

# REPORT

## Terminal Evaluation of Socio-Economic Empowerment for Disadvantaged (SEED) Youth Project in Liberia



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)  
&  
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## I. ACRONYMS

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AfT	Agenda for Transformation
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CIC	Commander in Chief
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INCHR	Independent National Commission on Human Rights
KII	Key Informant Interview
LBDI	Liberian Bank for Development and Investment
LDEA	Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency
LGA	Local Government Act
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LMPTF	Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund
LNP	Liberia National Police
LRRRC	Liberia Refugee Repatriation Resettlement Commission
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MCC	Monrovia City Corporation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MODEL	Movement for the Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MOGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MSC	Most Significant Change
NRM	National Road Map

OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee's
PAPD	Pro-poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RACER	Relevant, Acceptable, Credible, Easy and Robust
RPP	Reflection of Peace Practice
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEED	Socio-Economic Empowerment for Disadvantaged
SGDV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SME	Small and Micro Enterprise
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats
TCC	Technical Coordination Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPBF	United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
YCWL	Youth Crime Watch of Liberia
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The SEED project sought to rehabilitate and empower disadvantaged youth with skills and knowledge for economic livelihood and behavioural change to help facilitate peaceful co-existence and reintegration as meaningful members of their communities and societies in Liberia. The project targeted disadvantaged or street-absorbed youths. The disadvantaged youth, who are labelled as “Zogos and Zogesse”<sup>1</sup> in local nomenclature, were once trapped in a destitute lifestyle of perpetual despair, poverty, crime, and drug abuse; all of which are potential threat to the peace and stability that Liberia currently enjoys.

The purpose of this assignment was to carry out a terminal evaluation of the SEED Youth Project in Liberia with the aim of understanding the extent to which the project achieved its objectives. The evaluation focused on assessing the project’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, cross-cutting issues (gender and youth) and initial impact. The evaluation serves an important accountability tool that provides key lessons for national stakeholders and partners in Liberia with an impartial assessment of the results of the project’s intervention. Given the need to reach more disadvantaged youth within Montserrado County and across the country, the findings of this evaluation are important because they will be used to understand the level of support that should have been provided to these youths and will serve as a key resource mobilisation tool.

### **Methodology**

The evaluation used a participatory evaluation approach which combined secondary analyses (project documents and reports on youth in Liberia), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), semi-structured questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to collect data from all the stakeholders involved in the SEED project. Purposive, random, and snowball techniques were used to select informants. Key informants were selected for their specialised knowledge and unique perspectives on the issues examined in the evaluation. A total of 239 informants were interviewed in the 10 communities targeted by the project, comprising of West Point, Central Monrovia, Sinkor, New Georgia, Duala, New Kru Town, Goba Chop/Redlight, King Gray, Duport Road and Mount Barclay. The communities are all located in Montserrado County, where the project was piloted. The data collection tools were developed using the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee’s (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria including: Relevance and Design of the Project, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability and Cross-Cutting Issues. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data and the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Mining was used to analyse qualitative data. The Most Significant Change (MSC) tool was separately coded, collated and used to triangulate data from the other tools. It helped to strengthen and further enrich the sections on context, findings and especially recommendations.

### **Findings**

**Relevance:** The project is highly relevant, and it identified and engaged 500 youth and sought to transform them from being threats to their communities to facilitators of peace and being constructive citizens engaged in decent means of livelihood. An inter-webbed approach that integrated several

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the consultants avoided the use of the words “zogos” and “zogesse” during the evaluation, as they contain stereotypes and stigmatisation that have ethical implications. The words used are “disadvantaged youth” and “youth targeted by the project”.

actors including UNDP and UNFPA, government and non-governmental institutions and the families and communities of the beneficiaries.

**Intervention Logic, Monitoring and Learning:** The intervention logic is good and the indicators as set during the design stage of the project were unambiguous, RACER and can be easily used to measure the progress made by the project. It has only two result areas, which are largely interlinked and shaped the approach of the project. The choice of activities and outputs to be delivered by the project was good as they took into consideration the psycho-social and mental health assistance required by the beneficiaries and the socio-economic support, they needed to promote not just their successful reintegration but also their dignity and voice in society.

**Efficiency:** In relation to efficiency, it was concluded that the project was well designed, had a Steering Committee, a Technical Coordination Committee and Implementation Committees for the components of the project. UNDP responsible for the overall implementation and coordination of the project. The different partners demonstrated commitment to the project and their human resource and facilities were made available to the project. Additionally, the rich blend of the partners and their commitment to the project, provided it with the socio-political capital it required to achieve the set objectives. It was further concluded that the finances of the project were well managed and used, and value for money was ensured with activities undertaken.

**Effectiveness:** With effectiveness, it was concluded that the project made significant progress in undertaking the set activities and that it succeeded in achieving most of its set objectives. The outputs delivered were of high quality and were delivered by the institution that had the technical capacity to deliver them such as Plan International, CAFOD and YWCA, with them working with the MoH, MoYS, UNDP and UNFPA. However, the implementation process was to some extent affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby having some activities delayed. The project was adapted to the context, with the implementation team adhering to COVID-19 regulations as they implemented the project. There were significant gains made by the project, with changes experienced on the side of both the targeted youth and communities as indicated under the impact section.

**Impact:** There were significant gains made by the project, with changes experienced on the side of both the targeted youth and communities which are listed under the impact section. An example of an experienced change is that there is a general awareness related to vulnerable youth in communities and the need for community actors and their families to work on reducing their vulnerabilities and helping to be reintegrated into their communities. Another change is that it was observed that most of the youth engaged during the evaluation have improved life skills.

**Sustainability:** The approach adopted by the project fosters sustainability, as the knowledge and skills acquired by the respective beneficiaries, will remain with them and there is growing awareness on how communities could best support vulnerable youth. Furthermore, economic activities such as the VSLA and small-scale businesses that the youth are involved in are gradually demonstrating sustainability. However, the full integration of the private sector could have added value in relation to both the implementation and sustainability of the project as they could have provided extra support to the beneficiaries. To further build on the gains made so far, it will be good to have another phase of the project.

**Cross-Cutting Issues:** One of the aims of the project was to improve the relationship between the citizens and the state. The project contributed to improving the relationship between the target groups and state security actors, such as the LNP. The project had a human rights and gender equality-based approach, and the set objectives are all focused on protecting and promoting the rights, welfare, and

dignity of vulnerable groups within the targeted communities. Women, girls, men and boys, were all fully involved in the project and there were no reports of exclusion or marginalisation in relation to the project.

**Conclusion:** The project is highly relevant, and its design was good, with the implementation mechanisms well thought through. It succeeded in providing much needed support to the targeted youth. However, it contended with challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted to delays in implementing some components of the project and there were weaknesses in relation to the coordination of activities. Coupled with this there are challenges related to the failure to have an exit strategy embedded in the project and fully rolled out. Despite these challenges, the project significantly impacted most of the beneficiaries and there is the need to further build on the gains made.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations listed below build on the findings and some suggestions provided by the stakeholders consulted on what could be done by specific actors to improve on future interventions and their programming:

- Subsequent interventions should have well designed coordination structures that foster the integration, buy-in, ownership and leadership of the project by all partners.
- Future interventions must clearly define the strategies and associated activities required to ensure reintegration and rehabilitation with the support of community leaders, local law enforcement structures, other community-based structures that provide some form of support to the target group prior to project intervention such as religious leaders as observed in few project intervention communities.
- For future interventions, the training methodology should be reviewed, and scope expanded through consultation with the target group, experts, and key stakeholders.
- For future interventions, a clear and concrete strategy for job linkages and internship opportunities should be developed.
- Steering Committees should include all key partners especially those that are directly implementing a project or programme, in this case, CAFOD, YWCA and Plan International
- The media and private sector are crucial partners that should be central in the development and implementation of any project and they should be involved from the design stage.
- Even though the project has ended, the partners should continue to monitor the sustainability of the interventions. Additionally, they could link the beneficiaries to related interventions that they or their partners are undertaking, to ensure that they continue to get external support.
- The design of future interventions should have a well embedded and properly rolled-out exit strategy.
- Future interventions should be tailored to be gender focused and responsive. Tied to this is the need for gender dynamics to be assessed in potential intervention areas at the design stage of the project, with the findings used to further strengthen the gender component of the project.
- The GoL should mobilise resources from the development partners to undertake similar projects of this nature, with gradual upscaling done to ensure that youth across the country are targeted.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

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The Socio-Economic Empowerment for Disadvantaged (SEED) Youth project is funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) through the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF) and jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) serving as key government partners with other institution such as

The SEED project was developed and implemented initially for eighteen-months (February 2019-August 2020), with an additional six-month extension to February 2021. The project sought to rehabilitate and empower disadvantaged youth with skills and knowledge for economic livelihood and behavioural change to help facilitate peaceful co-existence and reintegration as meaningful members of their communities and societies. The project targeted disadvantaged or street-absorbed youths. The disadvantaged youth, who are labelled as “Zogos and Zogesse”<sup>2</sup> in local nomenclature, were once trapped in a destitute lifestyle of perpetual despair, poverty, crime, and drug abuse; all of which are potential threat to the peace and stability that Liberia has been working on building since the end of its two civil wars that lasted from 1989 to 2003. Thus, the project was part of the broader support provided by the United Nations in complementing the activities of the Government of Liberia in addressing youth vulnerability and enhancing their capacity to meaningfully contribute to their personal growth and the peace, security, growth and development of their communities.

To ascertain the efficacy of the implementation of the project, the partners commissioned a terminal evaluation with the aim of assessing the continued relevance of the programme, and the progress made towards achieving its planned objectives. This report provides relevant findings, lessons-learned, and recommendations which will be widely shared with donors, partners and local stakeholders and will also be used to guide and inform future programming.

Noting that the assignment was conducted within the context of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the methodology ensured that all regulations and protocols are fully observed to ensure the safety and security of both the evaluation team and those that engaged during the assignment.

The report has five sections, sections 1.1 and 1.2 present the objectives of the assignment and the methodology used in the evaluation, section two presents an analysis of the context that precipitated the need for the project and how the context have been evolving over time, chapter three provides and analyses the findings, specifically using the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee’s (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria including: Relevance and Design of the Project, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability and Cross-Cutting Issues. Sections four and five provide conclusions and recommendations that will be essential in strengthening future interventions by the respective partners.

## 1.1. PURPOSE OF THE TERMINAL EVALUATION

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the consultants avoided the use of the words “zogos” and “zogesse” during the evaluation, as they contain stereotypes and stigmatisation that have ethical implications. The words used are “disadvantaged youth” and “youth targeted by the project”.



The purpose of this assignment was to carry out a terminal evaluation of the SEED Youth Project in Liberia with the aim of understanding the extent to which the project achieved its objectives. The evaluation focused on assessing the project’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, cross-cutting issues (gender and youth) and initial impact. The evaluation serves an important accountability tool that provides key lessons for national stakeholders and partners in Liberia with an impartial assessment of the results of the project’s intervention. Given the need to reach more disadvantaged youth within Montserrado County and across the country, the findings of this evaluation are important because they will be used to understand the level of support that should have been provided to these youths and will serve as a key resource mobilisation tool.

## 1.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AND ITS INTERVENTION LOGIC

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The SEED Youth Project was implemented between February 2019 to February 2021. It was initially designed as an 18-month project, which was extended to a 24-month project. The overall objective of the project was to “rehabilitate and empower disadvantaged youth with skills and knowledge for economic livelihood and behavioural change that facilitate peaceful co-existence and reintegration as meaningful members of their communities and societies”.

The project had two outcome areas:

**Outcome 1:** Zogos/Zogesse in Montserrado county are socially reintegrated and peacefully co-exist with communities. Some of the key outputs set under this outcome area are: Capacity of three drop-in centers strengthened to provide psycho-social, mental, and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services to 500 Zogos/Zogesse in Montserrado County; 500 Zogos/Zogesse rehabilitated, reintegrated, and peacefully co-exist with community members in Montserrado County.

**Outcome 2:** Improved access of 500 Zogos, Zogesse in Motserrado county to sustainable livelihood and employment opportunities to enhance their resilience to conflict and social tension. Some of the key outputs set under this outcome area are: 500 Zogos/Zogesse empowered with skills in entrepreneurship, small enterprise development and management and to establish sustainable Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) for waste management and other business entities; 500 Zogos/Zogesse supported through the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) with start-up capital to strengthen waste management processes in Montserrado for the trainees through Microfinance Institutions (MFIs); 500 Zogos and Zogesse capacitated with start-up capital to own businesses and linked to sustainable job and employment opportunities.

The main beneficiaries of the project were 500 disadvantaged youth in ten communities in Montserrado county, with activities designed by the project intending to address the vulnerable and precarious condition of the Zogos and Zogesse – poverty, deprivation, exclusion and their potential threat to the peace and security of the country. However, it is very important to note that the initial target set in the logframe was 200 youth, however the Ministry of Finance, which is heading the Steering Committee, rejected the proposal and asked that 500 beneficiaries are supported by the project.

## 1.3. METHODOLOGY

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The evaluation used a participatory evaluation approach which combined secondary analyses (project documents and reports on youth in Liberia), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), semi-structured questionnaire, and focus group discussions (FGD) to collect data from all the stakeholders involved in the SEED project. The stakeholders included staff of UNDP, UNFPA, Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Health (MoH), Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Plan International, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Drop-In Centres, disadvantaged youth, and members of communities targeted. The approach supported the generation of sufficient relevant data that provided findings that were significant in achieving the objectives of the evaluation. In all phases, a strong participatory approach was applied to ensure maximum engagement of all the relevant stakeholders. Purposive, random, and snowball techniques were used to select informants. Key informants were selected for their specialised knowledge and unique perspectives on the issues examined in the evaluation. A total of 239 informants were consulted consisting of 152 disadvantaged youth, including their Commanders in Chief (CIC). Of the total number of youth engaged, 103 (67% males and 33% females) participated in interviews, while 49 (47 % males and 53% females) participated in focus group discussions. Additionally, 65 community members (77 % males and 23% females), on average 6 per community, and 22 key informants (55% males and 45% females) from 12 partner institutions and other stakeholders were engaged in the evaluation.

All 10 communities targeted by the project were visited, comprising of West Point, Central Monrovia, Sinkor, New Georgia, Duala, New Kru Town, Goba Chop/Redlight, King Gray, Duport Road and Mount Barclay. The communities are all located in Montserrado County, where the project was piloted. The evaluation was conducted by an international (male) and national (female) consultants, supported by four enumerators (two males and two females), to ensure a gender balanced team. A one-day training was conducted for the enumerators to familiarise them with the tools and prepare them for the data collection process.

The data collection tools were developed using the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria including: Relevance and Design of the Project, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability and Cross-Cutting Issues. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data and the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Mining was used to analyse qualitative data. The Most Significant Change (MSC) tool was separately coded, collated and used to triangulate data from the other tools. It helped to strengthen and further enrich the sections on context, findings and especially recommendations.

It is important to note that all COVID-19 regulations were fully adhered to during field consultations. Additionally, some of the interviews, especially with partners, were conducted virtually by the international consultant, while the national consultant conducted field consultations in the targeted communities.

Further, it is important to note that the study contended with some challenges including the fact that due to the COVID-19, the international consultant could not travel, and the national consultant and enumerators undertook the field data collection, while the international consultant did the virtual interviews. Other challenges included difficulties accessing some respondents, as such extra time was taken to ensure that they were accessed and included in the study.

## 2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

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For several decades, Liberia had a chequered history characterised by corruption, bad governance, nepotism, and the marginalisation and infantilisation of the country's women and youth. These factors were worsened by the instrumentalisation of the state security and justice apparatus, which became heavy-handed against the country's youth and those who were critical of the state and its political elites (Youboty 1993). Consequently, the country gradually disintegrated into a violent civil war in December 1989. At the centre of the civil war, known as the First Liberian Civil War, were disillusioned and frustrated youth, some of whom wanted to revenge against the state for the marginalisation and social injustices that they were subjected to over the years (Bangura & Specht 2012).

Young people played several roles in all the respective factions,<sup>3</sup> that participated in the war. They served as fighters, cooks, load carriers, spies etc, and women and girls were specifically targeted and used as bush wives and sex slaves (Specht 2013; TRC 2009; Isaac 2014). Youth and child combatants committed horrendous atrocities and gained global prominence as the images from Liberia caught the attention of the international media. The first war ended in 1996 with the election of Charles Ghankay Taylor as president. However, the country easily relapsed into violence in 1999, with children and youth again trapped in the centre of the second war. The two factions, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), laid siege on the capital city Monrovia, and eventually Taylor's forces were overpowered. Left with limited options, Taylor eventually agreed to sign a peace agreement, resign as president, and go into exile in 2003.<sup>4</sup> This paved the way for an end to the conflict, with the process overseen by the International Community.

At the end of the two wars, over 250,000 lives were lost,<sup>5</sup> with more than a million people becoming refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Additionally, all sectors of the society were badly destroyed by the wars, which increased the level of poverty and economic hardship in the country. Again, the worst affected category was that of the youth, who had very limited access to economic opportunities and essential services that the state should provide. Despite this, the post-war period generated significant hope, especially with the high interest on the part of the international community on the country, and the deployment of a United Nations Peacekeeping mission.<sup>6</sup> The high expectations were however short-lived as the pre-war political elites re-emerged, with post-war processes such as the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of Ex-Combatants programme failing to adequately promote the socio-economic transformations that especially youth ex-combatants anticipated. As a result, many young people were left without the help they needed.<sup>7</sup>

With time, the country came to have a wide range of vulnerable youth, across rural and urban communities, who had limited or no access to socio-economic and political opportunities. Denied a voice, place, identity and recognition, these youth in some cases sought to re-engineer the social space through mobilising into gangs and cliques, using local coffee booths as platforms for socialisation with their peers, or engaging in criminal enterprises. Their involvement in criminal networks and the threat

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the factions that participated in the first civil war included the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) and the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). ULIMO had two factions, one led by Roosevelt Johnson, known as ULIMO-J and another led by Alhaji Kroma, known as ULIMO-K.

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.voanews.com/archive/liberian-president-charles-taylor-goes-exile-2003-08-11> (Accessed on 20 April 2021).

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://borgenproject.org/the-liberian-civil-war/> (Accessed on 21 April 2021).

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/03/1006221> (Accessed on 21 April 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Bangura, I. Specht, I. 2012, "Work not War: Youth Transformation in Liberia and Sierra Leone" in Accord: 23.

that some came to pose in their communities, undermined their relationship with the state, their communities and in some cases their families. These challenges were exacerbated with the upsurge in the use of drugs by vulnerable youth, as the drugs has psychosocial and mental health challenges for them, but at the same time, it further widened the disaffection between the youth, the state, and their community members.

Even though several youth programmes were undertaken by the government and its development partners, they targeted very limited numbers of youth. Thus, currently, a large amount of youth continues to deal with unemployment, poverty, and exclusion. In fact, the International Labour Organisation reports that 85% per cent of the population aged 15 to 36 is currently unemployed.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the youth lack access to essential services such as health, with women and girls contending with Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) but receive very limited treatment, support, and access to justice.

The disadvantaged position of the Liberian youth is worsened by the fact that they lack education and employable skills. More than 45% of the country's youth are illiterate and the rate amongst female youth is higher.<sup>9</sup> The Ebola (Woods 2011)<sup>10</sup> and COVID pandemics have contributed to further dampening the limited economic gains experienced in post-war Liberia, thereby making an already difficult situation worse. Thus, there has been the need for the Government of Liberia and its development partners to critically study the challenges that vulnerable youth contend with in Liberia and come up with interventions that will help transform the lives of young people, as a broader approach to peace, security, and development in Liberia.

### 3. FINDINGS

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<sup>8</sup> International Labour Organisation 2017, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2015, Adult and Youth Literacy Programme, Liberia.

<sup>10</sup> The Ebola pandemic affected Liberia from 2014 to 2015 and have devastating effects on its economy.

This section presents findings from data collected from 239 respondents, using FGDs, survey and KIIs. The findings are presented under the evaluation criteria, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and cross-cutting issues.

### 3.1. RELEVANCE

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The project is highly relevant and seeks to address the challenges that are related to vulnerable youth in ten communities in Montserrado County. It engaged 500 youth and sought to transform them from being threats to their communities to facilitators of peace and being constructive citizens engaged in decent means of livelihood.

The project as designed, directly responds to the needs of the beneficiaries including the vulnerable youth, who are the primary targets and the communities into which they are reintegrated. Specific approaches were used to comprehensively engage and support the vulnerable youth. This included the identification and inclusion of the youth into the project, and the provision of orientation and rehabilitation, capacity building, vocational skills-training, social reintegration, and job creation and linkages with business support services that they benefited from. It was expected that the inter-webbed approach will address the challenges that they contend with, support their successful reintegration into their communities and at the same time provide them with skills and the economic support they required to lift them out of poverty and be economically productive. To further strengthen the economic component, the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) methodology was adopted, alongside the cash for work approach, which integrates Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to immediately provide needed cash to the beneficiaries, to take care of their immediate needs. The VSLA methodology was developed with the aim of having a sustainable approach to lifting vulnerable youth out of poverty, through providing a model that helps them to save money, take loans that are interest free and save them from the indignity and harassments that young people usually suffer when they take microcredits and other loans in communities.

The project also engaged the members and leaders of targeted communities, women, and youth groups, and provided them with the awareness raising and sensitisation required to have them provide the social capital essential for reacceptance and reintegration of the vulnerable youths.

The project uses an integrated approach through which it seeks to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries by working directly with the MoH, MoYS, the Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA), Liberia National Police (LNP), the Monrovia and Paynesville City Corporations. This relationship underpins the relevance of the project to the Government of Liberia, as it complements its goals to address youth related challenges in the country.

The methodology adopted by the project fostered the use of government institutions such as the MoH and the MoYS, to work with institutions such as CAFOD, Plan-International and YWCA to provide essential services to the target groups. For instance, three drop-in centres run by the MoH provided psychosocial, SRH and other medical services to the disadvantaged youth. The project included a component on building the capacity of the drop-in centres to enable them to deliver essential services efficiently and effectively to the targeted youth.

The design of the project is adapted to the institutional, human, and financial capacities of the partner government and other key stakeholders. However, it was concluded during consultations that the partners, both government and the non-governmental partners, were unclear with the roles and the capacity of their partners at the inception of the project. This had implications as the government

actors did not directly choose the implementing organisations that they had to work with. This created initial challenges that were eventually overcome as the partners began to meet and plan the implementation of activities.

The lead organisation responsible for the implementation of the project was UNDP, working on it with UNFPA, both were grant recipients. UNDP's role included convening coordination meetings and facilitating joint implementation and monitoring and evaluation exercises and coordination of reports. UNFPA's role was to support the implementation of the psycho-social and health component of the project. The government partners were the MoH and the MoYS, with the former working with UNFPA, on the psycho-social and health component and the later working with UNDP on socio-economic reintegration. CAFOD directly implemented the economic component, working with MoYS, while YWCA and Plan International implemented the psycho-social component, working with the MoH in the drop-in centres and in local communities.

The partners complemented each other and provided the project with the diversity it requires. Coupled with this, based on findings from the field, they had the staff and the experience required to implement the pilot project. It is also worthy to mention that they have been functioning in Liberia for several decades and as such have developed a good working relationship with communities, which was essential for the success of the SEED project.

The choice of implementing partners is appropriate and provides a good blend and diversity that is essential to achieve the goals of the project. The partners bring in different skills and have specific components that they are responsible to deliver. For instance, the MoYS and CAFOD supported the implementation of the socio-economic component of the project, while MoH and YWCA supported the implementation of the psycho-social and health components of the project. Thus, the blend of the three partners provides the complementarity that project required.

The full fund for the project was provided by the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF)/Peace Building Fund Secretariat. The staff and facilities of the respective partners were available for use by the project and there appeared to be very high commitment on the part of all partners to support the implementation of the project. Engagements with the government partners provided evidence of the commitment of the respective government institutions involved in the project.

The project was aligned with national laws and policies such as the 1986 Constitution of Liberia, the National Youth Policy and Action Plan (2019-2023), the Rape Amendment Act of 2006; the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030), the National Gender Policy (2010-2020), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 10, the Medium-Term Development Strategy – the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD). The project is also aligned to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which is the collective UN support (Delivering as One – [DaO]) to the government of Liberia's Agenda for Transformation (AfT) and the Vision 2030. The project aligns to UNDAF outcomes: (1). Peace, Security and Rule of law; (2). Sustainable Economic transformation; and (3). UNDAF Cross-cutting area on youth. This broad appeal to improving alternative livelihoods in support of national reconciliation converges with the long-term strategic direction of both the UN and the government, which emphasised critical investments in strengthening youth employment and empowerment for conflict prevention.

### 3.2. INTERVENTION LOGIC, MONITORING AND LEARNING

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The respective partners all bring to the project several decades of experience working on similar interventions. The uniqueness of this project is that it draws from the individual experiences of the work of the partners, identifying challenges related to vulnerable youth in the targeted communities, with the project being a pilot project to examine how effective the model used will be in addressing the identified challenges. The lessons from previous engagements by institutions such as UNDP, UNFPA, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)-Cities Alliance informed the design and implementation of the project.

The logframe is well-designed and is of very good quality. It has two outcomes, each with outputs that are well defined and clearly speak to what the project aims to achieve. The intervention logic has assumptions and risks that are clear and speak to the context and they include:

- i) Failure of the government to maintain youth as a priority and commit resources in the outcome document of the PAPD.
- ii) Relapse/return of the disadvantaged youth to old habit or status quo due to the inability of the Drug Enforcement Agency reduce/prevent the infiltration of illegal drugs and substances in the country.
- iii) Sale of project materials/tools by the disadvantaged youth to support craving/habits.
- iv) Potential of violent protests from disadvantaged youth who will not be selected as beneficiaries.
- v) Youth conflict and violence: Misunderstandings and misinformation to disadvantaged youth and community members concerning their roles and the projects objective/outcome.

A risk matrix was developed at the project design stage with impact and probability, countermeasures and management responses included and the parties responsible for assessing and managing each risk factor included. The risk factors were monitored and assessed by the project's implementation team. Importantly, the initial design of the risk factor did not consider factors such as natural disasters and pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic had implications for the implementation of the project as the outbreak happened at the onset of the implementation of the project. Thus, there was the need for adaption to ensure the delivery of benefits to the target groups.

The indicators as set during the design stage of the project were unambiguous, Relevant, Acceptable, Credible, Easy and Robust (RACER) and can be easily used to measure the progress made by the project. It has only two result areas, which are largely interlinked and shaped the approach of the project. The two result areas are 1) Disadvantaged youth in Montserrado County are socially reintegrated and peacefully co-exist with communities. 2) Improved access to 500 disadvantaged youth in Montserrado County to sustainable livelihood and employment opportunities to enhance their resilience to conflict and social tension.

Target values are set for every indicator, and they are realistic and achievable and were regularly updated. For instance, indicator 1.1.1 reads "Number of drop-in centres capacitated and providing psycho-social support, mental and SRH services to disadvantaged youth". Indicator 1.2.1. reads "Number of disadvantaged youths engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives in their communities". Additionally, the logframe has clear timelines for implementation of activities.

The targets set are sex-disaggregated and provide a clear indication of the number of males and females targeted by the project. However, a specific baseline study for the project was not done at the inception phase. This is as a result of the fact that the project team considered the assessment done by LRRRC (one of the project key stakeholders) of vulnerable youth and launched by the UN Resident

Coordinator as a baseline. The team did not want to duplicate an assessment that had already been endorsed by the UN Resident Coordinator. In addition to the LRRRC Assessment, the team decided to conduct several screening exercises on the beneficiaries based on best practice and lessons shared by the Embassy of France (based on a similar programme in Cote d'Ivoire) and assessment of the capacity of the Drop-in Centers as a means of updating the project implementation strategy/modalities. Based on all of the above, a baseline assessment was not included in the project budget.

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### 3.2.1. MONITORING SYSTEMS

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The project had systems in place that were embedded at the design stage to have the project monitored by all the actors involved in its implementation. For instance, the project was said to have been intermittently monitored by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) consisting of the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, the UN Resident Coordinator and a designated representative at the level of the LMPFT Secretariat. Reports were said by respondents to be provided to the committee, with the committee providing recommendation and guidelines on the implementation of the activities. However, there was no evidence if they were visiting the project sites to have a first-hand view of the implementation process. Such visits could have helped to have them provide informed perspectives on the implementation of the project.

At the UN level, a Technical Coordination Committee (TCC) was established, and it consisted of the technical focal points of the agencies involved in the project and was coordinated by the PBF Secretariat. It was on occasions chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator when key issues were discussed, and decisions had to be made. The TCC was established to discuss the progress made by the project and the challenges that were encountered. It met monthly and targets were set for each month during the meetings held.

In addition to the TCC, there were multi-layers of monitoring done by UNDP and UNFPA, which were the agencies responsible for the implementation of the project. They directly monitored the activities of the respective partners and engaged them and the beneficiaries during field visits. In addition to this, UNDP organised coordination meetings with the partners, where the partners made presentations on their activities and feedback was provided to them. In addition to the above, due to the design of the project and the divisions of responsibilities, the MoH and UNFPA directly monitored the activities of YWCA and Plan International. The activities of CAFOD were monitored in the field by UNDP.

It was deduced from the reports provided and interviews conducted that there were very minimal joint monitoring missions and institutions largely conducted individual monitoring exercises. Consequently, this limited the potential for collective conclusions based on the realities in the field and for cross-learning and exchanges for instance between the activities of YWCA and Plan International on the one hand, and CAFOD on the other hand. Continuous joint monitoring could have added significant value to the implementation of the project.

Reports were provided by the partners on the implementation of the project. The reports from the field were compiled by UNFPA and UNDP and used to develop the annual reports. The reports are of good quality and they provide clarity on how the project was implemented.

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### 3.3. EFFICIENCY

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The project is well designed, however, looking at the intervention logic, it may at first glance appear to be very complex and with too many actors when it could have been implemented with few actors and tailored to be much straight forward and less challenging to implement. However, a closer look points to the need to have diversity in terms of specialisation in the respective areas delivered by the project, for instance those that provided psychosocial, and health related and those that are based on economic support, undertaken by different partners. Thus, it was concluded that the implementation mechanisms that were put in place were good, and they enhanced the potential for the project to achieve its expected result.

The project as indicated above has UNDP as the lead organisation, with UNFPA being the co-applicant. Both are agencies of the United Nations and they have been complementing the activities of the government of Liberia, as credible development partners for decades. The two agencies coordinated the activities of the project at all levels and had very specific responsibilities in relation to the implementation of the respective components of the project.

The implementation of the project was supported by the PSC, the TCC and the Project Implementation Teams set under the respective components, with UNDP working with MoY and CAFOD on the one hand, and UNFPA working with the MoH and YWCA and Plan International on the other hand. The approach adopted had the UN agencies working with state and non-state actors to ensure that an integrated and collaborative approach is used in delivering the benefits of the project. They met regularly and it was observed that all the actors were familiar with the project and its objectives and are contributing to the success of the project.

Closely tied to the above is the fact that there were several other actors that supported the implementation of the different components of the project, and they include both state and non-state actors. Some of these actors are the Liberia Refugee Repatriation Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) the Monrovia and Paynesville City Corporations, and Youth Crime Watch of Liberia (YCWL). Such institutions supported the project's capacity building exercises through the facilitation of workshops and supervised job placement and livelihood activities such as the cash for work program. It was however observed that these actors were not integrated into the Project Implementation Teams and they were not part of the monitoring exercise that were conducted. Rather than them being incorporated and working on supporting specific components of the project, they should have been integrated into the project teams to foster an integrated approach that would have enhanced local ownership and leadership in the implementation of the project.

Despite the above, the government actors, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) participated in the implementation of the project. Their participation and commitment to the project provided it with significant political capital that a project like the one reviewed requires. Thus, there was a good understanding on the part of the state actors that the project is complementing their actions and that it is in their interest to best support the implementation of the project. However, some government actors indicated that even though they played key roles in the project, they were not fully involved when critical decisions were being made. For instance, they indicated that the choice of partners for the Ministries to work with, was made by the UN agencies, with the Ministries informed, rather than all of them taking the decision. Essentially, for instance, with the case of the MoYS and YWCA, it was indicated that it took a while for them to have a clear understanding of how they can function together, with the Ministry supporting the organisation to implement activities related to the project.

An actor that could have added value to the implementation of the project that was not fully involved in the project, is the media. The media, especially community radio stations could have played a critical role in enhancing awareness raising and sensitisation activities in relation to vulnerable youth.

It is worthy to mention that even though community leaders and structures such as women and youth groups and law enforcement within the existing communities were engaged at the inception phase of the project and trained on how they could support its implementation, they were not fully integrated into every component of the project. Their role and place in the provision of psycho-social support to the youth was vague and that had effects for that component of the project as described in the sections below. This was however not the case for the VSLA component, where they continue to provide maximum support as described in the section on the impact of the project. Community structures and leaders are essential for the successful reintegration of vulnerable people, especially in fostering re-acceptance and addressing issues related to stigmatisation and stereotypes. These structures are owned and led by community members and they have the access and legitimacy that was required to undertake a reintegration project, so working with them would have helped immensely especially in relation to the provision of longer-term psycho-social support. In most cases, they are the first point of contact and call for the beneficiaries and as such, should have been capacitated to provide longer term support to them.

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### 3.3.1 ADEQUACY IN RELATION TO THE INPUTS/RESOURCES PROVIDED BY THE VARIOUS PARTNERS

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The financial resources provided for the project, 100% by the LMPTF /Peace Building Fund Secretariat, would have been adequate based on the initial design of the project. However, the shift from 200 to 500 beneficiaries had financial implications and even led to a shift from institutional training to the apprenticeship/master trainer model. What the government could have done to upscale the project through having co-funding provided to add beneficiaries and at the same time maintain the quality of the project as designed. Despite this, it was concluded that the finances of the project were well managed and used, and value for money was ensured with activities undertaken.

The facilities and the human resources of the partner organisations were made available to the project. All the partners provided the required human resources that the project required. Furthermore, the government, CSOs provided human resource and other forms of support to the project. For instance, the drop-in centres are owned by the government and the facilities were used throughout the project and vulnerable youth continue to access them. As indicated above, a major gap identified during the evaluation was the failure to have community structures embedded into the project, they would have provided additional longer term human resource and social capital that would have helped to promote the ideals and objectives of the project.

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### 3.3.2. DELAYS ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

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The implementation of the project encountered some delays which had implications for its implementation. This section discusses the key challenges and how they were addressed. The principal challenge that the project contended with was the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic affected Liberia in early 2020 and had implications for the implementation of the project, as it led to delays in implementing. Especially as the pandemic brought its own security challenges, which included having the public to respect the regulations set by the government, including lockdowns and curfews. However, project partners indicated that they were able to adapt to the context of the pandemic and gradually delivered the services needed by the youth. They also noted the challenges that they had to deal with as some youth used the periods that they could not be reached to continue

the use of drugs or be involved in criminal activities, which placed the need for extra work on the counsellors to have them constantly engaged and encouraged to stay focused on the support they were getting from the project.

Some partners indicated that there was a financial crisis in Liberia at the start of the project and as such they could not access funds from the bank for a while. They had to regularly engage the banks especially the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI) to ensure that funds they could get at least some of the funds they needed. This challenge persisted for months but was eventually fixed by the Government of Liberia.

There were also delays that resulted from the slow transition from the psychosocial to the economic component of the project. For instance, by the end of the first year of the project, only 196 (39%) out of the 500 targeted youth had been received and verified by CAFOD. The reason for the delay was attributed to the COVID-19 and the need to ensure that the youth complete all the compulsory drug rehabilitation and counselling sessions before they could be allowed to participate in the economic component of the project. Thus, CAFOD had to wait much longer than anticipated to carry out their activities. However, they were able to eventually get the lists and provide the training and support required by the beneficiaries.

It is important to note that most of the challenges at the initial implementation point of the project were identified by the Evaluability Assessment conducted by the PBF Secretariat. The assessment went a long way in helping to guide the process of setting the project on the rightful course as the findings and the recommendations produced were shared with partners, with corrective measures taken.

### 3.4. EFFECTIVENESS

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Significant progress has been made already in producing the expected outputs under each of the outcome areas. Below is provided under the specific result areas, some of the outputs that have been delivered so far.

**Outcome 1)** In 2019, the project established three drop-in centres to cater to the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged youth. Additionally, 15 psycho-social counsellors, 6 mental health clinicians and 5 pharmacists were provided with training to build their capacity, and they were eventually able to provide quality treatment and support to over 1972<sup>11</sup> beneficiaries; The youth were medically screened and received counselling at the centres and in communities. The psychosocial support provided at the community level included the identification and recruitment of project beneficiaries through strategic community entry methods that involved community leaders and the CICs. Counselling and follow-ups were provided to the youth within their communities as well as awareness targeting their families and community members for them to support the longer-term successful reintegration of the vulnerable youth.

Other services provided were Sexual and Reproductive Health services, including the distribution of condoms, care for malaria, typhoid, anaemia, scabies, respiratory infections including tuberculosis. These were usually preceded and followed by awareness raising activities in the communities and in the drop-in centres; The health and psychosocial support resulted in significant progress in the stabilisation of 321 disadvantaged youth (64% of 500) from drug addiction/use. Of these, 113 (35%) have been reunited with their families, and 196 (61%) reintegrated into communities; Further, the

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<sup>11</sup> The Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF) Annual Results Report 2019, Page 10.

project provided capacity strengthening and technical advisory support at the local and national level through knowledge building and partnership. In September 2019, 250 community leaders, members, personnel of LNP and Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and disadvantaged youth received an inception training on the plight of disadvantaged youth, the goal of the project and the role of each actor in supporting the project activities aimed at addressing the situation of disadvantaged youth; 510 (127 females/383 males) disadvantaged youth received training on peacebuilding and conflict management skills in August 2020. The Peacebuilding training increased the disadvantaged youth understanding on the importance of peaceful co-existence among their colleagues and community members; A specialised training manual on drug addiction counselling, rehabilitation and integration was drafted under the project.

**Outcome 2:** Between September 2019 – December 2020,<sup>12</sup> the targeted disadvantaged youth have benefited from several activities aimed at reducing their economic and social vulnerabilities; 521 (136 females/385 males) disadvantaged youth are trained in business management and financial and adult literacy; 225 (71 females/154 males) disadvantaged youth trained in business planning and development; 508 (133 females/375 males) disadvantaged youth placed in 5-month vocational skills training and two graduations were held to mark the end of their training , one on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and the second on 11 December 2020 ; 435 (115 females/320 males) disadvantaged youth graduated and were provided with start-up kits (tools and materials) across 14 sectors: hair dressing/cosmetology, barbing, pastry/catering, interior decoration, plumbing, tailoring, soap production, auto mechanic, electronics, refrigeration, welding, masonry, electricity and carpentry; 478 (117 females/361 males) disadvantaged youth were trained and formed into 19 VSLAs. The VSLA groups were established in Gobachop/Redlight, King Gray, Chocolate City, West Point Point 4, Duala and New Kru Town communities. The groups are supervised by community leaders or other community members identified by the disadvantaged youth. The supervisors keep the savings boxes and host meetings for the VSLA members. The youth were trained in the VSLA methodology and how it can support self-sufficiency and financial management. By the end of the project, 13 out of the 19 VSLAs were active and five had successfully carried out their first share-out with members and had extended a call for new membership, including interested community members, and opened a new savings cycle; 12 communities across two cities (Monrovia and Paynesville) benefited from clean-up exercise with tools and materials handed over to the two cities at the end of the exercise; 455 (122 females/333 males) disadvantaged youth participated in the 10-day clean-up exercise and received Cash for Work; 200 (71 females/129 males) disadvantaged youth are actively engaged in their relevant trade and industry; 146 (37 females/109 males) disadvantaged youth participated in networking meetings across five communities in preparation for internship placement and SME development; 150 (41 females/109 males) disadvantaged youth were placed and completed three-month internships across 20 institutions and businesses, and 42 (11 females/31 males) of those have been absorbed by their institutions.

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<sup>12</sup> CAFOD, 2019. SEED Project Final Annual Report. September 2019 - December 2020.

### 3.5. IMPACT

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The project as indicated above, succeeded in making tremendous progress, which contributed to the achievement of some of the goals of the project. Below are reasons provided under each result area for the conclusions arrived at:

- i. There is a general awareness related to vulnerable youth in communities and the need for community actors and their families to work on reducing their vulnerabilities and helping to be reintegrated into their communities. Families and community members in all the communities visited indicated that they are conscious of the need to mitigate the stereotypes and stigmatisation that contributed to the perception of exclusion and marginalisation on the part of vulnerable youth in their homes and communities. Thus, communities are seen making conscious efforts to support the reintegration of vulnerable youth.
- ii. It was observed that most of the youth engaged during the evaluation have improved life skills and they constructively engaged the reviewers and community members on the challenges they were contending with prior to the project, and their desire to continue demonstrating that they are not threats to their communities, but young people who want to be recognised and given a voice and place in their communities. The exchanges provided an indication that there is a positive relationship and growing trust between the community members and the vulnerable youth. This development was attributed to the project by both groups.
- iii. Communities visited indicated that there is reduced violence and criminal activities. The high spate of criminality and violence that those communities experienced before the project were said to be caused by vulnerable youth. However, with the involvement of some of the vulnerable youth into the project, they came to have an alternative, which has been helping them to better relate with their communities, thereby minimising criminal activities and the threats that were related then to the youth.
- iv. It was observed that the project contributed significantly to the shift/change of habits on usage/intake of drugs and alcohol as well as other harmful substances. This conclusion was made based on engagements with the youth and the verification of community members. Some have significantly reduced levels, and some have completely stopped the habit. The use of harmful substances contributed to the high level of criminality and SGBV that communities experienced prior to the project.
- v. Based on consultations held with the youth, it was noted that there is tremendous shift from the activities that most of the targeted youth were involved in, prior to the project and what they are currently involved in. For instance, most of them were involved in petty trading, menial jobs and most were idle. This has changed because of the support provided by the project under review, as part of its economic reintegration support. The blend of psycho-social support, counselling and vocational and technical training on specific trades helped to build their skills and put them in the right frame of mind to engage in more dignified economic activities.
- vi. The use of the VSLA methodology appears to be working very well in some communities for example Redlight/Gobachop community where they were established. It helps the beneficiaries save money, and the money saved can be used for expansion of businesses or the beginning of businesses. It provides them also a platform where they can take loans if they need money without the indignity of using other loan facilities that harasses them to

repay, usually with high interest rates. By the end of the project, groups had saved a combined L\$300,628. It is important to note that the VSLAs were not provided with seed money and members used their own money to begin and maintain them. Community members are also joining the VSLA groups, and they are also benefitting from the model. It has the potential of lifting a lot of people out of poverty, if communities continue to use it on a longer-term basis. However, in some communities such as Mount Barclay, the methodology has not succeeded as the youth have not demonstrated the expected commitment to the methodology. It was generally observed in relation to the VSLA in the targeted communities that it appears to be much more successful in communities where there are more women involved and community leaders are willing to keep the savings box and manage the process. It was also observed that in some communities when the cash for work projects were ongoing, the youth had money to save but when it ended, some could not find avenues to get money to take care of their daily needs and at the same time save, so it limited their contributions to the VSLA.

- vii. The project helped to improve the relationship between the vulnerable youth and state institutions such as the LNP and the city councils. The relationship especially between the vulnerable and the LNP was said to have disintegrated overtime because of the heavy-handedness of the police and their criminalisation of the youth. However, the interaction between the police and the youth because of the project helped to improve their relationship.
- viii. The project contributed to increasing visibility of the situation of disadvantaged youth in Liberia. There is indication from political actors and national decision makers that there is great need for the socio-economic empowerment of disadvantaged youth and the SEED project is one of such projects that contributes to the addressing the vulnerability of disadvantaged youth.

Out of the 103 youth who were engaged in the field, 75 indicated that they were very satisfied with the project and the support provided to them. The remaining 28 youth indicated that the project could have done much more than it did and some of their observations are noted below:

- i. Some of the beneficiaries are of the perception that the project was too short and that they needed more psycho-social and other support to overcome alcohol and substance abuse. This points to the need for the project to have trained key actors in the respective communities to support the provision of longer-term support to overcome this challenge. This said to have led to recidivism and the selling of start-up kits on the part of some youth, even though this is indicated by the respondents to be on a smaller scale.
- ii. Some of the female beneficiaries indicated that the project did not adequately mainstream gender and that it was not gender focused or responsive. For instance, they indicated that there was very limited privacy when dealing with survivors/victims of abuse, the counselling spaces designated did not always ensure privacy and confidentiality of information as well as specialised training on gender and dealing with People with Disability.
- iii. The failure to prepare the youth for the end of the project left some of them very confused as to the next steps and who they can turn to for support and guidance when required. Future projects should have exit strategies not only included in them, but they should be fully rolled-out from the inception phase.



- iv. Youth complained that they were not provided with food and transportation when visiting the drop-in centres and this demotivated them as they usually had to return hungry and tired after sessions.

In addition to the above, some other conclusions were reached based on interviews with key informants, on some factors which limited the gains and impact made by the project:

- i. The non-inclusion of the beneficiaries and key partners such as community members in the design of the project, limited its ability to have their ownership and leadership of the implementation process. Even though the project was based on the lessons learned from previous projects, it is always a good practice to engage potential beneficiaries on key needs and aspirations at the start of any project and to have them fully integrated throughout the implementation of the project.
- ii. A lack of uniformity in the implementation of activities across project intervention. For instance, some communities such as the West Point indicated that they had fewer training options and programmes compared to other communities.
- iii. Most respondents including the disadvantaged youth were of the view that the master trainer approach mainly based on an apprenticeship model and the use of individual trainers in the intervention communities to be changed to an institutional training strategy to improve the quality and supervision of the training as well as the impact on the beneficiaries. In fact, as indicated earlier, the institutional training model was that which was embedded in the design of the project, but it was changed to accommodate more youth into the project.
- iv. Key drugs needed for the withdrawal from drugs such as Methadone were not readily available; in fact the first batch came in almost at the end of the project, while the second batch was not received before the end of the project.

### 3.6. SUSTAINABILITY

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Since the end of the project, it has demonstrated that it has a fair potential of sustainability and at the same time there are several factors that undermine the potential for sustainability. In relation to the factors that are enhancing sustainability, it is important to note that the project to a large extent was built around the provision of psycho-social, mental, SRH support, skills building and economic empowerment for vulnerable youth, to reduce the vulnerability of the youth and improve on their socio-economic status. Thus, the bulk of the activities undertaken were geared towards changing the mind-set of youth and lifting them out of poverty. The psycho-social and rehabilitation support has led to some youth completely dropping the habit of drug and substance abuse, while others have minimised it. It was concluded that even though some of the beneficiaries may get fully hooked up on alcohol and substance abuse, most of those that are off it now may never go back to using them, especially since they are now involved in productive economic activities.

The economic support provided to some of the beneficiaries has gone a long way in building their knowledge and skills on specific technical and vocational trades. Thus, they can compete for work and some of them do have their businesses. It was also observed that some of these businesses will succeed in lifting the young entrepreneurs and their families out of poverty, if properly managed. This prospect could have been better enhanced if the project were fully linked to private sector actors in the localities where the youth have their businesses. The private sector actors would have provided the mentoring and coaching support that the youth require on a longer-term. Nonetheless, some of these

youths were linked to apprenticeships and placements and with the MCC and the PCC to have them work on strengthening waste management systems in Montserrat. This point does not mean that the private sector was not involved in the project, they were involved but not fully mainstreamed at the design stage and they did not have ownership of it. Thus, they have very limited roles to play throughout the project.

The VSLA methodology adopted has a very high potential for sustainability. It is embedded in communities, with community members supporting its rolling-out. Some of the VSLAs have demonstrated that they can be rolled-out with very limited external support. The disadvantaged youth are saving money from the trades they are involved, and this effort has been sustained since the end of the project. However, there will be the need for them to be guided on how they can use the profit they make to begin or expand on their businesses. This is where private sector actors could have played a role in helping to mobilise them into cooperatives and helping them invest and have businesses of their own.

The life skills that the youth acquired are skills that would be with them for the rest of their lives, and this has significantly contributed to the improvement of their relationship with community members. Additionally, this is said to increase peace and security in local communities. There has been consistency in the growing relationship between the youth and community members. This is coupled with the awareness raised on youth issues that contributed to an appreciation on the part of community members to support the reintegration process of the vulnerable youth.

Despite the gains made, it was concluded that there are immense factors that undermine the potential for sustainability. Principal among these is the fact that the project was short and was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited the benefits that the project could provide to those targeted. In line with this, there was very limited coordination of activities, which undermined the partners to have a webbed approach towards ensuring stability and continuity. Thus, there was no properly rolled-out sustainability strategy and as such, there is limited post-project support for the beneficiaries. For instance, as indicated above, the project could have tied the provision of mentoring and coaching support to the private sector, while psychosocial support could have been tied to community leaders and structures. Despite this, some aspects of the psychosocial support and mental health component of the project have the potential of sustainability. For instance, the drop-in centres are in government health facilities and the mental health clinicians trained are on government payroll.

It was concluded that there is the need for another project, even if it is on a smaller scale to build on the gains made by this project. It must be implemented as soon to ensure that the gains already made are not lost. This conclusion is derived from the foundation that there is no concrete strategy for continued psycho-social, mental, and SRH support provided to the beneficiaries. Although the evaluation took note of plans for facility to community outreach to be conducted by the drop centres in collaboration with intention communities post project, there was limited indication that beneficiaries are aware of continuation of services. Additionally, the beneficiaries that are participating in economic activities would require mentoring and coaching support, and this includes those using the VSLA methodology.

### 3.7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

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In relation to cross-cutting issues, two areas are examined, i) State-Citizens Relationship, and ii) Human Rights and Gender Equality.

**i) State-Citizens Relationship:** One of the aims of the project was to improve the relationship between the citizens and the state. As indicated above, the project contributed to improving the relationship between the target groups and state security actors, such as the LNP. This relationship has deteriorated over time because of the lack of faith and confidence of young people in the state. Such a relationship was defined by the chequered history of the Liberian state and its marginalisation of young people, and the failure of the state to provide essential services and meet the needs and demands of its citizens over the years. The inability of young people to access socio-economic and political opportunities led to some of them becoming vulnerable youth. Thus, there was the need to have a project that would seek to improve the relationship and enhance effective collaboration between the vulnerable youth and state authorities. In essence the project is about reassessing the social contract between the state and its citizens and enhancing the ability of a significant state institutions such as the MoH, MoYS, LNP etc. deliver on their own component of the social contract, through providing essential services to vulnerable youth.

**ii) Human Rights, Gender Equality, and the Rights-Based Approach:** The project had a human rights and gender equality-based approach, and the set objectives are all focused on protecting and promoting the rights, welfare, and dignity of vulnerable groups within the targeted communities. Women, girls, men, and boys were all fully involved in the project and there were no reports of exclusion or marginalisation in relation to the project.

The project sought to promote SRH, mitigate SGBV and enhance the inclusion of women into the project. However, there were concerns raised by respondents in relation to challenges relating to gender mainstreaming, and ensuring the privacy of some female beneficiaries, for instance, counselling spaces did not fully ensure privacy and confidentiality of information taken from female beneficiaries. Additionally, some of the female beneficiaries indicated during consultations that they felt that some of those who provided training and other forms of support needed to be trained on gender. Furthermore, more effort should be placed in identifying and reaching vulnerable women. It was observed during field visits that there are several women in the communities visited that could have been involved in the project. At the end, approximately 25% female youth benefited from the project.

The project appears to have adhered to the working principles of the rights-based approach. The training activities undertaken and the awareness raising, and sensitisation activities are all hinged on the rights-based approach. The project sought to shape the mind-set of community members on the need to addressing challenges that they have been contending with for years and that have to do with their rights, dignity, and welfare.

## 4. CONCLUSION

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The project is highly relevant, and it identified and engaged 500 youth and sought to transform them from being threats to their communities to facilitators of peace and being constructive citizens engaged in decent means of livelihood. An inter-webbed approach that integrated several actors including UNDP and UNFPA, government and non-governmental institutions and the families and communities of the beneficiaries. The intervention logic is good and the indicators as set during the design stage of the project were unambiguous, RACER and can be easily used to measure the progress made by the project. It has only two result areas, which are largely interlinked and shaped the approach of the project. The choice of activities and outputs to be delivered by the project was good as they took into consideration the psycho-social and mental health assistance required by the beneficiaries and the socio-economic support, they needed to promote not just their successful reintegration but also their dignity and voice in society.

Even though the design of the project was based on the experiences and lessons learned from previous projects, beneficiaries were not directly engaged before the design of the project to have their views on how the project could address their needs and aspirations. Such an approach would have added value to the project, as the needs of youth in the different communities targeted may differ. Additionally, the provision of reintegration support should be needs-based and informed by the profile of the targeted person and contextual issues responsible for their vulnerability. Even though there were multiple monitoring layers, they were not harmonised to maximise the benefits that the project could have had from monitoring exercises. Despite this, the reports produced were insightful, easy to read and of high quality.

In relation to efficiency, it was concluded that the project was well designed, had a Steering and Implementation Committees, with UNDP responsible for the overall implementation and coordination of the project. However, some partners were critical of the coordination of the project and indicated it could have been strengthened to further enhance better interaction and complementarity of efforts among the respective partners. The challenges related to coordination also had implications for the monitoring of activities. In addition to this, the private sector was not integrated into the project and the community leaders and structures were not fully mainstreamed into the psycho-social component of the project, as they could have helped to provide longer term support to the beneficiaries.

The different partners demonstrated commitment to the project and their human resource and facilities were made available to the project. Additionally, the rich blend of the partners and their commitment to the project, provided it with the socio-political capital it required to achieve the set objectives. It was further concluded that the finances of the project were well managed and used, and value for money was ensured with activities undertaken.

With effectiveness, it was concluded that the project made significant progress in undertaking the set activities and that it succeeded in achieving most of its set objectives. The outputs delivered were of high quality and were delivered by the institution that had the technical capacity to deliver them such as Plan International, CAFOD and YWCA, with them working with the MoH, MoYS, UNDP and UNFPA. However, the implementation process was to some extent affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby having some activities delayed. The project was adapted to the context, with the implementation team adhering to COVID-19 regulations as they implemented the project. There were significant gains made by the project, with changes experienced on the side of both the targeted youth and communities as indicated under the impact section.

The approach adopted by the project fosters sustainability, as the knowledge and skills acquired by the respective beneficiaries, will remain with them and there is growing awareness on how communities

could best support vulnerable youth. Furthermore, economic activities such as the VSLA and small-scale businesses that the youth are involved in are gradually demonstrating sustainability. However, the integration of the private sector could have added value in relation to both the implementation and sustainability of the project as they could have provided extra support to the beneficiaries. To further build on the gains made so far, it will be good to have another phase of the project.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The recommendations listed below build on the findings and some suggestions provided by the stakeholders consulted on what could be done by specific actors to improve on future interventions and their programming.

<b>Actor(s) recommendation is targeted at:</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
UNDP and UNFPA	Subsequent interventions should have well designed coordination structures that foster the integration, buy-in, ownership and leadership of the project by all partners. This should include multi-layered coordination approaches that will ensure fluidity in coordination and all partners are fully involved in all stages of the project.
UNDP and UNFPA	Community serves as a lynchpin between the project and the beneficiaries, allowing them to play critical and defined roles would enhance the project's goals especially along reintegration and rehabilitation. Therefore, future interventions must clearly define the strategies and associated activities required to ensure reintegration and rehabilitation with the support of community leaders, local law enforcement structures, other community-based structures that provide some form of support to the target group prior to project intervention such as religious leaders as observed in few project intervention communities. A concerted effort must be made to ensure that there is a consultative process that includes community perspectives, ownership and leadership.
UNDP and UNFPA	For future interventions, the training methodology should be reviewed, and scope expanded through consultation with the target group, experts, and key stakeholders. The evaluation noted the need to expand training options, duration include basic numeracy/literacy skills and provide institutional training as opposed to the apprenticeship model. To take these considerations further, future intervention should commission assessments and dialogues with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that skills training is needs based and impact the beneficiaries as well as contribute to overall peacebuilding goals.
UNDP and UNFPA	For future intervention develop a clear and concrete strategy for job linkages and internship opportunities. The project performed well on providing livelihood skills and providing immediate economic opportunities to the target group, however the evaluation found limited evidence that the gains can be sustained without further support and supervision.
UNFPA, UNDP and government actors	Steering Committees should include all key partners especially those that are directly implementing a project or programme, in this case, CAFOD, YWCA and Plan International. Their inclusion will go a long way in having meaningful discussions and faster decision-making processes. The donor should also be part of the Steering Committee and that Committee should be undertaking monitoring visits to have firsthand understanding of implementation process of the project, with recommendations provided on corrective measures to be undertaken as and when necessary.
All partners	The media and private sector are crucial partners that should be central in the development and implementation of any project. They have their own agency and could bring in significant value addition that could help

	<p>maximise the benefits of the project for the beneficiaries. Thus, it is essential that an actor mapping exercise is undertaken at the inception stage of future interventions, with the skills and areas of competence of relevant actors identified, with them engaged, mobilised and encouraged to support the implementation of the intervention. The failure to effectively do so in the project under review, limited the potentials of the project and the contributions that the said actors could have made to it, if they were included.</p>
All partners	<p>Even though the project has ended, the partners should continue to monitor the sustainability of the interventions. Additionally, they could link the beneficiaries to related interventions that they or their partners are undertaking, to ensure that they continue to get external support. It will be unhelpful to the beneficiaries for them to be abandoned by the partners because the project ended. Post-project monitoring visits would boost the morale of the beneficiaries and it will encourage them to continue building on the progress they have made so far.</p>
All partners	<p>The design of future interventions should have a well embedded and properly rolled-out exit strategy. The implementation of the strategy should begin at the inception phase of the project, with all stakeholders well educated on the sustainability model that the project is using and how to promote continuity at the end of the lifespan of the life span of the project.</p>
All partners	<p>Future interventions should be tailored to be gender focused and responsive. Tied to this is the need for future baselines undertaken to assess gender dynamics in potential intervention areas, with the findings used to further strengthen the gender component of the project. Logframes should have sex-disaggregated data and targets set should be gender focused.</p>
The GoL	<p>The GoL should mobilise resources from the development partners to undertake similar projects of this nature, with gradual upscaling done to ensure that youth across the country are targeted. As the principal duty bearer in relation to the rights and welfare of Liberians, there is the immediate and urgent need for the government to address the challenges that vulnerable youth contend with in Liberia, as the failure to do so has implications for peace and security, especially in local communities.</p>

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## 7. ANNEX 1: LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

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The list below provides details of some of the respondents that were engaged in the evaluation, it does not entail the names of beneficiaries that participated in the survey and community members that participated in FGDs, as the principle of anonymity was applied during engagements with them.

<b>Key Informants Interviews (KIIs)</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Albertha G. Ketter	Mental Health Clinician	Drop in Center, Duport Road Health Center
Angie Tarr Nyakoon	Director of the Mental Health Program	Ministry of Health
Bendu Zaizay	SEED Project Manager	UNDP
Barzeah Youlo	Psychosocial Counsellor	YWCA
Emmanuel S. Gaye	Special Project Officer	Paynesville City Corporation
Frank Yancy	Psychosocial Counsellor	YWCA
Gerald Witherspoon	Former Programme Officer	UNDP
James Koryor	Secretary General	Federation of Liberian Youth
John Davis	Field Officer	Caritas Development Office Monrovia
Joseph S. Quoi	Pharmacist, Mental Health Program	Ministry of Health
Josephine Moore	Psychosocial Counsellor	YWCA
Marie Togbana Gbah	Project Coordinator	Plan International Liberia
Maybe Garmai Livingstone	National Program Specialist Youth and Adolescent,	UNFPA
Nicole Geremia	Program Development Officer for Liberia and Sierra Leone	CAFOD
Philomena Nimely	Mental Health Clinician	Youth Drop in Center, Soniwein Health Center
Robert Kutu-Akoi	Chief of Drug Prevention	Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency
Roseline Q. Toweh	National General Secretary	YWCA
Sam Ford	Assistant Director for Community Service	Liberia National Police
Sampson Benin	Program Officer	CAFOD
Stephen Kiah Jr	Director of Special Projects	Paynesville City Corporation

Varney Wilson	Project Manager, and SEED Project Focal Person	Youth Crime Watch of Liberia
Isaac Doe	Deputy Minister for Youth Development	Ministry of Youth and Sports
John Dennis	M&E Officer	UNPBF Secretariat
Vulnerable Youth - Details withheld as indicated above		
Community Members - Details withheld as indicated above		
Commanders-in-Chief - Details withheld as indicated above		