments have worked tirelessly to promote the participation of youth in their own development. However, the extent of the participation of youth may be limited to some extent because of cultural and traditional practices in some contexts. Some of these biases start from the very beginning which is the definition of youth. In Liberian, the term youth has been defined in many ways depending on the subject at hand, the time, the gender, age, and culture. In Liberia, like most African countries, the concept of youth may be viewed from the biological (ages 15-35 years) and culture perceptive (has gone through the

⁶⁴Kurlantzick, J. et al: China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy December 12, 2006 Washington, D.C

traditional rites). According to Ismail et al (2009; 25) and as mentioned by Mutisi M. (2010; 95) youths in West Africa are characterized by hardship, political exclusion and disenfranchisement⁶⁵. The youth makes up about almost 70 percent of the population, which means if the youth are economically and politically marginalized to a very high degree, this could be the beginning of the post-war country going back into chaos and anarchy. Many social, political scientists (Robert Kaplay, Jack Goldstone and other theorists) have predicted youth led violence, criminality and insecurity in contemporary world. Matisu further quoted the findings from anthropologist Richards (2005 in his studies on Liberia and Sierra Leone; Richards foresaw the likelihoods of youth engaging in violence if state and non-state actors continue to alienate them in decision making⁶⁶. These and much other assertion take us back to the significance of youth involvement in their own empowerment.

Programmes aiming empowering youth should view youth as beneficiaries, partners and leaders at all aspect of the engagement. Participation is a right according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child; it is the right of young people to participate in decisions that will affect their lives in accordance to their age and level of maturity. With this in mind, regional and national governments are obliged to promote the participation of youth at all times and in all matters of concern to them. During the research, youth respondents categorically stated that their participation in their own empowerment is very minimum; all decision affecting them are made by the government and the decisions imposed on them. The youth indicated that their participation in some of the decisions are only done so for political reasons which are very temporary. *“how can you and your people go and sit and decide what*

⁶⁵Martha Mutisi. Interrogating traditional youth theory: Youth peace building and engagement in post-conflict Liberia, 2012 African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

is good for me, without consulting us, or even if you consult us on something, we give our inputs, you go and change them”⁶⁷ the saying of one youth leader in Monrovia.

One may argue that the youth do not have the relevant education, skills and knowledge to full participate in their empowerment, but that does not in away justify the marginalization of youth in decision affecting them. During the research, majority of the youth and adults that were in favor of youth empowerment highlighted the following as ways in which youth want to be involved in their own empowerment:

Youth as leader: the respondents said they want to see youth as leaders in shaping their own destiny; they want to take leading role in identifying their issues, prioritizing them, and recommending to local and national government appropriate strategies to achieve them.

Youth as beneficiaries; at this stage, youth will be seen as beneficiaries of project that they have been involved in crafting, and they are now benefitting from it. Notwithstanding, they are still to be involve in decision making concerning the changes and sustainability of the project outcomes, this is to ensure proper accountability not only to the donors as was the norm in previous practices, but also, accountability to the beneficiaries who are in the long run going to be the indicators of the success of the projects.

Youth as participants: youth are often times mentioned as the “future leaders of any country” therefore for there to be a country that is well developed and functional, the future leaders which in this case, the youth must be included and [actively] participate in decisions making and structures at the community, country and national levels.

⁶⁷Interview with Nubantu NCube, a youth in Monrovia, July 2013

The above mentioned ways proposed by the youth is in line with the United Nations Development Programme Three-lens approach to youth participation *“Development assistance should work for the benefit of youth (as target beneficiaries), with youth as partners, and be shaped by youth as leader. .This is an assets approach to youth participation in development which appreciates and mobilizes individual or group talents and strengths, rather than focusing only on deficits (needs), problems or threats and is referred to as the three-lens approach to youth participation”*⁶⁸.

Youth in Liberia have tried to ensure that their participation in issues that are affecting them are further enhanced through their initiatives. They have formed themselves or aligned to/into smaller groups/association or network of young Liberian to support each other; the formation of these groups like motorcycles union, Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) and Margibi Youth Network (MAYONET) are some of the active and influential youth groups contacted during this research. These youth groups have tried to provide the some form of capacity building to their members to enable them fully participate in their own empowerment. The actual fact that belonging to these group provide some form of bonding for the youth thereby fulfilling their sense of belongings as indicated by Abraham Maslow in his Hierarchy of needs, and the horizontal empowerment (social capital) mentioned by Ozerdem and Maclay above. *“since I joined MAYONET, I have seen that my life has changed in a direction that I feel empowered; I have been able to make my voice heard I youth and national gathering at county and national levels; it was even the same level of enthusiasm that led me to push my bit for running as a parliamentarian for my district*

⁶⁸ <http://www.ygproject.org> accessed on August 25, 2013

*in the last national election*⁶⁹” says Urais Brooks Jr. a 30 year old active member of MAYONET. Liberian youth are not just sitting and waiting for the GOL to make way for them, they have taken the responsibility of participating in their own empowerment; this was emphasized by Mitesi (2008) and as quoted by Munive (2010) “the very act of hustling – which is characterized by high levels of mobility, intense use of social networks and creativity – demystifies the conception that Liberian youths are static, and always waiting for change to come externally. Such inventiveness demonstrates how youths have developed creative responses to violence, inequality and poverty”⁷⁰. This the level of creativity exhibited by the young in coping with the world around them.

3.7 The role of the communities in youth empowerment programmes

“The community is the second known protective circle that a child/youth has, and it is expected to take the role of parents in shaping the skills and minds of the youth.” *“These community members formulate traditional norms and practices that these young people are to conform to, these very norms defines the cutoff point between youth and adulthood and sets expectations for the youth. Many of these rules, practices are passed down from generations to generations. But giving the contemporary society we find ourselves in, some of those norms and practices are not seem to be holding any longer, the coming of technology, global laws and policies have even exacerbated the transformation*⁷¹” a local chief in Kakata stated. The role of community members in the empowerment of youth is very vital to the sustainability of youth programme; community members need to first value these

⁶⁹ Interview with Urais Brooks July 2013

⁷⁰ Martha Mutisi (2008). Interrogating traditional youth theory: Youth peace building and engagement in post-conflict Liberia, 2012 African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

⁷¹ Interview with a local chief Momo Kpaih in kakata, July 2013

youth from within the community before they are accepted outside; this process brings about a community cohesion process which is part of the horizontal empowerment; but this can only be done also if the young people have a sense of direction and value themselves. The communities in Liberia are said to be homogeneous which is a strength in the empowerment of youth is. Many adults in the communities have now taken back seats in effective decision making, and gave the support to the youth to make decisions in issues that are affecting them; the role of the adult community members is now limited to advisory one.

But in this case studies, there were different approaches brought forward by youth leaders in communities in Kakata, and Monrovia because of their urbanization; Adults in Kakata felt that support to the empowerment of youth is seen mostly in the sporting aspects, where tournaments and other contests are organized to bring youth together to form a common ground; while others adults in Kakata and Monrovia stated that *“these days the coming of the various movies and styles have eroded our culture to the extent that the young people do not want to listen to adults any longer, they do their own things”*⁷². These different assertions are a wake-up call for an investigation to be launched on the relations between adults and young people especially when it comes to the youth empowerment. Adults are still seeing young people as agent of destruction, and this needs to be proven and disproven in a more scientific way.

“Adults are the ones that serve as teachers, principals of schools or colleges; they are servicing a national and local leaders, so they need to use those powers to help improve the lives of the youth people, one youth leader in Monrovia expressed’

⁷² Interview with a youth leader (Alfred Nemeneh) In Monrovia, July 2013

In essence the roles of adults in youth empowerment is more of an advisory role than decision making ones; they (adults) will have to set rules in consultation with youth, befriend them (youth) and see them take the necessary actions gear toward their own empowerment.

3.8 Challenges

These challenges are stated as they were presented by respondents during the research, some may be similar to what other studies on youth in Liberia have presented.

Liberia is a post-war country that has a predominantly youthful population that has enormous divergent challenges that is typical of any post-war developing country. During this research, youth and adults were very categorical in stating the challenges that youth in Liberia are faced with in their quest to empowerment. The following were listed as some of the major challenges that are preventing youth empowerment:

Limited youth representation at county and national levels to effectively propagate the views of youth; the youth representational at national level are political projects who are planted to showcase the government's promises of youth empowerment, but those youth do not look behind or take matter of youth empowerment any more serious for fear of losing their jobs.

Limited access to quality post-secondary public academic and training institutions: in the country there are only two public universities, three teacher training colleges, and five community colleges operating, and these institutions will require some fees for admission of students; scholarships for national or international

studies are not granted on a merit basis, but rather used by public officials to educate their children or siblings.

Limited public health facilities: there are very few public health facilities in the country with limited capacity to provide the relevant health services to especially young people, young people especially girls die during pregnancy or when giving birth.

Lack of formal employment opportunities for youth even those that are out of universities/colleges; the employment opportunity for youth in the public sector is very limited if not absent. According to the Liberian Labour Force Survey 2010, a third of the youth are employed, and about 90 percent of that group is employed in the informal settings (petit businesses, small scale agriculture etc.), the youth indicated even those that are involved in the informal employments, they do not have access to bank loans to support their businesses.

Lack of willingness on the part of central government to translate words into deeds when it comes to youth empowerment

Youth empowerment programmes are not based on evidence, but rather one that the local or national authorities feel is of priority at the time.

Traditional and cultural practices and beliefs are still denying youth the opportunities to fully participate in decision making at community, country and national levels.⁷³

3.9 Conclusions

After a thorough review of the research and the secondary data accessed, the empowerment of post-war Liberia to enhance international relations is gaining some momentum, since in fact numerous of studies have been undertaken to understand the

⁷³ Challenges as presented by the respondents during the research in July 2013

roles of the various stakeholders including youth themselves in their own empowerment. International relations between Liberia and China on one hand, and Liberia and America on the other hand have seen youth empowerment emancipated to some extent; youth are sent for further studies or exchange in one country or another and skills and knowledge gained used to improve the social and economic development of their respective countries. Globally, discussions on youth empowerment are taking center stage at meetings of world, and regional leaders.

It is however worth noting that the achievements of youth empowerment initiatives have their own challenges especially in such a post-war country where almost all of the youth have been affected by the 14 years of civil crisis and their expectations are very high. The GOL has made significant strides in putting youth empowerment on the agenda of the PRS, and other key national recovery projects or programmes. Liberia has signed but has not ratified the African Youth Charter. Despite all of the challenges presented by youth to the empowerment of youth, the youth themselves have taken bold steps to play a leading role in the empowerment of youth, this is manifested by the different programmes or projects undertaken by youth groups to build the capacity and increase the social cohesions among the youth populace in the country. The issues of youth empowerment in any country with a high youth population like Liberia needs to be given keen attention and preventive mechanisms put in place to avoid youth led violence, criminality, demonstration and other formal unrests as a result of youth feeling of marginalization; let it be noted that these preventative initiatives should be undertaken with youth as beneficiaries, participants and leaders in their own programmes.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN POST-WAR LIBERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The conduct of field research, collecting for information from secondary resources and linking those pieces of divergence information was what the previous chapter focused on. The involvement of various stakeholders in youth empowerment, the connections between youth empowerment and international relations needed not be over emphasized as this was the overarching purpose of this research.

This chapter is going to come up with the key emerging issues from the research as indicated in the previous chapter, and a thorough analysis of those issues as they relate to the objective of this research will be done. Issues relating to youth empowerment are no more an individual country domestic problem; this issue has taken central stage in almost all forums of global, transnational, regional and sub-regional leaders; in 2010, young people employment issues was very high at the during the International year of the Youth, that meeting later led to a meeting of the UN General Assembly on youth in July 2011⁷⁴. That meeting acknowledged the employment issues of youth as a key challenge and called on all governments to take practical actions toward reducing that element of youth empowerment. This is based on the premise that 50 percent of the global population is youth, to that end sociologists, and anthologists hold the view that any nation with a large youth population is at risk of violence, and criminality because the vulnerability of those youth makes them even more susceptible to recruitment into fighting forces. On the

⁷⁴ United Nations: United Nations World Youth Report: Deep Concerns about employment prospects & calls for increased investment; 2011 United Nations, New York

other hand, some researchers differed with the perception held by those social scientists about youth; arguments have erupted on the perceived nature of youth. Youth to others, are of very high value because of the energy, enthusiasms, and innovation that they hold, they are able to make the world a better place for all; therefore, they should be empowered to take the role at an initial stages. The role of Information Communication Technology in the empowerment of the youth who are said to be marginalized in the society as a result of lack of access to information and inability to effectively communicate with their peers will form a substantive argument in this paper.

4.2 Emerging issues

4.2.1 Low participation of youth in decision making

Participation is a part of human right that all people irrespective of their sex, age, nationality, creed, religion or social status; this was affirmed in the United nations Convention of the Rights of the Child Articles 2 and 12⁷⁵. State parties are to ensure that these rights are upheld by all, ironically, it is the same state parties that sometimes abrogate these rights through their constant disregard for the involvement or active participation of youth and young people in decision making at all levels. In effect, some governments may see you empowerment as extending invitations to youth groups to attend meetings where their voices or suggestions would not be considered valid, this is not what the concept of participation imply. From the research and review of other resources on this topic, it has become evidently cleared that participation can be effective depending on the scope and domain of the events or activity, and the category of participants. According to Oakley, P. and Marsden, D,

⁷⁵United Nations: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

participation varies from one setting to another; “for some, it is a matter of principle; for others, practice; for still others, an end in itself”⁷⁶.

In the context of youth empowerment, the researcher would want to agree with the assertion made by Oakley and Marsden⁷⁷ *community participation as the process by which individuals, families, or communities assume responsibility for their own welfare and develop a capacity to contribute to their own and the community’s development. In the context of development, community participation refers to an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefit.*⁷⁸ This definition gives a vivid description on how youth will like to see their participation. Youth participation needs to be fully explained and understood by all stakeholders so that decision made are not considered as mere rhetoric or political statement.

The fact that participation is very critical to ownership, the participation should begin at the very stage where participants to a particular meeting/programme or events are selected based on well participatory selection process where the merits and demerits of purpose and process will be well understood by all. According to AmartyaSen’s (1999) and as emphasized by Björn-SörenGigler, “*greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development*”⁷⁹. The youth in post-war Liberia will further enhance their empowerment and future development if and only if they are given the freedom required to fully participate in decision making processes the

⁷⁶ Oakley, P. and Marsden, D (2007): Understanding Community Participation

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Björn-SörenGigler Including the Excluded- Can ICTs empower poor communities Towards an alternative evaluation framework based on the capability approach; Paper for 4th International Conference on the Capability Approach 5-7 September, 2004 University of Pavia, Italy; London School of Economics, United Kingdom, August 1, 2004

nation over; in that way, they will be able to come up with factors that will be important to the success of their empowerment.

Youth in Liberia have seen their participation in some of the events as one that is marked by gross disregard of the opinions of those the beneficiaries; some of the youth that are selected to attend or benefit from some initiatives are selected because their parents or relatives are in decision making authority. UNESCO and other development partners have also acknowledged that the empowerment of youth for smooth transition into productive adulthood will require coherent efforts of all development partners including youth themselves. In 2008, UNESCO developed a strategy on African youth titled: Towards an Enabling Policy environment For Youth Development and Civic Engagement in Africa (2009-2013)⁸⁰.

In that strategy, youth participation and inclusion is one of the three objectives areas that need to be critically analyzed and implemented. UNESCO has purpose to work with the AU Commission to focus fostering a democratic and inclusive representation concerns for youth as well as promoting youth-led activities at the community level. It is worth noting here that youth participation on the continent is gaining some momentum; there have been youth groups named and styled sub-regional or regional youth movement, youth parliaments that meet to plan advocacy programme and so forth, to some extent, they are involved in decision making, but to what degree do their participations bring to bear pressure on the governments to understand the benefits of youth participation in decision making. In Liberia, the participation of youth is said to be more egoistic and tokenistic where the voices of youth leaders are silence as soon as they are given some positions in government that

⁸⁰United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural organization (2010): UNESCO SHS STRATEGY ON AFRICAN YOUTH 2010

quench their quest for power and when they are allowed to participate in a once while occasion or process that just for the name that they participated.

Youth in Liberia are still grabbling with how, when who to go about giving grievances on issues that affecting them because, leaders in political positions are seen as backing one another so, issues of holding elected or appointed leaders in government is becoming a challenge. Youth employment was pointed out during the study as one of the means in which youth are empowered to fully participate in the reconstruction of the war-ravished nation. The availability and accessibility of decent and productive work for the youth is still in its formative stage in Liberia with being given jobs occasionally which is viewed by many including the youth a mere tokenistic and political which is not sustainable and does not promote the values and self-esteem of youth people; the GOL is yet to come up with a Decent and Productive work bills/ laws that will see job being created for youth people who make up the majority of the population and work force of Liberia and those jobs should help to sustain their communities through the use of earned resources which the youth themselves and national leaders will see as part of empowerment.

In furtherance of the many concerns for youth empowerment, the African Union developed a Ten- year Plan of Action on youth empowerment and development which would see youth empowerment through meaningful participation at all levels as one of the key priorities; towards that end the Union has categorically stated *that “a new emergent and integrated Africa can be fully realized only if its demographic advantage “large population of youth” is mobilized and equipped to help drive Africa’s integration, peace and development agenda”*⁸¹. To achieve this, stakeholders

⁸¹ African Union : African Youth Decade (2009-2018) Plan of Action Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development May 2011

will have to appreciate and take advantage of, the fulfilling potential, skills, knowledge, and the social coherence of the youth at every stage of this journey.

In Liberia, we have seen how social cohesion is helping in bringing back youth that participated as perpetrators and victims of the 14 years civil war to their communities, and get involve in other meaningful income generation activities; similarly, we have seen how youth in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and other African countries are making use of their potential and skills to through the use of ICT to bring about changes in their communities, nations and the continent at large. Those gains can only sustainable if the youth get the needed support from the adults through drafting and passing of legislations and policy that will see youth participation in decisions making as a cornerstone of any social, economic, and development initiative. On the contrary, if youth participation is not seen as an emerging issues in the contemporary development issues, they (youth) will be disenfranchised and made solve to taking issues up in their own way, which may not be necessary the right option.

Youth unemployment can be considered as a participation issue as well. Youth unemployment in Africa in stands between 5-60 percent in with Rwanda accounting for the lowest and South Africa the highest⁸². This high rate of youth unemployment according to the Regional overview of youth in Africa is mainly due to the mismatch the educational system and the skills needed for the market, and the saturated public services with few private sectors. In Liberia, it was observed that because of the limited options for education for youth especially post-secondary one, young people leaving secondary schools will all want to enroll at the only public university which does not have the capacity to absorb all of the more than 30 thousand candidates,

⁸²United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth: Regional Overview of Youth in Africa ; facts sheets; <http://www.socialun.org/youthyear> 2011

consequently, those that did not get the opportunity to enter have to look around for what-so-ever educational opportunity that comes across them, or resolve to other informal activities.

Conversely, we need to understand that getting an education does not automatically mean that one is empowered unless that person is able to use that education to make changes in his/her life. Currently in Liberia, government work force of about 39,000 of which 36 percent is youth out of the 69 percent of active employed youth⁸³. That means for the education to contribute to empowerment of youth, the learner should have various options from where which they are supported to make decision that will help them through after leaving the learning institution. Decision makers need to be very conversant of these issues when making decision.

Also, the concept of youth empowerment is still being fully digested by youth themselves; youth see empowerment mainly from the status that they find themselves in in the society because of their economic standing in their community, as compare to their meaningful participation in decision making⁸⁴; that perception of youth needs to be changed by getting youth groups to further sensitize their peers through workshops or awareness meetings on what youth empowerment is all about. This will further help demystify that perception that youth empowerment is the sole responsibility of government and her partners.

4.2.2 Limited government policies to promote youth empowerment

The Liberian Poverty Reduction Strategy, an expressed statement by the President of Liberia, and the National Youth Policy are all gear towards promoting youth

⁸³ Government of Liberia (2010): Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey 2010 February 2011: Monrovia, Liberia, Government of Liberia

⁸⁴ Maclay, C. and Ozerdem, A. (2010). Use them or Lose Them. Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth through Socio-political Integration, International Peacekeeping

empowerment. The means to go by turning those statements into actionable initiatives is what that remain to be seen. The active participation of youth decision making at the local and national levels is an impetus for sustainable peace and tranquility in post-war Liberia. According to Maclay and Ozerdem, unless there were strategies to ensure youth participation in social and economic development priorities, the propensity for the youth to return to conflict was imminent⁸⁵.

The GOL and her development partners need to very more proactive in designing policies and strategies that will promote the participation of youth. Liberia has signed but has not yet ratified the African Union Youth Charter which is the foundation block on which “Africa Youth decade” will be achieved. This means national leaders and their governments should take practical actions in designing and implementing policies at national and local levels. Also, the policies need to be coherent so that they help the decision making and results to be holistic. For example, there should be strong policy on improving the education system so that by the time a young person is leaving from one stage to another; they are well grounded to meet the challenges. The GOL, development partners and youth themselves to come up with strategy and programmes that will promote youth entrepreneurship for youth that leave schools and want to run private business; this can be undertaken in a way that youth are not just provided with access to bank loan, but they should be schooled on how to run business through coaching, mentoring, and training to some extent. Young people in Liberia lamented the lack of access to bank loans as ridiculous to achieving their dreams of becoming young entrepreneurs. Policies for promoting and protection young people especially women at workplaces do not seem to be helping in any way for the youth in Liberia this is a situation that has seen many young people losing their

⁸⁵Christopher Maclay, C. and A. Ozerdem, (2010). Use them or Lose Them. Engaging Liberia’s Disconnected, in *International peacekeeping* 2010 17 (3), 343-360

jobs without any justification. The effective implementation and monitoring of some of the policies is very critical to the achievements of what so ever objective that has been planned.

Weak government system, lack of adequate resources, and the limited roles of youth in the development, implementation and monitoring of the policies are but a contributing factors in this regard. Accountability of the key duty bears is lacking and unquestionable. In some instances, some law makers are grilled during elections campaigns, but again, that does not hold much water because the youth are coherent enough during such a highly charged political season. The government has too many agencies that are involved in bits and pieces of youth empowerment programme which might make it even more complicated to have effective accountability framework.

The AU, ECOWAS, Mano River Union and other intergovernmental bodies have all made frantic efforts to creating youth policies that will enhance the empowerment of African youth; and national governments have been encourage to have these policies incorporated in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Some countries have taken this approach too far to the extent that they are making significant strides in the youth empowerment drive. Some countries have developed laws and policies that see their youth benefitting from young entrepreneurship programmes and business start-up schemes supported by small industry development organizations (SIDO), and bank loan schemes that provide technical skills and financial access that will enable them generate some form of livelihood.

In Liberia, some of these policies are only in writing but their implementations are yet to begin despite the many findings and recommendations by researchers and programme evaluation reports on youth empowerment. More than half of the

employed youth are said to be employed in the informal settings like petite trade and agriculture, some do not go and further because of the lack of finances; they have alluded their unemployment to lack of bank loan facilities. As for the banking sectors, they are said to be very hesitant to give loans to youth or other small scale business because of the low or no payback attitudes and the absence of assets that can serve as collateral that have prevailed in post-war Liberia. The Liberian government and her partners are yet to address some of these.

In many instances and in many policies on youth empowerment, special emphasis are placed on programmes that will see the empowerment of the most vulnerable group to include people with disabilities, young women and homeless children, but on many occasions, little or nothing to said or done to address some of those concerns. The policies themselves are killed before they even enter the doors of parliament. For policies to gain the requisite weights for implementation and monitoring, they must be backed by legislations that will ensure the enforceability and hold national government and her partners responsible.

Globally, no one country is capable of single-handedly providing for her citizens; they encourage multinational corporations through sustained integration relations to invest in their countries; setting the stage for favorable investment climate, there must be laws and policies to attract investors. And when these investors come in, government works to promote improvement in the social economic environments of her citizens, towards that end, public, private, partnership is enhanced with accompanying corporate social responsibilities.

Liberia is endowed is enormous resources that have attracted multinational corporations like BHP Billiton, Arcelor Mittal, Firestone, China Union, just to name but few that are currently operating and providing employment to opportunities to

many Liberian including youth. In her drive to promote youth empowerment, GOL does not have legislative backed policies that will encourage those companies to put in place system that will see them design strategies to improve the skills of the manpower needed for the successful operation for their businesses instead, technocrats are brought from outside of the country, mostly the mother countries of the companies to provide undertake such task; they should establish training institutions like what pre-war corporation LAMCO and Bong Mines did to train youth in country and abroad in the require skills for the smooth operations of their corporation which has even made Liberia to have some level of engineers today.

When this is done, the country will even boast of qualified human capital thereby breaking the circle of poverty gradually. It is extremely important for youth to be involved in deliberations to commission new companies in a country or country; this to provide youth the opportunity to actively participate in decisions that will improve their lives and that of the betterment of their entire community; but because of the long held African traditional believes, perceptions and practices of those in leadership about youth, the participation of youth is usually low or tokenistic. Again, those long-held traditional believes, practices and perception of youth by community leader may serve or is serving as an impediment to the achievement of youth empowerment. For example in Kenya, young Kenyan, Chris Ghalily who studied in China made a small aircraft that can fly up to the cloud without a pilot on board. The creative young man was stopped by the authorities in Kenya on grounds that he was not licensed to do so⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/ktn/video/watch/aeronautical-engineer-design-dron>: accessed August 29, 2013

4.2.3 Information communication and technology (ICT)

The use of ICT is a common meeting point for all youth in this era. The coming of the ICT to Africa has really enlightened the minds of African youth to the extent that Africa that was once considered the “hopeless continent” is now becoming the hopeful continent”. ICT being an emerging issues in the effort of governments to empower African youth, policies for youth empowerment should not only be geared toward others helping to create opportunities for youth to grow; the policies should help promote innovative initiatives of youth to reach greater heights in a more sustainable manner.

The implications of using ICT to empower youth needs to be critically viewed from different angles; according to NeilaKabeer (1999a) and as quoted by Björn-SörenGigler, that empowerment is “*the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them*”⁸⁷” If this assertion holds, then the importance of ICT in the empowerment of youth in Liberia is very significant; the youth in Liberia has been long denied of their ability to make strategic choice because of the prolonged civil war that brought the social and economic development of the country to a complete stand-still, with children now youth being used and exploited in warring leaders in their quest for their selfish gains. The access to and use of various ICT products by youth in Liberia is yet to come to speed with their counterparts in other developing countries. In Kenya, youth have been involved in many innovations. The young man that first designed the mobile money transfer technology, there is another one that invented anti-theft device that

⁸⁷Björn-SörenGigler Including the Excluded- Can ICTs empower poor communities? Towards an alternative evaluation framework based on the capability approach; Paper for 4th International Conference on the Capability Approach 5-7 September, 2004 University of Pavia, Italy; London School of Economics, United Kingdom, August 1, 2004

uses SMS technology to both block and track car theft⁸⁸; there is also a youth that embarked on the designing a helicopter-like vehicle using local materials and motorbike engine in his home town⁸⁹, these and many youth in Africa are doing and continue to use ICT to come up with many innovations but there are little or no policies from government to see them achieve their dreams. In the case of post-war Liberia access to ICT by youth is a luxury and not a necessity; in fact the increase numbers of youth that access internet and are conversant with the use of ICT are those that sought refuge in other countries during the civil war.

According to report on a survey conducted by Cables, Commissions, and Cybercafés: ICTs in Post-Conflict Liberia, Liberia has one of lowest PC and Internet penetration are among the lowest in the world⁹⁰, with youth being the most regular users. The report further indicated that by 2010, 7 in every 100 people were using the internet. According to the same report, a survey of 100 cybercafés in greater Monrovia saw that 95 percent of internet users used the cybercafé, and 85 percent of the same population reported accessing internet via their mobile phones and the rest of the five percent of users are those that access internet in their homes, offices and very few schools. That being the case, the use of ICT to post-war Liberian youth needs to be improved if they will HAVE TO use it to access information on education, global innovations, and overall to enhance their empowerment. As the report stated, there were many youth who went to the cyber cafes to browse, but the report did not state to what extent the browsing affect the cultural norms and practices of Liberia in particular and Africa in general; during the research, most of the youth respondents said that they learn a lot from youth in China and America, and those

⁸⁸ Government of Kenya, Vision 20-30: Information Communication Technology innovation award May 2013; Government of Kenya

⁸⁹ Kenya Television Network (KTN NEWS) accessed August 10, 2013

⁹⁰ The report “Cables, Commissions, and Cybercafés: ICTs in Post-Conflict Liberia” <http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1201.html>; accessed on August 29, 2013

lessons have impacted on their lives in a positive way and has increased their exposure to the modern world; centrally to those views, the adult respondents attributed the changes in their community to the negative sites or movies that they children accessed from video clubs and internet. As for mobile phone communication, Liberia has three GSM mobile phone service provided that have been operating in the country since 2001; to date, it reported that there has been a rise in the number of persons that have access to and using mobile phones. Between the years 2000 to 2010 the growth access and usage of mobile phone jumped from 0.05 percent to 39.4 percent⁹¹.

Liberia has an ITC Policy which states that Liberia's development will depend partly on how people [especially the youth] will use ICT to produce service or sell services which will further enhance Liberia's international relations. This means, it is incumbent upon the youth to use the technology to empower themselves. But a question that would come to the mind of the common Liberia is, how will the youth be able to adequately use the ICT when schools and other institutions that are responsible for man power development do not even has computers and access to internet connectivity. The ICT policy does no state how it is going to ensure equally access to low cost ICT services in the country. According to the report from the research conducted by Cables, Commissions, and Cybercafés in Liberia, 90 percent the respondents that participated in the survey of the cybercafés were males fairly young and 52 of that number were between the ages of 25-34 years, and 24 percent 24 years or younger. With that analysis, one can safely see that the youth are ones mostly involved in the use of ICT, meaning, more needs to be done to further increase access affordable ICT services. However, this paper would like to emphasize that the access

⁹¹ The report "Cables, Commissions, and Cybercafés: ICTs in Post-Conflict Liberia" <http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1201.html>; accessed on August 29, 2013

to ICT is not end to the means but rather the means to an end. The access to and use of ICT does not mean the youth are empowered, ICT is only an tool that will help in the attainment of the fully empowerment.

Many young school leavers in Liberia have seen computer knowledge as a career in itself, so, they opt for going to computer training institutions and at the end they find themselves still lacking the requisite knowledge and skills to get employment. The computer skills should be seen as a complementary knowledge to formal education or training.

4.3 Conclusion

The low participation of youth in decision making is seriously affected their empowerment; government has limited policies in place that calls for youth empowerment, but the implementation of the policies are becoming another nightmare; the emergence of the Information Communication technology is enhancing the empowerment of youth, but youth in Liberia are seeing ICT as an end to the means instead of a means to the end in their quest to attain empowerment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Liberia suffered a brutal 14 years of civil war which saw many young people being used as both perpetrators and victims of gruesome human rights violations and abused. The war did not only expose the youth to horrific scenes and weapons of destruction but up to now, the youth are still recovering from the effects of the war that also saw the destruction of infrastructures in the country, and livelihood of families. At the moment, basic social services have not been restored many parts of the country, with some parts of the country being completely inaccessible by salon vehicles despite efforts by the post-war elected government of Africa's first female president. In Liberia, the youth makes up about 70 percent of the population which is highly illiterate, with low or no participation in decision making processes at the local and national level; and when such a youthful population continues to suffer marginalization, social scientist have predicted that, such marginalization amounts disenfranchisement of the youth which will subsequently lead to the high rate of criminality, violence, and even instability in a fragile peaceful country like Liberia. The Government of Liberia is making frantic efforts to improve the wellbeing of the citizens particularly the youth.

Globally, the subject of empowering youth has become even more urgent and has drawn the attentions of leaders from all over the world; therefore, relevant UN agencies have been working with continental and sub-regional integration groupings and governments to address this growing issue. The European Union⁹², United States,

⁹² Common Wealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, 2007-2015

United Kingdom, African Union, United Nations, and Commonwealth have all taken steps to develop policies and charter on youth empowerment⁹³ with the recognition that the future will be in complete chaos and anarchy if the youth are not empowered; so it is about time to take affirmative actions to mitigate the effects of such a global nightmare.

While this paper recognizes the tireless efforts being made by the youth in Liberia in finding solutions to their emancipation from the dungeon of marginalization to a world of equal participation for all; even in the midst of all the challenges that youth are going through, they are very careful on how to handle situations that come across them thereby dispelling the long held notion of some researchers in youth empowerment that disenfranchised youth resorted to violence, and criminality to make their case heard. On the other hand, this paper wants to note the immense contribution that the GOL and her international partners are making to bring about the sustainable empowerment of the youth. The research outlined several emerging issues for youth empowerment which when effectively addressed, will go a long way in the empowerment of youth.

5.2 Key findings

During the course of this research, so many things regard the youth empowerment was found to be either contributing or hampering the process and as such they must be carefully examined.

Youth empowerment does not seem to be very cleared to the youth themselves. Some of the youth in Liberia that this research encountered views of youth empowerment were narrow only to economic activities that could enable them

⁹³ African Union: African Youth Charter, July 2006, African Union Commission, Addis Abba

earn livelihood which in this paper is referred to as vertical youth empowerment, the participation in decision making was not paramount to them probably because they felt that traditionally in Africa, children or young people voices do not matter; very few of the respondents saw youth empowerment beyond mere economic activities. In fact the level of social cohesion that exist among the youth stands from the structures they find themselves in, like association of motorcycles riders which some of them do not even to have meaning to them.

The research also found out that despite the many concerns and publicity that youth empowerment has received do not match the achievements gained from it. The very local communities that the youth come from do not seem to understand their role in the empowerment of youth; community members stilling have notion that youth in post-war Liberia were violent and that they can make their own decision on what they want to do without listening to adults. They felt that the only authority that has the responsibility for empowering youth is central government. If youth are considered to be the future leaders of the very communities or nation, how then is community preparing the youth to effectively participate in decision making that will bring about changes in their communities when the molders are not keen on playing their rightful roles? Decisions that are being made by the youth does not seem to be helping them a lot; for example, school leavers do not even has in minds what to do to aspire their dreams, but they followed what they see many of their peers going to.

The youth in Liberia are taking some serious steps towards their own empowerment by providing training for themselves, and advocating for policies change; their participation in youth gathering at local, national and continental levels has increase significantly, but this research found out that even more needs to be done by youth themselves in taking greater responsibilities for their actions and in-actions

that are gear towards their empowerment. While it is true that the GOL may not be making much progress they would expect from promises made and policies that have been developed, but the youth are not making keen efforts to take advantage of the little gains that have been made by the GOL towards their own empowerment; they want to be spoon fed and they see youth empowerment as an event where everything is done at once instead of looking at it as a process that takes time to be achieved.

The access to and use of ICT is an asset that will enhance the youth agency to have a sustainable empowerment, but we are yet to find out the effects of the access to and use of ICT on the cultural practices and norms on youth in Liberia. Youth have said the coming of ICT has brought about their emancipations from living a society that was away from modernization; while the adults see the coming of ICT as both positive and negative; it is positive because young people can keep in contact with their peers the world over, and learn some positive values; negative because it has brought an erosion of their cultural values and norms.

Lastly, the study found out that the pace at which youth in Liberia are moving with youth in many other parts of the continent and the world at large during this technological age is very slow; youth in Liberia still see the coming and access to technology as a luxury and not necessity. Many youth school leavers that participated in this research that by learning how to use computer was itself an skill that can earn them a career, they do see computer as a tool that they can use to bring about the change that they want to make for themselves.

5.3 Recommendations

After the analysis of this key emerging issues and findings of this research, there may be many gaps that may not have been filled in this paper, it therefore prudent and wise to recommend that the following be thoroughly researched to help in making youth empowerment as a strategy to improving international relations:

The role of community is very vital to the enhancement of youth empowerment, because it the community that see the flattering steps of those very youth, and they play a major role in forming and molding the minds of those youth so as to improve the future of their community. Community leaders should see themselves taking more active parts in help the youth in their quest for empowerment and this will improve the lives of youth in Liberia.

In a post-war country like Liberia, the demand for improvements in the lives of its citizens through infrastructure development and the provision of service is very high, the empowerment of youth as a sector may not be taking center stage, but if it does, it done in a fragmented way with one some people being supported to acquire vertical empowerment, while others look at the horizontal empowerment aspect, these two need to go together to help satisfy the economic and social empowerment of the youth. Efforts should be made to get this on track.

Government of Liberia should work in bridging the gaps between government agencies that are responsible for youth empowerment and youth themselves through youth groups that are fully recognized by youth in the country; the agency should see youth as beneficiaries, partners and leaders in their own empowerment where accountability will be a priority. Youth through youth groupings should be helped to fully understand what youth empowerment means and is about. Key emphasis should

be placed on the differences and importance of the vertical and horizontal youth empowerment.

As the research went further youth empowerment was seen to be crosscutting in all to all segments of the country with no one agency or group being viewed as the primary lead in the process, it is therefore recommended that a further study is done to identify the linkages between government agencies responsible for youth empowerment and community agencies that are responsible for youth empowerment to see the efficiency of the various groups as they work together on one hand, and the efficiency of the a particular agency as they work in individually towards youth empowerment. This may help to reduce the bureaucracy and blame games that sustainable youth empowerment faces ICT as an emerging issue in youth empowerment is another area that needs to be investigated; in this technological based era, it would be very good to understand the extent to which access and use of ICT will impact on the process of youth empowerment in terms of their education, and preservation of their culture.

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