



**MERCY
CORPS**

Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force Feasibility Report

July 2021

A Case Report for the Creation of a Multi-stakeholder
National Youth Employment Task Force in Liberia





Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force

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This report was produced to present study findings and propose a framework for the creation of a *Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force* to Mercy Corps Liberia and her partners, through the Liberia Employment and Entrepreneurship Program (LEEP). The report was prepared by TRIBE.

ABOUT Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global humanitarian agency saving and improving lives in the world's toughest places. With a network of experienced professionals in more than 40 countries, Mercy Corps partners with local communities to put bold ideas into action to help people recover, overcome hardship and build better lives now, and for the future. Mercy Corps Liberia has been working in Liberia since 2002 with focus on youth, agriculture, livelihoods, conflict resolution and emergency response.

LEEP is a three-year French Government funded program to bolster employment and entrepreneurship potential of at-risk youth, engage public and private sector stakeholders in youth opportunities and build micro- and small and medium enterprise (MSME) capacity to contribute to economic growth and social

development in Liberia. The goal of LEEP is to enable 11,000 male and female Liberian youth aged 18-35 in rural and urban areas of Grand Bassa, Margibi and Montserrado counties to find meaningful, market-driven employment or self-employment through increased self-confidence, skills, and employment opportunities.

LEEP has three interlinked and mutually reinforcing objectives that address constraints to both youth labour demand and labour supply: a) expand upon successful piloted initiatives, train and build youth's confidence as employees and entrepreneurs; b) create new opportunities for young people and expand engagements in the private sector; c) create partnerships to identify and nurture talent in the nascent tech entrepreneurship space.

About TRIBE

TRIBE seeks to inspire a new generation of purpose-driven young African problem-solvers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and storytellers. Through its educational social enterprise and workforce development and entrepreneurial consultancy, the institution is reimagining

secondary education and creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem to bridge the learning and workforce development gap between students, schools, and employers. TRIBE's work is based on the premise that everyone should be an entrepreneur.

Acknowledgements

A team of consultants from TRIBE implemented this project. The evaluation was led by Solomon Mahn, Director of Programs & Evaluation. Morgan Jennings and Demitria Wack, Program and Development Fellows, respectively, based in London, conducted the research with Wainright Acquoi. Morgan Wack, Chief Strategy Officer, based in California, and Christy Potvin, editorial consultant, reviewed the report.

Other TRIBE team members supported the development of this report, including Lexanndine Taylor, Elvis Browne, Jallah Sumbo, Nathalie Marie, Allyson Elwart, and our design lead, Rye Nacasi.

Thanks to Mercy Corps' Enterprise Development Manager, Christollie Ade Suah, and Mwesigwa Bikie Isharaza, LEEP's Team Lead, for their contributions to the project.

This report is a part of Mercy Corps' efforts to build employment opportunities for Liberia's youth, and TRIBE's efforts to create entrepreneurial and employment ecosystems for young people.

This report is strictly based on findings from engaging with private-sector and a few nonprofit firms. Mercy Corps has a prior agreement with the Government of Liberia to create the task force under its LEEP (Liberia Employment and Entrepreneurship Program) initiative, informed by pre-existing findings. As an immediate effort of the Task Force, we recommend a study comprising interviews, focus groups, and surveys with youth about creating a Task Force that works for them.

All inquiries can be directed to Wainright Acquoi, lead consultant on the project, at info@weareatribe.org.

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Participants at the stakeholder meeting and validation workshop.

PHOTO | Jallah Sumbo / TRIBE

Contents

- 5 Glossary of terms
- 6 Acronyms and abbreviations
- 6 List of figures and tables
- 7 Executive summary

PART I

9 About this report

- 10 Background
- 12 Methodology
- 16 Findings

PART II

26 Youth employment and the argument for a structured initiative

- 27 The Liberian youth employment brief
- 30 Youth demographics and potential dividends

PART III

31 Setting up a multi-stakeholder youth employment task force

- 32 Key insights
- 34 Proposed structure of the multi-stakeholder national youth employment task force
- 38 Evaluation

39 Conclusion

41 Report Validation

43 Appendix

45 References

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Civil war. An internal conflict usually between organized groups (ethnic, religious) within the same state or country.

Employability. Refers to the quality of being suitable for paid work.

Entrepreneurial development. Equipping entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs with knowledge, skills, and confidence through formal and informal training and mentorship to support their initiatives and contribute to the economy.

Industry. A group of productive enterprises or organizations that produce or supply a closely related set of raw materials, goods, or services within the economy.

Job creation. The process of providing or creating new jobs, especially for people who were previously unemployed or inactive.

Multi-Sector. Involving or relating to more than one sector within the economy.

Multi-stakeholder National Youth

Employment Task force. A national structure comprising stakeholders from various sectors and industries, created to address youth unemployment issues and transition youth into the workforce through policies, collaborations and programs.

Potential. An existing but untapped demand and resource; having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future.

Private sector. An economic unit that does not fall directly under the government but is independent and focuses on business initiatives

Public sector. The part of the economy constituting both public services and public enterprises, exclusively run by the state.

Skill Gap. A fundamental mismatch between the skills that employers rely upon in their employees and the skills that job seekers possess.

Soft Skills. Soft skills are non-technical skills that relate to your personality and how you work. They include interaction with colleagues, solving problems, and managing work.

Stakeholder. An individual or group interested in any decision or activity of a group, organization or country.

Supply chain. The series of steps involving the movement and transformation of raw materials into finished products, transporting those products, and distributing them to the end-user.

Task force. A special committee or organized unit usually of experts and experienced stakeholders formed expressly to study a particular problem.

Technical skills. The abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks and functions.

Wealth creation. The process of investing in different asset classes where the investments will help fulfil critical needs (i.e. creating and sustaining jobs).

Work Ethics. An attitude of determination, professionalism and dedication toward one's job.

Youth. An individual between the ages 15 and 35.

Youth unemployment. The situation of young people who are looking for a job cannot find a job, with the age range 15–35 years old according to the Revised National Youth Policy (2012 – 2017).

Youth Employment Landscape. The current state of youth employment in a particular setting (available job, unemployment rate, skill gaps, and training opportunities).

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank	MFDP	Ministry of Finance & Development Planning
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	MoL	Ministry of Labor
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease	MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
FY	Fiscal Year	TRIBE	Technology, Research, Innovation, Business & Entrepreneurship
GoL	Government of Liberia	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
HCI	Human Capital Index	WBES	World Bank Enterprise Survey
IDP	International Development Partners	WBG	World Bank Group
JET	Jobs and Economic Transformation		
LEEP	Liberia Employment and Entrepreneurship Program		

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

- Figure 1. Categories of Respondents/ Key Informants
- Figure 2. Sector Representation
- Figure 3. Firm Willingness (or Commitment)
- Figure 4. Respondents reasons for not joining the Task force
- Figure 5: Firms Annual Labor Cost
- Figure 6: Major Constraints to Business Performance and Job Creation
- Figure 7: Soft Skills in Demand
- Figure 8: Qualifications of current employees Vs Qualification in demand
- Figure 9: Average Annual Cost of Training

Tables

- Table 1. Firm Selection and Categories
- Table 2. Number of firms engaged, declined, and interviewed
- Table 3. List of Interviewees

Executive Summary

Liberia's population is predominantly composed of youths, with over 60% below 35 years old¹. This young population presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the country's struggling economy. Marked by insufficient local infrastructure and underdeveloped markets, Liberia has failed to create employment opportunities for most of its working-age population².

By adequately preparing its young people for the workforce and creating the markets necessary to absorb its working-age population, the country can build a productive workforce that will guarantee economic growth. Otherwise, Liberia will not only suffer the current downward economic trends it faces but also risks a sustained, longer-term negative economic impact due to a significantly unskilled, unemployed, and unproductive working-age population.

This period calls for deep reflections on the country's priorities. It requires a critical assessment of the kinds of policies and programs needed to support local creativity and entrepreneurship to inform youth employment. Though such efforts typically rely on government policies and investments, multi-sector engagement strategies are vital. To understand the interest of private sector firms in creating and supporting a youth employment initiative, Mercy Corps collaborated with TRIBE, as an independent consultant, to conduct an assessment. The assessment comprised

selected for-profit and nonprofit firms with high potential for job creation across high-performing industries in three counties: Montserrado, Grand Bassa, and Margibi. The purpose of the assessment was to determine the feasibility of creating a youth employment task force comprising multi-sector stakeholders to create youth employment opportunities.

Our research sought to answer the following questions: Will participating firms have the capacity/ability to participate actively in the task force? Could the task force advance the firms' ability to hire and train Liberian youth? Do firms see the proposed task force as performing an essential role in aiding Liberia's youth's employment? This report presents an overview of our engagements with participating firms, presents the findings, and proposes a framework for creating a "Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force".

We based our findings on in-depth research and an analysis of our assessment data: Liberia's youth employment landscape, case reviews of existing task forces, and a blend of human-centered design approach with our understanding of the local context. In-depth interviews and surveys revealed a general capacity of firms to be able to actively participate in the task force, given certain conditions. Ideally, the Task Force will drive the creation of employment opportunities through the supply chains and business activities of

1 de Mel, Elder & Vansteenkiste (2013): Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia

2 World Bank (2010): Employment and pro-poor growth

participating firms and the cultivation of local entrepreneurial initiatives by young people. However, it will require extensive work to ensure the task force and its initiatives drive productive, sustainable, and impactful results. With these conditions in mind, the task force has the potential to also strengthen firms' ability to hire and train youths. Finally, our research has shown that firms do view the task force as a factor in reducing unemployment in Liberia,

conditioned on the support of effective government policies and programs in combination with the support of bilateral development partners.

The findings will inform Mercy Corps' efforts to work with the Government of Liberia, its partners, and current and future firms to create a sustainable initiative that benefits young people and businesses across Liberia.



Participants at SMART Liberia's College Readiness Program.

PHOTO | Linnea Chea / SMART Liberia

PART 1

About this Report

This report presents a case for the creation of a **Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force** in Liberia. This study was formulated on the premise that a multi-sector approach is crucial to advancing the job creation agenda for young people. This report presents findings from the rapid assessment conducted with private-sector and selected nonprofit firms about their potential and willingness to generate job opportunities for youth through their business activities and along their supply chains. Additionally, it provides insights into the nature of various costs and challenges associated with hiring, training, and working with youth in Liberia from the employers' perspectives. Finally, we assessed the interest of participating firms in creating and officially joining a youth employment task force.

The findings of this report reflect only the views of participating firms on the proposition of creating a task force. Its results can be further understood and justified by more comprehensive initiatives (reports) with more depth and breadth about Liberia's youth unemployment and the need to create large-scale interventions, such as those of the government, WBG, USAID, among other development institutions. There have been numerous initiatives in public and private sectors working to bridge Liberia's youth unemployment gap³. However, no formal task force comprising stakeholders from multiple sectors have previously existed to jointly leverage their business activities and supply chain for job creation and entrepreneurial development for Liberia's youth.

We sought to answer three main questions:



Will participating firms have the capacity/ability to participate actively in the task force?



Could the task force advance the firms' ability to hire and train Liberian youth?



Do firms see the proposed task force as performing an essential role in aiding Liberia's youth's employment?

3 de Mel et al.

Background

This report is a part of the LEEP (Liberia Employment and Entrepreneurship Program) initiative, funded by the French Government through Mercy Corps. LEEP seeks to support youth employability and cultivate entrepreneurial endeavours. Moreover, it engages public and private sector stakeholders and builds micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) capacities to contribute to Liberia's economic growth and social development. Mercy Corps' objective is to

ensure that 11,000 Liberian youth—aged 18 to 35—in the rural and urban areas of Montserrado, Grand Bassa, and Margibi Counties find meaningful, market-driven employment or self-employment through increased self-confidence, skills, and employment opportunities. The proposed task force will play an important role during and beyond the project, potentially creating jobs for Liberia's youth. This report is a part of the first activities in setting up the task force.

Objective

The primary objective of the Youth Employment Task Force is to strengthen intersectoral collaboration for the creation and expansion of youth employment opportunities. Liberia's development challenges require a multi-stakeholder approach, combining the resources and expertise of government and private sector institutions to institute reforms⁴. The past years have seen numerous donor-led, extensive policy and programming initiatives responding to youth unemployment in Liberia. Unfortunately, the larger youth unemployment context remains significantly unexplored by these interventions, and the results from these initiatives are non-sustainable— and sometimes unseen⁵ (Batmanglich and Enria, 2014). Drawing from lessons learnt, we attempt to propose, in this report, a framework that is stakeholders-led, and set up to lead relevant, result-driven, and sustainable youth employment initiatives that address the local contexts. Combined with deep reflections and

knowledge-sharing, practical involvement of public and private sector stakeholders, and the collaborative will, the proposed Task Force can be a structural approach to drive lasting change for Liberia's youth development.

“ A major challenge in the area of youth unemployment is that different actors have different understandings of where the biggest gaps lie. Coordination among these actors could help make advances in this area. ”

Regina S. Jun
Deputy Director, Program and Project Development Office,
USAID Liberia

-
- 4 Patience Coleman (2017): Tackling Liberia's Youth Employability and Workforce Development Complexities: A Critical Path to Fulfilling Employment?
- 5 Sara Batmanglich and Luisa Enria (2014): Real Jobs in Fragile Contexts - Reframing youth employment programming in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Purpose

This report serves two primary purposes. First, it presents findings on the selected private sector and nonprofit firms' interest to create and join the proposed task force. Under the agreement of a collaborative strategy across industries, these firms will explore and leverage their business activities and supply chains to lead job creation initiatives. Secondly, it proposes the structure and design of the task force. From understanding and analyzing the local context and learning from existing task forces in similar ecosystems, we present the guidelines and scope of operations most relevant to the Liberian context and various communities of practice to achieve its goals.

In coordination with participating stakeholders, Mercy Corps will work with Youth & Sports and Commerce Ministries to set up the task force. Findings and recommendations from this report will be assessed to inform the conceptualization and design of the Task Force and its governance and programmatic structures. In the subsequent sections, we address critical questions concerning the feasibility of setting up the initiative, its ideal structure, and considerations for Mercy Corps and partner institutions during its formation.



Dieudonne K. Perry, Executive Director, SMART Liberia speaking to TRIBE's consultants during his interview.

PHOTO | Elvis M. D. Browne / TRIBE

Methodology

We utilized a mixed-method approach in answering the proposed research questions over a 60-day period.

The mixed-methods approach⁶ included surveys and interviews to extract critical findings for the report. This research was supported with desk research and literature reviews of Liberia's youth unemployment and task force creation and operations across similar ecosystems. These combined findings informed our framework and final recommendations.

We developed selection criteria⁷ for potential participating firms. Our preferred firm representatives were heads of the firms or their principal deputies or members of the human resources or community engagement teams. We prepared an in-depth questionnaire consisting of survey and interview questions. The survey questions covered specific parameters: the firms' establishment, economic sectors, infrastructure, product and services, labour and business environment. The

interview questions targeted participants' insights of the local employment challenges, preferences, and ideas for a productive task force structure, along with the firms' interest and potential contributions to the task force's initiatives. Subsequently, we hope this baseline study can inform future assessments and develop a repository of local knowledge regarding the upscaling of domestic efforts to improve Liberia's youth employment through multi-stakeholder approaches. We integrated questions that gathered quantitative responses to serve as a baseline for follow-up assessments to assess future impact.

Before preparing and publishing the final report, our team and Mercy Corps organized a stakeholder workshop for participating firms and other partners to present the initial findings and solicit feedback. The final copy of this report incorporated input we received from stakeholders.

Sampling

Our sampling strategy aimed to obtain a sufficient sample that is representative of the sectors⁸ proposed by Mercy Corps. Our background research informed us of existing industries and participating firms in the three counties. Initially, we randomly selected firms to reflect this population. Subsequently, we

employed a convenient sampling and engagement strategy resulting from several constraints, including time, logistics, response, and participating interests. We compiled a list of and engaged 31⁹ for- and nonprofit firms that met our selection criteria.

6 A mixed-method approach was a combination of interviews, surveys, and literature-based research.

7 The selection criteria was an eight-point selection guideline for potential participation firms covering legal establishment, sector, operations, and employment. The complete list is added to the report's appendix.

8 Mercy Corps provided a list of sectors from which we should interview firms, including telecommunications, agriculture, banking and finance, mining, construction, energy, transportation, manufacturing, and service.

9 The target number of firms for Mercy Corps was 20, and we engaged 31 with the assumption that a few would decline and others would be unresponsive.

Recruitment and Data Analysis

To recruit corporations to participate, we leveraged the search of online databases and points-of-contacts to gather the contact details of potential participating firms. We first called or sent an email to assess their willingness to participate in an interview to ensure efficiency and consent. Our team compiled and submitted a formal interview request along with a project summary to each willing firm. If a firm could not meet on either of our two proposed dates and time, we asked them to provide us with a more convenient time. To conduct the interviews, we drove to the firms' physical establishments and conducted in-person interviews¹⁰. We employed a primary data analysis method. We collected survey

responses and interview insights through Google form and automatically compiled them into a Google spreadsheet. Given the straightforwardness of the survey and interview questions, the form allowed us to quickly analysed the data with no complicated analysis. We aggregated similar responses to establish categories respondents represented, the most prevalent sectors in the sample, the firm's willingness to participate, and gather other essential information. We recorded some of the interviews and replayed or reviewed them to gather specific insights or direct quotes. We interviewed one individual per firm. The responses we collected represented and were analyzed at the firm level. All other methods were straightforward.

Stakeholders

Participants of the surveys and interviews are leaders at their respective firms (see respondents disaggregated in the chart below). These individuals significantly influence their firms' business activities and programs, including informing collaboration strategies and creating youth employment opportunities. We sent out 31 invitations or inquiries to potential participating firms. We conducted interviews with 14 firms. Three firms declined, while the remaining firms either did not show up for the discussions at the

scheduled time or were unresponsive, even after several follow-ups. USAID, neither for-profit nor nonprofit firm in Liberia, participated in an interview. We included USAID because of their deep insights and extensive work in the youth development sector, fundamental interest in youth development initiatives, and potential influence on the task force. Thus, though our response sample size was small, we obtained a broad industry representation.

¹⁰ A few firms, including ArcelorMittal and USAID, opted for a virtual interview due to COVID constraints or time constraints.

Figure 1
Categories of Respondents / Key Informants

Among those interviewed were Chief Executives, General Managers, Heads of Human Resource, Managing Directors, and other senior-level business executives. We specifically targeted insights from these categories of crucial informants under the assumption that the higher the position within the establishment, the more first-hand and valuable the information obtained. Across all the major sectors investigated in this report, 33.3% of respondents were CEOs of their respective companies, while the remaining respondents mainly were Managers and Heads of Human resources.

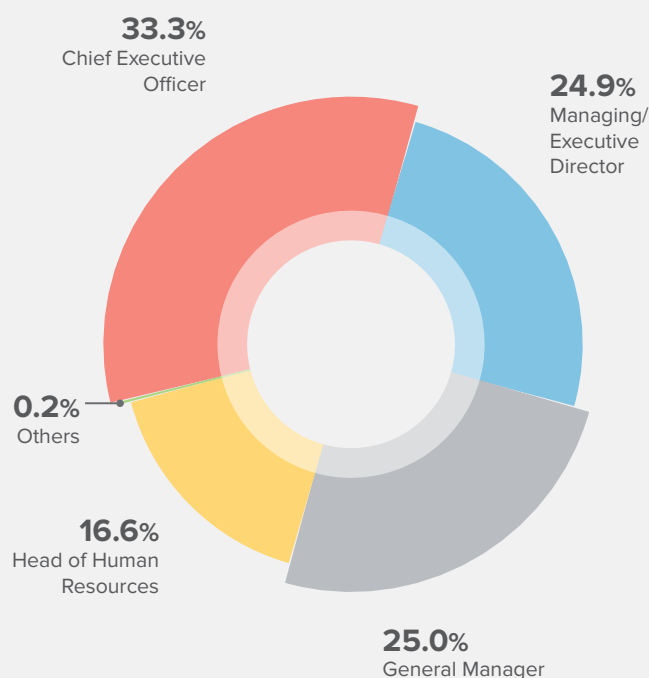
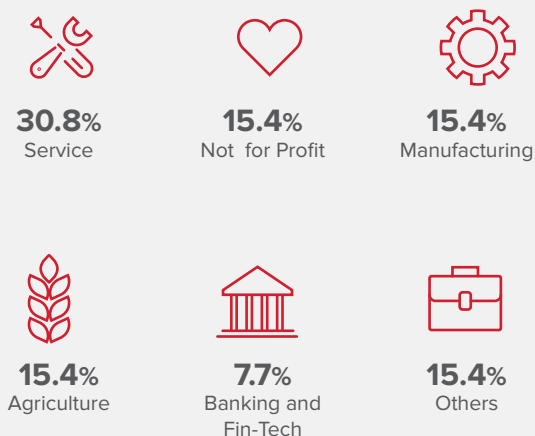


Figure 2
Sector Representation

The overall assessment covered six sectors. However, the majority of participating firms represented four sectors: Service, Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Nonprofit. These four sectors included firms in the Construction, Agro-processing, Waste Management, Shipping & Logistics, and the Telecommunications industries. The remaining sectors were represented by one firm each. Though we achieved a low sector representation, the data from respondents about skills, job creation, and sector overview were insightful and standard across all sectors, further validating the overall data.



SOURCE

Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

Limitations

Along with the overall limited scope, our team faced several challenges while conducting this research:

- 1 Time constraints:** Mercy Corps requested a rapid assessment of 60 days. While other research areas could be done within this period, confirming and interviewing firms (the critical component of the project) took up more than half of the time, resulting in significant delays.
- 2 Geographical limitations:** The target geographical locations of the project originally were Montserrado County, Grand Bassa County, and Margibi County. Already an inaccurate representation of Liberia's 15 counties, we could not confirm any participating firm in Margibi County, limiting the geographic representation further.
- 3 Sample size:** Insights from the sample were insufficient to make an objective inference related to youth workforce development and employment in Liberia. The targeted sample of 20 firms across three counties (still not achieved within the project period) provides insufficient objective evidence for creating the task force. However, prior government insights and interventions and Mercy Corps' engagements provide initial evidence for its establishment.
- 4 Lack of youth participation:** The task force will be set up to create youth employment opportunities, but the scope of the assessment did not include gathering the views or insights of youth. SMART Liberia, an education social enterprise, and the Universal Outreach Foundation were the only two youth development-focused institutions interviewed during the research process.



Laureine Guilao, CEO, TipMe, speaking during her interview with TRIBE consultants.

PHOTO | Elvis M. D. Browne / TRIBE

Findings

In this section, we discuss the key findings generated from interviews and surveys with participating firms. We present the key findings in two categories: a) the potential and capacity of firms to generate youth employment opportunities through their business activities and supply chains; and b) the willingness of firms to help establish and join the proposed youth employment task force. These categories are further discussed under various subsections based on the project terms and scope.

A. Firm Capacity

We devised an objective approach to understand the influencing factors that will inform firms' willingness to leverage a task force for job creation opportunities for youth. Following this framework, we reviewed the firms and sector specific information to evaluate capabilities of participating firms to deliver on these commitments. We assessed each firm based on the significance of job creation to its overall operations, the proportion of annual expenditures allotted to the development of its human resources, and its recruitment needs and frequency. Finally, we reviewed the sector specific challenges—internal and external—and the overall firm and industry performance to identify its potential to contribute significantly to the task force in creating employment opportunities for youth. We outlined seven categories¹¹ of assessment. We sought to answer relevant questions in each category for every firm, as presented below:

- 1 **Administrative feasibility:** Does the firm have the internal organizational and managerial capacity to meet the task force objectives? Is there a history of such responsibilities? Who influences decisions, and how are they made?
- 2 **Market feasibility:** Does the firm have a strong market positioning? How is demand for its products and services?
- 3 **Technical feasibility:** Does the firm have the technical competence to ensure the task force's purpose is achieved? Does the firm have industry expertise, credibility, and pursue innovation?
- 4 **Financial feasibility**¹²: Does the firm have the financial capacity to hire or create more jobs? Is the firm profitable?
- 5 **Legal feasibility:** Does the firm face any past or current legal issues that could affect its credibility and impact its participation in the task force?
- 6 **Political feasibility:** Does the firm engage in any form of political activities that could impact its participation in the task force?
- 7 **Ethical/social feasibility:** What are the firm's values? Does it commit to serving disadvantaged populations and their communities?

11 We adopted and modified this framework from Mercy Corps' feasibility criteria for new initiatives: <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Tool%20Feasibility%20Assessment.pdf>

12 We measure financial feasibility on the most recent financial statements of firms that provided us with the information.

Of these seven categories, we focused on the first four for this report. The following table summarizes the relations of all participating firms to each of these categories.

Table 1
Firm Selection and Categories

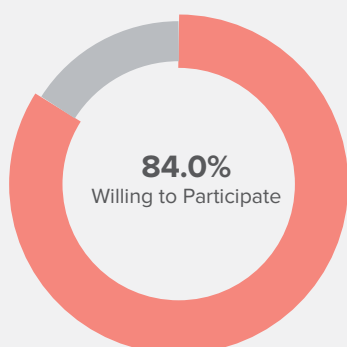
Category	Applicable to report	Explanation	Results: Firms meeting criteria of each category	
			Criteria met (#)	Criteria not met (#)
Administrative	Yes	Without a solid administrative capacity and sound decision-making, firms will not make significant contributions to the task force	14	-
Market	Yes	There must be a market for the firm's products and services before hiring (more) employees	14	-
Technical	Yes	Participation in the task force is crucial. Without technical competence, a firm's contributions may not be valuable	14	-
Financial	Yes	Profitability and financial resources drive market expansion and recruitment. A firm must meet this criterion to be a high-potential firm for job creation	10	4
Legal	No	There was not sufficient time and capacity to conduct a wide-scale legal assessment of participating firms	N/A	N/A
Political	No	Political engagements were not relevant to this study	N/A	N/A
Ethical/social	No	There was no substantial evidence showing a firm's values to its impact on the task force	N/A	N/A

B. Firm Willingness (or Commitment)

The three locations selected for the assessment were strategically chosen for two reasons: their proximity to the capital city, Monrovia, and their level of urbanization and

economic activities compared to other counties. Initially, 11 of the 31 firms we invited to participate in the assessment confirmed their willingness to be part of the Task force.

Figure 3
Firm Willingness (or Commitment)

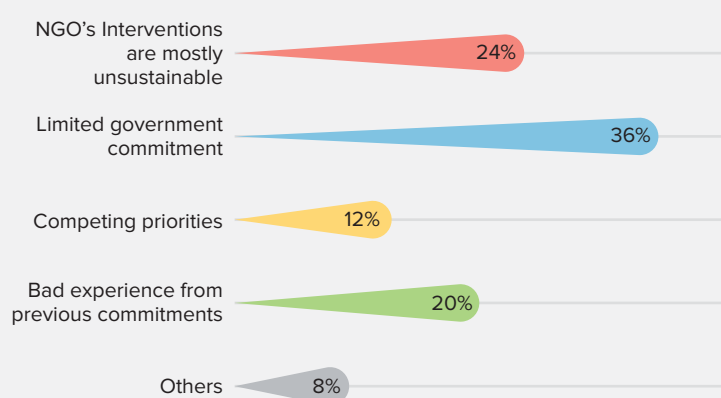


By the end of the surveys, 84% of respondents committed to join the task force, while 16%, although agreed to be interviewed, declined commitment to the task force.

SOURCE

Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

Figure 4
Respondents reasons for not joining the Task force



I. Firm and Sector Potential

Existing literature¹³, shows that the agriculture sector (farming, forestry, fishery, etc.) represents over 32.5% of youth employment in Liberia, thus accounting for the largest share by sector (Sajith de Mel, et. al, 2013). Wholesale and retail activities account for 27.1% of youth employment with household employment (i.e. cleaners, chefs, drivers, etc.) accounting for another 10.8% of jobs for young people. Female workers constitute a largest share of household employment as compared to their male counterparts. Male dominated sectors include the wholesale and retail sectors (37.7%), the agriculture sector (34.9%) and the extractive industries (mining, quarry, etc.).

Youth Employment In Liberia



“ We train the locals in proper palm farming methods. ”

Respondent

13 IDA (2019) Special Theme: Jobs and Economic Transformation
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/381791564075012778/pdf/Special-Theme-Jobs-and-Economic-Transformation.pdf>

II. Commitment to Youth Empowerment and Job Creation

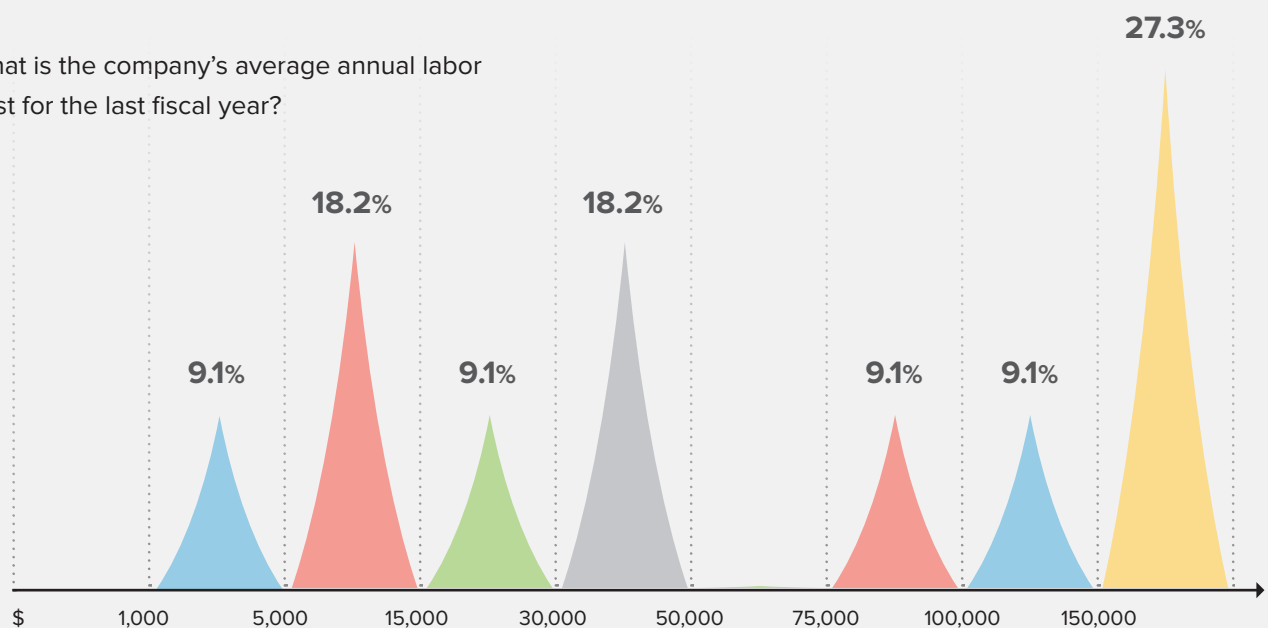
We tailored a section of our interview questions to establish each firm's commitment to job creation and the current (productive) state of operations. In this regard, we examined each firm's commitment to youth empowerment and their annual expenditure on labour and internal training activities.

Of the responses collected, 83.3% of respondents reported that job creation is an extremely important aspect of their firm's purpose. In addition, 91.7% of firms are willing

purpose. In addition, 91.7% of firms are willing to accept volunteers and interns to work directly or indirectly, provided the parties organizing the volunteers and interns cover the associated costs. In comparison, 75% of firms are actively involved in recruiting interns through internal internship programs and initiatives that the firms themselves fund. However, only 66.7% of firms offer capacity development training for employees and new staff.

Figure 5
Firms Annual Labor Cost

What is the company's average annual labor cost for the last fiscal year?



SOURCE

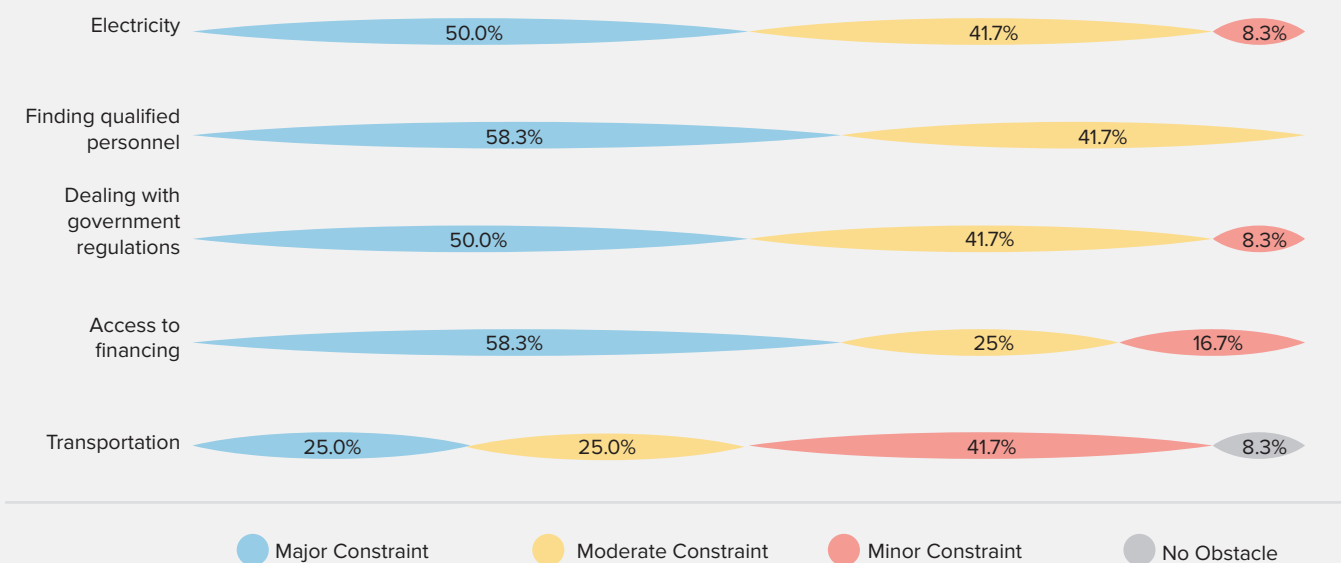
Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

Additionally, we sought to identify some of the main challenges hindering firms' engagement in youth employment and empowerment initiatives and the costs associated with

training and supporting youth development. From the survey, we highlighted five main constraints to job creation.

Figure 6

Major Constraints to Business Performance and Job Creation



SOURCE

Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

Access to finance, finding qualified personnel, electricity, and dealing with government regulators were among the top constraints hindering firms' performance and their ability to create more jobs and empower their

employees. These findings correlated with the World Bank's Doing Business¹⁴ and the 2017 Enterprise Survey¹⁵ reports, highlighting the major constraints to doing business in Liberia.

III. Technical Skills

Our findings show that rather than the lack of skills, there exists a skills mismatch. Teaching is mainly instructional, while learning focuses mostly on rote memorization and test-taking in traditional core-competencies, rather than building relevant workforce skills. Employers are demanding skills that are otherwise not provided by the learning institutions of youth

job-seekers. Our respondents reported that they generally are seeking skills in the areas of technology and innovation across sectors. The specific skills include data analytics, digital media, creativity, digital research, software development, and coding, all of which align with the global future of jobs report¹⁶.

¹⁴ World Bank (2020): Doing Business Report

¹⁵ World Bank (2017): Liberia Enterprise Survey

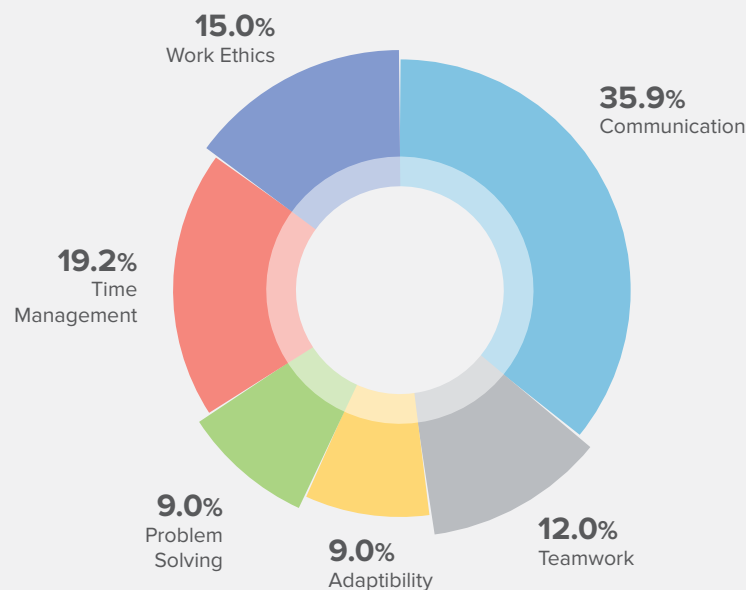
¹⁶ World Economic Forum (2020): Future of Jobs Report

IV. Human Skills

As reported by respondents, of increased importance are human skills¹⁷. Human skills are non-technical skills that are relevant and becoming increasingly crucial in the workforce. Respondents believe schools and learning institutions are not teaching youth these skills before they transition into the workforce, creating a major gap that significantly impacts their performance and business operations. In response to a question on the top human skills demanded, 87% of respondents across all industries reported reading comprehension, communication (writing and presentation),

problem-solving (initiative, critical thinking, independence), and time management (or professional etiquette). Respondents identified these skills to be primarily lacking among youth in the labor market (and employment institutions). As we stated in the limitations of this report, we did not gather youth's perspectives during our assessment, hence, we cannot further validate this premise as being accurate, or having an underlying reason stemming from youth not effectively marketing their skill sets.

Figure 7
Soft Skills in Demand



SOURCE

Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

We asked respondents to further expand on the human skills gap among young people. The findings revealed a more interesting pattern among youth in the labor force: inadequacies in personal characteristics and behavioral skills when employed. These skills, as discussed by respondents, enhance

interactions, job performance, and career development. Discipline, workplace ethics, collaboration, honesty, integrity, and adaptability are among the list of behavioral skills reported, primarily missing among young employees or job seekers.

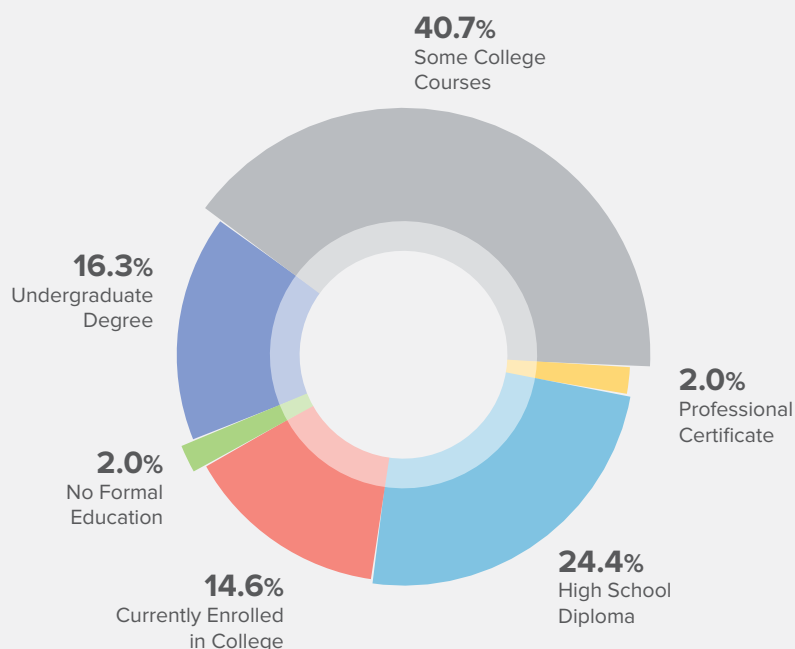
17 Formally called soft skills, or people skills, we reframed the category to human skills to align with our skill framework and recognize the importance of this list of skills to workforce development.

V. Qualifications of Current Employees vs Qualification in Demand

When probed on the academic qualifications in demand at their establishments, the need for hands-on experience more than an academic degree was the most favorable response. The average education status of employees within the sample of firms was some college courses (40.7%). In other words, most employees working at interviewed firms have an incomplete college education, with 24.4% percent of employees having completed high

school and another 16.3% having an undergraduate degree. Regardless, we observed that the need for more hands-on skills and experience was a demand that many respondents mentioned. Some even prefer an employee having the requisite skill needed for the job than having a college degree. The below figure highlights the responses from the survey.

Figure 8
Qualification



SOURCE

Mercy Corps "LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021", collected and tabulated by TRIBE

VI. Cost of Training

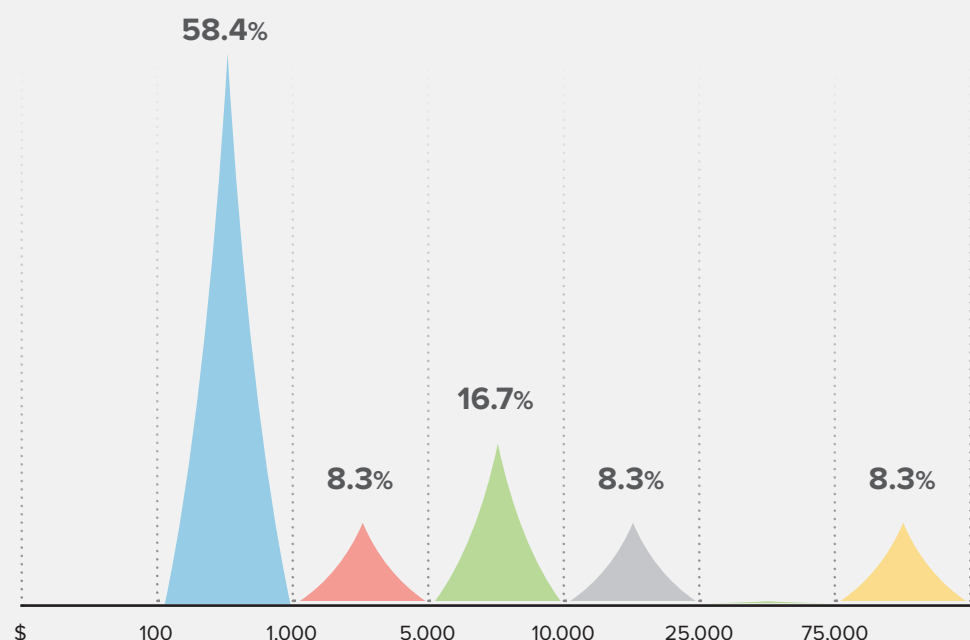
The World Bank's *Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP)* program argues that limited skills resulting from poorly functioning education systems perpetuate poverty and inequality. When done correctly, the provision of skills development programs and training within the public and private sectors could

serve as an effective mechanism to address unemployment, limited workforce productivity, and low living standards. Facilitating the development of relevant skills in young people is an economically viable approach; however, the associated costs (financial and non-financial) can be a demotivating factor.

Though most respondents reported the provision of internal staff development and advancement training in related areas of operations, the data shows that, on average, the annual amount spent on training by private sector firms is still significantly lower than other expenses. Under economic terms, there is a high cost associated with providing training and refreshers to newly hired employees given

the challenges of the Liberian business environment, where performance is vastly unpredictable. The high cost associated with training new employees before they offer value to the firm through improved performance was mentioned as an area associated with the increasing cost of hiring in Liberia.

Figure 9
Average Annual
Cost of Training



SOURCE

Mercy Corps “LEEP Rapid Assessment Survey 2021”, collected and tabulated by TRIBE

VII. Job Readiness, Work Ethics, and Soft Skills

The need for strategic policy and program interventions to effectively support skills development, enhance workforce productivity, and improve employment prospects remains a priority for many countries¹⁸. The average annual job advertised among firms in our survey is six adverts per year (68% of

respondents), suggesting low demand for workers, low rate of job advertisement, among other factors. With persistently high unemployment rates still challenging growth prospects in all sectors of the economy, it is challenging to simply associate job creation with demand for workers alone.

¹⁸ World Bank (2010): Stepping up skills for more jobs and higher productivity

From the assessment, we identified that the low demand for workers by firms in our sample points stemmed from crucial realities including, a) skills mismatch, b) ill-equipped workers, and c) workers' poor orientation to the demands of the labor market. Various evidence shows that the poor quality of education is a primary culprit. However, we need to note that when education systems are also not providing the skills and training demanded by the local labor market, unemployment challenges are usually an inevitable result.

What causes the low demand for workers?

01

Skills mismatch

02

Ill-equipped workers

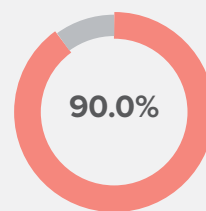
03

Workers' poor orientation to the demands of the labor market

VIII. Availability of Internships and Volunteer Programs

We asked firms whether their establishments had programs and initiatives already designed to train and nurture future employees. From the responses, 31.4% of firms had some form of internal program or activity geared towards recruiting and preparing youth for some time. The majority of respondents did not have a structured program for this purpose. However, over 90% of respondents reported their willingness to recruit interns and volunteers, provided an external party would address the challenges and underwrite the associated cost of operationalizing such initiatives.

Existing literature shows that various internship and volunteer programs have previously and currently exist¹⁹.



Respondents who were willing to recruit interns and volunteers, provided an external party would address the challenges and underwrite the associated cost of operationalizing such initiatives.

“ We do not have anything formal [Social Impact Activities] at the moment, we basically sometimes respond to organisations and individuals requesting our assistance. ”

Mahmud Johnson
CEO, J-Palm Liberia

19 Emy Linberg (2014): Youth and the Labour Market in Liberia – on history, state structures and spheres of informalities

IX. Employment and Entrepreneurship

Strategic placements of new employees, the provision of internships and volunteering opportunities, and internal expansion within existing firms have proven to be the main approaches for job creation by the Liberian government. However, with the limitations associated with these approaches, our respondents (30.4%) believe an alternative and more sustainable mechanism to addressing unemployment is for the country to focus its efforts on entrepreneurship. We observed that most job creation-focused interventions over the years had done little more than address a symptom (limited job opportunities) of a much bigger economic problem – the narrow, and in some cases, lack of diversification and growth within the private sector. With a struggling private sector, there are fewer firms well-positioned to employ Liberia’s fast-growing working-age population. Even more unfortunate, as the business climate slowly deteriorates, fewer firms remain to assume this responsibility.

On the other hand, by adopting an employment framework with wealth creation, innovation, and entrepreneurship at its core, the impact could establish new industries, create new jobs, and sustainable wealth creation for a greater portion of the population. However, this would require intentional efforts and partnership between businesses, government, and education institutions. A multi-stakeholder approach becomes vital to ensure that education and training provisions meet the needs of local labour markets and align with economic development strategies. Furthermore, these stakeholders need to be empowered to make decisions and take actions to align the labor market supply and demand equation through a vibrant education system, a necessary condition for a productive, growing, and competitive workforce.

“ We also take the view that not every person is going to go into a 9 to 5 job in a corporation. Many youth will be focused on entrepreneurship – starting their own businesses. That is also a tremendous opportunity in a place like Liberia where there are not [many] opportunities for youth [employment]. ”

Respondent

PART 2

Youth Employment and the Argument for a Structured Initiative

This section of the report discusses the Liberian youth employment challenges and the rationale for creating a multi-stakeholder, structured youth employment initiative, such as the task force. This is complemented with an analysis of current youth demographics and employment rates.

In our research, we found existing literature that provides in-depth analysis and discussions on Liberia's youth unemployment challenges, interventions that have been proposed, and a

variety of policy and programmatic ideas based on similar programs and local knowledge. These documents present compelling ideas to address Liberia's youth unemployment crisis. We analyze the discussions of these existing reports and policy papers in juxtaposition with the findings we derived from our assessment to inform the task force's creation.



Employees at J-Palm Liberia during a regular work day at the administrative office.

PHOTO | J-Palm Liberia



Abel T. Neewhord, J-Palm's Manufacturing Operations Manager reviewing dataset of the company's stocks.

PHOTO | J-Palm Liberia

The Liberian Employment Brief

In fragile nations like Liberia, high unemployment rates and social inequalities affect violence and crimes (Stewart, 2002). The country's economic growth is challenged by an unproductive workforce, massive unemployment, sustained poverty, inadequacies in education delivery, high-scale illiteracy, among other factors. When unaddressed, the combination of all of these factors further threatens Liberia's fragile peace and security (Kurschner et al., 2012). As youth make up over a third of Liberia's population (de Mel et al., 2013), we explore the nexus between creating employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth and the country's long-term economic growth potential.

In 2018, the African Development Bank and the Nigerian government inaugurated a task force on youth employment and skills development²⁰. During his inaugural speech, the Nigerian Minister of State for Labor and Employment, Stephen Ocheni, asserted:

“ The shared commitment to accelerate the pace of job creation in Nigeria must be at the heart of actions and policies to restore growth, whilst combating unemployment and promoting decent jobs, especially for youth and women. ”

20 Nigeria: African Development Bank inaugurates task force on youth employment and skills development: <https://www.afdb.org/fr/news-and-events/nigeria-african-development-bank-inaugurates-task-force-on-youth-employment-and-skills-development-18400>

His speech further encouraged the task force and all stakeholders to assume a collective responsibility to address the rising unemployment rate for young people in the country. For Liberia, over 60% of the population are under 35 years old (ibid). In comparison, at least 60% of young people are employed in the informal sector (World Bank, 2014). Lindberg (2014) found that a stark 76.9% of employed youth face job insecurity and struggle to meet their basic economic needs. For several million people around the world, having a job does not necessarily guarantee economic security (ILO, 2018). However, obtaining a well-paid and stable job has a greater possibility of eradicating poverty (Acumen, 2019). With the increasing rates of youth unemployment, de Mel et al. (2013) found that about 80% of youth in the labor force are underutilized labor. This scenario suggests that the country is yet to fully integrate the youth employment agenda into its policies and actions to create the requisite employment opportunities for its youth (World Bank, 2010). Though there have been public and private sector initiatives to improve access to employment opportunities for youth over the past years (UNESCO, 2011), the quality of productive employment remains low and insufficient (Lindberg, 2014).

Studies have argued that a nation's long-term economic development and growth is a function of an educated and productive workforce (Burgess, 2016). As noted by the Nigerian Minister of Labor, Coleman (2017) argues that a multi-stakeholder approach to the unemployment crisis in Liberia is vital. However, it is important to note that though setting up initiatives such as the Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force is significant progress in this effort,

“Despite efforts by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, to date, stakeholder engagement in the area of youth employment has not been formalized or structured.”

Regina S. Jun
Deputy Director, Program and Project Development Office,
USAID Liberia

workforce development requires a multifaceted approach. Schools and other learning institutions have a responsibility to equip youth and students with the necessary skills to become employable and productive. Unfortunately, young people do not seem to be adequately equipped with the relevant skills through their education and vocational training; thus, reducing their likelihood of being attractive to employers (Wilmot, 2012). Globally, many countries recognized this challenge and dedicated intentional efforts to empowering learning institutions to improve the effectiveness and relevance of learning and teaching, which is expected to lead to the training of young graduates and make them employable (Pollard & Hillage, 1998). Yet still, in Liberia, as in other countries, a variety of job-essential skills can only be obtained through employment and not at learning institutions (Coleman, 2017). Therefore, a task force set up to create employment opportunities for youth must ensure employers regularly train and develop their employees before and during their periods of employment.

“ *Coordination between private sector actors, development partners, and the GOL on improving the lives of youth through increasing their ability to find employment would be of tremendous value in Liberia.* **”**

Kimberlee Bell
Supervisory Program Officer,
USAID Liberia

Beyond the interest and participation of private-sector firms in creating employment opportunities for youth, decent political leadership and national ownership are vital to strengthen and measure the country's progress on youth employment. Unfortunately, there is a lack of leadership, causing government ministries to have overlapping functions for addressing youth employment through skills development and workforce preparations (ibid). The availability of employment opportunities and youth skills development does not necessarily assure that a person will be matched with an employment opportunity. Youth tend to suffer from limited experiences and a lack of professional networks to support their development and workforce transitions (Coleman, 2017).

Numerous political, economic, social and technological factors influence workforce development and youth employment. Understanding these factors is essential to the adequate formulation of an effective youth employment task force.

Politically, youth are often excluded from critical decisions, even when it concerns them. Government and its partners must endeavor to drive youth interventions with primary insights from young people. As stakeholders explore ways to create employment opportunities for youth, wages and personal development must be crucial aspects of these interventions. The wealth gap and inequality across the country prevent many deserving (even capable) young people from pursuing employment and personal development opportunities. Employers must engage these young people beyond the transaction of work and value to cater to other personal needs and well-being. As many youths rely solely on informal networks while searching for opportunities (de Mel, 2013), a task force for youth employment must create clear pathways that do not automatically eliminate a particular group of young people from pursuing these opportunities. Lack of widespread technological access and limited access to connectivity also pose significant challenges to youth in the labor market. Such challenges must be considered when designing initiatives for youth.



PHOTO | Linnea Chea / SMART Liberia

Youth Demographics and Potential Dividends

The state of the demographic transition is an important consideration in developing policies related to all aspects of life. Currently, “one-third of the population is between 15 and 35 years old” (Lindberg, 2014, p.5). It is most advantageous to maximize policies affecting youth as Liberia currently experiences a youth bulge. With a large group of people under the age of thirty, increasing access to education and youth programs will provide Liberia with an educated population to contribute to the country’s development when the demographic shifts to an aging population. Additionally, this will prevent conflict from arising, resulting in a youth demographic dividend (Lindberg, 2014). In recognizing this, Liberia has the opportunity to build a productive workforce as the youth age and develop skills. Improvement in youth

programs, such as a youth employment task force, would improve many aspects of life for Liberia’s youth. Employment task forces can improve youth skill development by integrating employers with the next generation of workers. This effort contributes to Liberia’s overall social capital, improving social standing through employment and economic positioning. Lower unemployment rates mean more people are working and contributing to the government in taxation, which can contribute to overall state development. Furthermore, networks between the identified stakeholders may develop due to the early collaboration among these stakeholders, which could streamline the education system to make it more workforce development-oriented.

PART 3

Setting up a Multi-stakeholder Youth Employment Task Force

This chapter synthesizes learnings from the previous two chapters to propose the conceptual design for the Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force.



SMART Liberia's College Readiness Program participants in a learning session at the ChangeMakers Village.

PHOTO | Linnea Chea / SMART Liberia

Key insights and learnings

This section combined insights from the overall research with a literature review and understanding of the local context to formulate a learning brief for the proposed task force. The following synthesis articulates critical considerations for its establishment:

- **A youth engagement strategy should inform the establishment of the task force.** The views and insights of youth must drive an initiative for youth. This report reflects the opinions and insights of employers about youth and their workforce development. However, it lacks the views of young people about the labor force constraints they face. The task force must endeavor to consult young people and youth-focus networks and institutions to gather critical insights and learnings to inform its structural and programmatic initiatives.

“ We spend a lot of time talking about youth, without youth being in the room. I think that is a huge misstep. That is something we should fix if we can. One thing that will be a powerful representation is to bring young people in the room, around the table, to present the reality. ”

Respondent

“ In order to make youth employment opportunities valuable, to make the programs go well, you have to have public-private partnerships that are training young people for jobs that exist. ”

Respondent

- **A youth-focused institution should coordinate the affairs of the Secretariat.** Potential participating firms for the task force have many wide-ranging priorities, often without a direct focus on youth engagement and development strategies. For an effective youth employment task force, we advise that the task force be coordinated by a Secretariat, comprising representatives from participating firms, government, and development partners. Additionally, the Secretariat should be led by a youth-focused workforce development organization. This organization will coordinate the affairs of the task force and its members, manage multi-sector engagements and represent young people based on local power and primary insights. As discussed in the following section of the report, the Secretariat will ensure the effective development and delivery of initiatives that address core labor force issues and integrate systems that support youth empowerment and employment.



Marie Kpoto, Representative of Green Cities Inc. at the stakeholder meeting and validation workshop.

PHOTO | Jallah Sumbo / TRIBE

- **The role of relevant government institutions in strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration for the task force.** During the recruitment of participating firms, communications and proposed interactions with larger firms posed a repeated challenge. Reportedly, larger firms have multiple competing priorities and intense pressure to manage wide-scale supply chains and business operations. As with the study, it will be challenging to get their full support or participation without government interventions or benefits to larger firms. Given their oversized influence both in the local economy and promoting the task force, generating buy-in from these firms should be a central priority. In setting up the task force, key government authorities must ensure they communicate the value (and alignment to the government's priorities and policy engagements) of such initiatives to larger firms and the potential benefits for these firms from government connections and linkages to other local businesses.
- **The task force should be an independently branded institution called a *"Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force"*.** There is growing concern about the fragility of youth development initiatives and their rates of failure in Liberia. Initiatives such as establishing the task force by Mercy Corps were reported to be non-substantial and futile as youth empowerment is concerned. Hence, respondents, though excited about its prospects, are skeptical about the long-term benefits and credibility. As a result, the task force should not be "owned" by Mercy Corps, but established and branded as a "Multi-stakeholder National Youth Employment Task Force". This effort will empower and strengthen collaboration between the government and its partners and build local credibility as a stakeholder-led initiative.

Proposed structure of the multi-stakeholder national youth employment task force

I. Mission / Purpose

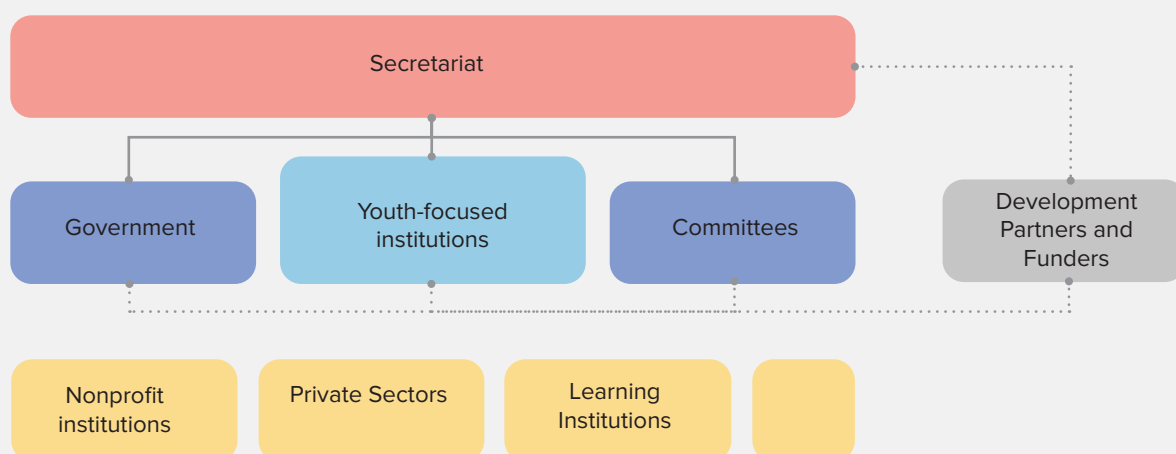
The purpose of the task force is to build a multi-sectoral model that leverages stakeholder collaboration to create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Liberia's youth.

II. Goals

- 1 To strengthen multi-sectoral engagement for youth development
- 2 To create youth employment and entrepreneurial opportunities through the exploration of business activities
- 3 To develop initiatives that prepare youth for the workforce
- 4 To contribute to knowledge management for institutions preparing young people for the workforce

III. Operating Framework

A. Structure. The task force should be a stakeholder-led initiative, comprising representation from the Government of Liberia, private-sector firms, representatives from the donor community, and local Liberian enterprises working in workforce development. A structure that combines expertise, resources, and contributions from all sectors will offer more value and balance of power and decision-making for its initiatives to prepare and transition young Liberians into the workforce. If one institution, like Mercy Corps or a government agency were to own this initiative, it could potentially dilute the credibility of the task force with the perception of it being a political initiative that may result in limited to no impact and hinder program sustainability..



B. Constitution. The task force's constitution should endeavor to achieve a near-balanced geographical and sectoral representation at any given period and should be a membership-based initiative. However, it is understood that the task force may not accomplish this goal during its initial establishment but should be a goal as it develops and builds local credibility. Though we propose the diversity of membership, emphasis must be placed on each participating firm's role, informed by the potential to create job opportunities, availability of resources, or local insights. The actual number of firms joining the task force will be variably dependent on the interest and capacity of firms to serve the task force mandates. We recommend at least one representation from each of the targeted sectors, with a continuous effort to increase the number of recruited firms over the months and years that follow.

C. Stakeholders and sustainability. The task force will consist of a diverse set of stakeholders as members. Relevant government institutions, including the Ministries of Youth and Sports and Commerce, will lead the government's efforts to establish policies and frameworks that will empower the task

force to deliver on its mandates. Mercy Corps and other partners, including funders and development institutions, will support the establishment and operations of the task force, providing local funding and resources for its initial operations. Private-sector firms will collaborate to create job opportunities. Nonprofit and learning institutions will create alternative models and knowledge management systems that adequately prepare young people for the workforce in collaboration with other task force members.

D. Formation. The establishment of the task force must be an intentional and carefully designed process. We recommend a sufficient amount of time for its planning, establishment, and launch. Ideally, the design team should initiate the process two-fold: a stakeholder collaboration on designing the task force and a youth engagement process that gathers the insights of young people to be integrated into its conceptualization. More importantly, the first year of operations should be set up as a pilot phase for learning and evaluation. From this, the lessons learned and results achieved can be used to confidently proceed or to redesign the initiative.

IV. Structure of the Task Force

A. Secretariat. A secretariat should run the task force, consisting of representatives from each participating firm. Meanwhile, a youth-focused organization whose work focuses in part or lie at the intersection of youth development, education, or workforce development should coordinate the affairs of the secretariat. In consultation with Mercy Corps and government representatives, the Secretariat will manage the affairs of the task force and coordinate the activities between member firms. This responsibility shall include the day-to-day operations, meetings, recruitment of new members, reporting, and developing and executing programs and interventions that deliver on the task force's mission. The Secretariat may be accountable to all member firms, governed and development partners. The inaugural task force shall set in place the standards and procedures of this mandate.

As we discussed in the limitations of this report, participating firms, particularly more prominent institutions, are faced with multiple competing priorities and limited time for 'nonessential' responsibilities. A youth-focused organization already commits to delivering on the mission of workforce development. Therefore, this structure will reduce the commitments of larger participating firms, but the task force will have a coordinating body that ensures it operates effectively on a full-time basis.

B. Management. As a multi-stakeholder initiative, the secretariat will coordinate the affairs of participating members, supported by various committees. The head, or a designated member

(preferably a senior executive) of the organization leading the task force secretariat at a given period, will be the Head of the Secretariat. The Head of Secretariat shall work closely with each member firm to set up the committees for the period of leadership. Section D discusses the various proposed committees of the task force.

C. Term of leadership. We propose a two-year leadership tenure for the secretariat and its committees. This two-year term will enable the leadership to design or follow through with programs and initiatives that deliver targeted results on the task force's mission while facilitating the transition to another group of firms to continue on such efforts.

D. Committees. The inaugural task force shall be responsible for defining the various committees that will apply to its work. However, we propose that the committees cover areas such as a) designing programs and initiatives for youth employment and enterprising, b) researching and reporting on workforce development and learning, c) building and managing partnerships for the operations of the task force, d) fundraising and seeking investments to support the task force's initiatives, and e) evaluating the work of the task force and parallel workforce development initiatives across Liberia.

E. Terms and governing policies. This report provides the basis for setting up the task force. However, the team responsible for setting up the task force, or the inaugural task force, shall be responsible for developing its terms and governing policies.

V. Suggested Programs and Initiatives

- A. Design and initiatives.** The secretariat shall work with the member firms, the government and development partners to design annual programs and initiatives in line with the task force's mission. This process will define each initiative's goals, objectives, structure, stakeholders, content, and budget.
- B. Reports.** The task force shall conduct studies and produce annual reports on areas such as the task force's impact, Liberia's workforce development, skill development and learning, youth employment, among other essential areas of the task force's mission. These reports shall provide information on the state of affairs of Liberia's workforce development for youth and contribute to knowledge management for institutions concerned with workforce development.
- C. Job fairs.** From time to time, the task force may organize job fairs for employers seeking to recruit talents and youth seeking employment. Such initiatives shall allow firms to sell their mission while youth market what skills and competencies they possess. We recommend, however, that various training activities that prepare interested youth for such opportunities precede these job fairs.
- D. Business development initiatives.** The task force may organize business development initiatives to support young people's interest in entrepreneurship and job creation. Members of the task force shall coordinate and explore ways to support enterprising youth and their ideas or solutions.
- C. Donor-advised fund.** A donor-advised fund is a vehicle through which organizations and individuals can engage in philanthropic endeavors through existing structured initiatives. In consultation with the fundraising and investment committee and partners, the secretariat may set up a donor-advised fund through which organizations and individuals interested in supporting youth employment and enterprise development can provide financial support. Such funds shall be used to support employment initiatives and local business interventions.
- D. Internship program.** An annual internship program may be a vehicle to prepare and transition youth into the workforce. Participating firms may commit to joining an annual internship program initiated by the task force. The secretariat will launch, recruit, and place interns at various institutions during particular times of the year. We recommend that the task force sets this initiative up to provide skill development, training, and financial support for interns.
- E. Public-Private roundtables.** The task force should organize annual public-private roundtable discussions or symposiums to discuss investment opportunities in youth employment, skills development, and local entrepreneurship. These discussions, bringing together stakeholders from across sectors and industries, will highlight important issues that impact youth employment and contribute to reducing youth unemployment.

VI. Reporting

The task force shall produce an annual impact report in December of each year. The report shall present the state of the task force's leadership, programs and initiatives, and impact against its annual goals and targets. Such reports shall cover job creation, publications for knowledge management, and youth transitioning into the workforce. The report will also present an opportunity for learning and adaptation among participating firms and development partners. We recommend that an annual symposium be organized to publish such a report, convening all stakeholders, including firms and youth participants, and open to the public for presentation, discussion, and solicitation for planning for the following year.

VII. Evaluation

The task force shall undergo two sets of evaluations. The first is a mid-term evaluation by the internal committee and an annual report by the task force on its yearly performance. The second may be an external evaluation by a contracted firm covering the two-year tenure of each Secretariat before the leadership transitions. Findings from these evaluations shall be produced into a report and published as a public knowledge management tool.



Participants at the stakeholders meeting and validation workshop. L-R: Dieudonne K. Perry, Executive Director, SMART Liberia, Christollie Suah-Collins, Enterprise Development Manager, Mercy Corps, Jarius Andrew Greaves, CEO, YONER Liberia.

PHOTO | Jallah Sumbo / TRIBE

Conclusion

Liberia's youth population is essential in delivering the country's hope for a prosperous future. However, throughout this assessment, it was evident that the issues of youth employment and job creation pose significant challenges to the government of Liberia and its development partners. As reported, despite numerous efforts over the years, Liberia's growing working-age youth population remains largely unprepared and inadequately equipped to meet employers' demands or to launch, build and sustain profitable entrepreneurial ventures. Despite these challenges, research shows local firms are willing to participate in the youth task force, given certain conditions and firm capacity.

We found that the creation of the task force is feasible under three conditions:

- 1** The task force should be a stakeholder-led initiative with committed investment from stakeholders across all sectors and industries, primarily large private sector firms, based on recognition and acceptance of the value of the task force to job creation and these firms' business activities.
- 2** A dedicated team, quality time, and intentional efforts are required to build the structure and credibility of the task force. The task force must be carefully designed into a structural initiative that transcends any one institution or government interest, placing the interests of job creation for youth and developing the local entrepreneurial market as a top priority.
- 3** Youth must be critical partners in designing, developing, and executing the task force.

With these conditions in place, our research reveals the potential the task force has in advancing local firms' ability to hire and train Liberian youth. The close and early working relationship with this population could also fill an employment gap in Liberia. The disconnect between youth skills and the needs of employers could be significantly reduced, playing an essential role in decreasing Liberia's youth unemployment.

Initiatives such as the task force must be set up and operationalized formally in the best interest of youth and the country. Though the recommendations reflect the researchers' views as informed by desk research and data collected during the study, they are validated by and closely align with the opinions and insights of renowned local and international institutions on the issues under review. Efforts toward tackling these challenges can not be swift or immediate if the goal is to become sustainable and impactful. Of all the firms and literature we engaged during this study, the main concern was the insufficient preparation of the young labor force. The lack of relevant skills to poor work ethics and an understandable need for immediate financial compensation have proven to be a costly but necessary investment in preparing Liberia's young population.

It is crucial, in further research, to gather the primary perspectives of youth and their preparations for the workforce. In addition to exploring job creation opportunities for youth, it will be beneficial to assess how the task force can be set up to participate in preparing youth for the labor market. Considering a further assessment of more firms across multiple industries in several geographical locations of Liberia will provide more grounded



TRIBE's Wainright Aquoi (Left), CEO, and Solomon Mahn (Right), Director of Programs & Evaluation, presenting the research report at the stakeholders meeting and validation workshop.

PHOTO | Elvis M. D. Browne / TRIBE

insights. A study of the intersection between secondary education, tertiary education, career development and the workforce will generate desired insights for the task force's operations and future initiatives seeking to build youth workforce capacities and create a productive workforce.

We hope this report provides a preliminary understanding of how structural networks can contribute to Liberia's workforce development and may lay the foundation for further research on leveraging multi-sector employment and youth development approaches.

“Liberia is blessed with talented youth who have skills, abilities, and the desire to succeed. They are ready to contribute to their families, their communities, and their country. They are passionate about their chosen field and the work they are doing. In fact, they report improving their skill set through (largely unpaid) internships with local and international organizations.”

Kimberlee Bell
Supervisory Program Officer,
USAID Liberia

Report Validation

TRIBE and Mercy Corps hosted a one-day stakeholder meeting and validation workshop to solidify the report's findings and validate its insights and recommendations against the views and insights of respondents. Twenty-five stakeholders representing participating firms, individuals, and institutions working in youth and workforce development participated in the session. With support from Mercy Corps, TRIBE designed and facilitated the meeting. The project consultants presented two sessions, the study methodology and the report and its findings, followed by stakeholder discussions and questions after each presentation. Within the context of the study and report limitations and challenges, there was a consensus validating the report's methodology, findings, analysis and recommendations.

Following the stakeholder meeting and validation workshop, TRIBE prepared and shared a validation form with each respondent and participant to validate the report or present feedback to any of its content. Participants were asked to respond yes, if after reading and reviewing the draft report, they agreed with the statement, no, if they did not, and other, if they had specific feedback for the statement. Following our analysis of the 13 responses, we present that the report was validated. The respondents approved all findings, with further suggestions aligning with the report's limitations and recommendations. The following section gives an overview of the validation statements and responses.



Participants at the stakeholder meeting and validation workshop.

PHOTO | Jallah Sumbo / TRIBE

1 Validation that the findings reflect a balanced overview and conditions of youth employment and workforce development in Liberia.

Yes **85.7%**

A good start but sample size is really small. Great review/ incorporation of existing literature. I did not see some of the skills providers interviewed.

7.1%

The report is good and the need to set up such platform is necessary and timely, but I recommend further consultation with key youth development actors and Liberian-owned enterprises be engaged.

7.1%

2 Validation that the recommendations the report provides address the challenges identified.

Yes **85.7%**

I read the report and even though there are rooms to build on the recommendations, I think they relatively cover the context of the challenges the report addresses.

7.1%

Unclear Question **7.1%**

3 Validation that the findings, recommendations and conclusions adequately address research question: 1. will participating firms have the capacity/ability to participate actively in the task force?

Yes **100%**

4 Validation that the findings, recommendations and conclusions adequately address research question: 2. Could the task force advance the firms' ability to hire and train Liberian youth?

Yes **100%**

5 Validation that the findings, recommendations and conclusions adequately address research question: 3. Do firms see the proposed task force as performing an essential role in aiding Liberia's employment?

Yes **100%**

6 Validation that the report presents a strong argument for the creation of the task force, and an endorsement of its recommendations.

Yes **78.6%**

Case is compelling. Early recommendations are fine, but I think more thinkin has to go into the structure and activities of the task force.

7.1%

I read the report and even though there are rooms to build on the recommendations, I think they relatively cover the context of the challenges the report addresses.

7.1%

The report is crystal clear and necessary don't need strong argument and I endorse its recommendations.

7.1%

Appendix

Table 2
Number of firms engaged, declined, and interviewed²¹

Code	Firm	Location	Interview Status
001	Lonestar MTN	Montserrado	Engaged
002	Orange	Montserrado	Engaged
003	SMART Liberia	Montserrado	Interviewed
004	J Palm Liberia	Montserrado	Interviewed
005	MOTC (Montserrado Oil Trading Company)	Montserrado	Engaged
006	United Bank of Africa	Montserrado	Engaged
007	LBDI (Liberian Bank for Development and Investment)	Montserrado	Engaged
008	Royal Hotel	Montserrado	Engaged
009	TipMe Liberia	Montserrado	Interviewed
010	LOOP Academies	Montserrado	Declined
011	USAID Liberia Mission	Montserrado	Interviewed
012	Universal Outreach Foundation	Montserrado	Interviewed
013	APM Terminals	Montserrado	Interviewed
014	Green Cities Inc.	Montserrado	Interviewed
015	CONEX	Montserrado	Engaged
016	Atlantic Food Company	Margibi	Engaged
017	Farmington Hotel	Margibi	Engaged
018	Naresh Brothers Inc.	Montserrado	Interviewed
019	Firestone Liberia Incorporated	Margibi	Engaged
020	ArcelorMittal	Grand Bassa	Interviewed
021	Tri Buchanan Development Corporation	Grand Bassa	Interviewed
022	Hotel Buchanan	Grand Bassa	Declined
023	BRAC Liberia Microfinance Company Ltd	Grand Bassa	Engaged
024	Liberia Agriculture Company	Grand Bassa	Engaged
025	Sunset Beach	Grand Bassa	interviewed
026	Philipmena Guest House	Grand Bassa	Interviewed
027	Equatorial Palm Oil Liberia Inc.	Grand Bassa	Interviewed
028	Unity Construction Company Inc.	Grand Bassa	Interviewed
029	Liberia Marketing Association	Grand Bassa	Declined
030	Last Mile Health	Grand Bassa	Engaged
031	Libassa EcoLodge	Margibi	Engaged

²¹ Interviews with USAID and ArcelorMittal were not collected through the standard interview questionnaire due to technical challenges.

Table 3
List of Interviewees

Name	Title	Organization/Firm	Interview Date	Time
Dieudonne Perry	Executive Director	SMART Liberia	5/1/2021	10:27:39
Mahmud Johnson	CEO	JPL Consumers Inc.	4/28/2021	16:58:43
Laureine Guilao	CEO	TipMe Liberia	5/1/2021	10:43:03
Cecil Wilson	Country Director	Universal Outreach Foundation	5/10/2021	14:54:24
Bleejay Innis	Managing Director	Tri Buchanan Development Corporation	5/10/2021	15:33:06
Marie Kpoto	Finance Manager	Green Cities Incorporated	5/10/2021	17:03:29
Atty Arthur O. Williams Jr.	HR Manager / Legal Officer	Equatorial Palm Oil	5/13/2021	11:20:51
Solomon Jackson	Manager	Philomena Guest House	5/13/2021	11:48:34
Melvin George	CEO	Sunset Beach Inc.	5/18/2021	11:51:13
Lawrence Williams	General Manager	Unity Business Inc.	5/18/2021	12:09:07
Karan Anandani	General Manager	NARESH BROTHERS	5/21/2021	12:28:58
Samuel T Duo	Head of Human Resources	APM Terminals Liberia	5/28/2021	18:45:47
Kimberlee Bell	Supervisory Program Officer	USAID Liberia	May 7, 2021	13:00
Rose Kingston	Learning and Development Superintendent	ArcelorMittal Liberia	5/27/2021	12:00 - 12:45

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