

# National Roadmap on Protection of Children Living in Street Situations in Liberia Final Report

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## Executive Summary

The qualitative aspect of this mixed-methods study sampled 403 participants (193 children living in street situations and 210 parents/guardians) from Liberia's 15 counties; 14 representatives from the Child Protection Network (CPN); two Government ministries, two UN agencies and three NGO/partners while the quantitative component sampled 159 out of the 225 respondents (15 each from the 15 counties); this constitutes 70.6% response rate. The sampling technique for this study was purposive. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were instruments used to collect the qualitative data, and the Kobo Toolbox software was used to collect the quantitative data.

From the qualitative data, there are several factors responsible for children living in street situations in Liberia. First, parents say "they live in multidimensional poverty". This means that they are poor, and their impoverished conditions lead them to use children as bread winners. According to the parents, "they cannot readily feed their children three times daily, and they cannot send them to school and provide other basic needs like clothes and healthcare for them". Most parents are without jobs, and there are limited opportunities for them to make a successful living that would allow them to "provide for the wellbeing of their families, mainly the children." Second, persistent non-support to children and mothers by most fathers leads children to living in street situations. Several families have broken down due to fathers' abandonment of their children with the mothers. Based on the views gathered from the children and mothers, most fathers do not care about supporting their children after leaving the marital relations. As a result, the mothers become single parents. In instances where such mothers get remarried, their new husbands "either do not have the means to fully support the wives and the stepchildren or they do not love the stepchildren."

The third major factor that leads children to living in street situations is limited access to free and compulsory primary education across the country. There are public schools in most parts of the country, but some of these schools are dysfunctional and are without qualified teachers. Some communities do not have primary schools. Where public schools are available, the children and parents have argued that "the fees and tuition being charged by these schools are very high". Hence, the poor parents "cannot afford to pay the fees being charged." Some teachers and schools' administrators that attended the FGDs blamed the charging of higher fees on the lack of material or budgetary support to public schools. Participants in the FGDs also blame the Education Ministry for "poor supervision and management of public schools". The fourth phenomenon associated with schools across the country is that the children go to school hungry and cannot stay there. Therefore, most of the children who enroll drop out of school. The parents have equally agreed that "there is no food for children in the morning and they do not have the means of providing breakfast, recess, lunch, and dinner daily". In view of this, the children and parents across the counties called for school feeding to allow children stay in school. It is believed that school feeding across the country "will draw more children into schools and this could help mitigate the problem of children selling to earn money for their school fees and feeding".

The fifth factor responsible for children living in street situations in Liberia is that some children are orphans or abandoned children whose parents left them with grandparents or without anyone to care for them. Orphans are found in all the counties but are less frequent in the Southeast of the country. Some of these orphans that attended the FGDs contend that “UNICEF, Gender Ministry and other agencies frown on orphanages; hence making them to live in street situations”. Additionally, there are other children that are without parents. Such children are found in the mining, fishing, and concession areas where migrants leave pregnant mothers and do not return. Most of these mothers are themselves children; hence when they have these babies, they leave them with either grandparents, family members, friends or just abandon the babies in public places. Such children need care and protection because they are found living in street situations due to the inability of the foster parents to adequately care for them.

The sixth factor that makes children to live in street situations is drug abuse. According to the parents and children, illicit drugs are widespread across the country. Both children and parents as well as policy makers who took part in the study confirmed that “illicit drugs are widespread in the country and that National security forces are protecting drug importers and drug dealers”. Accordingly, “drugs are sometimes placed in foods like candies, kanyan, gari, pepper soup and cakes sold on school campuses and other public places”. The children indicated that “disabled persons are part of those peddling drugs in communities and public areas”. The use of drugs is not only voluntary but also involuntary because anyone consuming such foods becomes an involuntary drug user. Therefore, the parents recommend the “formulation of harsher drug laws if the country must have a future productive generation”. Both the children and parents have recommended that “rehabilitation centers equipped with counselling and vocational training facilities be built to rehabilitate children that are abusing drugs”.

The seventh factor that leads children to living in street situations is teenage pregnancy or early parenting. There is high incidence of teenage pregnancy across the country, although the situation seems less prevalent in the South-eastern counties of Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, and Rivercess. Teenage girls get pregnant and dropout of school. Often, they are impregnated by teenage boys that are unprepared to become responsible fathers. In most instances, such babies are left with grandparents or other relatives to care for. Early parenting is a contributing factor to the circular flow of poverty and leads most teenage girls behind in terms of education. Some parents throw out their daughters who get impregnated by teenage boys or older men. This leads a whole lot of such children living in street situations in search of survival.

Due to all the above factors, children engage in child labor that itself is one of the key reasons children live in street situations. Child labor takes place in several forms. One of the frequent forms is the riding of motorcycles by teenage boys. The parents argued that “motor cycling is a new form of employment that attracts children, and this puts most of them out of school. The children themselves agree that “this new commercial affair is attractive and lucrative; hence they prefer it rather than going to school that takes a very long time to give them an income”. One key risk that street girls face is the issue of rape and sexual exploitation. Sometimes, “male adults offer monies for their goods for illegal sex while some boys are raped by adult males for food money”. Besides motor cycling, there are other forms of child labor across the country. The washing of cars/motorcycles, the crushing of rocks, working in food centers/restaurants, garages, mining, and fishing. The parents argue that “they make a living out of the labor of their children and through that they are able to make ends meet”. Coupled with child labor is the issue of peer pressure, which most parents and children themselves see as one of most essential elements that leads them into unacceptable lifestyles.

There are other issues leading children to living in street situations including “accusation of children as witchcrafts, corporal punishment by parents, children being brought up in garages and some being used to take their disabled parents around for begging”. Also, “some children become gays or lesbians and are despised by parents”. The adoption of children from the interior was another issue raised during the FGDs, but the parents feel that adoption is one of the ways their children can get external support. The children sampled were in the

age range of 7 to 14 years, although there were others who were 15, 16 and 17 years old. The gender ratio of participants in the study was 103 boys to 90 girls, and 69 men to 141 women.

From the quantitative data collected, it is estimated that 366,585 children sell in the street in the 15 counties. Montserrado has the largest number followed by Nimba, Grand Bassa, Bong, and Margibi. Regarding the number of children living in the street without going to school, respondents estimated that there are 126,702 children living in street situations without going to school in Liberia. Again, Montserrado came first, followed by Nimba, Maryland, Grand Cape Mount and Bong, respectively. On the issue of both parents and their children living in street situations, the respondents estimate that 25,406 children and their parents fall in this category in the 15 counties. Once again, Montserrado comes first followed by Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, Lofa, and Nimba, respectively.

## INTRODUCTION

The Government of Liberia and UNICEF agreed to partner with other national and international organizations to conduct a qualitative study on the protection of children living in street situations in Liberia. Later, the Steering Committee leading this process agreed to do a nation-wide mixed method data collection rather than only a qualitative study. The study will enable Government and partners to do an informed and objective analysis on children living in street situations in Liberia. Based on the analysis, a right based and results-focused national roadmap on protecting children living in street situations will be developed and costed in line with international and regional standards. This roadmap would be the first of its kind in the Republic of Liberia relative to the protection of children living in street situations. To achieve this goal, a national consultant was contracted by UNICEF Liberia to lead and coordinate the roadmap formulation between the Government of Liberia and UNICEF Liberia. First, the consultant presented an inception report. This document constitutes an analysis of the mixed method data collected on children living in street situations in Liberia thus far.

### Definition of children in street situations

According to UNICEF, children living in street situations (street children) are “any boy or girl who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, and so on, has become his/her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, directed and supervised by responsible adults”.

UNICEF has categorized street children into three types:

1. Street living children: those who sleep in public places without the presence of their families.
2. Street working children: those who work on the streets during the day and return to their families at night.
3. Children from street families, who live with their families on the street.

### Purpose and objectives of the roadmap

The purpose of collecting this data is to develop a rights-based, results-focused and costed roadmap for the protection of children in street situations across Liberia. To achieve this goal, a mixed method data collection process was utilized. The data collection process involved the affected children, their parents or guardians, the national government, and partners. This evidence serves as the bedrock for the formulation of a national roadmap to protect children living in street situations in Liberia. The specific objectives of this data collection were:

1. To collect data across Liberia to provide substantial evidence on
  1. The views and factors that lead to children living in street situations.
  2. Parents' feelings, views, and perspectives about these children on what could be done to protect them.
2. Estimate the number of children living in street situations.

3. To obtain informed insights and recommendations from the Government and partners on what needs to be done to protect children living in street situations in Liberia.
4. To develop a comprehensive rights-based, results-focused and costed national roadmap to address the plight of children living in street situations in Liberia.

### Key research questions

In view of the strategic objectives above, the leading research questions that this study sought to answer were:

1. What are the factors that lead children into living in street situations in Liberia?
2. What are the views and perspectives of some parents whose children are living in street situations in Liberia?
3. How many children are living in street situations in Liberia?
4. What concrete child protection actions can the Government and partners take to protect children living in street situations in Liberia?
5. What are concrete recommendations that the Government and partners could proffer to protect children living in street situations in Liberia?
6. What strategic rights-based, and results-focused objectives and deliverables can be costed in a national roadmap to address the plight of children living in street situations in Liberia?

### Approach to the assignment

This assignment considered three approaches in dealing with children in street situations. They are the rights-based approach, the welfare approach, and the repressive approach. In the process of formulating the national roadmap for the protection of children living in street situations, the rights-based approach was utilized grounded on the key principles below:

1. Child-rights approach whereby the child is respected as a rights holder and decisions are often made with the child. A child-rights approach ensures respect for the dignity, life, survival, well-being, health, development, participation, and non-discrimination of the child as a rights holder. Gathering the children's perspectives was the primary reason for the data collection.
2. Evidence-based, whereby the national roadmap will be based on the analysis drawn from data collected on children in street situations, as well as learning from their experiences as expressed during the data collection process.
3. Participatory approach which constitutes the involvement and consultation with State and non-State actors, including children and communities. This was the reason parents affected by this situation, the Government and partners working in child protection were included in the study.
4. A system-building approach and sustainable interventions. This will constitute the ingredients of the roadmap.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was the overall research approach that the National Consultant used for data collection that informs the formulation of the roadmap for protecting children living in street situations in Liberia. The Steering Committee on the formulation of the roadmap agreed that a mixed method data collection process was conducive rather than the qualitative data collection process initially approved. This discussion changed the analysis from the previously approved qualitative data collection to a mixed method analysis.

## Research method

This mixed methods research was utilized to conduct this nationwide study. It adopted the sequential explanatory data analysis approach.<sup>1</sup> Mixed methods research (MMR) involves collecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a single project. It is problem-centered approach to research (methods and theories are used instrumentally). Methodologically it combines deductive and inductive designs to generate both quantitative and qualitative data and integrates the datasets in some way.<sup>2</sup> The mixed method research combined qualitative and quantitative research methods to triangulate research findings. It combined quantitative data from a survey questionnaire with qualitative data that was gathered from structured key informant interviews and focus group discussions to explore and explain factors associated with and affecting the protection of children living in street situations in Liberia, using the county capitols as the data collection settings.

To understand the insights, perspectives, feelings, and views of children living in street situations, as well as parents or guardians affected by this phenomenon, and policy makers and partners in Liberia, the qualitative research method was used. This research method for this part of the study was relevant because there was a need to understand what leads children to live in street situations. This means that the children themselves were met and listened to obtain their personal insights, perspectives, feelings, and views on the issue.

Equally, to obtain a balanced analysis of children in street situations and estimate the prevalence rate of this phenomenon in the counties, it was important to obtain the views of county and city officials, as well as partners residing and working in the counties through a survey. Therefore, a quantitative research method was used to obtain information on approximate frequencies of children living in street situations in Liberia. In addition to collecting the primary data as indicated above, a thorough review of the international, regional, sub regional and national policies and laws on children living in street situations was undertaken. Therefore, the following policies and laws were reviewed to determine gaps in their implementation by the Government of Liberia. Policies reviewed were:

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),
2. The National Human Rights Action Plan,
3. The Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity,
4. The National Child Welfare and Protection Policy,
5. The Children's Law of Liberia,
6. General Comment # 21 of the Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child,
7. ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems; and
8. other child rights related policies that the government and partners deemed necessary for review.

## Research design

The research design utilized an exploratory and a descriptive research designs because this issue is an emerging area of study in Liberia. The qualitative aspect was exploratory, while the quantitative component was descriptive. An exploratory study is useful when it comes to investigating an issue or a problem on which existing comprehensive studies have not been done, while a descriptive design is suitable for quantitative analysis.

## Research population

The population of the research was all the children living in street situations in all the fifteen counties, their parents and policy makers, as well as partners working on child protection in Liberia. There is no national statistics on children living in street situations; however, UNIEF Liberia puts the population of Children in

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Leavy (2017) argues that sequential mixed methods research arranges qualitative data analysis before the quantitative aspect or vice versa.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Liberia at more than 2 million children living under age 18.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the data collection covered all the counties. A survey questionnaire intended to obtain the frequency of children living in street situations in the counties was administered and 159 respondents completed the survey out of the targeted 225 respondents across Liberia. The counties served as the sampling frame for the study.

### Sample size and sampling technique

For the qualitative component of the study, 320 participants were targeted as the sample size of this study. This sample was expected to participate in the focus group discussions and the KIIs across the country. Ten children living in street situations from each of the counties were targeted while 10 parents/guardians from each county were also targeted. This means that a total of 150 children were to be sampled while 150 parents/guardians were targeted. However, the actual number of participants exceeded the 300 children and parents. These parents/guardians that participated were mostly families whose children live in street situations.

The third set of focus group discussions were held with 14 representatives from the Child Protection Network (CPN) in Liberia. This group represents national and international partners that are working on child protection issues in the country. It was essential to get their perspectives, analysis and aspirations on children living in street situations. The final component of the qualitative data collection sampled two Government ministries, two UN agencies and three NGO/partners that are members of the Steering Committee on Children Living in Street Situations<sup>4</sup>. These six agencies formed the sample from policy makers' angle. The quantitative part of the study targeted 225 (15 respondents each) county officials or staff of line ministries, CPN members and NGOs in the counties. However, 159 respondents responded from the 15 counties. This constitutes 70.6% response rate. The table below presents the total sample from which the data was collected across the country.

The sampling technique for this study was purposive. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their data collection.<sup>5</sup> Participants in this study were those considered to be familiar with the issues of children living in street situations in Liberia.

Research Sample				
Qualitative Data (Focus Group Discussions)				
County	Children		Parents	
Sector	Boys	Girls	Males	Females
Montserrado	10	0	3	8
Gbarpolu	8	8	4	10
Bomi	8	4	3	9
Grand Cape Mount	4	8	3	8
Grand Bassa	8	10	1	16
Margibi	13	0	2	12

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Liberia (2022). E-source: <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/situation-children-liberia#:~:text=More%20than%20million%20children,of%2018%20live%20in%20Liberia.>

<sup>4</sup> The Steering Committee on children living in street situations, chaired by the Gender Minister, provides overall guidance to the development of a National Roadmap for the protection of children living in street situations in Liberia.

<sup>5</sup> Leavy (2017).

Bong	6	13	4	12
Nimba	4	9	5	8
Lofa	5	12	9	7
Rivercess	9	1	6	4
Grand Gedeh	6	4	3	7
Sinoe	2	8	1	9
River Gee	5	5	5	5
Maryland	9	3	1	10
Grand Kru	5	5	5	5
CPN	0	0	10	4
KIIs	0	0	4	2
Sub-Total	103	90	69	141
Total	193		210	
Grand Total	403			
Quantitative Data (Online Perception Survey)				
Total number of respondents	159			
Grand total sampled	562			

## Data collection instruments and procedure

The instruments used to collect the qualitative data during the study were Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The FGDs were used to collect data from the children living in street situations and their parents as well as a representative group of the Child Protection Network in Liberia, while the KIIs were used to collect data from government ministries and agencies, as well as partners that are part of the Technical Working Group for development of the roadmap. The qualitative data collection process for this roadmap was done in three phases. Phase one focused on data collected directly from affected children living in street situations in the fifteen counties. Since County Capitols are the center stage for such condition, all the fifteen county Capitols were targeted as the setting for data collection from the children. However, giving that the Capital Cities of Maryland and Nimba Counties are less active compared to their biggest commercial hubs, Pleebo City and Ganta City were the only data collection settings that did not constitute county capital cities.

Phase two of the data collection process focused on affected parents. These parents were separately met in focus group discussions just after the FGDs with the children in each county. This means that the children and parents were met on the same day in two separate focus group discussions. The children and parents that participated in the focus group discussions were identified by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection through the office of the Gender coordinators in the fifteen counties based on an agreed criterion that all participants must have had experience with the issue of children living in street situations. Phase three of the data collection was focused on Key Informant Interviews. The seven participants were two ministries and two UN agencies and three NGOs that participated in the KIIs were selected by the Gender Ministry,

UNICEF, and the National Consultant. They were the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Steet Child Liberia, Plan Liberia, Defense of Children International (DCI) Liberia, UNFPA and UN Women. Finally, for the quantitative part of the study, an online survey was administered across the country to gather the views of policy makers about the frequency of children living in street situations. At least 159 respondents completed the survey online.

The National Consultant was responsible for all data collection across the country. However, giving the bad road conditions, as well as resource and logistical challenges expressed by UNICEF, six (6) volunteers from the Tubman University Volunteer Movement coordinated with the Gender Coordinators in Maryland, Grand Kru, and River Gee Counties to conduct the focus group discussions, collect the quantitative data, compile the reports, and submit same to the National Consultant for review and analysis. Also, two Volunteers from the University of Liberia Volunteer Movement coordinated with the Gender Coordinators in Rivercess and Sinoe counties to collect the data in both counties and submit reports to the National Consultant. In Grand Gedeh County, the UNICEF Field Office, coordinated with the County Gender Coordinator to collect the data and submitted report to the National Consultant. These volunteers, as well as the staff in the Zwedru Field Office underwent a virtual training and orientation on the data collection procedure prior to the start of the data collection. The UNICEF Zwedru Field Office coordinated the volunteers in the Southeast.

The National Consultant himself, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and UNICEF, collected the data from the remaining nine (9) counties of Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Bassa, Monsterrado, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, and Bomi. UNICEF facilitated the transportation, feeding and snacks for participants in the focus group discussions.

### **Data Analysis and presentation**

After the primary data was collected through FGDs and KIIs, the notes were consolidated and synthesized based on thematic areas of the discussions and interviews and elaborated in prose form as indicated under data discussion, interpretation, and analysis. The narratives were discussed and analyzed to reach insightful conclusions and make recommendations for prioritization in the roadmap. The qualitative data was complimented by quantitative analysis from a perception survey conducted on children living in street situations. The roadmap will therefore contain short-, medium- and long-term SMART deliverables that the Government and partners will implement once it is concluded, endorsed, and launched. For the quantitative data analysis, the Kobo Toolbox software was used to collect data from counties. Charts and graphs automatically generated from the system were utilized where suitable.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed, both verbally and in writing, that they were under no obligation to take part in the research and that they had the right to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. They were supplied in advance with information about the purpose and objectives of the data collection and who was conducting it. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No inducements were offered to encourage their involvement.

An informed consent form explaining the nature of the research and participants' involvement in it, as well as any potential risks and benefits, was given to all the relevant participants; and only those who accepted the conditions for participation were included in the data collection process. Data from the research is being kept securely in a data repository on the office laptop provided for the consultancy, while precautions were taken to prevent the leaking of confidential information. Data files held on computer are encrypted and protected by password access under UNICEF policies. All documents and other materials from the data collection will be kept for 5 years following completion of the development of the national roadmap. There was strict adherence to the rules and regulations of the referral pathway for children that needed immediate support during the data collection process.



## Situation analysis on children living in street situations

The issue of children in street situations is not unique to the Republic of Liberia. This subject has been a global concern in view of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) that did not directly speak about children living in such conditions. However, it is implied that the CRC covers all children globally and is binding on all states that acceded to the Convention. In this regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued General comment No. 21 in June 2017 on children in street situations.<sup>6</sup> This Comment provides an authoritative guidance to States on developing comprehensive, long-term national strategies on children in street situations, using a holistic, child-rights approach and addressing both prevention and response in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The policy review component of this roadmap focused on the review, analyses, and synthesis of key international, regional, sub-regional and national policies on the protection of children, especially children living in street situations as indicated below.

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis of all of UNICEF's work. It is the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. All UN member states, except for the United States of America, have ratified the Convention.<sup>7</sup> The UNCRC has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life. It outlines the political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights, which all children everywhere are entitled to. The UNCRC also states and elaborates how governments and adults should collaborate to ensure that children enjoy all their rights. Article 1 (definition of the child) indicates that anyone under the age of 18 is a child and has all the rights in the Convention.

No matter what ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities, or any other status that a child has, each child has the right to live and thrive. Therefore, the Convention must be seen in its totality. This means that all the rights are interlinked and no one single right is more essential than another, and that children living in street situations must also enjoy these rights. The right to relax and play (Article 31) and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) have equal importance as the right to be safe from violence (Article 19) and the right to education (Article 28).<sup>8</sup> The UNCRC did not directly speak to the issue of Children Living in Street Situations; however, such children must enjoy all the rights guaranteed under the Convention. Therefore Comment 21 of the UN Executive Board on the CRC specifically enunciates what should happen to children living in street situations.

### UNCRC Executive Board Comment #21

Comment # 21 was an outcome of a qualitative study done in thirty-two countries covering 327 child participants. Children in street situations consulted for the general comment spoke strongly about the need for respect, dignity, and rights. They said "[People] should give us a chance to use our gifts and talents to achieve our dreams"; "Give us the opportunity to change our story".<sup>9</sup> The Committee on the CRC's Comment #21 on children in street situations defined such children as "(a) children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family; and (b) a wider population of children who have formed strong connections with public spaces and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities"<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See Committee on the CRC Comment (2017, Page 3 (para 2))

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (2022). E-source: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Para 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Para 4.

The Comment indicates that children live in street situations due to inequalities based on economic status, race, and gender. These problems are exacerbated by material poverty, inadequate social protection, poorly targeted investment, corruption and fiscal (tax and expenditure) policies that reduce or eliminate the ability of poorer people to move out of poverty. To mitigate these, the Committee on the CRC calls on state parties to adopt policies based on Child Right approach that ensures respect for the dignity, life, survival, wellbeing, health, development, participation, and non-discrimination of the child as a rights holder.<sup>11</sup>

States are urged to adopt holistic and long-term strategies and make the necessary budget allocations for children in street situations. They must engage in prevention, early intervention and provide street-based support services that are mutually reinforcing elements and provide a continuum of care within an effective long-term and holistic strategy.<sup>12</sup> They (States) are also encouraged to partner with the academia, civil society and the private sector to develop systematic, rights-respecting, participatory mechanisms to collect data and share disaggregated information about children in street situations. This has been done in the case of the development of this roadmap.

Paragraph 35 of Comment # 21 calls on states to strengthen prevention; build the capacity of parents, extended families, legal guardians and community members to provide appropriate direction and guidance to children, helping them to take into account the child's views, in accordance with their age and maturity; provide a safe and supportive environment in which the child can develop; and to recognize the child as an active rights holder who is increasingly able to exercise those rights as he or she deserves, given proper guidance and direction. Simultaneously, states should ensure that free, accessible, simple, and expeditious birth registration is available to all children at all ages. Children in street situations should be supported proactively to obtain legal identity documents. As a temporary solution, states and local governments should allow innovative and flexible solutions, such as providing informal identity cards, linked to civil society personnel/addresses, allowing children in the meantime to gain access to basic services and protection in the justice system.<sup>13</sup>

Paragraph 44 of General Comment # 21 categorically states that for those children in street situations without primary or proxy caregivers, the State is the de facto caregiver and is obliged, under Article 20, to ensure alternative care to a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment. The types of care include: practical and moral support to children on the streets, through a trustworthy adult street worker or peer support, without requiring or coercing children to renounce their street connections and/or move into alternative accommodation; drop-in and community/social centers; night shelters; day-care centers; temporary residential care in group homes; foster care; family reunification; and independent living or long-term care options, including but not exclusively adoption.

Finally, states should take measures to address the structural causes of poverty and income inequalities to reduce pressure on and strengthen precarious families, as a means of offering better protection for children and reducing the likelihood of children ending up in street situations. Such measures include introducing tax and expenditure policies that reduce economic inequalities; expanding fair-wage employment and other opportunities for income generation; introducing pro-poor policies for rural and urban development; eliminating corruption; introducing child-focused policies and budgeting; strengthening child-centered poverty alleviation programmes in areas known for prominent levels of migration; and offering adequate social security and social protection.<sup>14</sup> The conditions laid out under Comment #21 are non-existent in Liberia presently; hence, the need for the development of this roadmap.

### **Regional Level (Africa)**

Based on the principles of the CRC, the African continental body, the African Union developed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. This Charter is a regional human rights treaty adopted in 1990

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Para 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Paras 13 and 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Paras 40 and 41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, para 55

and which came into force in 1999. It sets out rights and defines principles for the status of children.<sup>15</sup> The African Charter is ideally a powerful tool to hold governments accountable for ending child marriage as well. It defines the rights and responsibilities of a child and mandates protection of the girl child from harmful cultural practices such as child marriage. For instance, in Article 21 (2), it explicitly states that “child marriage and the betrothal of children shall be prohibited” and that “effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years.”<sup>16</sup>

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) was established in 2001. State parties to the Charter submit reports to the Committee, which documents information and assesses the situation of children. Member states must submit their first report on their implementation of the charter two years after ratification. After that, periodic reports are submitted every three years. This reporting process is meant to keep governments accountable to the commitments they have made within the African Charter, and this is a fantastic opportunity to raise better measures to end child marriage. Members can see when their countries will submit a report on the committee website. However, one key gap is that the Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child did not speak specifically to the question of children living in street situations. Nevertheless, Comment 21 of the Executive Board on the CRC is well acknowledged by African States.

### **ECOWAS Child Policy (2019-2030)**

At the sub-regional level, the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) initial Child Policy was developed to support the promotion and fulfilment of children’s rights in West Africa, focusing on four key priority areas, including Survival, Development, Protection and Participation. The ECOWAS Heads of State and Government officially adopted this Child Policy in December 2008.

The accompanying Strategic Plan of Action provided a roadmap linking the Child Policy objectives to actionable strategies under the four key priority areas and ran from 2009 to 2013. Due to the expiration of this policy, a new Child Policy was developed and adopted again by the ECOWAS Authority. The current Child Policy is the result of an in-depth review and update of both the initial Child Policy and the Strategic Plan of Action, and provides a comprehensive, holistic and gender-based approach to protect and promote the rights of children in the ECOWAS region.

The ECOWAS’ present Child Policy provides the broad-based structure and a policy direction for Member States in their common regional and international aspirations towards fulfilling child rights in West Africa. The imperative for a regional Child Policy stems from ECOWAS Member States’ commitment to fulfil their obligations towards children in accordance with the Revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 and its associated instruments. Article 4 of the Treaty guarantees the fundamental principles of human rights in accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights. With respect to child well-being, all ECOWAS Member States have so far ratified and domesticated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

In all these instruments, a child is defined as any person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood lower, something that would be abnormal after signing of the international and continental instruments. In conformity with international and regional instruments and commitments, ECOWAS drafted and adopted a range of documents aimed at promoting and protecting children’s rights and reinforcing respect for the rights of the child within the region. The ECOWAS Child Policy also fully recognizes and integrates the targets set out in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s). The SDGs comprise 17 Goals and 169 targets to be delivered by 2030 of which 48 targets are directly relevant to children.

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<sup>15</sup> Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, ECOWAS developed a Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa. The Strategic Framework builds on existing policy and legal frameworks within the region and adopted by ECOWAS in 2017 to promote accountability and provide direction and guidance to Members States on child protection and to influence national level programme initiatives that promote a protective environment to children in both emergency and nonemergency situations. The key issues affecting children in the ECOWAS sub-region include poverty, disasters and environmental hazards, gender inequalities, unemployment, weak governance structures, conflict and violence, and the impact of rapid urbanization and globalization. Millions of children in West Africa are denied their rights to education, health, protection and participation because of poverty, gender, ethnicity and nationality, lack of documents or geographical location.<sup>17</sup>

The four main thematic issues affecting children in the ECOWAS sub-region are multi-dimensional child poverty; impact of climate change, natural disasters, and environmental hazards; crises, conflicts, and children in emergencies. Gender inequalities affecting children and other cross-cutting vulnerabilities and issues. Children in the region with specific needs and vulnerabilities that need to be addressed include those with disabilities, those affected by HIV/AIDS, children on the move, including forcibly displaced children (for example refugee and asylum-seeking children), and children in contact with the law.

The Child Policy's guiding principles encompass that i) children are rights-holders and active participants in realizing child rights, who can hold duty bearers to account, and may claim rights which are violated or gaps in their provision; ii) child rights are inherent, inalienable, and indivisible and they apply to all children without discrimination; iii) the best interests of a child shall be the primary consideration in any decision-making which affects the child; iv) States have an obligation to ensure adequate resources are available to effectively guarantee children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation.

Others principles are that children have a right to have their views heard in decision-making that affects their lives, and a right to be protected against all forms of discrimination and to enjoy positive advantages to ensure that all children have equal access to their rights; vi) children should benefit from child-friendly procedures in all matters concerning them; and vii) Members States shall ensure that all duty bearers, ranging from parents to care-givers, communities and the State, are empowered with a support system within an enabling environment to serve the best interests of children in their care, and respect and ensure the protection and fulfilment of the rights of the child. Liberia has not fully rollout the implementation of all the deliverables in the ECOWAS' regional policies. Hence, this roadmap for Children Living in Street Situations in Liberia is intended to capture what such children should have to be fully protected as required by ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection.

### **National Human Rights Action Plan of Liberia (NHRAPL) 2013-2018**

The National Human Rights Action Plan of Liberia (2013-2018) has expired already. However, it described the situations children faced in Liberia during the protracted civil conflict when children were disproportionately affected and suffered human rights violations committed. Major human rights violations against children included abduction, assault, forced displacement, forced recruitment, forced labor, sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery, sexual abuse and being forced to witness unspeakable atrocities. Essential to the upbringing of a child is education. However, external factors inhibit children from access to education. (p.20). Today, these same issues still confront Liberian children, most especially those living in street situations. All the lofty ideas in this plan were not achieved nationally and are still wanting. Also, the Plan has expired and there is no replacement for it yet by the Independent National Human Rights Commission of Liberia; hence, the imperative for the inclusion of these in the National Roadmap.

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<sup>17</sup> ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection 2017



## Children Law of Liberia

Article II, Section 4 of the 2011 Children Law of Liberia stipulates that all decisions and actions that affect children (defined as those who are under 18 years of age) must take their best interests into consideration. Section 5 also states that no decision or action can be taken that discriminates against a child based on sex, family, color, race, and ethnicity.

Article III, “Bill of Rights for Children,” lays out the following provisions (among others):

- Basic rights: The rights to an adequate standard of living; education (including free, compulsory primary education); adequate food, water, housing, and clothing; access to medically necessary health care; participate in cultural activities that are in the child’s best interests; and leisure, play, and recreation.
- Rights of expression and religion: Rights of expression, access to information, freedom of thought and religion, and freedom of association.
- Rights of inheritance: The right to benefit from an inheritance left by a child’s parents. (No guardian, caregiver, executor of a will, or other such person can dispossess a child of her inheritance.)
- Protection from harmful work: The right to be protected from work and other practices that may threaten a child’s health or development.
- Protection from sexual abuse: The right to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation, including prostitution and pornography.
- Protection from involvement in violent conflicts: The right to be protected from involvement in or recruitment for armed or otherwise violent conflicts.

Article VI, Section 38 and Article VII, Section 45 offer the following additional protections:

- Marriage protections: Children under age 18 cannot enter marriage. Additionally, they cannot be betrothed into marriage or promised for marriage.
- Other work protections: Children cannot be given over to work to satisfy a parent’s obligations (regardless of whether the work is harmful).
- Protections from cruel treatment: Children cannot be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Protections from other harmful practices: Children cannot be subjected to unnecessary practices that may cause physical or psychological pain to the child, or violate her health, dignity, education, or development.

One major gap in this law is that it did not assign special obligations to specific institutions to fulfill and monitor the rights of children; it particularly calls for the ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL CHILD WELFARE COMMITTEES AND CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATIVE FORUMS. Article XI calls for two types of local bodies to be created: a child welfare committee, to be established at the community or town level. (Article XI, Sections 79-85), and a children’s representative forum, to be established at the town, district, and county levels. (Article XI, Sections 96-99). The rights stated in the law are mostly abused for children living in street situations and there is no one, agency or ministry of government taking action to remedy this situation. These children do not participate in any of the child welfare committees mentioned. Hence, there is a need to take affirmative action to provide them protection under this National Policy Framework.

## Presentation of field data

### Child Protection Network (CPN)

The focus group discussion with the Child Protection Network (CPN) in Liberia was held on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Organizations that attended include Child Educational Aid; Equipping Youth to Help One another (Equip Youth); Restoring our Children’s Hope; Alem for Orphan and Vulnerable Children; Assistant Director for Policy and Planning (Gender Ministry); Save the Children; Children Assistant Program; Ministry of Justice,



Assistant Director for Child Justice; Gender Ministry; Assistance for providing aid; Youth Crime Watch and Children Parliament

### CPN's reasons why children live in street situations in Liberia

- Lack of parental guidance; and children are taken from their parents who are in the rural areas and brought to town by relatives or friends, on the promise of sending them to school.
- Parents in rural areas who give out their children cannot be held responsible for this as the schooling environment in the rural areas and other communities is unfavorable and inconducive. Kinship care is not working well.
- Teenagers or irresponsible individuals bearing children due to inability of parents to provide for their children. So, children labor to make ends meet.
- Most times when parents have many children both boys and girls, and they do not have the financial capacity to take care of them, they would send the boy child to school and allow the girls to go in the streets to sell.
- Emotionally unintelligent parents who quickly and always unleash corporal punishments on their children create the condition for them to be in the streets.
- Out of fear that their parents who beat on them severely for wrongs they have committed, some children would prefer to stay on the streets and not return home.
- Inadequate bread-winning opportunities for parents lead some parents to send their children out to sell.
- In pursuit of greener pastures, some children are on the streets because at home, they suffer transferred aggression from single parents.
- Some single parents, mostly mothers, whose fiancés abandon them with their children unnecessarily get angry with children and insult them and even beat on them.
- Some of those children are victims of substance abuse; drugs are widespread across the country. Anyone, including children, can easily access drugs.
- Children are having children, interestingly also, some of those children were birthed by parents who are themselves victims of substance abuse.
- Children are being raised by single parents, mostly single mothers.
- Peer-pressure/ peer influence; and poverty situation of parents lead children into the streets.
- Lack of schools in every community, compels some children to travel long distances to and from school. In the process, they become vulnerable and are influenced by bad friends.
- Loss of parents; and mental health issues; accusation of children as witchcrafts are all issues leading children in the street.
- Child prostitution or transactional sex is on the increase mainly in counties where mining, and fishing companies are operating.

### CPN's intervention in addressing issues of children in street situations?

- CPN has established networks and usually conducts regular meetings on issues affecting children.
- CPN advocates for child protection policies.
- There is an ongoing effort which CPN is a part of to review the Children Law,
- CPN has provided accelerated learning programs for children who have outgrown the elementary class age range.
- CPN reports and fights against Child trafficking in Liberia; CPN has established children forums.
- There are challenges with CPN addressing the clothing, shelter, health, and other concerns of children in street situations; but it has made efforts to:
- Visit orphanage homes and provide clothing.
- Advocate for policy to address these concerns.
- Some member institutions of CPN such as Save the Children and Mary's Meal provide shelter and school feeding for children in public and private schools.
- Provide 10 months of accelerated learning opportunities for children in three counties, and during training these children are fed.

- Provide livelihood trainings, including soap-making for single parents.
- Advocate for drug-control policy, as drugs intake is a contributing factor for children being in the streets.
- Sensitize children to opportunities associated with participating in national and international programs such as Day of African Child and encourage them to participate.

### **CPN's recommendations on what to do about children living in street situations**

- Religious institutions should get involved and help with national awareness and crusade on the dangers of children being in the street.
- Schools should get involved with creating awareness, too.
- In fact, schools should call the parents of students/children before sending them home for school fees or other reasons.
- Like FLY and LINSU, Government should empower the Liberia's Children Parliament to organize programs for children since, in fact, Children's Parliament is taking a peer-to-peer approach to children's issues.
- Government should do research on the needs of children based on demographics, Ex: children of age range 5-10; 11-15; 15-17, and based on the needs identified and design interventions.
- Government should take children from the streets and set up a habitation area for them with appropriate care given.
- Government should ensure the resettlement and re-unification of children with their parents.
- Before re-uniting children with parents, Government should provide finance to parents.
- The national guidelines on Kinship should be revisited and amended to address the situation of children who are taken from their parents by their parents' relatives and friends under the pretext that they would be sent to school.
- The guidelines, in fact, should be enacted as a law.
- Government should ensure the enforcement of policy/laws protecting children in all areas.
- Awareness should be carried out about the dangers of parents allowing their children to be taken from them by relatives, friends, etc., under the pretext of schooling.
- Government should launch an emergency mobile hot meal and clothing for children in the streets.
- Government should train a considerable number of social workers who will go after taking children from the streets.
- Government should provide primary and elementary schools in every community and improve all schools across the country in a child-friendly manner.
- Full implementation of Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) laws.
- Full enforcement of laws prohibiting children from drinking alcohols.
- Village, town, and community leaders should be aware when children of their communities are given out to others for care and schooling.
- The re-introduction of Boys Town, and the addition of Girls' Town.
- Consistent with laws, punitive actions should be taken against parents who sent their children in the streets to sell.
- Government of Liberia, UNICEF, CPN and others should ensure that young and inexperienced parents are taught basic parenting skills through community outreach and national radio programs.
- The inclusion of children with disability and those children who take their disabled parents in the streets to beg.
- Government should create national accelerated learning programs for children, especially the ones that have outgrown.
- Make drugs law capital punishment or nonbillable to stop or reduce the incidence of drug addicts in Liberia.

### **Focus Group Discussions with children and parent in counties**

The Focus Group Discussions across the 15 counties were done from 10<sup>th</sup> August to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. As agreed, two focus groups were held in each county (one with the children and one with parents). Below is a

detailed presentation of protection issues raised by children themselves and parents as issues responsible for children living in street situations across the country. The presentation below also includes children's and parents' key recommendations on how to resolve issues affecting their protection in street situations in Liberia.

### **Montserrado County:**

The Focus Group Discussion in Montserrado were conducted in Mount Barclay on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022. A total of ten children attended. All of them were boys. This was followed by the parents. There were 12 parents (3 males and 8 females).

### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “We are engaged in habits that our parents do not like; such habits are the use of illicit drugs (coco, tar, rock, cush). Drugs lead us to stealing and unruly behavior. So, we live on our own because we want to be without parental control.
- To keep up our drug habits, we enjoy living on crimes like jerking of phones, purses, wallets, etc.
- Some friends influenced us to get in the street and join them in their unpleasant habits.
- Living in the street is an extremely hard struggle. We help people to carry on construction, cleaning of their homes and clothes washing.
- Some of our friends (boys) can take money from people to have sex with them.
- When we get sick, we are helped by the drug dealers to get medical treatment.
- Big people give us liquor and drugs and use us to go to fight for their land and property to drive out their opponents.
- When we go to school, we steal book bags, money from those who have it, and we leave classes during recess to take drugs brought on campus.
- Our parents pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some old men who can buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but we cannot get the chance to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger.”

### **Recommendations on what should be done to remove them (children) from living in street situations:**

- “Government should place us in rehabilitation centers and flush out the drugs from our system. The centers are good and preferred because our parents will not trust us when we return home and going back to them will still make us to see our bad friends and follow them. Also, leaving drugs requires persistent engagement and this can be done in the rehab centers.
- We want to learn trades like plumbing, electricity, mechanic, carpentry, driving, tailoring, computer, etc. to be able to live on for life. Those who want to help us should support these.
- We want to change; so, we need help from Government and partners.”

### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations:**

- “Our children join or follow bad friends. They are on drugs; they steal, sell household materials, and disobey parents or guardians once they are on drugs.
- Some of the children are getting in same sex issue and we (parents) do not want that.
- The Education Ministry is responsible for our children being in the street because it is not working hard to monitor schools; schools are just collecting money from parents and schools are the places children learn bad ways of life, including drugs that are sold in schools.
- Education Ministry does not visit schools; there is bribery in schools for grades; so, our children are not learning anything good in the schools.
- We (poor parents) cannot afford to send kids to school; We have no money to provide for our children; so, the children are on their own.

- Disable people are sometimes drug dealers; police and DEA are taking drugs and are facilitating drug trade.”

#### **Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “The children need counseling facilities where they will stay to recover and learn trade as some of them have passed the regular school going ages.
- There is need for the Government to ban drugs and even make a death penalty for drugs.
- Government and partners should build rehab centers for the children to stay and learn trade.”

#### **Gbarpolu County:**

The Focus Group Discussions in Gbarpolu were conducted in Bopolu City on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022. A total of 16 children attended (8 girls and 8 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 14 parents (4 males and 10 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “We want to go to school, but the schools can put us out because of school fees; so, we sell to get money.
- Either our mothers or fathers abandon us; so, we got to make life on our own.
- Public school fees are high; our parents cannot pay, and private schools are expensive; so, we sell.
- WAEC fees are paid only for 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, not 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>; and public schools can charge additional money to facilitate transport of school administrators to register students for WAEC. So, they charge us to pay for that.
- Some of us lost our parents (eg. 4 kids lost their parents in roll and are living with grandparents that ill). So we got to feed ourselves by selling around.
- Our guardians can give us harsh punishment; so, we go out in the street. ( a girl’s finger cut by a guardian for eating over food)
- We are the problem because some of us do not want to do what our parents say. We are also the problem because we want things that our parents do not have.
- We take drugs to make us extremely high. The drugs come thru candies, kanyan, gari, etc., and other ways.
- Our parents pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some old men who can buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but we cannot get the chance to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger.
- We want to come home late and our parents do not like that.
- Our mothers send us to go and sell because our fathers left them.”

#### **Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “We need scholarships to go to school; we need rehab centers to stop us from going on the mines and taking drugs. We can learn trade in the rehab centers.
- We love to the older men on the mines to get money to support our parents.
- Government should come for orphans without immediate families in the communities (eg. migrants’ kids).”

#### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations:**

- “Children rights undermine child control (Children take parents to the police and the police jail parents).
- Mothers or fathers abandon children and grandparents take charge of them with less control (non-parental support)

- Motorbikes boys take (girls) from the villages and bring to Bopolu or on the mines to enjoy. So, children are being used to win bread, find school fees, and support their poor or ill parents or grandparents.
- Child prostitution is extremely high on the mines that are promoting all kinds of lifestyles among young people. Most of those prostitutes are 11, 12 to 13 years old.
- Traditional/cultural and religious practices that lead to child marriage and early pregnancies cause early parenting.
- Children take parents to the law.
- Persistent nonsupport to mothers lead to their failure to send children to school. So, children are used to farm.
- No money to pay school fees, buy book bags, uniforms, books, etc., for kids.
- Children stay with grandparents with no hand to care for them. And Some parents do not value education for girls.
- Some schools do not have teachers; retired teachers have not been replaced and have not gotten their retirement benefits (in Gokomu, 2 schools closed out of 17, Garwula, 4 closed out of 24); in some cases, there is a single teacher to an entire school
- CSOs like Action AID, KEEP, CID and SGBV team help children. KEEP (provides few reading rooms)."

#### **Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- "We need teachers for all our schools; we also need education monitors for schools to do the right things.
- Rehab centers needed to keep children under control and out of drugs and remove them from mines to learn trade.
- School feeding programs need to be restored like in prewar days to retain children in schools and help parents who do not have to provide for their children.
- Train police to be able to professionally manage/investigate cases brought by children against parents.
- There is need for a safe home in Bopolu to take care of orphans and abused kids.
- Government should open night schools for overaged children and pregnant girls to continue school.
- Empower the CSOs in counties to carry on awareness on children's issues because government alone cannot make it.
- Gender offices in counties are under staff; they need logistics to reach out to districts; some of the staff are volunteers and so they are not getting pay."

#### **Bomi County:**

The Focus Group Discussions in Bomi were conducted in Tubmanburg City on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2022. A total of 12 children attended (4 girls and 8 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 12 parents (3 males and 9 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- "Parents or guardians do not have money to support us; so, we follow friends to survive on our own.
- Parents or guardians can beat us, mean us with food, make us work the entire day because we are not their children.
- Motorbikes give us quick money; so our sisters or big brothers can give them to us to ride for them.
- We live on daily jobs like cleaning homes or around the house, washing clothes, cars, and bikes. Our parents cannot pay us for such work.
- Our parents pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages and they can sleep in the old cars.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some old men who can buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but we cannot get the chance to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger.
- Mary's meal gives the other children food in their schools but cannot give to some of us in our schools; so, we leave school.



- When we get sick, they take us in the sick bush because there is no money to go to the hospital.
- Friends put us in problem; sometimes they steal and lie on us, and the police can put us in jail for long time.
- No food, clothes, and other things that we need; so, we work in cook bowl shops to get food.”

#### **Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “We need scholarships and school feeding to remain in school.
- We want to learn trade (mechanic, carpentry, baking, hair platting, tailoring, etc.)
- Some of us are tailors, but we have no machines and our bosses do not pay us for the work we do. They only give us food.
- We need rehabilitation centers for us to live in to get counseling, leave the drugs and learn trade.”

#### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “Most of us are single mothers because our husbands left the children to marry other wives. This is rampant in Bomi, (culture and religion contribute mostly to it).
- Single mothers alone cannot control children these days; so, the children stay on their own while we go to hustle.
- Some of us are farmers and do not get much out of farming; so, we live in poverty and cannot provide for our children.
- Some parents are in the sick bush and children are left alone; so, they follow bad friends, peers and get in drugs business.
- There are many Ebola orphans living with relatives or non-relatives; so, there is a need for Government to support them. Some live with grandparents that are old.
- Rampant divorce leaves women and children vulnerable.
- Police send children to the Central Prison daily; and 12,13,14-year-old girls are in the street on drugs (mostly orphans from the EVD). Most of the Ebola orphans do not want to be controlled because there is no orphanage in Tubmanburg.
- Drugs dealers put the drugs in Canyan, milk candies, “Opong Eyeball.”
- DEA officers are backing drug dealers; when we report them, they take money and free them. Their bosses here and in Monrovia call to free the drug dealers.
- Drugs are placed in car tires just to be able to pass thru check points; criminal gangs, and drugs dealers are forcing some children to join the drug taking.
- Some parents sell palm nuts just to make ends meet. Poverty is extremely high.
- Traditional doctors are the best doctors for most of the sicknesses here.
- When we report drug dealers, criminals can attack us, and the police can back the criminals because they give the police money.”

#### **Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Open rehab center like Don Bosco Homes or like Boy’s Town to help our children leave drugs and learn trade and go through counselling.
- Put in place strong drug laws (death penalty or lifetime in prison) to get rid of bad drugs in the country.
- Since the country medicine can work better and it is cheaper, can the Government agree to join country doctors with the hospital people? The Government should do that.
- Support single parents with micro credit or other means to empower them economically.”

#### **Grand Cape Mounty County:**

The Focus Group Discussions in Grand Cape Mounty were conducted in Robertsport City on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022. A total of 12 children attended (8 girls and 4 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 13 parents (3 males and 8 females).

## Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:

- “Most children in this county are not in school due to fishing and teenage pregnancy.
- Parents abandon some children, ‘saying children are witchcrafts.
- Some mothers die at childbirth and the fathers run away.
- Teenage pregnancy and teens parenting are stopping children from going to school.
- Children sell and put susu to return to school; we sell for market women that do not pay us what is promised. (Example a 10-year-old kid sent to jail for more than 3 months for allegedly ‘stealing 3000LD’ and being unable to pay. The police commander has taken the kid home, but he is not in school).
- Parents put pregnant girls out; so, they are on their own with babies.
- Some parents are on drugs and/or are alcoholics and they abuse the children (a case of an orphan living with such parents has been taken in a safe home in Robertsport).
- Children run away from school to offload canoes (Gbasco is the name for this practice in the county).
- Our parents pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some old men who can buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but we cannot get the chance to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger.
- There are Nigerians trading drugs in Cape Mount and they have support from the security. On July 26, one of them had children lined up taking drugged candies, kanyan, ‘Opong Eyeball’, etc.
- Security officers themselves are in the ghettos always taking drugs.”

## Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:

- “Some children are homeless and need safe homes or rehab centers to have their lives reshaped.
- We need back-to-school support, Adult Literacy Programs (ALP) and scholarships. We want to learn trade (interior design, catering).
- Give single mothers and poor parents micro credit to get hand.
- Support fishing cooperatives to make profits out of the fish industry; this will enable parents give us support.”

## Responses from parents on why children live in street situations

- “Some parents are drug addicts and stay in ghettos all day leaving kids on their own.
- Children leave school to haul canoes for fish, and when given the fish, they sell it and buy drugs.
- Some children are on the mines and have lost contacts with their parents; some are migrant kids; they are being abused in multiple ways.
- There are lot of street children in Grand Cape Mount in the mines and in fishing communities where there are no schools.
- Husbands abandon their wives with kids; and there is persistent nonsupport to kids (this aspect instance is higher than rape cases in the county).
- Motorbike riders who are children get money on their own; so, they do not respect their poor parents. They use their money on young girls, and this leads to teenage pregnancy, child marriage and early parenting.
- Drugs are a big problem in communities; the security know about the drug dealers; some government officials and security officers are running ghettos in the county.
- There is limited police presence in the county, including on the mines, etc.
- Children are the bread winners for their families; they sell and make money. So, they make decisions.
- Migrants are more in Grand Cape mount; they leave many children with mothers and return to their countries or counties; most of them are miners and fishermen.
- Fishing is a fast-moneymaking thing like mining. So, children do not want to waste their time on schooling.
- Fishing cooperatives are led by foreigners; so, the local ones do not really profit from fishing.

- Some parents are drug addicts, and they abuse and abandon children.
- Food, clothing, health treatment, etc., are not available to children.
- Police jail breastfeeding/lactating mothers and pregnant women (the case of a pregnant woman freed by the Gender Ministry team while in labor and was later sent to Redemption Hospital for surgery). The lactating mothers, and pregnant women are placed in the same cells with minors.
- Child prostitution is extremely high in the county due to drugs (behind the rock is a case on point).
- County officials, including county lawmakers, leave their offices and stay on the mines for brown envelopes.
- “Fish for Fish” leads to child marriage (this is a concept whereby mothers give their children to fisher men to prioritize the parents by giving them fish to sell and return the money).”

#### **Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Need vocational schools or rehab centers for the children to be controlled, counselled, and get skill trainings.
- There is a need to stop motorbike importation to solve the problems associated with such business.
- Dissolve the DEA because they are protectors of drug dealers.
- Increase security officers in the county.
- Form fishing cooperatives so that fishermen and their families can from fishing as this is what most families are living on.
- Empower single mothers or parents thru micro credits or live skills.
- Stop drugs, place harsh penalties on drugs dealers or just kill them (death penalty or life imprisonment.
- Introduce school feeding programs and ALP to get kids attracted to schools, and to help the overaged ones.
- Assess fishing communities and build primary schools for kids to give them access to education.
- Support scholarship programs or financial aid for students to relief the financial burden on parents.
- Open night schools for adults and pregnant girls not to be left behind. They need to also get educated.
- Prevent children from taking parents to the law.”

#### **Grand Bassa County:**

The Focus group discussions in Grand Bassa were conducted in Buchanan City on 23rd August 2022. A total of 18 children attended (10 girls and 8 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 17 parents (1 male and 16 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “Parents do not have money to send their children to school.
- Some children live with relatives who do not love them and do not want them to go to school but use them for winning bread for them.
- Our parents pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages. They sleep in the old cars. Some live in the graveyard.
- Some boys are into prostitution in Bassa County.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some old men who can buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but UNICEF and Gender Ministry do not want us to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger.
- Some children’s parents are dead, and some have single parents who cannot make it alone to cater to the children.
- Most parents do not have jobs, so children can sell for businesspeople to find food to eat and get money to do other things. Some children sell mobile phone minutes and use the money for unhealthy habits like drugs.

- We sell to find food to eat. Some children join prostitution to get money and some children have God fathers that can give them money.
- Orphans wash dishes and do household work for some adults in the communities just to eat and live. Sometimes, they steal to get food to eat (the case of a boy who stole bread and was taken to jail).
- Peer pressure from friends who have phones, clothes, etc.
- Hospitals are too expensive and there are no free community clinics to help us get treatment.
- There are no schools in some communities where children live; and in some communities, drugs are sold right in front of the school (Kpelleh Town Community in Buchanan is an example).
- Some children live in the graveyard, 'Dead Forest Field,' behind the Lonestar Tower, etc., on drugs. The Nigerian people are the main drug sellers.
- Some teachers rape students, give grades for sex and money, etc.
- Government schools are charging too much money and our parents cannot get the money. (a student says she paid 1100LD)."

#### **Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- "We want free school or government must reduce school fees for the poor people.
- Bring companies for our parents to work and support us.
- Stop the rape in the schools and stop sex for grades and grades for money.
- Need free clinics in the communities, as well as price control because goods and foods are expensive. This will lower the burden on parents.
- We need safe drinking water (public hand pumps in the community are owned by the zonal chairpersons like their private property). We also need playgrounds."

#### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- "Some parents love the children too much and spoil them. They do not discipline them. But some children just have bad behaviors.
- Some parents abandon the children and leave them with their grandparents who do not have full control and the hand to care for the children.
- Poverty is extremely high because there are no jobs for fathers; so, mothers are the main bread winners who go out daily to sell. This leaves children to be on their own and get spoiled.
- Mothers are now the main providers of food and all the basic things for families. So, homes are breaking up. Fathers are poor so they cannot have control.
- Most fathers abandon wives and children and move to different communities to live their lives. (Persistent nonsupport to children is high).
- The courts are corrupt. When we take fathers to the law to provide for us and our children, the courts can back the fathers and take bribes from them.
- Village savings clubs are helping us, but the money is too small to do business with. Access Bank can put too much pressure on us to pay back their money; so, some people can run away from the county.
- We make our children to sell so that they can eat, go to school, and get the basic things they need.
- Our children cannot eat on time because we (parents) ourselves cannot find food easily. So, the children can disrespect us.
- Children join early marriage or prostitution to live on their own and give back to poor parents. Some parents join prostitution to make ends meet.
- Children live in the graveyard. We need our children back.
- Children take their parents to the police and courts."

#### **Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- "We need trade school for both parents and children because parents cannot afford to send the children to college. We need support for single parents to do business.
- Support the women village saving clubs so they can expand their businesses.

- We need free schools for our children, and we need school feeding.
- Fishermen are mostly foreigners. So, when they get the fish, they give to their families to sell. Few local people do fishing.
- Government hospitals are expensive (we buy plaster, needles, injection materials, etc.); so, we need free hospitals.
- Secret killing is getting too much. No justice for the poor. So, we want Government to stop this.
- We need rehab centers for our children who are living on drugs. The Government needs to stop the Nigerians from bringing in the drugs. We need death penalty or life imprisonment.
- Change the law that allows children to take parents to court or to the police.”

### **Margibi County:**

The Focus group discussions in Margibi were conducted in Kakata City on 24th August 2022. A total of 13 children attended (0 girls and 13 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 14 parents (2 males and 12 females).

### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “Our parents do not have the money; some of our friends’ parents died so they dropped out of school.
- Peer pressure from bad friends all day in street smoking, drinking, grass drugs attract some of us. We live on stealing (jerking phones, bags, bikes, etc.); wash bikes and cars to get money to buy food, clothes; and the girls look for men to live.
- We take bath in the creeks and hospitals drop wastes in there. So, we can get sick sometimes.
- We experience mob justice, beating at night, jailing of children, get medicine from drug stores, etc.
- Sometimes we beat fufu for cold-bowl shops and get food; we keep money with aunties, help cold-bowl people to wash dishes, and sometimes we are motorbike rogues.
- So, once the parents die, we sleep with friends in the community, sleep in cars; some of us are renting room for 500LD each, and we sometimes sleep-in cold.
- We miss our parents, especially when we get in trouble and the people grab us.
- School fees for 7<sup>th</sup> grade is 3500LD. Then the student will buy uniform, 250LD for information sheet.
- Some children get missing and travel when they travel to other counties....
- We go through harsh punishments from parents (instance of dipping hot water on a child’s skin).
- There was a program for foster parents and safe home (UNICEF and Save the Children). It ended and the children went back in the street.
- Children are selling drugs; and the dealers are not easily found.”

### **Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “Send the children back to school and provide food assistance. We want to go to trade school (tailoring, mechanic, carpentry, garage)
- Children get missing, sometimes,
- Education support, ALP program was running but stop; so, we need rehab centers because the safe home is not a good place to live.
- “There is a need for sustainable programs to keep the children off the street”, one of the Social Workers said.”

### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “We do not have the money to send our children to school. Some of us lost our husbands and the kids are many for single parents to support (lady with 5 kids indicated).
- Some women neglect kids when husbands leave them, and the children are left to live on their own.
- Some kids do not want to go to school, and some parents are just lazy and make no efforts to support their children.



- Fathers have no jobs, we want to see our children grow successful, but the country is bad off. We cannot get jobs to do and there are no companies (a heavy-duty driver indicated).
- Government schools are now expensive like private schools. So, we cannot afford to pay school fees for the children.
- No farming materials and support for us to make gardens or farms.
- We use traditional or country medicine to treat ourselves and children. The hospitals are expensive, and they do not even have drugs.
- Drug dealers and DEA officers are twin brothers; drugs are in all the communities.
- Parents put girls out for getting pregnant; so, the children and grandchildren are on their own.
- When you make garden on someone's land, you and the owner will share 50/50 of the yield."

#### **Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- "There is need for vocational training for the children because some of them cannot make it in the normal school now
- Land for farming is an issue that needs to be addressed. Support parents with funding to engage in business and farming.
- Support community farming groups with farming tools and other things that can help them.
- BRAC gets parents in prisons (our capital investment to BRAC is left with them even when we leave prison
- Children should be treated kindly and with love by parents, parents should not compare their children with those who have."

#### **Bong County:**

The Focus group discussions in Bong were conducted in Gbarnga City on 25th August 2022. A total of 19 children attended (13 girls and 6 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 16 parents (4 males and 12 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- "Some of us lost our fathers and only mothers are left to support us; and some of us lost our parents and are living with relatives who think we are a burden on them.
- Some fathers disown our mothers' pregnancies; so, we live with stepparents. So, poverty and peer pressure are the biggest problems with some of us.
- Children sell (sugar cane, plastics bags, etc., to find food and eat. Some good will community members sometimes provide food for poor neighbors.
- Some community members who are nurses sometimes give injections to us in the community; but country medicine is the best.
- When money gets missing, parents or guardians put us out, deny us food; so, we either decide to stay out there and follow friends.
- Some girls and boys take drugs; but sexual harassment of kids who are selling is high here in Bong County.
- Some kids of ages 12, 13, 14 and 15 get pregnant; and they born the children who do not have fathers.
- Drugs are placed on gari and when we eat it, we get high then later get attracted to doing the drugs every day.
- Many kids are in prison for stealing food; some kids killed their friends (two are currently in prison)."
- Some children are becoming gays and lesbians

#### **Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- "We need free education; the Orphans need special attention.
- We need rehabilitation centers, trade schools to learn masonry, carpentry, tailoring, plumbing, etc.

- Our grandparents that we live with need feeding and we need help for our parents to do business.
- Some of us are ashamed of street selling, but that is the only way we can help our parents to survive.”

### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “Poverty is high on us and there is no money to send the children to school. Some of us are single mothers; so, we send the children to sell cold water and fish and use the money to get food for us to eat.
- We pay for Mary’s meal; we also pay school fees to public schools. Some of the public schools cost more than 6,000LD for registration for 6<sup>th</sup> graders. So, government schools are not free (we pay fees, test fees, pamphlets fess, color day, etc.).
- The economy is bad. So, we use our children to foot the bill.
- Government has officially recognized Zogos, so other children are attracted to becoming Zogos.
- A gang group called OG is in Bong County and the police and AFL officials are those helping to recruit our children into such group. Criminals are in the state security.
- Some fathers abandoned the children with mothers, while some mothers also abandoned the children with the fathers. So, the children must sell to bring in income to run the home. We support the older ones to finish school to help us maintain the younger ones.
- Teenage pregnancy is rampant and those who pregnant our children are themselves children riding bikes, etc.
- Early marriage, poverty and tough times break families down. Single mothers are suffering; we do “sell pay. Sales are low, so we get indebted to those we take goods from to do sell pay” (some mothers owe cold storage) ; we “sell fish and children help to sell to get school fees for them”.
- Government schools in Bong are more expensive now than private schools.
- We take the fathers to court for support, and they tell the court that they are not able to support family. So, what will we do?
- Sellers are more than buyers these days, no job opportunities.
- Children 7,8,9,10 years old are taking drugs and our children are spoiling; but the government does not care. The Drugs are placed in food (gari, kanyan, candies, and real food for eating)
- There is favoritism in scholarships that the Government send to us in Bong County; they are political scholarships for votes.
- Some children are engaging into bad acts like same sex.”

### **Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Ban Zogo camps and open rehab centers for them; help to empower single mothers and fathers.
- Put parents who abandon mothers or fathers and children in long term prison.
- Customary marriage is not working/legally binding because the courts do not compel those who abandon mothers and children to take care.
- Ban rude music and dances; we need free primary and secondary schools. The Government free schools are not working so we want UNICEF to give us free schools; or UNICEF must check on the Government to really see to it that free schools work.
- Government salaries are exceptionally low this time; so, they cannot take of families. There is a need to increase salaries.
- Support women clubs and provide real micro credit for single mothers .
- There is a need to bring back dormitories run by churches so that our children can be in safe places. The schools have become the place for drugs.
- There should be lifetime jail for drug dealers; non-billable laws are needed to stamp out drugs.
- LPA needs to be restored to allow low-income earners to be able to build houses. We are suffering too much.
- We need playgrounds for our children. We need vocational schools because most of our children are left behind the regular school now.
- We need school feeding; and support to families in the agricultural sector will be a particularly good help; especially women in agriculture. Let the UN help us.

- We want UNICEF to give our children school supplies (non-food items...book bags, etc.)”

## Nimba County

The Focus Group Discussions in Nimba were conducted in Ganta City 26th August 2022. A total of 13 children attended (9 girls and 4 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 13 parents (5 males and 8 females).

### Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:

- “Some of us are not in school because our parents and guardians do not have money to send us to school; also, some children do not like school.
- We cannot get food to eat daily; so, some of us sell mobile phone minutes to eat and send ourselves to school (criminal children Ganta stole a microphone from a boy who lives and goes to school by selling minutes).
- Most children sell to get food to eat and live; some of us live in the orphanage homes because our fathers are not living, and our mothers are poor people.
- Some parents put children outside for being stubborn; and when we are out, we join our friends living out there.
- Christian Aid has been helping our orphanage, but we cannot see them this time.
- We put susu from selling minutes and when we get sick, we get money from the susu to buy medicine from the drug store.
- Public school registration fees are around 7,000 LD here in Nimba.
- Children take drugs and they harass people on the street, jerking things (Black City is here in Ganta). The children on drugs can rape boys and girls at night.
- Children get missing here every day; we only find the dead bodies; recently a man went to sell his son for 10, 000.USD.
- There is child trafficking here; and teenage pregnancy is extremely high here.
- Most parents are vulnerable and poor; children are self-supported here; and several children are arrested and sent to jail. See them tomorrow.”

### Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:

- “Pay school fees for us (free school) and provide feeding in the school so that we can stay there. Then our friends will come and join us.
- We need health facilities for children in Nimba, foot ware, book bags, etc.
- Help our parents to do business and bring jobs for our fathers.
- Provide shelter for the children in the black city; provide counseling for them; open agricultural projects to make those living on drugs to get jobs and leave the drugs.
- Some children graduated from high school, but they are only riding bikes; so, bring trade schools for them.
- Need to take the children living on drugs to rehab centers; put them back in school because they are suffering. Open Rehab Centers and teach trade that they will live one.
- We need programs to help get the extremely poor children back in school.”

### Responses from parents on why children live in street situations

- “The economy is bad; so, we send the children to sell and raise money for food, school, and other things to keep life going.
- Raping of children is very rampant here in Nimba.
- Christian Aid supports the orphanage here; but it looks like the support is down.
- Many fathers abandoned their wives and left the children on their head. Hard time is the main cause.
- These days, there is too much freedom for children; children rights are causing us problem; human rights make the children frisky too much. They bring police to arrest parents and no parent want to see this.

- Families in the interior want their children to come to cities to go to school because the school system has broken down in the interior. Government schools are limited for the population in Nimba. So, our children cannot make it in private schools. Even at that, the government schools are very much expensive.
- Government cannot pay its workers. We take pay once every two to three months; so, we cannot easily support the children in school now.
- A parent said on radio that he wants to complete his house; so he went to sell his son to Mr. Prince Howard; the man has been on local radio stations justifying his actions and no one has arrested him. People are even saying “he is right to sell his son because that is his child”.
- Nigerians are the key drugs dealers in Nimba; and they are destroying the children here. There is no future generation if things continue as they are.
- Killing of kids, trafficking and ritualistic killings are all happening here daily.
- Single parents are getting many and they cannot control the children.
- Children are bearing children and leaving them with their grandparents.
- We take traditional medicines for treatment because hospitals are just there without drugs. Hospitals are expensive, and they do not even know what to do (the case of an Oldman whose pressure testing was a scenario where the nurse said the Oldman was already dead when, in fact, the pressure machine was not working); hospital staff are not even well trained.
- Several children sleep in the market halls and public places; this is prevalent here in Ganta
- DEA and LNP are aware of drug dealers, in fact, they are the ones who protect them.”

#### **Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “We need school feeding for our children; we also want the free school system to work.
- Make drug laws non-billable.
- Need more Government schools and they must make schools free. Why cannot UNICEF check on the so-called free education policy of this government? UNICEF and partners must check and tell the government the truth.
- We need vocational schools with rehab centers for these children that are spoiling.
- We need companies to provide job opportunities for the families and parents.
- Land ownership is an issue that discourages farming here in Nimba; there is a need to solve this problem so that we can make farm and do so freely.”

#### **Lofa County:**

The Focus Group Discussions in Lofa were conducted in Voinjama City on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022. A total of 17 children attended (12 girls and 5 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 16 parents (9 males and 7 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “Some children are not in school because they have not seen their fathers, and mothers cannot support them due to poverty.
- Some girls get pregnant and now have children; so, they have dropped out of school to look after their babies (four girls of ages 12, 14, 15 and 16 at the FGD had kids with no fathers). This means children are themselves parents.
- They do farm work or any contract to survive and take care of the babies.
- Children are selling in the street because there is no support. So, we sell to get money and buy food to keep us going. We sell in the streets to help our mothers get money to send us to school; we use street selling to get food, school fees, hospital bills, and put susu.
- When the goods or money get missing, we face various punishments, including beating, not eating, being put out of the home, etc. Sometimes, girls have sex with people to get them buy all the goods they are selling.

- Some girls get raped while selling in the street. There has been cases of gang rape and the goods are taken by the gangs.
- Sometimes children have accidents with cars, bikes, etc. while selling in the street.
- Drugs are in all our communities and the drugs are placed in food like peanut butter, milk candies, 'Opong eyeball,' pepper soup, gari etc.
- Drug dealers bribe the police to protect them. Police can only pretend; they are the ones helping drug dealers.
- We take drugs to make us extremely high. The drugs come thru candies, kanyan, gari, etc. and other ways.
- Our families can pay for stolen properties that we steal; so, we are not even sure they will take us back.
- Some of our friends are living and working in garages. They can steal car batteries to live.
- Some girls that are selling around can meet some men who buy their goods for sex.
- Some of us do not have parents, but we cannot get the chance to live in orphanage homes.
- This time there is no school feeding for children. So, we cannot go to school because of hunger."

### **Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- "Bring economic empowerment for our parents.
- Awareness is needed for children living on drugs so that they can leave it.
- We need school materials like book bags, clothes, uniforms, school feeding, and food for children living on drugs because they are hungry.
- Vocational schools will be good for children that are left behind. We need trade schools.
- Support children forum to continue awareness and serve as role model to attract some children.
- Child prostitution is high in Lofa; there is need to get the girls out of the street.
- We need free Medicare.
- Some men acting crazy rape vulnerable girls (a case of a Mandingo lady raped and had to commit suicide because the husband left her).
- Training for children forum and support for them to fight against child labor.
- We need drugs in the hospitals; if drugs are there, we will reduce the traditional treatment."

### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- "Husbands abandon kids with mothers; so, we (mothers) must use the children to sell to get food and school fees, clothes, and everything to make ends meet.
- No food for parents and children cannot get food until parents can find it.
- Some kids (both boys and girls) get raped, and nothing is done about this.
- Government schools are expensive more than private schools in the county.
- Some kids join drug gangs because of poverty, single parents, etc.
- Most people are unclear about law regarding customary marriages; so, children are the victims when the husbands leave, and the courts do nothing about it.
- Government does not provide the services needed for children under the law; so, the Government is responsible.
- Gender has safe home for children in Voinjama; but other parts of the county do not have.
- Peer pressure put some children in the street.
- Education must be free and compulsory; but the Government is not ready yet. DEOs and CEOs are only taking salaries for free. They do nothing for which they are being paid. In fact, drugs are sold on school campuses to our children.
- Women are not empowered, and fathers abandon families; there are no jobs, and people working with the government do not take pay on time and the salaries are even low. So, parents are poor and cannot take control over family responsibilities.
- Sometimes, courts put some fathers in prison for persistent nonsupport, but the fathers do not have it. so, keeping them in prison and feeding them is even useless.



- No vocational schools for children; so, when they graduate, they got no skills to work. Most of them ride bikes.
- Teenage pregnancy is extremely high here in Lofa
- Drug laws in Liberia are very weak. We need strong laws like death penalty and making drugs law non-billable for importers of drugs rather than chasing the drug users.
- Fewer women abandon children compared to fathers in Lofa County.
- Child labor is rampant in Lofa (eg. Malabu children are made to sell wood and bring home 50 to 200 LD daily).
- Cultural norms lead to child marriage which is also prevalent in Lofa.
- People are selling alcohol to children without and punishment. So, Government is the problem (a girl was drugged on July 26 and gang raped in Voinjama). No action was taken.
- DEOs and CEOS are not available to monitor what the schools are doing; PTAS are weak and need to be strengthened.
- Children are having babies, and this places burden on us as parents.
- Stepchildren are one of the biggest problems with husbands who think their wives put more burden on them by bringing stepchildren. Some mothers, too, do not want stepchildren.
- Man drowned himself because he said there was too much pressure on him for support for his children and their mother (his wife). He told the family that they he was going to drown himself in the creek, but they overlooked it. So, when it happened, they all were saying, "he said it yesterday-oh".
- About 600 girls were just taken in the society bush; but the whole fight against the FGM is undermining the time they should be there to learn traditional skills. So, when they stay few weeks, they come back empty."

#### Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:

- "There is a need for the government to monitor all schools.
- Communities need to make their own laws against drugs since Government is not able (the case of Lawalazu making their own law in the town; in Bolahun, the town expelled a drug peddler who was an alien, but they guy left the business with his host that the town cannot expel. So, Government needs tough laws against drugs (non-billable, death penalty, etc.)
- Women need micro credit, and the parents need more economic empowerment opportunities.
- We need vocational schools for our children; life skills or skill training can help.
- We need awareness for laws in the country in communities; this could help address some of the problems.
- We need logistics for local government ministries and agencies, Monrovia is not Liberia.
- Use local COBS and NGOs based in the counties; do not give money to people in Monrovia to come and work in counties (the case of crusaders for peace project from UNICEF has a negative image in Lofa). Sign boards are the biggest development from International and national NGOs. (The use of CBOS in Lofa for voter education helped to reduce spoiled ballots in last senatorial elections).
- The psychosocial pillar manual that was validated and approved has not been sent to counties from the Ministry of Gender. We need it to guide our work.
- Need to provide skills trainings at the prisons to change the life of prisoners.
- We need the restoration of funding for Labor Ministry staff to do awareness on child labor, and trafficking in the counties.
- Dissolve the DEA because they are protecting drugs dealers."

#### Rivercess County

The Focus group discussions in Rivercess were conducted in Cestos City on 26th August 2022. A total of 10 children attended (1 girl and 9 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 10 parents (6 males and 4 females).

### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “We do not have support from our parents to achieve our dreams to be what we want because our parents do not have the money.
- We follow friends and join them to do things that our parents do not like.
- Some of us want to become footballers, lawyers, gospel musicians, etc.
- We do not have books, copy books, book bags, uniforms, and shoes for school.
- We cannot go to hospital when we get sick because our parents do not have money.
- Food business is hard on us here.
- Some of us are taking drugs because we have nothing to do.
- People are in the street after graduating from high school or college. So, this has discouraged some of us from going further and because there is no future support.
- We are selling of Orange Minutes and Lonestar Minutes in the street to get money.
- Children can drink herbs (country medicine) that are provided by mother or sometime family member, because we do not have money for drugs (pharmaceutical) from the drugstore or go to hospital.
- One child said, I do not want to go to school because everyday people who learned book can be looking for work at party headquarters and some people are loading cars and washing cars for living. So, I am really discouraged in learning book because it will be the same thing.”

### **Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “Want Government and partners to come in Rivercess to take footballers out to advance countries and the government should open academy for football players to improve their career.
- Government should organize sporting tournaments in various parts of Rivercess to get players that will be send out of Liberia to play football.
- Want Government to open law school in Rivercess County to make those wanting to become lawyers achieve my dreams.
- Want Government to please build big school (college) for us in Rivercess County because only one high school (Cestos High School); so, after high school we will continue to college.
- Want Government and partner please build recording studio in Rivercess County for us who want to become musicians to enable us make music and sell it to people outside Rivercess.
- Want Government to build skills training schools for us (interested students) in Rivercess county that will train students for livelihood empowerment and will benefit them in the future.
- Want Government to bring ART & CRAFT for us to learn and make money after learning. This will also help us from being in the street.
- We want school feeding because we can be hungry at school.
- Want Government to also empower the disabled community youth and teach people about sign language.
- Want Government to take us from the gap (ghetto), and this will change our living condition because we are tired smoking, but nothing to do.
- No money to get food to eat every day. So, we only eat when our mothers get food.”

### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “Children are on the street selling because the country is hard, and they sell to raise money for their own school fees.
- There are plenty drugs(narcotics) on the street making our children to follow bad friends (peer pressure)
- The children can just sell to help their mothers because the market can be too much.
- There is no money to keep the children in school. So, they are on their own.”

**Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Government should provide free education (skills training) for children living in street situations to help in their transformation and mold their minds for tomorrow.
- Government Should take children off the street, investment must be made in early childhood; the primary and secondary educational sectors must prepare children and make them better in society. Also, more awareness needs to be done for people to be informed about the protection of their children.
- We need recreation centers and trade schools to be built for children in street situations to learn trade for their personal growth and development.
- Government should build life skills center in Rivercess for parents to learn and provide for their families.
- Government and partners should provide micro loans for parents of children in such situations.
- Government should punish such children and their parents that will abuse any support provided to children in street situations.
- Government needs to help children in street situations that are serious about education to get educated and be useful to our community.”

**Grand Gedeh County**

The Focus group discussions in Grand Gedeh were conducted in Zwedru City on 24th August 2022. A total of 10 children attended (4 girls and 6 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 10 parents (3 males and 7 females).

**Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “Parents/guardians have no hand to support or to send us to school or buy food.
- No good shelters for us and our parents to live so we follow our friends.
- We do contracts for other people (weed and hoe grass, draw water and selling).
- We get water from the hand pump and wells that are closer and far, and we sell for people to buy clothes for ourselves.
- We seek treatment from the hospital and drug store and sometimes we get treatment from traditional herbs.
- The children that attended the FGD are in classes ranging from 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grades. They feel bad (because terrible things can happen to us; sometimes parents/guardians, including older boys and girls mal-treat us).”

**Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “We need skill training and vocational schools (trade school) to do tailoring, catering, and soap making.
- Some of us want to go to regular schools. So, we need free schools.
- We need support for our parents so they can help us.”

**Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “Our children are in the street because of the situation in which we find ourselves (no work).
- Parents separation or not living together is one of the major reasons. Also, children follow peer pressure.
- Single mother/parent is another big reason children live in street situations.
- Some children are being accused as witchcrafts and wizards. So, parents throw them out.
- Girl's children comparing their life with adult women leads them into street situations.”

**Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Continue talking with children about what they are involved with, and we need to stop them not to sell in the street. Parent/guardians should provide study class teacher for those in school.

- Everybody's involvement in protecting children is important.
- Liaise with or engage Government agencies responsible and other humanitarian organizations to provide support for such children.
- Provide safe homes for them to live and provide rehabilitation centers and recreational places.
- Parents should afford to support their children.
- Provide trade school/ vocational training, and free education for children across Liberia.
- Provide scholarship for children to achieve their dream; Provide loan for parents/guardians to cater to their children (Male)."

### **Sinoe County**

The Focus Group Discussions in Sinoe was conducted in Greenville City on September 9, 2022. A total of 10 children attended (8 girls and 2 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 10 parents (1 male and 9 females).

#### **Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

##### **12 children between the ages 9– 14 years participated in the FGD**

- "To help our mothers put food in the house.
- To pay our school fees.
- Because our parents do not have support.
- We need food feeding so we cannot be hungry in school."

#### **Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- "We want Government to help pay our school fees.
- We need school feeding.
- We want Government to help our parents so that they can stop sending us in the street to sell."

#### **Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- "Our husbands abandon us and the children; and there is no support.
- The children help us sell; so, we can find food to eat.
- We are not working.
- We are grandparents, their parents left them with us in the name of going to hustle, since their departure, no response, no support, so we must send our grandchildren to help us sell to get daily bread and pay their school fees."

#### **Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- "Do not have anything to say, the country is extremely hard and only selling can make us to eat, so we cannot stop them from selling in the street
- We need help from Government and UNICEF to support us with our children school fees, at least to reduce our burdens.
- We are asking Government and UNICEF to please help us protect our children."

### **Rivergee County**

The Focus Group Discussions in River Gee was conducted in Fish Town City on September 12, 2022. A total of 10 children attended (5 girls and 5 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 10 parents (5 males and 5 females).

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**Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:****12 children between the ages 13 - 17 years participated in the FGD**

- “Peer Pressure get us in the street.
- We do not have place to live, so we are in the street.
- We do not listen to parent’s advice.
- We are helping our parents to sell.
- We are in the street because of material things.
- Parents cannot afford, and we have no food.
- Some of us are portraying/ practicalizing what is being watched in movie.
- We run away from home because of housework.”

**Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “Take us from the street and send us to free school.
- Parents should advise their children.
- Provide shelter and send us to regular school or send us to vocational school.
- Reduce school fees.
- Straight measures should be put in place by the parents.
- Government should provide playground and school feeding.
- Parents should provide regular feeding.
- Government should provide safe drinking water and provide toys for the children.
- Government should bring in permanent teachers.
- Provide drugs for treatment in health facility.
- Government should pay teacher’s salary on time.
- Government needs to pay health care providers.”

**Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “We cannot afford so gave them businesses to help with their school materials.
- We do not have money to purchase school materials.
- Some of us are single mothers; UNICEF used to bring copybooks, but this is not happening anymore.
- Because they are on drugs and want to be violent.
- Because some of us are widows.
- People go into the rural parts take people children with the intention of helping them, and after a while these children are accused of theft, witchcraft activities and they ask them to leave their homes, as the result of this, these children end up in the street.”

**Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Government should provide market building with playground.
- Government should ensure teachers are available and paid with good salaries.
- Government should provide psychosocial counselors and first Aid-nurses to all public schools.
- Government should stop unnecessary retirement for teachers.
- Government should provide loan for women empowerment.”

**Maryland County**

The Focus Group Discussions in Maryland were conducted in Pleebo City on September 8, 2022. A total of 12 children attended (3 girls and 9 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 11 parents (1 male and 10 females).



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**Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:****12 children between the ages 7 – 15 years participated in the FGD**

- “We sell in the street to pay school fees, we got to sell.
- We stay in the street to keep us busy.
- We sell in the streets for school purpose.
- We go to hustle to have provision and medication.
- We stay in the street for survival.
- Because some children’s fathers abandoned them.”

**Children’s Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- “Government should provide School fees.
- Government should provide business money for our mother.
- Government should provide scholarships for us to go to school.
- We need help from Government to contribute to our education.
- Need government help and support.”

**Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- “Children area in the street because of survival.
- Children live in the street because of the influence by friends.
- Children are in the street because of poverty.
- Children are in the street because they want certain provisions and material things.”

**Parents’ recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- “Government should provide business for parents.
- Need help in anyways to properly care for our families.
- Provide vocational school for the children.
- We need Government to help pay our children school fees.
- We need loan to help us care for my children.
- We need government to help in her power to remove the children from the street.”

**Grand Kru County**

The Focus Group Discussions in Grand Kru County were conducted in Barclayville City on September 9, 2022. A total of 12 children attended (4 girls and 6 boys). This was followed by the parents. There were 11 parents (5 males and 5 females).

**10 children between the ages 10– 17 years participated in the FGD****Responses from Children on why they live in street situations as well as their experience in the street:**

- “We are in the street because of the lack of good support.
- We are in the street because our parents cannot put us to school.
- We do not have the sense of reasoning because we are young and want everything.
- Some children go to dig gold and get money.
- Parents do not want to send us to school because they do not have money.
- No food for us when we go to school; so, we do not want to go there.”

**Children's Recommendations on what should be done to remove them from living in street situations:**

- "Parents should put us to school and encourage us to leave the street.
- Parents should care for their children by providing for them.
- Government should provide money for parents.
- Government should provide free education for us.
- Government should provide scholarships for us.
- Government should construct the road and homes."

**Responses from parents on why children live in street situations**

- "Children do not want to listen parents.
- Because they want money, they are in the street.
- Lack of parental support is what got them in the street.
- Because of drugs and stealing, children are in the street."

**Parents' recommendations on what should be done to remove children from living in street situations:**

- "Government should provide school fees to parent.
- Government should Provide vocational education.
- Government should reinforce monitoring system to ensure children leave the street.
- Government should enforce the free and compulsory education system and stop charging activity and different fees.
- We need community college for our children."

Key informant interviews have been conducted with selected government ministries and partners. Below are summary notes on these KIIs.

**Ministry of Justice**

"The Child Justice Unit at the Justice Ministry acknowledges that the situation of street kids is endemic and needs to be addressed holistically. However, for its part, Justice Ministry provides legal representation for kids who come in conflict with the law. The children are also in harm's way. Accordingly, attempts were made to take kids off the streets, but there was nowhere to keep them, and they could not be kept at police stations more than the statutory period. Feeding, housing, etc. were issues that undermined that attempt to remove children from the street. Justice Ministry is a legal arm; it does not operate facilities to keep children. The Ministry would like to collaborate with other partners to deal with situation."

"Rate of children in prison has dropped. There is no separate facility for children in detention. The Ministry has been working to release children from prison. It has diversion program in 8 counties. The Ministry in collaboration with partners provides training to police and juvenile justice staff and social workers, collaborating with parents and courts. There is only a singly juvenile court in Montserrado. Therefore, all other cases across the country should be heard by magisterial courts that have their own burden of caseloads."

"Presently, prison conditions are deplorable; the Ministry is fighting to reduce the cases of children in conflict with the law. There are 49 male children detained; 8 convicted; 3 girls detained. This is the official national figure now. Public defense program provides defense for kids who come in conflict with the law. They provide support to children. Lower number of public defenders remains a challenge across the country."

"On the issue of children as low as 11 to 12 years having kids, once there is no complain of rape, the Ministry cannot bring charges against anyone. Yes, babies are having babies. What is happening to those who impregnate these kids become a matter of cultural and religious matters that are affecting rape cases. However,

the Ministry has established the SGBV unit that is prosecuting cases. The Ministry also provides short stay facilities for children having legal issues and coming in conflict with the law.”

“The Ministry of Gender takes responsibility of taking care of the children. However, there is not funding allocated in the national budget for children’s issues. For instance, the Children Wellbeing Council created by law is dysfunctional. There is not a single dollar in the national budget per this law. This is a need to fund this initiative to increase children protection across the country.”

“On the question of drugs, you need to speak with the Minister of Justice who oversees all other security apparatuses like the DEA, Liberia National Police, Immigration, etc., to speak to this matter. There is a need for a communication to the Minister to bring all these parties around the table to discuss the drugs issue.”

## **UNFPA**

“The issue of children living in street situations is a national concern and should claim the attention of all partners and line ministries. There is an urgent need to pay attention to at-risk youth, mostly those who are on drugs. Some got on drugs voluntarily and involuntarily. As low as 10-year-old kids are affected. So, there is a need to establish institutionalized programs.”

“UNFPA is part of a UN and Government of Liberia Joint Program on at-Risk Youth. The Resident Coordinator pledged 1.5m USD and the President of Liberia pledged 1m USD to the program. There is a need to make the drug laws tougher than what they are now. Drugs should be made a nonbillable crime because it is destroying the children and youth. There should also be monitoring mechanism within the schools to hold them accountable to the normal standards because drugs have now entered schools. Counselling and rehabilitation of children could be of help, but they must be somewhere.”

On the issue of those complaining that family planning is making women fatter and totally stops girls from having kids when they need to, UNFPA “believes that is a perception”. Children are having children; therefore, the family planning procedures are good for the girls. “Given the intervention made in the Southeast by the UN System, teenage pregnancy has been reduced there and institutionalized delivery has increased there as well. Notwithstanding, there is a need to increase awareness on the safety of family planning drugs to dispel the misconceptions in the counties about same.”

## **UN Women**

“There is no ongoing work with children living in street situations, but UN Women is working with children in schools in partnership with Orange Liberia. The project is transforming classrooms to make them digital for under privileged schools and introducing tablets for students to access lesson and for teachers to conduct lectures, using the tablets.”

“UN Women is also supporting Village Savings Associations (VSLAs) to empower rural women. It also collaborates with young girls through SGBV advocacy, etc. The Spotlight initiative is working with FGM communities. Giving that there is increasing rural urban migration of children, UN Women is collaborating with rural women to generate income so that they can support their children in the countries. There are also ongoing sexual and reproductive health rights projects being implemented in Bong County and other places. UN Women is also a part of the UN-Government-of-Liberia Joint Program for at-Risk youth.”

Although the UN Women is doing some work in some counties, there is a need to scale up intervention across the country because parents (mothers) have complained about abject poverty, blaming same on reason they are using children to sell in the street.

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## Ministry of Internal Affairs

“The Ministry has no direct intervention in working with children living in street situations, but it is part of other networks like the SGBV, etc. However, at the county levels, not much is being done. County officials have not gotten involved in addressing the issue of children living in street situations.”

“The Ministry is more focused on the Sande and Poro traditional secret societies to prevent the forceful induction of children, especially when regular schools are in session. In 2018, there was a moratorium on the recruitment of children in the Sande, but the traditional leaders have signed a moratorium for 3 years. This agreement calls for the establishment of heritage centers, alternative livelihoods, etc. Much is desired in these areas. Despite this moratorium, it was observed in Lofa during the data collection process that over 600 kids were recruited into the traditional society.”

The Ministry also “noted the need to reward communities that are not practicing FGM as a means of encouraging those that are practicing it to change their mind.” Presently, “the Ministry has a Gender Policy and is in the process of establishing Gender Desk Offices under the County Superintendents’ offices. This will help the counties get fully involved with addressing gender issues in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Teams in counties”. The Ministry of Internal Affairs “is not fully involved with addressing drugs issues, but as Chair of the County Ministerial teams, there is a need to get them involved”. The Ministry recommends that “the Ministry of Gender needs to include all issues affecting children in the National Budget to have resources for intervention”.

## Plan Liberia

“Plan Liberia does not have a specific program for street children, but it supports vulnerable families and children, thereby preventing them from getting in the street. Plan supports Street Children below 18 years including orphans by constructing schools that can provide access to for them to gain education in Nimba, Lofa, and Bomi counties. Plan provides nonfood items to the students who attend schools constructed by the organizations.”

“Plan also provides Alternative Learning Programs for overgrown children that cannot go to regular schools. The work of Plan is sometimes negatively impacted by the lack of supervision and monitoring of schools, as well as the absence of assigned teachers. Plan’s constructed schools are community based and fall under the management of the Ministry of Education.”

## Defense of Children International (DCI)-Liberia

“DCI-Liberia has social workers operating in Monrovia. Monrovia has been divided into three zones. The entity works with children in conflict with the law and monitors police depots, juvenile courts, etc. in the country. DCI also monitors internal and external trafficking and reunifies trafficked children/victims when they are identified. The social workers also trace separated children and re-unifies them with their families.”

“The migration of kids from rural to urban areas is being done for exploitation/labor market/domestic servitude related issues. Once the organization comes across such cases, it intervenes.” The entity raises awareness on these issues nationally and recommends that:

1. “Government should enforce the free and compulsory primary education policy by increasing education budget and providing more trained teachers.
2. Government should empower poor and vulnerable parents with farming tools, funding collateral and revamp the Cooperative Development Agency to form these vulnerable groups into effective cooperatives for empowerment programs.
3. There is a need for more competent institutions to deal with the drug pandemic in the country and make drug a nonbillable offense with civil liability on those who sell drugs to children.
4. There is a need to do a national study on prostitution and transactional sex in the country to find out the root causes.

5. Government needs to harmonize the statutory and customary laws on the age of consent because one says age 18 while the other says 16 years.
6. There is a need to investigate reports of the increasing incidence of teenagers as gays and lesbians.”

### **Street Child Liberia**

“Street Child Liberia works in three areas, including access to education for the most vulnerable children in Liberia (Margibi, Montserrado and Maryland counties); livelihood support to the parents of such children and child protection. The Social Workers for Street Child Liberia use a vulnerability criterion for the recruitment of such children in the three counties of program focus. Children are identified and recruited when schools are in session. This means out of school children are targeted to benefit after the recruitment process. School fees for the selected beneficiaries are paid by Street Child and the children are provided uniforms, book bags, copy books, pens/pencils, shoes, and socks.”

“As a way of empowering the parents to gain economic upliftment, Street Child provides them livelihood grants to do business. The beneficiaries are required to save part of their profits of their businesses with Street Child. They are required to save up to 100USD annually. This money goes into a revolving fund to support additional children and keep the beneficiaries’ children in school. The organization supports child protection through its engagement with Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) in project communities to enhance their capacity in monitoring and reporting child rights abuses. The Ministry of Gender is responsible for training the CWCs across the country, but some communities and counties do not have the CWCS set up yet.”

“Street Child has observed that, despite the moratorium on FGM and the recruitment of girls into the Sande society, traditional leaders and some members of the Council of Chiefs and elders are surreptitiously supporting the practice because they gain millions of Liberia Dollars, rice, chickens, and goats from the families whose daughters are recruited. This is syndicate that needs to be undercut because it keeps children out of school. Street Child builds schools and trains teachers to teach in those schools in the project communities. The trained teachers serve as volunteers for three years and are paid stipend by Street Child. Communities also help them by making farms for the teachers. It is hoped that Government will place such volunteers on the payroll. Street Child has launched a new program that intends to send over 13,000 out of school kids back to school and build 37 schools in the next four years.”

To address the issues of street children, there is a need for the Government of Liberia to do the following:

1. “Provide school feeding because it is the solution to getting children in school and retaining them there as most families are poor and vulnerable and cannot find food for themselves and their children.
2. Improve the quality of education in the rural areas and provide trained teachers so that children can remain with their families and go to school.
3. Government must commit to quality education in the country to allow partners raise funds to compliment the efforts of national government.
4. Government needs to strengthen drug laws in the country and enhance the capacity of the DEA by providing logistics, etc.
5. Government needs to address extreme poverty in the country because it is the major cause of children living in street situations in the country.”

### **Quantitative data presentation, analysis, and interpretation**

A perception survey about children living in street situations in Liberia was conducted to compliment the qualitative data collected. This survey, amongst other things, obtained estimates of how many children live in street situations in Liberia. Below is the data collected from 159 respondents from the 15 counties.



Table 1.1: Estimated number of children selling in the street

Bomi	5,050	10 <sup>th</sup>
Bong	36,400	4 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Cape Mount	10,068	8 <sup>th</sup>
Gbarpolu	5,325	9 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Bassa	37,000	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Grand Gedeh	14,500	6 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Kru	2,550	13 <sup>th</sup>
Lofa	12,427	7 <sup>th</sup>
Margibi	29,500	5 <sup>th</sup>
Maryland	2,753	12 <sup>th</sup>
Montserrado	153,982	1 <sup>st</sup>
Nimba	50,500	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Rivercess	100	15 <sup>th</sup>
River Gee	1,850	14 <sup>th</sup>
Sinoe	4,580	11 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>366,585</b>	

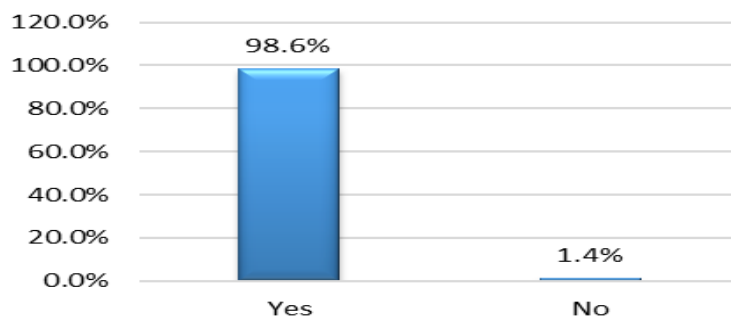
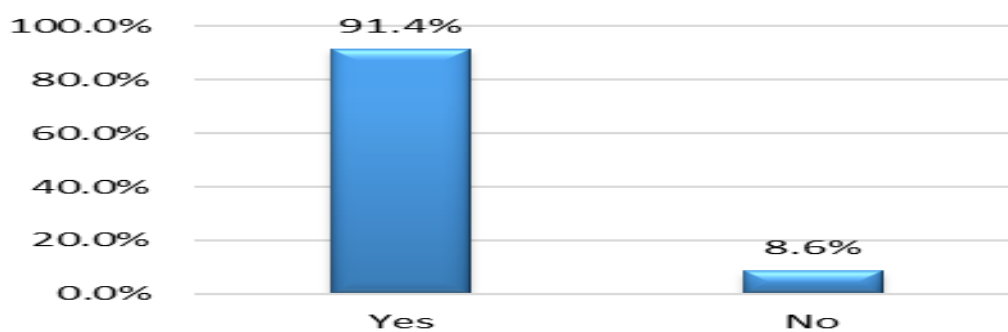
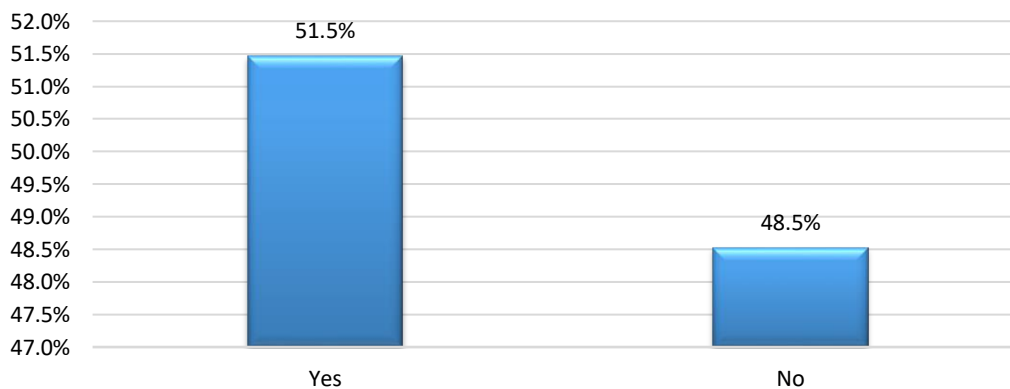
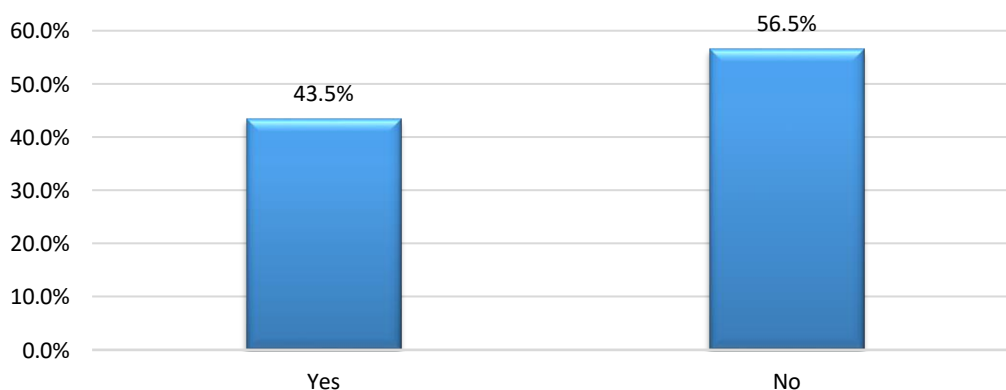
Table 1.2: Estimated number of children living in the street without going to school

Bomi	800	12 <sup>th</sup>
Bong	9,900	5 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Cape Mount	10,180	4 <sup>th</sup>
Gbarpolu	1,400	11 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Bassa	9,850	6 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Gedeh	1,900	9 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Kru	425	14 <sup>th</sup>

Lofa	4,024	8 <sup>th</sup>
Margibi	8,000	7 <sup>th</sup>
Maryland	10,710	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Montserrado	48,682	1 <sup>st</sup>
Nimba	18,200	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Rivercess	81	15 <sup>th</sup>
River Gee	750	13 <sup>th</sup>
Sinoe	1,800	10 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>126,702</b>	

Table 1.3: Estimated number of children living in the street with their parents

Bomi	0	
Bong	400	6 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Cape Mount	3,710	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Gbarpolu	0	
Grand Bassa	250	8 <sup>th</sup>
Grand Gedeh	0	
Grand Kru	0	
Lofa	1,400	4 <sup>th</sup>
Margibi	200	9 <sup>th</sup>
Maryland	2,578	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Montserrado	15,617	1 <sup>st</sup>
Nimba	850	5 <sup>th</sup>
Rivercess	1	11 <sup>th</sup>
River Gee	350	7 <sup>th</sup>
Sinoe	50	10 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,406</b>	

**Are there children selling in the street? (N=159)****Are there children permanently living in the street without going to school? (N=159)****Are there children who live together with their parents in the street? (N=159)****Is there anyone (government, NGO, other institutions, or a person) that is helping such children? (N=159)**

1. If yes, what type of help is being provided to the children by such helper?

Q8_Yes	
counseling	4
Food	4
Humanitarian assistance	4
orphanages	32
shelter and feeding	4
safe home	4
empowering their parents	1
Education support	104
Security/child protection	2

2. What do you want the government and partners or people who what to help the children do to make them to realize their dream in life?

Q10_help	
Rehabilitation	30
Government support	3
Education Opportunity	50
Vocational training	19
Counseling	3
Livelihood for parents	51
Child Protection Awareness	3

### Data discussion, analysis, and interpretation

Based on the qualitative data collected thus far using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), the factors leading to children living in street situations revolve around key thematic issues including multidimensional poverty amongst parents, persistent non-support of parents (mainly fathers) to their children, orphans and abandoned children left in communities without any relatives to care for them, drug abuse by children, limited access to free and compulsory primary education, teen age pregnancy/early parenting, child labor and peer pressure.

### Multidimensional poverty of parents

Most of the parents that attended the focus group discussions in all the counties have indicated that parents are impoverished and cannot afford to cater to their children as required. They contend that “the economy is hard,

and their impoverished conditions lead them to use children as bread winners”. The children themselves have concurred with parents indicating that “most of the parents do not have money to feed them three times daily, send them to school and provide other basic needs like clothes and healthcare for them”. Most parents are without jobs, and there are limited opportunities for them to make a successful living that would allow them to “provide for the wellbeing of their families, mainly the children”. To address this situation, parents have confirmed that “they send their children to engage in street selling and other child labor practices from which the parents can gain access to funds to minimally feed their families and send the children to school where feasible based on the earnings from such initiatives”.

### **Persistent non-support**

The second factor that leads children to living in street situations is persistent nonsupport to children and mothers by most fathers. Many families have broken up due to fathers’ abandonment of their children with the mothers. Based on the views gathered from the field, most fathers do not care to support the children they have when they abandon mothers. As such, the mothers become single parents because other men are afraid to bear the burdens of children that the mothers have. In instances where such mothers get married by any chance, most of their new husbands” either do not have the means to fully support the wives and the stepchildren or they do not love the stepchildren”. In fewer instances, some fathers argued that women leave children with fathers and go to remarry. However, this view is not frequent across the counties. Additionally, participants argued that “there are public officials that have extra marital affairs, have children and fail to support the mothers and the children”.

Asked about the role of the justice system in addressing cases of persistent nonsupport by fathers, majority of mothers who attended the FGDs argued that “the courts do not compel such irresponsible fathers to support families”. Hence, they recommend that such fathers “be given prolonged prisons sentences”. The mothers believe that “the law on persistent non-support to children are weak and need to be revisited to hold such fathers or parents accountable for the provision of school fees, money for food, treatment, etc.”. Children concur that “families eat once in a day due to the lack of food and the abject poverty parents live in.

### **Limited access to primary education**

The third major factor that leads children to living in street situations is limited access to free and compulsory primary education across the country. There are public schools in most parts of the country, but most of these schools are dysfunctional and are without qualified teachers. In some counties, some communities do not have primary schools. Where public schools are available, the children and parents have argued that “the fees and tuition being charged by these schools are very high”. Hence, the poor parents “cannot afford to pay the fees being charged”. Some teachers and schools’ administrators that attended some of the FGDs blamed the charging of higher fees on the lack of material or budgetary support to public schools. According to them, “the schools use the extra monies charged to purchase classroom materials, stationery and to undertake repairs on campuses as well as facilitate teachers’ travel from the counties to Monrovia and back to attend to school operational matters. Participants in the FGDs blame the Education Ministry for “poor supervision and management of schools”.

Another phenomenon associated with schools across the country is that the children go to school hungry and cannot stay there. Therefore, most of the children who enroll drop out of school. The parents have equally agreed that “there is no food for children in the morning and they do not have the means to provide breakfast, recess, lunch, and dinner daily”. In view of this, the children and parents across the counties called for school feeding to allow children stay in school. It is believed that school feeding across the country “will draw more children into schools and this could help mitigate the problem of children selling to earn money for their school fees and feeding.

### **Orphans/abandoned children**

The fourth factor responsible for children living in street situations in Liberia is that some children are orphans or abandoned children whose parents left them with grandparents or without anyone to care for them. Orphans



are found in all the counties but are less frequent in the Southeast of the country. Some of these orphans that attended the FGDs agree “that UNICEF and other agencies frown on orphanages homes; hence making them to live in street situations”. The parents that participated in the FGDs also agreed with the children that “UNICEF and other international groups as well as the Ministry of Gender prevent the opening of orphanages in communities without providing alternative care for orphans; hence, they called for alternative measures that will provide effective care and protection for orphans across the country”.

In addition to orphans, there are other children that are without parents. Such children are mainly found in mining, fishing and concession areas where migrants leave pregnancies with mothers and do not return. Most of these mothers are themselves children; hence when they have these babies, they leave them with either grandparents or friends. Such children need care and protection because most of them are found living in street situations due to the inability of the foster parents to adequately cater to their needs. Worse more, some girls have children and abandon them in public areas.

### **Drug abuse**

The fifth key factor that makes children to live in street situations is drug abuse by children. According to the parents and children, illicit drugs are widespread across the country. Both children and parents as well as policy makers who took part in the KIIs agree that “illicit drugs are widespread in the country and that security forces including the National Drug Enforcement Agency, Liberia Immigration Service, the Liberia National Police, and the Armed Forces of Liberia are protecting drug importers and drug dealers”. As already expressed in the narratives from the field, “drugs are sometimes placed in foods like candies, kanyan, gari, pepper soup, cake, etc. and sold on school campuses and other public places”.

Some of the children informed that “disabled persons are part of those peddling drugs in communities and public areas”. This needs to be further verified by security intelligence under a rights-based environment as the disabled people themselves need protection under the law. Equally important is the correlation between drugs and crimes. Children on drugs are committing crimes to get money to keep their bad habits. They “steal motor bikes, bags, household items, etc.” Therefore, such children come in conflict with the law. When they are caught committing crimes, they are arrested and imprisoned in adult prison cells. Hence, there is a need to address the issue of juvenile detention in adult prisons.

The use of drugs is not only voluntary but also involuntary because anyone consuming such foods become an involuntary drug user. Therefore, the parents recommend the “formulation of harsher drug laws if the country must have a future productive generation”. Both the children and parents have recommended that “rehabilitation centers equipped with counselling and vocational training facilities be built to take charge of children that have already fallen prey to drugs and whose lives need to be rehabilitated to make them useful citizens”. They also suggest that “vocational skills training should be part of the rehabilitation centers to provide skills to the victims of drug abuse”.

### **Teenage pregnancy/early parenting**

The sixth factor that leads children to living in street situations is teenage pregnancy or early parenting. There is high incidence of teenage pregnancy across the country, although the situation seems less prevalent in the six Southeastern counties of Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, and Rivercess. Teenage girls get pregnant and dropout of school. Often, they are impregnated by teenage boys that are unprepared to bear fatherly responsibilities. In most instances, such babies are left with grandparents or other relatives to care for. Early parenting is a contributing factor to the circular flow of poverty and leads most teenage girls behind in terms of education. Some parents throw out their daughters who get impregnated by teenage boys and this leads a whole lot of such children living in street situations in search of survival.

### **Child labor and peer pressure**

Based on the above-mentioned factors, children engage in child labor that itself is another key factor that makes children to live in street situations. Children labor takes place in several forms. One of the frequent

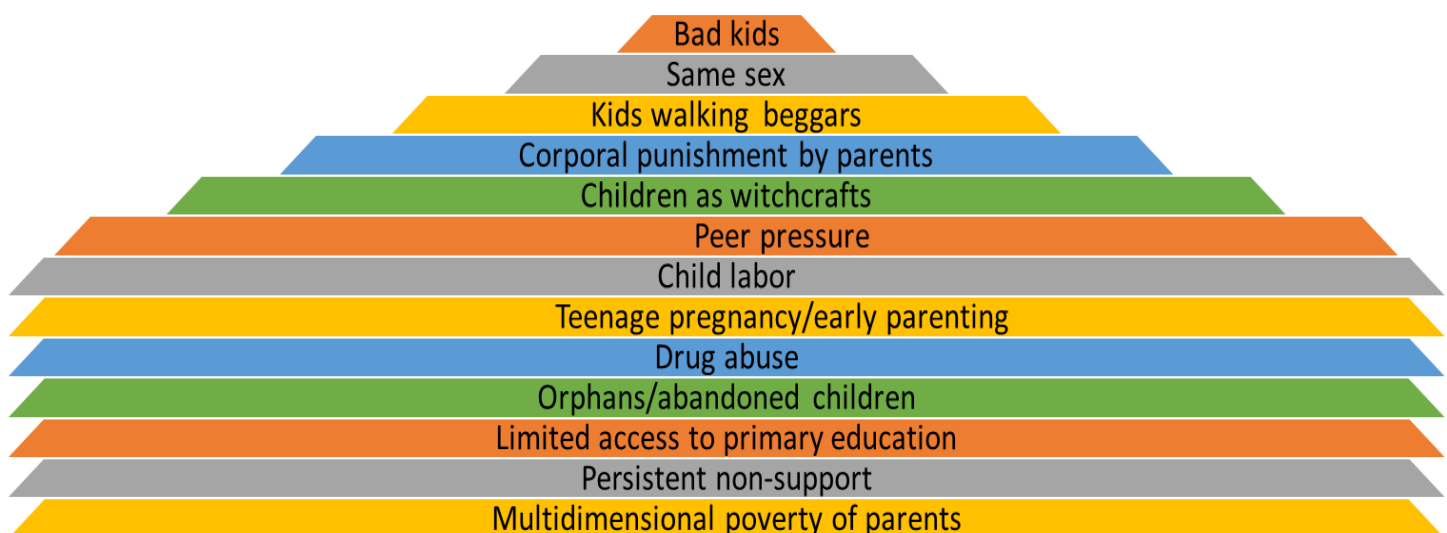
forms is the riding of motorcycles for adults by teenage boys. The parents argued that “motor cycling is a new form employment that attracts children, and this puts most of them out of school”. The “riders of the bikes earn money and take on responsibilities that they should not take on as children”. The children themselves agree that “this new commercial affair is attractive and lucrative; hence they prefer it than going to school that takes a very long time to yield income”. One key risk that street girls face is the issue of rape and sexual exploitation. Sometimes, “male adults offer monies for their goods for illegal sex while some boys are raped by adult males just for money to get food”.

Parents recommend that commercial motor cycling be curbed to save the future of Liberia. Besides the motor cycling, there are other forms of child labor across the country. The washing of cars/motorcycles, the crushing of food centers/restaurants, garages, rocks, mining, fishing, working in “street selling, and children involvement in other forms or labor practices are of great concern to parents across the country. However, the parents argue that “they make a living out of the labor of their children and through that they are able to make ends meet”. Coupled with child labor is the factor of peer pressure which most parents and children themselves see as one of most important elements that leads them into unacceptable lifestyles. The children and parents assert that “when children see their peers living on these different ways of labor and earning money, their peers get attracted to same and leave the homes of their parents and guardians to join their peers in living in the street”.

## Others

Finally, based on the data gathered, the above-mentioned factors are the leading causes of children living in street situations in Liberia. However, there were other issues as factors also leading children to living in street situations. Such issues include “accusation of children as witchcrafts thereby making parents or guardians to abandon them, corporal punishment by parents, some children are being brought up into garages and are left out of school, some children are being used to take their disabled parents around for begging, some children become gays or lesbians and are despised by parents and the general view that some children are just bad”. The adoption of children from the interior was another issue asked about during the FGDs, but parents feel that this is one of the ways their children can get external support outside of poor families.

**Table 1.1** Causes of children living in street situations in Liberia



## Quantitative data analysis and interpretation

From the quantitative data collected through a perception survey, 159 respondents provided their views on the three categories of children living in street situations in Liberia. It is estimated that 366,585 children sell in the street in the 15 counties; 98.1% of the 159 respondents agreed that this is the aggregate number of children selling in the street, while 1.4% have said no. Relative to the ranking of this phenomenon by county, Montserrado is first followed by Nimba, Grand Bassa, Bong, and Margibi.

Regarding the number of children living in the street without going to school, respondents estimated that there are 126,702 children living in street situations without going to school in Liberia. Of the total number of 159 respondents, 91.4% confirmed this while 8.6% said no. Again, Montserrado came first, followed by Nimba, Maryland, Grand Cape Mount and Bong respectively. On the issue of both parents and their children living in street situations, the respondents estimate that 25,406 children with their parents fall in this category in the 15 counties. 51.5% said yes there are such children and parents while 48.5% said no. Once again, Montserrado comes first followed by Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, Lofa, and Nimba respectively.

Generally, there are many children selling in the street and most of these children are out of school. There are lesser children and their parents living in the street permanently. Children in street situations do not have easy access to shelter and food, and they do not have the level of protection required for children. There is some level of support being provided by NGOs, other institutions, and individuals. However, such interventions to support children living in street situations is unsustainable and inadequate; hence, the need for Government and partners to intervene. The quantitative analysis agrees with the qualitative analysis that Government and partners need to invest in the economic empowerment of parents (mainly mothers), adequately support the free and compulsory public education policy, prioritize vocational education, and provide rehabilitation centers for the most vulnerable children living in street situations in Liberia.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, this mixed method data on the factors leading children to live in street situations in Liberia was collected within two months (August and September 2022) across the 15 counties. The sample size of the study was 562 participants (103 boys, 90 girls, 69 males, 141 females and 159 survey respondents). The study has found out that children living in street situations are generally vulnerable and mostly unprotected. Most of the children “go hungry all day without food, they barely get clothes to wear, they cannot get treated at medical centers and children are placed in the same prison cells with adults and most of them do not have birth certificates”.

In some instances, “lactating mothers are imprisoned with their babies without any regard to the protection of the babies”. Children and parents have also reported the “disappearances and killings of other children in the counties”. This is an abuse of the rights of children. The quantitative data confirms the qualitative data indicating that children in street situations need rehabilitation and education support. It also confirms that there is a need to economically empower parents to cater to the wellbeing of their children in Liberia.

Comment #21 indicates that “children live in street situations due to inequalities based on economic status, race, and gender. These problems are exacerbated by material poverty, inadequate social protection, poorly targeted investment, corruption and fiscal (tax and expenditure) policies that reduce or eliminate the ability of poorer people to move out of poverty.” To address these factors, the Committee on the CRC calls on state parties to “adopt policies based on Child Right approach that ensures respect for the dignity, life, survival, wellbeing, health, development, participation, and non-discrimination of the child as a rights holder”.

In view of the outcome of this study, children living in street situations in Liberia are there either due to inequalities based on economic status and gender. These problems are exacerbated by material poverty, inadequate social protection, poorly targeted investment, corruption, and fiscal policies that reduce or eliminate the ability of poorer people to move out of poverty. Therefore, to address the issue of children living in street situations in Liberia, it is hereby recommended that the Government of Liberia with support from partners do the following:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Policy and legal Issues

1. Strengthen drug laws in the country and enhance the capacity of the DEA by providing logistics, etc. Death penalty (capital punishment) is preferred by most of the participants, but where Government cannot do so due to international requirements, a nonbillable law for narcotic drugs is needed and desired

- to protect the national interest and safe the state. Also, there should be civil liability on those who sell drugs to children.
2. Harmonize the statutory and customary laws on the age of consent because one (the statutory) says age 18 while the other (customary) says 16 years. This conflict is being used in some counties where cultural, religious, and traditional practices promote child marriage.
3. County Administrations need to effectively coordinate all sector ministries and partners in the counties to ensure delivery of services to children at county, district, and community levels.
4. License traditional medical practitioners/herbalists to operate within medical centers as a complimentary arm of treatment across the country because majority of those who participated in the study said, “they take traditional medicine and trust the herbalist more than the medical practitioners”.
5. Need to activate the Child Wellbeing Council created by law and fund it under the National budget to increase child protection across the country.
6. Organize the Child Welfare Committees across the country in all counties and districts so that they can serve as an alternative peer group towards which children can gravitate.
7. Remove disabled persons from the street to prevent them from using children as beggars. Disable persons equally need to be prevented from peddling drugs as claimed by the participants in the study.
8. Provide clarity on the issue of gays and lesbians’ rights because it is unclear what government policy is on this matter. It was reported in some of the counties that these acts are being practiced in some communities and this makes parents to put their children out. Notably, Liberia’s domestic relations law provides for marriage only between a male and a female.
9. Empower traditional leaders that live on running “bush schools” as agreed in the moratorium on traditional schools so that the practitioners can take one alternative livelihoods.
10. Address the violent and unacceptable conduct of motor cyclists across the country, and
11. Conduct a national study on prostitution and transactional sex by teenage boys and girls in the country to find out the root causes.

### Empowerment of Parents

1. Address extreme poverty of parents because it disempowers parents from providing the basic needs to their children; hence, the major cause of children living in street situations in the country.
2. Empower poor and vulnerable parents with farming tools, funding collateral and revamp the Cooperative Development Agency to form these vulnerable groups into effective cooperatives for economic empowerment programs.

### Child education

1. Enforce the free and compulsory primary education policy by increasing the education budget, building primary schools where they are not found, and providing more trained teachers.
2. Provide school feeding to children in all public schools because it is one of the solutions to getting children in school and retaining them there as most families are poor and vulnerable and cannot find food for themselves and their children.
3. Improve the quality of education in the rural areas and provide trained or professional teachers so that children can remain with their families in the rural areas and go to school. This might reduce rural-urban migration.
4. Commit to quality primary education as a national emergency to allow partners raise funds to compliment the efforts of national government. This might help Liberia achieve SDG 4.
5. Transform public high schools in the counties into multilaterals where children will gain both academic and professional vocation skills so that graduates from high school can be marketable and fit for the job market to rebuild Liberia.

**Child health, justice, wellbeing, and rehabilitation**

1. Build and equipped safe homes in all counties and districts to cater to the wellbeing of children whose rights get abused.
2. Build rehabilitation centers to treat children that are abusing drugs because human resource is the most important resource of any country.
3. Provide hot meals and mobile health services to vulnerable and impoverished children in communities across the country.
4. Provide separate detention centers for children in conflict with the law. They should not be mixed with adult criminals in detention. Alternatively, rehabilitation centers should be built for them.
5. The issue of putting pregnant and lactating mothers needs to be given serious consideration such that the babies' survival is not compromised because of their mothers serving prison sentences.
6. Law enforcement officers need to pursue alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in cases where children report parents to them. Parents are offended by children taking them to the law.



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## Annex I:

### National Roadmap on Protection of Children in Street Situations in Liberia

#### Focus Group Consent Form

##### Purpose

You have been invited to participate in a focus group sponsored by the Ministry Gender, Children and Social Protection and UNICEF Liberia under the direction of Prof. Thomas Kaydor, National Consultant. The purpose of this focus group is to get **the views of children living in street situations in Liberia**. The information learned in this focus group will be used to develop a National Roadmap on the Protection of Children Living in Street Situations. Children living in street situations are those who sell in the street daily and go back home at night; have no place to live and therefore live and sleep in the street and public places, or are born in the street because their parents are homeless and therefore live in the street.

##### Procedure

As part of this study, you will be placed in a group of 6 – 10 individuals. A moderator will ask you several questions while facilitating the discussion. As approved by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and UNICEF Liberia, this focus group will be audio-recorded and a note-taker will be present. However, your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the final report. You can choose whether to participate in the focus group, and you may stop at any time during the course of the study.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions. The Gender Ministry and UNICEF Liberia want to hear the many varying viewpoints and would like for everyone to contribute their thoughts. Out of respect, please refrain from interrupting others. However, feel free to be honest even when your responses counter those of other group members.

##### Benefits and Risks

Your participation may benefit you and other children living in street situations in Liberia by providing relevant information that will inform the National Roadmap that is intended to provide protection for such children. However, no risks are expected beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

##### Confidentiality

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. Researchers within the Gender Ministry and UNICEF Liberia will analyze the data, but—as stated above—your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in any reports.

##### Contact

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact: Ms. Hawa Page, Child Protection

Specialist/Supervisor for the National Consultant, UNICEF Liberia, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, One UN House, Tubman Boulevard, Monrovia, Liberia.

[Email] [hpage@unicef.org](mailto:hpage@unicef.org)

[Phone number] +231 777016444

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide**  
**to collect data from children living in street situations**

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains questions that the focus group facilitator will use to conduct the focus group discussions with children living in street situations in Liberia. It is intended to get information from children themselves in an inclusive and participatory manner. Children living in street situations are in three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves live in street situations. The FGD will last for at least one and half hour or at most two hours with 10 minutes allocated to each question and any follow up on it.

1. Why are you living or selling in the street all day?
2. How do you get food to eat, water to drink or bath, and clothes to wear?
3. When you get sick, how do you get treated?
4. What is your grade level if you have ever been to school? How would you like to continue your school/education?
5. How do you feel about the kind/type of life you are living?
6. What are some of the good and bad experiences you have had living or selling in the street?
7. What do you want your parents/guardians, government, or people who what to help you do to make you realize your dream in life?
8. Is there anything we did not talk about that you want us to discuss?

**Thank you very much for taking part in this meeting and saying what is on your mind.**



### **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide** **to collect data from the Child Protection Network on children living in street situations**

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains questions that the focus group facilitator will use to conduct the focus group discussions with the members of the Child protection Network (CPN) in Liberia regarding children living in street situations in Liberia. It is intended to get information from the CPN members who are working on child protection issues in an inclusive and participatory manner. Children living in street situations are in three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves live in street situations. The FGD will last for at least one and half hour or at most two hours with 10 minutes allocated to each question and any follow up on it.

1. Why do you think children are living or selling in the street?
2. What have you done or are you doing as members of the CPN to stop them from living or selling in the street?
3. How do you feel about the kind/type of life the children are living in the street?
4. What do you think can be done about their feeding, clothing, shelter, health and education in such life?
5. What do you think can be done to protect them in such situation in which they live?
6. What else can you as CPN members do to stop the children from selling or living in the street?
7. What do you want the government and partners or people who what to help the children do to make them to realize their dream in life?
8. Is there anything we did not talk about that you want us to discuss?

**Thank you very much for taking part in this meeting and saying what is on your mind.**



### **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide** **to collect data from parents/guardians of children living in street situations**

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains questions that the focus group facilitator will use to conduct the focus group discussions with the parents/guardians of children living in street situations in Liberia. It is intended to get information from the parents/guardians who have been affected by this phenomenon in an inclusive and participatory manner. Children living in street situations are in three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves live in street situations. The FGD will last for at least one and half hour or at most two hours with 10 minutes allocated to each question and any follow up on it.

1. Why is your child or are your children living or selling in the street?
2. What have you done or are you doing to stop them from living or selling in the street?
3. How do you feel about the kind/type of life the children are living in the street?
4. What do you think can be done about their feeding, clothing, health and education in such life?
5. What do you think can be done to protect them in such situation in which they live?
6. What else can you as parents/guardians do to stop the children from selling or living in the street?
7. What do you want the government and, partners or people who what to help the children do to make them to realize their dream in life?
8. Is there anything we did not talk about that you want us to discuss?

**Thank you very much for taking part in this meeting and saying what is on your mind.**



## **Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide**

### **to collect data from the Ministries on children living in street situations**

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains questions that the National Consultant will use to conduct the Key Informant Interviews with government ministries and agencies regarding children living in street situations in Liberia. It is intended to obtain information from the ministries and agencies on the Steering Committee for the development of a national roadmap to protect children living in street situations. Children living in street situations are in three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves live in street situations. The KII will last for at least 20 minutes and at most 30 minutes.

1. What does your ministry/agency think about children living or selling in the street?
2. What has your ministry/agency done or is doing to stop them from living or selling in the street?
3. How have you prevented or how do you think children can be prevented from living in street situations?
4. What do you think can be done about the protection of children living in street situations regarding their feeding, clothing, shelter, health and education in such life?
5. What can your ministry/agency do to make the children realize their dreams in life?
6. Is there anything we did not talk about that you want us to discuss?

**Thank you very much for taking part in this interview.**



**Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide**  
**to collect data from UNICEF and partners on protection of children living in street**  
**situations**

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains questions that the National Consultant will use to conduct the Key Informant Interviews with UNICEF and partners regarding children living in street situations in Liberia. It is intended to obtain information from UNICEF and partners on the Steering Committee for the development of a national roadmap to protect children living in street situations. Children living in street situations are in three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves live in street situations. The KII will last for at least 20 minutes and at most 30 minutes.

1. What does UNICEF/Agency think about children living or selling in the street in Liberia?
2. What has UNICEF/agency done or is doing to stop them from living or selling in the street?
3. How have you prevented or how do you think children can be prevented from living in street situations?
4. What do you think can be done about the protection of children living in street situations regarding their feeding, clothing, shelter, health and education in such life?
5. What can UNICEF/your agency do to make the children realize their dreams in life?
6. Is there anything we did not talk about that you want us to discuss?

**Thank you very much for taking part in this interview.**



### Questionnaire

#### to collect data from county policy makers on prevalence of children living in street situations in Liberia

**Background:** this data collection instrument contains 7 close-ended questions and three follow up open-ended questions that will be administered to county policy makers to find out the estimate number of children living in street situations in each of the fifteen counties of Liberia. Children living in street situations fall within three categories: a) those living with their parents or guardians and go out daily in the street to sell and return home to sleep; b) those who live permanently live in the street and sleep there; and c) those who are born in the street or public areas by parents who themselves have nowhere to live. This survey questionnaire intends to gather insights from county leaders about the number of children in such situation, and the services available to such children at the county level as well as their (policymakers') recommendations on what could be done to protect such children.

**Name of County:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Data Collection Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

1. Are there children selling in the street in this county? a) Yes b) No
2. In your view, how many children are found in this category in the county? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are there children permanently living in the street without going to school? a) Yes b) No
4. In your view, how many children are found in this category in the county? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are there children who and their parents live in the street in this county? a) Yes b) No
6. In your view, how many children are found in this category in the county? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Is there anyone (government, NGO, institution, or a person that is helping such children in this county? a) Yes b) No
8. If yes, what type of help is being provided to the children by such helper?
9. If no, what do you think needs to be done to protect these children that are living in such situation?
10. What do you want the government and partners or people who what to help the children do to make them to realize their dream in life?

*The responses for the last three questions can be written at the back of this questionnaire.*

**Thank you very much for answering these questions.**

## The Roadmap for the Protection of Children Living in Street Situations in Liberia Strategic objectives of the roadmap for the protection of children living in street situations in Liberia

Objective 1	Enhance family social cohesion through economic empowerment opportunities for parents, guardians, and single parents to allow them to cater to the wellbeing of their children.					
	Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)	Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)	Means of verification (how will we know it is done)	Responsible party (who will do what?)	Timeline how long?	Cost/USD how much?
1.1	Open Liberia Agricultural Development Bank (LADB) or loan facility to fund and support women framers.	LADB or loan facility established and fully functional with initial 2m USD investment deposited.	Existence of LABD with funding to support farming and agro-processing for women and girls.	MoS, CBL, MoA, MFDP, MoGCSP, USIAD	2023-2028	2m
1.2	Set up Child Welfare Council as enshrined in the Children's Law of Liberia	Child Welfare Council fully constituted, functional and managing the wellbeing of children in Liberia.	Existence of the Child Welfare Council and the allocation made for same in the National Budget.	MoS,	2023-2028	750,000.
1.3	Establish women farmers/business cooperatives in counties and districts.	Women farmers/business cooperatives organized and operational in all counties and districts.	Number of cooperatives formed and working in counties and districts.	MoGCSP MoA, Cooperative Agency, UN Women	2023-2028	750,000.
1.4	Give financial support to women farmer/business cooperatives through small grants.	Women farmers/business cooperatives empowered through small grants.	Amount of funding given to women farmers cooperatives.	MFDP, UNDP, UN Women	2023-2028	750,000.
1.5	Initiate national agricultural program for parents of children in street situations and those at-risk parents.	Women at risk empowered through a SMART agricultural program.	Number of agricultural projects in place for at risk women and parents of children in	MoA, FAO,	2023-2028	750,000.

			street situations.			
1.6	Fund livelihood and employable skills (vocational training, social cash transfer and micro-finance) for parents and guardians at risk including parents with disabilities	Livelihood initiatives for parents and /guardians at-risk become operational within the 15 counties.	Number of livelihood projects ongoing in the counties and districts.	MFDP, MOA, FAO	2023-2028	750,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>						<b>5.75m</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Enhance policies and programs that support compulsory free primary education for all children in Liberia.</b>					
	<b>Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)</b>	<b>Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)</b>	<b>Means of verification (how will we know it is done)</b>	<b>Responsible party (who will do what?)</b>	<b>Timeline how long?</b>	<b>Cost/USD how much?</b>
2.1	Provide school feeding in all public primary and community schools to increase enrollment and retention in Liberia.	School feeding programme established and available to kids in all public and community schools in Liberia.	Number of public and community schools benefitting from feeding and school enrollment statistics.	MoE, WFP, FoA, MoA,	2023-2028	2m
2.2	Operate night schools or ALP for teens with pregnancies/babies and overaged children for regular day schools.	Night schools/ALP operational in counties with high incidence rate of teenage pregnancy and overaged children.	Number of night schools operating and number of pregnant teenage girls, mothers and overaged kids attending.	MoE, UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
2.3	Conduct monitoring and strengthen school supervision in counties and districts.	Enhanced School monitoring and supervision processes in place and reports available.	Regular reports on school monitoring and supervision by DEOs and CEOs.	MoE/UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
2.4	Provide educational materials for public	Educational items including	Number of children	MoE, UNICE,	2023-	750,000.

	and community schools students and approve a national uniform to reduce the burden on parents/guardians.	copy books, book bags available to kids, and a national uniform for public schools approved.	receiving educational materials or supplies; approved national uniform.	USAID, other partners	2028	
2.5	Establish a specified number of boarding schools for orphans in partnership with the private sector.	Reduced number of orphans and vulnerable children not in school.	Number of orphans and vulnerable kids back in school.	MoE, UNICEF, other partners	2023-2028	750,000.
2.6	Give specialized assistance to disable persons and children caring for parents/persons with disabilities to allow those children to go to school.	Increased school enrolment and retention of children caring for persons with disabilities (PWDs).	School enrolment data of children caring for persons with disabilities	NCD, MoE, UNICEF, other partners	2023-2028	750,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>						<b>5.75m</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Stop drug importation and drug peddling to protect children's mental and physical health/wellbeing, ensure a drug free society, and provide vocational skills to rehabilitated children.</b>					
	<b>Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)</b>	<b>Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)</b>	<b>Means of verification (how will we know it is done)</b>	<b>Responsible party (who will do what?)</b>	<b>Timeline how long?</b>	<b>Cost/USD how much?</b>
3.1	Amend the drug law of Liberia to make it a nonbillable crime.	Drug law amended by National Government and Liberia becomes a drug free society.	New drug law printed into hand bills, published and effective.	National Legislature, MoJ, MoS	2023-2025	<b>0</b>
3.2	Construct rehabilitation centers fully equipped with vocational training equipment including psychosocial counselling and	Fully functional rehabilitation centers present in county capitals and major commercial	Number of counties and commercial hubs with functioning rehab centers or facilities.	MYS, MoGCSP, NCD	2023-2028	750,000.



	support in counties capitals and districts, and major commercial hubs.	hubs				
3.3	Train and increase mental health clinicians in rehabilitation centers.	Trained mental health clinicians available at all care centers.	Number of mental health clinicians and deployed at centers.	MoGCSP, MOH,	2023-2028	750,000.
3.4	Create mass awareness targeting every community in Liberia on the laws and policies that protect children from drug abuse and addiction.	A drug freed country with an informed population aware of drug laws, policies and reporting lines.	Number of awareness campaigns carried out in counties, districts and communities	LDEA, LNP, MoJ	2023-2028	750,000.
3.5	Provide support and protection for law enforcement officers and whistle blowers to effectively eliminate drug importation, peddling and addiction in Liberia.	Increased reporting of drug activities due to rewards and protection of whistle blowers and Law enforcement officers.	Policy/practices of reward in place to protect law enforcement officers and whistle blowers nationally.	MoJ, MIA, LDEA	2023-2028	750,000.
Sub-total						3m
<b>Objective 4</b>	<b>Strengthen the provision of basic vital services for all children to reduce their vulnerability and improve access to quality healthcare, adequate food, and provide counselling.</b>					
	<b>Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)</b>	<b>Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)</b>	<b>Means of verification (how will we know it is done)</b>	<b>Responsible party (who will do what?)</b>	<b>Timeline how long?</b>	<b>Cost/USD how much?</b>
4.1	Provide hot meals for vulnerable and at-risk children living in street situations.	At-risk children in street situations' rights to food guaranteed by provision of hot meals.	Number hot meal centers operation and statistics of kids eating from there.	MoGCSP	2023-2028	750,000.
4.2	Provide mobile health clinics to address the health	Health rights of vulnerable children	Number of mobile health facilities/clinics	MoH, WHO, USAID,	2023-2028	750,000.

	needs of vulnerable children across the country.	protected through access to effective and efficient mobile clinics.	cs available in county capitals and major commercial hubs.	MoGCSP		
4.3	Increase specialized medical and psychosocial care in hospitals and medical clinics for children.	Enhanced medical and psychosocial support provided in all medical centers in Liberia.	Number of services provided and reports on the quality and services available.	MoH, WHO, USIAD	2023-2028	750,000.
4.4	Conduct birth registration and certification for all children under 12 across the country.	All under 12 children in Liberia registered for birth.	Number of children registered for birth in the 15 counties.	MoH, UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
4.5	Build and equip safe homes in all counties and districts to cater to the wellbeing of children whose rights get abused.	Children's rights protected in all counties and districts.	Number of counties or districts with effective safe homes.	MoGCSP, MoH, UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
4.6	Strengthen and support institutions that provide psychosocial care and support to orphans and vulnerable children.	All orphans and vulnerable kids in Liberia protected and have access to psychosocial care and support.	Number of orphans and vulnerable kids in foster or institutional care.	MoGCSP, MoH, UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
4.7	Ensure that all school across Liberia have access to safe drinking water, latrines and safe learning environments.	Improved adequate health, sanitation and hygiene environment in all public and community schools.	Number of public and community schools with WASH facilities.	MoE, MoH, partners	2023-2028	750,000.
4.8	License traditional medical practitioners/herbalists to operate within medical centers as a complementary arm	Traditional and western medical practices harmonized and working	Health policy or regulations harmonizing western and traditional medicines in	MoH, Public Health, Traditional Council	2023-2028	0

	of treatment across the country.	collaboratively .	place.			
<b>Sub-total</b>						<b>5.25m</b>
<b>Objective 5</b>	<b>End all forms of violent practices that violate the rights and well-being of children in Liberia and strengthen juvenile justice.</b>					
	<b>Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)</b>	<b>Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)</b>	<b>Means of verification (how will we know it is done)</b>	<b>Responsible party (who will do what?)</b>	<b>Timeline how long?</b>	<b>Cost/USD how much?</b>
5.1	Establish, train and support Children forums in all counties and districts across Liberia.	Children forums organized and operational in all counties and electoral districts.	Number of children forums organized and functional in counties and districts.	MoGCSP, MoYS	2023-2028	750,000.
5.2	Train law enforcement officers to professionally address cases of child rights violation brought by children against parents.	Law enforcement officers gain knowledge of child rights and effectively handling cases between parents and children.	Number of officers trained, trainings conducted, and number of cases disposed of professionally .	MoJ, LNP,	2023-2028	750,000.
5.3	Teach parents with parenting skills on managing and monitoring their children.	Improved parenting of children in Liberia.	Number of parenting skills training carried out in communities.	MoGCSP, MIA, partners	2023-2028	750,000.
5.4	Establish playgrounds and recreational facilities in counties and districts	Excited and energized children across the country	Number of playgrounds or recreational centers opened	MoYS, MoGCSP, partners,	2023-2028	750,000.
5.5	Amend laws to harshly punish parents involved in persistent non-support to children and mothers.	Reduced cases of persistent non-support to children and mothers.	Statistics of cases reported to Courts and Gender.	MoJ, MoGCSP, Judiciary	2023-2028	0
5.6	Open Juvenile courts in counties	Enhanced Juvenile justice system in all	Number of juvenile cases settled by	MOJ, partners	2023-2028	750,000.

	and support them.	counties.	courts in counties.			
5.7	Extend the Juvenile Justice Diversion Program to all counties in Liberia.	Effective national Juvenile Justice diversion initiative.	Number of counties covered by juvenile justice diversion project.	MOJ, partners	2023-2028	750,000.
5.8	Separate children's, pregnant women's or lactating mothers' detention cells from adult detainees across Liberia.	Improved and right based prison conditions for all in place with children and pregnant women in separate facilities.	Number of prison facilities in compliance with international standards.	MOJ, Partners, DCI, UNICEF	2023-2028	750,000.
5.9	Train law enforcement officers to professionally handle children in conflict and contact with the law.	Professional law enforcement services available to all children in Liberia.	Number of officers trained, and number of cases professionally handled.	MOJ, partners	2023-2028	750,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>						<b>6m</b>
<b>Objective 6</b>	<b>Prevent teenage pregnancy to reduce the revolving incidence of poverty and stop the worst forms of child labor in Liberia.</b>					
	<b>Outputs (actions or items that contribute to achieving an outcome)</b>	<b>Outcomes (what do we want or need to achieve)</b>	<b>Means of verification (how will we know it is done)</b>	<b>Responsible party (who will do what?)</b>	<b>Timeline how long?</b>	<b>Cost/USD how much?</b>
6.1	Harmonize the age of consent between statutory and customary laws of Liberia.	Age of consent becomes one/harmonized in Liberia.	Single age of consent law passed and published into hand bill.	MIA, National Legislature, MoS,	2013	0
6.2	Enact law to prosecute adults impregnating teenagers and raise awareness on the law.	National Law enacted to reprimand adults impregnating teenagers.	Statistics on frequency of teenage pregnancy in communities	MIA, MoGCP	2023-2028	0

6.3	Carry on awareness about child labor in the 15 counties.	Child labor reduced in counties, districts and communities.	Number of child labor awareness campaigns undertaken.	MoL, MoE, partners	2023-2028	250,000.
6.4	Enforce laws and policies that curb the worst forms of child labor	Decreased bad child labor practices in all communities.	statistics of bad child labor cases and practices.	MoL	2023-2028	250,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>						<b>.5m</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>26.25</b>

#### Note:

1. Estimate of 10% of 366,585,000 street kids is 36,000X \$2.US X 365days equals \$26,280,000. This is the estimate annual budget for the roadmap.
2. \$26,280,000 X 5 years will be 131,400,000USD. (Better still the one year's cost could suffice for the five years meaning about \$5mUS annually).
3. The 750,000SUD for most deliverables assumes that 50,000USD will be allocated to each county, although all counties do not have the same #s; hence, counties with most street children would get more support than those less affected.