

OCTOBER 2019



JOB
DEMAND &
EMPLOYMENT
MARKET
ANALYSIS
LIBERIA



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BRAC and FHI 360 collaborated to lead this research and analysis.

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Acknowledgement

This publication was developed through a partnership between BRAC USA and FHI 360, given both organizations' commitment to ensuring all youth have the opportunity to access an equitable education and develop the skills needed to allow them to secure their economic well-being. For this initiative, FHI 360 conducted an assessment of BRAC's Employment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program. This report was authored by Thomas Galloway (FHI 360), Elebthel Gebrehiwot (FHI 360), Whitney Moret (FHI 360), Gary Walker (Consultant), with technical inputs contributed by Nora Sohnen (FHI 360) and Alec Hansen (FHI 360).

The assessment team would like to acknowledge the support of the BRAC USA team, particularly Aissatou Diallo, Carrie Ellett and Rosa Taylor; the BRAC Liberia Country Office, including Thelma Foley Ngabe; and the BRAC Sierra Leone Country Office, notably Jenneh M. Gbao. The Khana Group (Liberia) and Dalan Development Consultants (Sierra Leone) were instrumental in conducting field interviews and collecting relevant data to assist this effort.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
AGOA	Africa Growth and Opportunities Act
AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
BCG	Boston Consulting Group
BDOTC	Business Domestic Occupational Training Center
BWI	Booker Washington Institute
CESPRO	Children Empowered for Sustainability Program
CPHS	Cape Palmas High School
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EG	Enterprise Groups
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
ELA	Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIFES	Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability
GCM	Grand Cape Mount
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GoL	Government of Liberia
GVC	Gender Based Violence
HS	Harmonized System
ICT	Internet and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
JVTC	Jilijuah Vocational Training Center
KAVTC	Klay Agriculture Vocational Training Center
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRTTI	Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute
LADA	Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity

LDC	Least Developed Countries
LISGIS	Liberia institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LOIC	Liberia Opportunities Industrialization Center
MoY	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MVTC	Monrovia Vocational Training Center
MW	Megawatt
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-Profit Organization
NYEEP	National Youth Employment and Empowerment Program
RCA	Revealed Comparative Advantage
SBA	Small Business Empowerment Act
SCPZ	Staple Crops Processing Zone
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
TAVTC	Tumutu Agricultural Vocational Training Center
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WORTH	Women Owning Resources Together
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council
YMCA	Young Men Christian Association
YOP	Youth Opportunity Project

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Liberia Job Demand and Employment Market Analysis comes out of a joint effort of BRAC and FHI 360 to examine the Liberian economic context for adolescent girls and young women targeted by BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) programs. The goal of the BRAC ELA program is to enable adolescent girls in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa to reach their full potential by promoting education, economic empowerment, and social empowerment. BRAC has operated clubs for adolescent girls in Bangladesh since 1993, later adapting the model in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, and Nepal. Through the ELA program in sub-Saharan Africa, BRAC has reached more than 100,000 adolescent girls since 2006.

This report identifies employment opportunities and challenges facing adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Liberia and will inform BRAC ELA's economic empowerment strategy. The report provides an overview of AGYW ELA participants, the education and training contexts they engage in, the economic context in which they operate, and programming opportunities that could be leveraged to improve their employment and/or entrepreneurial outcomes. Moreover, this report is intended to benefit all development practitioners and actors in Liberia concerned with improving programming for AGYW and empower them to access better and more stable employment.

METHODOLOGY

This economic livelihood analysis was developed through a mix of desk research, data analysis and qualitative data collection with both key informants and AGYW focus group discussions (FGDs). Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted in English with 27 government officials, private sector employers, NGOs, educators, and parents of AGYW. A team of two consultants conducted FGDs with 16 groups including a total of 173 AGYW who are current or former participants in BRAC's ELA program. Participants ranged from 14 to 19 years of age. Two rural focus groups and two urban focus groups were held in each of the following counties: Grand Cape Mount, Bong, Margibi, and Montserrado. FGD locations were purposively selected based on accessibility during the data collection period.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The landscape analysis section provides a profile of AGYW and of the education and training context in Liberia. This includes an overview of the BRAC ELA participant population of AGYW, who face a broad range of challenges to improving their livelihoods — from demographic trends, to a difficult economic environment, and pervasive informality. It then examines the national trends in education, TVET, and training to understand how AGYW and youth are learning and building skills for employment and self-employment. Challenges explored in this area include low literacy rates, lack of TVET coordination, and the mixed success of NGO trainings.

ECONOMIC SECTOR ANALYSIS

The sector analysis is intended to look closely at Liberia as an economic context in which AGYW might find or create work, and which sectors might have the capacity to absorb or sustain such opportunities. Analysis in this section is informed by primary data in the form of response from both urban and rural KII respondents, as well as secondary data from databases and desk research.

Liberia has immense economic potential due to significant natural resources, but decades of economic extraction, two civil wars, and most recently the outbreak of Ebola, have stunted economic growth, a situation which has often translated into few opportunities for Liberian youth. While the majority of citizens are engaged in agriculture, the economic contribution of the sector to GDP has fallen, and agricultural productivity remains low. Government focus and dependence on extractive commodities (gold, petroleum, iron ore, as well as rubber and cocoa) has left many Liberians without the opportunity to build or demonstrate higher levels of skill required by other economic sectors. Without improvement in capacity and quality of exports the country will have trouble taking advantage of its trade deals.

In order for Liberia's economy to grow out from under this history of an extractive driven economy, micro, small and medium enterprises must be developed and strengthened. These enterprises already represent the vast majority of employment in Liberia and are the country's best bet for improving the country's resilience against economic shocks. Indeed, Liberia's economy may be likely to undergo a period of greater contraction in the near future. Thus, there is an even greater need to make sure that youth are deliberately aligned to potential sources of income that are more likely to be in demand even in a slower economic environment.

On the positive side, weaker commodity prices could offer an opportunity to build the foundation for diversification in Liberia, away from extractives, particularly in light of recent infrastructure improvements. Potential additional growth areas that could support opportunities for AGYW include: electricity, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture, rubber, fishing/aquaculture, services, tourism, and manufacturing. Trade and product space analysis show additional economic growth potential in scrap aluminum and copper, wood, batteries, and precious metal watches; and certain agricultural goods.

PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

Several programs encountered during the field collection demonstrated areas of potential overlap with BRAC ELA programing goals or geographies, including PROSPECTS (Promoting Sustainable Partnership for Economic Transformation), LADA (Liberia Business Development Activity), Grow Liberia, FIFES (Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability), and the Youth Opportunities Project. These could offer opportunities for a facilitated engagement that would allow for continued support of BRAC ELA beneficiaries after their graduation from that program.

Deepening the desk research into economic growth sectors through information gathered in KIIs and FGDs, a number of other areas were noted as having potential for employment of AGYW; namely, in addition to the above, agro-processing, meat production, agricultural services, packaging, petty trade, catering, baking, tourism, and Internet and Communications Technology (ICT). Specific skills needed in these sectors include broad soft skills such as team work, communication, critical thinking, as well as technical skills, from sales and accounting to customer service, or electrical wiring, among others. The main challenge is that higher abilities in most skills are needed as employees in every industry.

Finally, the report provides an overview of potential programming opportunities that may assist in the development and support of livelihoods and employment opportunities for AGYW. Programmatic opportunity recommendations include:

- Help AGYW or youth businesses take advantage of relevant policies and laws
- Identify skills gaps that could allow participants to link into projects
- Support mindset and behavior change regarding AGYW in non-traditional work

while training opportunity recommendations include:

- Provide specialized technical training
- Deepen technical knowledge of local trainers
- Develop agriculture-specific skills
- Raise awareness of potential agricultural markets

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Introduction

Liberia is a country that has faced significant challenges, but has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to recover. After a 14-year civil war, which ended in 2003, and the public health crisis of Ebola in 2014, recent years have seen notable improvements in the overall security situation of the country, with 2017 bringing the first peaceful transfer of power to a new democratically-elected president that the country has seen in 74 years.¹ Liberia is also making key investments in its infrastructure to grow its economy, presenting prospects for new livelihoods.

In the midst of this slow recovery, adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Liberia are a growing cohort that face numerous challenges to their livelihoods and well-being. These include harmful gender norms, lack of access to high-quality education and training opportunities, and a disconnect between what employers demand and what education and training institutions provide. The economic environment, while recovering, remains particularly difficult for micro- and small firms, which are largely informal – the level at which most AGYW are involved. The economy is dominated by large concessionaires and urban hub economies. However, the outlook for AGYW in Liberia is changing, with new potential opportunities that were not previously conceivable for this population, including in sectors and occupations traditionally dominated by men.

In 2018, the BRAC Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescent (ELA) program ended after three years. BRAC's USA-based implementing manager saw an opportunity to review Liberia's context, to better understand the economic opportunities and challenges for AGYW. FHI 360, which developed a labor market assessment toolkit that supports the analysis of a country's unique economic context, was contracted by BRAC in order to support in this review.

¹ Baffoe, J. and Mwasambili, R. (2018). Liberia. 2018 African Economic Outlook. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/country_notes/Liberia_country_note.pdf

At its core, this report presents information and ideas to inform AGYW livelihood development and identify programming opportunities that can be used widely to support programming goals, as well as help adolescent boys and young men (ABYM), families, and communities to thrive. However, given the near impossibility of accessing reliable data on microenterprises, informal sector, and specific town- and district-level industry economic demand, this report has taken a unique approach. To bridge this gap, FHI 360 built on contextual knowledge, observed best practices and challenges in key sectors, and integration of knowledge on identified areas of economic opportunity. To achieve this, the analysis:

- Provides an overview of the country context by mapping key economic, demographic and human capital trends in Liberia, with a particular focus on the areas of operation for BRAC ELA programs
- Provides an understanding of labor market supply and demand in Liberia, including sectors of greatest economic growth and opportunity
- Provides an understanding of opportunities and constraints to formal and self-employment opportunities
- Maps training and workforce development programs available for AGYW in Liberia
- Identifies possible bilateral partners, NGOs, facilitating organizations and private sector players within the youth and adolescent girls employment space to benefit from the labor market assessment or act as implementing partners
- Offers recommendations to actors engaging in the youth employment challenge in Liberia

METHODOLOGY

This economic livelihood analysis was developed through a mix of desk research, data analysis and qualitative data collection with both key informants and AGYW focus group discussions (FGDs). This research was conducted by a team of three FHI 360 staff and two local Liberian consultant researchers between February 18 and March 6, 2019.

Local consultant researchers were trained in research ethics and data collection procedures by FHI 360 staff on February 19-20. A pilot FGD was held with 12 BRAC Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) participants in Monrovia on February 21. All data collection was conducted in Liberian Simple English.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including government officials, private sector employers, NGOs, educators, and AGYW parents in English. Key informants were asked to provide verbal consent to participate in interviews. KIIs conducted by local consultants were audio-recorded and transcribed. KIIs conducted by international staff were not recorded.

A team of two consultants conducted FGDs with 16 groups with a total of 173 AGYW who are current or former participants in BRAC's ELA program. Participants ranged from 14 to 19 years of age. Verbal permission was obtained from all participants. Participants also completed a brief demographic survey prior to FGDs. Two rural focus groups and two urban focus groups were held in each of the following counties: Grand Cape Mount, Bong, Margibi, and Montserrado. FGD locations were purposively selected based on accessibility during the data collection period. Each FGD included between 5 to 13 participants. No identifiable information was collected from FGD participants.

The Context and Landscape Analysis for Engagement with AGYW

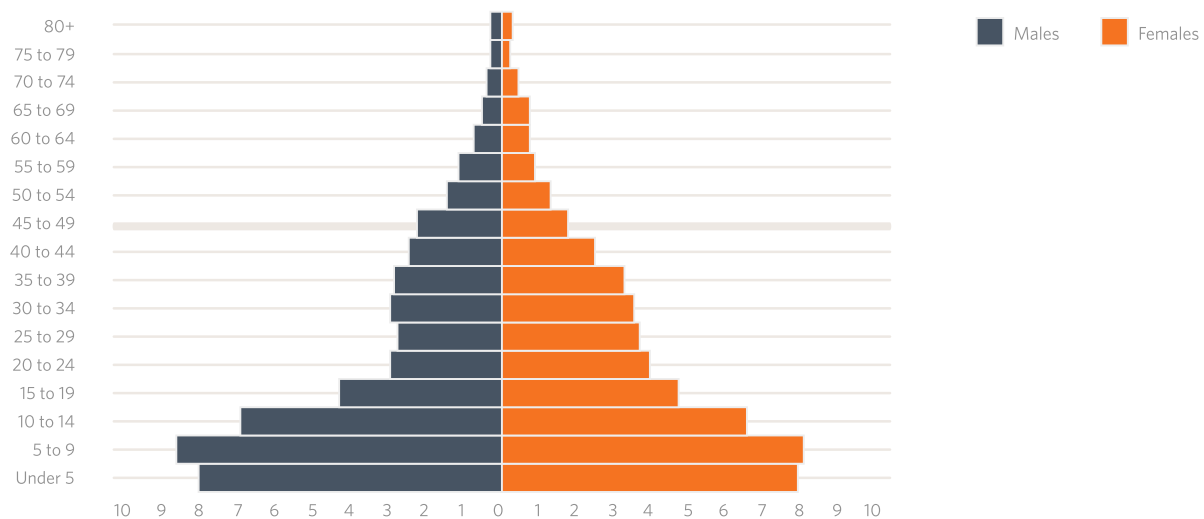
This section provides an overview of the beneficiary population of vulnerable adolescent girls and young women. These AGYW face severe challenges to livelihoods due to demographic trends and a complex and difficult economic environment, which is largely informal in both rural and urban settings.

Understanding who these AGYW are, across the different contexts in which they live, helps to better inform the creation of an effective and tailored program to strengthen livelihoods and employment for this population. This section will then also examine factors of economic trends, educational attainment for youth, and a broad range of health and gender biases that affect AGYW.

OVERVIEW OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Liberia's demographic trends illustrate a challenging context that has made the situation for AGYW more serious, having been shaped by the long shadow of two civil wars, and the more immediate fallout from the Ebola crisis. Liberia is a young nation, with 60% of its 4.8 million people under age 25, and with a median age of 17.8 years.² Women make up more than 50% of the population. For many young women, hardships start early, as Liberia's birth rate is the tenth highest in the world, with the average woman expecting to bear about five children. The age at first birth can be as low as 15.³ Literacy is estimated at 64.7%, and low levels of education, as well as high risk of infectious disease, present challenges to Liberia's growing youth population.⁴

Figure 1: Population of Liberia by Age and Gender, 2016



Source: CIA World Factbook, 2018⁵

2 CIA World Factbook. (2018). "Liberia." Retrieved December 26, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

3 <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/SR214/SR214.pdf>

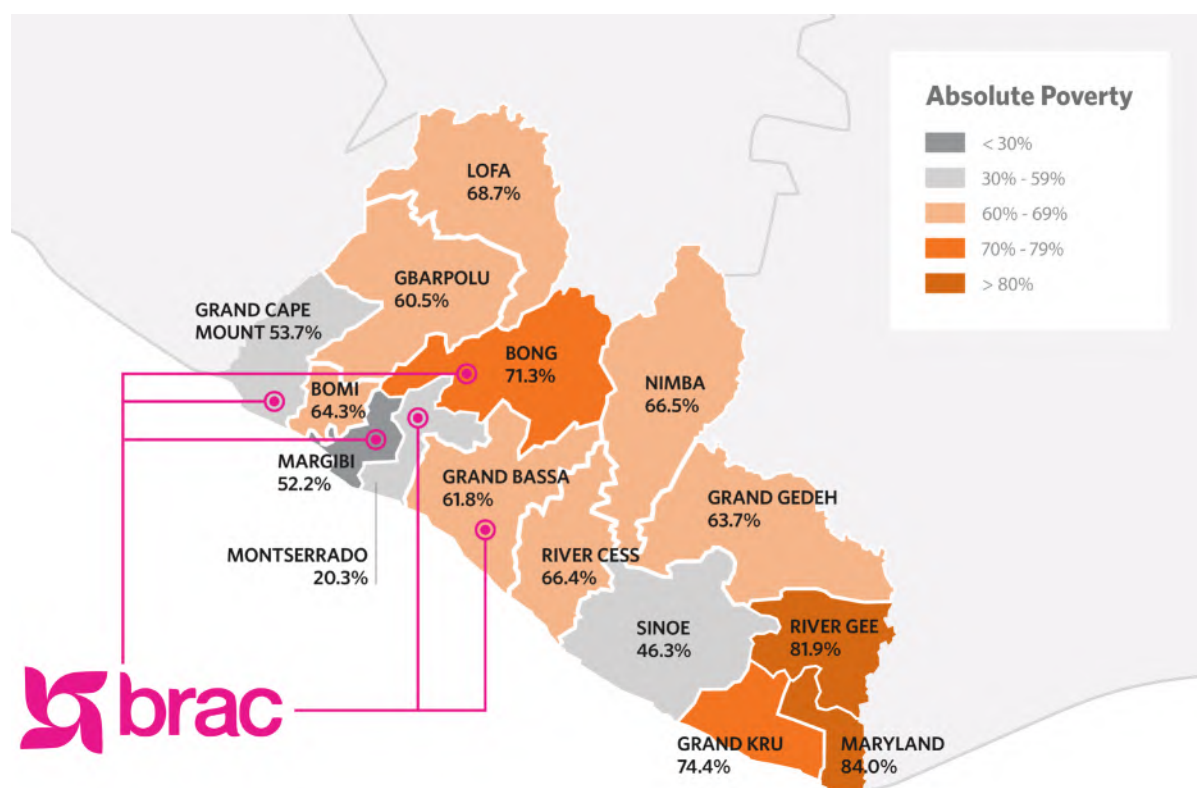
4 LISGIS. (2017). 2016 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2986>

5 CIA World Factbook. (2018). "Liberia." Retrieved December 26, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

The population pyramid above, indicates a large youth population, ages 15 to 19 and younger. Focusing on the under-25 age range, there is a significant expansion in the cohort of young people under the age of 14. While the focus of this study is on those currently 10 to 24, this shift is worth noting as those young people today will become the workforce of Liberia in 5 to 10 years. This matters, as a ‘youth bulge’ can become a positive or negative influence depending on opportunities youth are able to find when entering the workforce and adult society.⁶

Liberia ranks near the bottom of 189 countries on the Human Development Index at number 181.⁷ A little over half of Liberians live in poverty, as of 2016.⁸ Rural areas have a poverty rate of about 71.6%, compared to urban areas, with a rate of 31.5%.⁹ Poverty also varies by county. Of the counties of interest in this assessment, Montserrado has the lowest percentage of residents in absolute poverty at 20.3%, followed by Margibi at 52.2%, Grand Cape Mount at 53.7%, and finally Bong County with the most severe level of poverty at 71.3%, among the highest in the country.

Figure 2: Absolute Poverty Map, Liberia 2018



Source: World Bank Country Framework, 2018

6 <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries>

7 UNDP. (2018). Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update: Liberia. Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update. Retrieved December 26, 2018 from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/LBR.pdf

8 Absolute poverty is defined as a situation where individuals cannot meet their food and non-food minimum needs. The benchmark for those needs is established through an overall or absolute poverty line.

9 LISGIS. (2017). 2016 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2986>

A PROFILE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN (AGYW)

HEALTH, CULTURE, AND GENDER

Life is difficult for women and girls in Liberia. High birth rates, high maternal mortality rates, low levels of healthcare, and harmful practices such as female genital cutting are all risks to women's health and well-being.¹⁰ The UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII), which assesses maternal mortality, adolescent birth rate, female seats in parliament, and male/female disparity in secondary education and labor force participation, puts Liberia at 154/160 countries for 2018.¹¹ The Gender Development Index (GDI), which provides a ratio comparing the Human Development Index of women and men, is 0.846, meaning that women experience a level of human development that is roughly 15% lower than that of men (this gap is wider than most neighbors, including Sierra Leone, though not significantly). Inequality has material consequences for AGYW health and well-being. Prevailing gender norms oblige women to obey their husbands and fulfill traditional domestic and maternal roles.¹² Women tend to marry early, especially in rural areas, and traditional law often trumps statutory law, resulting in fewer protections for women.¹³ For example, traditional law allows polygamy and marriage at age 16, whereas statutory law forbids polygamy and only permits marriage for those over age 18. Girls, especially in rural areas, may receive education at "bush schools", usually in forests sacred in local traditional cultures with temporary shelter, where they are trained on local history, genealogy, family life, and sexual relations,¹⁴ in addition to undergoing female genital cutting (FGC), which is practiced by 10 out of the country's 16 ethnic groups and affects two-thirds of women.¹⁵

Early marriage and high fertility place women at risk. More than a third (35.9%) of Liberian women aged 20-24 were first married by age 18.¹⁶ The median age for first marriage among women 20-49 is 17.5% in Bong county, 17.8% in Grand Cape Mount, 19.4% in Margibi, and 20.5% in Montserrado.¹⁷ The median is 17.9 for rural areas and 19.9 for urban areas. Liberia's maternal mortality rate is estimated at 725 deaths for every 100,000 live births as of 2015.¹⁸

Rape and gender-based violence (GBV) is very common in Liberia. Formerly a weapon of the civil war, violence is now simply a part of life, including high rates of sexual violence against children aged 10-15.¹⁹ Due to weak judicial institutions, rape is often unreported and unprosecuted. Research has shown that nearly all children (96% surveyed) have experienced at least one form of abuse, and a quarter reported to have been coerced into sex – 30% of girls, 22% of boys.²⁰ Transactional sex is common, including among school-aged pupils with teachers. Although the government of Liberia has signed a number of human rights agreements and has addressed gender in the 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2009 National Gender Policy, and 2008 Gender and Sexually Based Violence Act, implementation is lacking.²¹

10 CIA World Factbook. (2018). "Liberia." Retrieved December 26, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

11 UNDP. (2018). Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update: Liberia. Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update. Retrieved December 26, 2018 from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/LBR.pdf

12 Education Development Center. (2017). Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children: Gender Analysis.

13 Stromquist, N., Lin, J., Corneilse, C., Klees, S., Choti, Y., & Haugen, a. (2013). Women teachers in Liberia: Social and institutional forces accounting for their underrepresentation. *International Journal of Educational Development* 33, pg. 521-530.

14 Stromquist, N., Lin, J., Corneilse, C., Klees, S., Choti, Y., & Haugen. Women teachers in Liberia: Social and institutional forces accounting for their underrepresentation

15 CIA World Factbook. "Liberia." Retrieved December 26, 2018

16 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

17 Data only available for women aged 25-49 in Montserrado

18 World Bank. (2018a). Doing Business 2019 Economy Profile: Liberia. <http://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/l/liberia/LBR.pdf>

19 Education Development Center. (2017). Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children: Gender Analysis.

20 IBIS, Concern Worldwide, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children. (2014). Passing the TEXT: based on the study Examining Gender Based Violence & Abuse in Liberian Schools (2012).

21 Education Development Center. (2017). Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children: Gender Analysis.

NUTRITION

Access to and preference for nutritionally healthy food is a challenge for young people, and affects their development from a young age, their ability to function in everyday life, and their pregnancies. Although the quality and quantity of food consumption seem to be improving across the country, levels of chronic malnutrition remain flat with 12% of children under 5 severely stunted, and 19% moderately stunted, with the highest levels of malnutrition in the North Central and South Eastern regions.²² Nationally, 15% of 15-19 year old women have a lower than normal BMI, with 5.2% classified as moderately or severely thin.²³

Thirty-two percent of the country's population were classified as moderately or severely chronically food insecure in 2017. The prevalence of chronic food insecurity was highest (40-45%) in the South Eastern regions (Grand Gedeh, Rivercess, Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, and River Gee) compared to other rural parts of the country (30-35%), and prevalence of food insecurity was lowest in greater Monrovia. Chronically food insecure households experience seasonal food deficits for 2-4 months annually and have low diversity of diet.²⁴

Malnutrition and malaria both contribute to anemia, which is a major public health concern. Sixty-nine percent of children under five, and 35% of women of childbearing age (15-49), are estimated to be anemic.²⁵ Twenty-nine percent of maternal deaths are due to indirect causes such as anemia.²⁶

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

In Liberia, menstrual hygiene practices affect AGYW abilities to succeed in school, find work, or pursue their own livelihoods. Water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities are insufficient in schools, especially in rural schools, presenting a barrier to girls' education. If private and clean facilities are not available at school, adolescent girls often travel home to use facilities there, particularly if they are menstruating, affecting their attendance.²⁷ Only a quarter of bathroom cubicles in Liberian schools are assigned to females, and a majority (63.2%) of schools with functioning WASH facilities did not incorporate menstrual hygiene elements.²⁸ More than one third of schools had no hand washing stations, with public and rural schools significantly less likely to offer these facilities.²⁹

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Liberian women bear primary responsibility for family nutrition and health care, subsistence agriculture, manual food processing and water fetching. Therefore, if the household is food insecure, or members of the household are ill or do not have adequate nutrition, women face additional work providing food and taking care of the sick, which can impact their ability to pursue work and income outside of the home. Household and personal nutritional and health issues may particularly impact rural women due to frequent childbirth, larger families, and heavy farm and home workloads.³⁰ In instances where women work, or engage in their own livelihood activity, a sick child can mean missing multiple days of work, resulting in job loss, or a loss of market opportunities.

22 USAID. (2017). Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET). Assessment of Chronic Food Insecurity in Liberia.

23 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

24 USAID. (2017). Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET). Assessment of Chronic Food Insecurity in Liberia. June. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Liberia%20Chronic%20Food%20Insecurity%20Report.pdf>

25 USAID. (2018). Liberia Nutrition Profile. February. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Liberia-Nutrition-Profile-Feb2018-508.pdf>

26 World Health Organization Liberia. (2016). Annual Report.

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28 Government of Liberia and World Bank. (2016). Liberia Education Sector Analysis.

29 Government of Liberia and World Bank. (2016). Liberia Education Sector Analysis.

30 FAO. (2018). National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: Liberia.

HIV

Liberia's national HIV prevalence rate is on the lower end for sub-Saharan Africa (1.9% nationwide), but several groups are at greater risk: young women, particularly young pregnant women, and urban dwellers are among the most likely to have HIV. In 2013, HIV prevalence in all urban areas was 2.6%, and higher in Greater Monrovia (3.2%) than other urban areas. Though just 1% of youths 15-24 had HIV, 2.9% of young women 20-24 did. HIV prevalence among young pregnant women was a concerning 5.3%. Married, divorced, separated or widowed women were more likely to have HIV than those who had never married.³¹

To further clarify what all the above means for various groups of adolescent girls and young women in Liberia, this study attempts to delineate differences between AGYW rural and urban populations. As BRAC's ELA programs operate outside Monrovia, in this case urban signifies built-up population centers which might also be characterized as peri-urban, in contrast to more remote rural communities.

RURAL AGYW

Employment, Economic Activity, and Skills

Less than half of rural AGYW are employed, mostly in vulnerable and informal agriculture or other low-skill jobs. They have very limited access to vocational training and very few prospects in formal employment.

Forty seven point eight percent of rural women aged 15-24 are employed (compared to the 49.5% of rural men who are employed), much lower than the average of 66.4% of all rural women over age 15.³² Thirty seven point one percent of females aged 15-35 work while they study.³³ The majority of women in rural areas are employed as skilled agricultural workers (57.9%), in elementary occupations (20%),³⁴ or service and sales work (16.3%).³⁵ Overall, almost three quarters of rural women work in agriculture, in both skilled and "elementary" capacities (72.5%). This is followed by wholesale or retail trade (17.8%). Work in other sectors is minimal with 3.3% of rural women involved in manufacturing, compared to 8% of rural men. Nine out of ten rural female workers are considered to be in vulnerable employment (93.8%, compared to 80.5% of rural male workers).

Education

Education and literacy levels among rural AGYW are very low, with about half of all rural women having no education at all. Only a quarter of rural women are literate, but that rate is likely higher for AGYW, as education levels are rising for young people in both rural and urban areas.

Family, Health, and Risks

Rural AGYW can be expected to marry before they turn 18 and will likely have 6 children in their lifetime.³⁶ They are unlikely to control their own earnings, which only a quarter of rural women aged 15-49 do. About two-thirds of women are members of a Sande bush society and are likely to have experienced FGC. As with urban women, AGYW in rural areas face a high risk of experiencing sexual violence.

31 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

32 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey." www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/presentation/wcms_156366.pdf.

33 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3.

34 The definition for "Elementary Occupations" comes from the ILO's International Standard Classification of Occupations, and states, "Elementary occupations involve the performance of simple and routine tasks which may require the use of hand-held tools and considerable physical effort. Most occupations in this major group require skills at the first ISCO skill level." The definition further details types of work that fall under this classification. To see the full list please refer to "ISCO-08 Structure, index correspondence with ISCO-88: PART III - DEFINITIONS OF MAJOR GROUPS, SUB-MAJOR GROUPS, MINOR GROUPS AND UNIT GROUPS." Accessed at: <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/index.htm>

35 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey."

36 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

URBAN AGYW

Employment, Economic Activity, and Skills

More than half of AGYW in Liberia live in urban areas, likely in slums - about two-thirds (65.7%) of urban dwellers were estimated to live in slums as of 2014.³⁷ Urban AGYW have much better access to education and training than their rural counterparts, but have very low employment rates. Only 21.5% of women in urban areas aged 15-24 are employed, slightly lower than 22.8% of urban men, but much lower than the average of 49.3% for all urban women over age 15.³⁸

The majority of women in urban areas are employed as service and sales workers (49.7%), in elementary occupations (21.2%), as skilled agricultural workers (12.1%), or as professionals (7.9%).³⁹ Substantially more women are engaged in elementary occupations than men, at 21.2% as opposed to 11.9%. Over half of urban female workers work in wholesale or retail trade (56.9%), followed by agriculture (15.9%). The provision of accommodations (e.g., hostels, hotels) and food employs 5.7%, and 3.7% have jobs in education. Another 4.6% of urban women work in manufacturing, compared to 10.4% of men. Four out of five urban women workers are considered to be in vulnerable employment (82.6%), compared to only 54.1% of men.

Unfortunately, using the ILO ISCO occupation definition, there is not a direct link to what work might be deemed 'decent'. The ILO defines decent work as, "opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."⁴⁰ While each type of occupation could theoretically meet this definition, based on responses from FGDs and KIIs indicating the lack of empowerment in jobs and risks of sexual harassment, this is unlikely.

Education

Education and literacy levels among urban AGYW are low, but much higher than their rural counterparts. About 62.1% of urban women are literate, and urban women have a median 5.4 years of schooling compared to 3.4 years for all women.

Family, Health, and Risks

Urban AGYW can be expected to marry around age 19 and will likely have 3-4 children in their lifetime.⁴¹ Only a third of urban women control their own earnings. About 40% of women are members of a Sande bush society and likely to have experienced FGC. As with rural women, AGYW in urban areas face a high risk of experiencing sexual violence.

BRAC ELA PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The average age of the 173 BRAC ELA participants who participated in the FGDs was 15.5 years (ranging between 14 to 19 years). The majority (115) had been in BRAC ELA for over two years (66.5%), 52 had been in the program for one to two years (30.1%), and 6 for less than a year (3.5%). Only one participant reported to be the head of her household.

37 UN HABITAT. (2014). Retrieved December 26, 2108 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS?locations=LR&view=chart>

38 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey."

39 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey."

40 <https://www.odi.org/publications/11029-how-do-donors-support-decent-work-agenda-review-five-donors>

41 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

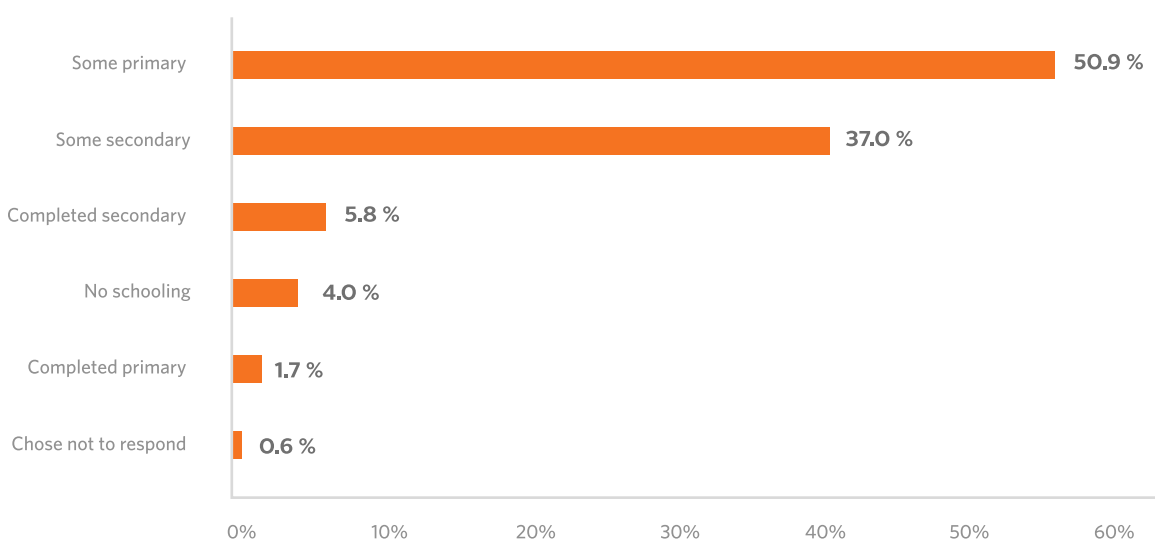
Marriage and childbearing

While most participants reported they are unmarried and without children, a notable minority of 5.1% of participants reported they are mothers. Only six participants reported to be married. Seven participants reported that they had one child, and two had two children.

Education

Liberian BRAC ELA participants are similar to the broad population of AGYW in Liberia, with about half having completed primary education.⁴² Most participants in the FGD sample (89%) reported to be in school, but more than half have less than a primary education. This contrasts to the overall age of participants, who as noted are on average 15.5 years old, meaning the majority are below grade-level for their age group. Most participants had some primary (50.9%) or some secondary (37%) education, with 4% reporting no schooling and 5.8% having completed secondary.

Figure 3: BRAC ELA Participants Highest Level of Education

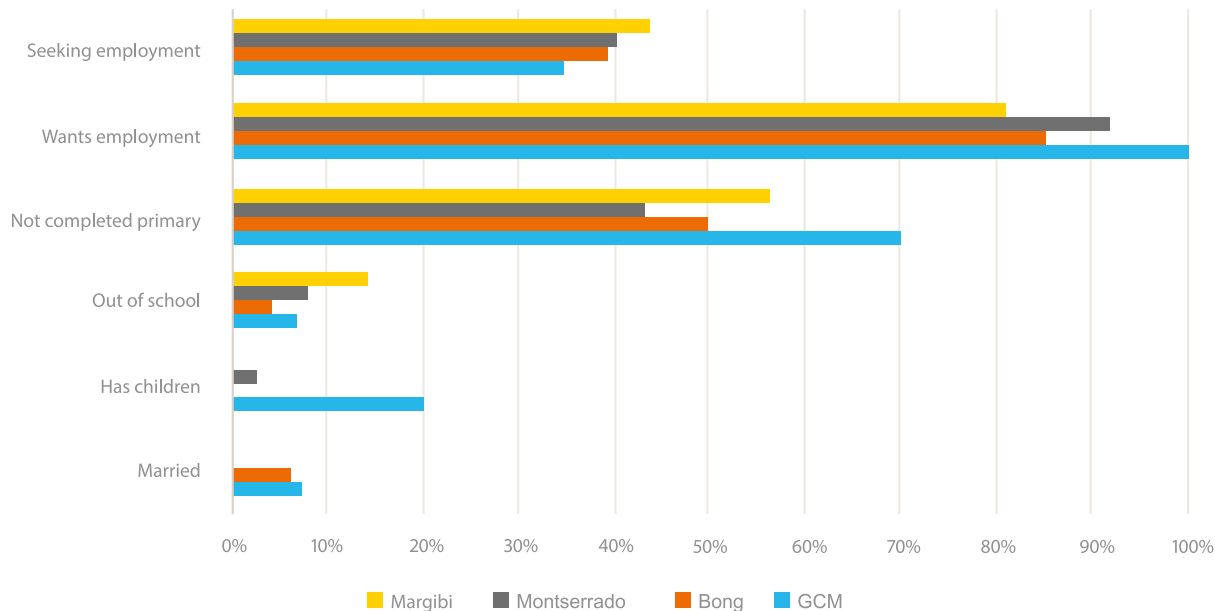
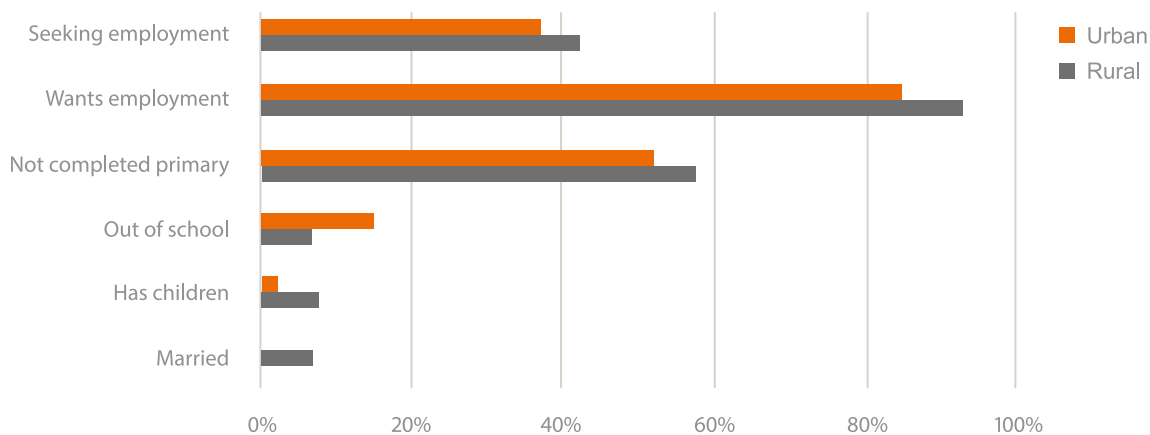


Urban-rural and county-level comparisons

Among selected counties, Grand Cape Mount (GCM) stands out for highest rates of marriage (7.5%) and childbearing (20%) and lowest levels of education, with the highest out-of-school rate at 17.5% and 70% of participants reporting to not have completed primary. Respondents from GCM were also the least likely to report seeking employment (35%), even though 100% reported wanting employment. Participants from Bong County were the least likely to be out of school, though half of all respondents who were married were from Bong.

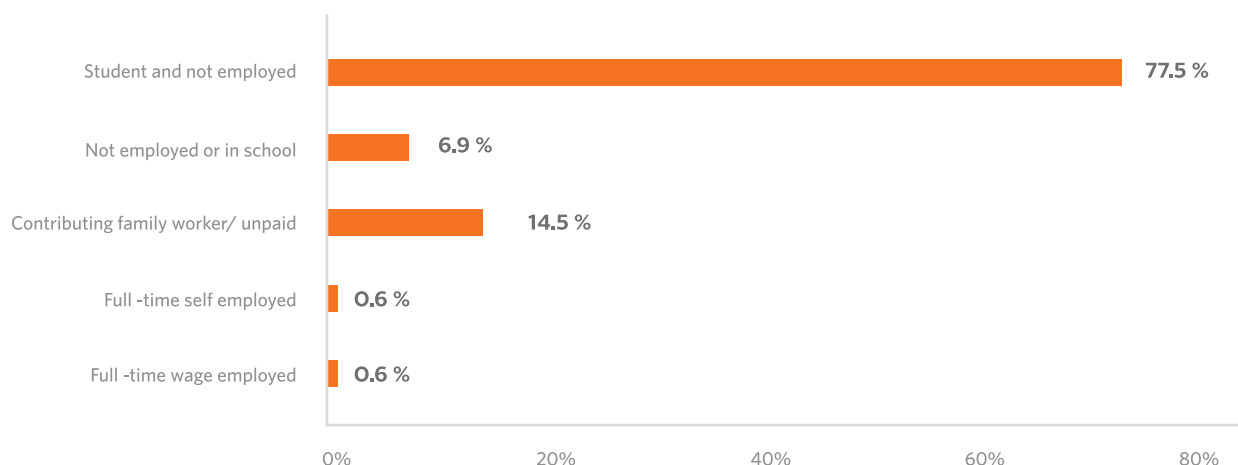
All married participants were from rural areas. Rural FGDs reported slightly higher levels of interest in employment. Rural participants were also more likely to be in school than their urban counterparts.

42 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.CMPT.FE.ZS?locations=LR>

Figure 4: BRAC's ELA Participant Characteristics by Counties**Figure 5: BRAC's ELA Participant Characteristics by Rural and Urban Settings**

Employment

Participants reported low levels of employment. More than three-quarters of participants reported that they are students and not employed. Although only 14.5% reported that they were unpaid, contributing family workers, FGD data found that nearly all participants described supporting their mothers in selling goods in the market or from their homes. Another 6.9% reported that they were not employed or in school. Only two participants were engaged in full-time work, and none reported part-time work. Despite low employment levels, 154 participants (89%) stated that they wanted to be employed, and 69 (39.9%) reported actively seeking employment (in this case looking for some of paid employment).

Figure 6: BRAC ELA Participants Employment Status

Despite greater interest in employment, rural participants were more likely to be unemployed. Margibi reported the highest number of participants who were both out of school and unemployed, at 15%. Participants from Bong County were the most likely to report working as unpaid family workers at 25% compared to almost none in Montserrado county. No participants reported working part-time.

Key informant interviews showed that most girls and women working in agriculture are involved in production, but generally not at other levels of the value chain. Key informants with experience employing AGYW described that they are working unskilled jobs or as sales agents, largely in microenterprises, with some in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In FGDs, BRAC ELA participants reported engaging in a relatively narrow range of industries, jobs, and types of self-employment.

Most FGD participants indicated that they were not engaged in paid employment, but nearly all of them were involved with helping their mothers sell a wide variety of goods in the market or from home, including food products, shoes, coal, cosmetics, and used clothes. Experiences with employment were only reported in Montserrado county and rural Margibi county, where girls engaged in activities such as working for an NGO on an HIV awareness campaign, working at a salon, informally washing clothes in the community, working at a computer shop, and making beads for a company.

BRAC ELA girls in Bong, Grand Cape Mount, and Montserrado counties also mentioned supporting the family farm or garden. Other than going to school or supporting family income-generation, girls universally reported spending their time doing chores at home, including washing and cooking.

Unemployment

Unemployed BRAC ELA participants described several reasons for not working. In about one-third of the FGDs, participants agreed that they should be focusing on school, not work. Some mentioned that they did not have enough education to work, were too young to be taken seriously by employers, or that their parents would not allow them to work. In one group in Grand Cape Mount, members saw a local rubber and palm plantation as the only work opportunity available, and one participant explained that she could not work there because “the work...is very hard for us, the women. Only men can go there.”

Self-employment and access to credit

Several participants across FGDs reported being involved with selling goods in the market for their own profit, not just supporting their parents. This was least common in Grand Cape Mount, where no participants

indicated being self-employed in either of the rural FGDs. Self-employment was also somewhat uncommon in Montserrado county. Participants were most likely to be self-employed in Bong county, where three to seven people in every FGD were involved in self-employment.

Self-employment primarily consists of petty trade activities. Almost none of the participants reported borrowing money to support their businesses beyond very small amounts from family at no interest. Participants identified BRAC or 'susu' savings groups as sources of credit in their communities, and they were able to describe terms of borrowing, including interest rates and payback periods. Banks were rarely mentioned as an option for borrowing. Most of the participants indicated that these sources of credit were not available to them: they were considered too young to participate in savings groups and most saw themselves as ineligible to borrow from BRAC.

Perceived work opportunities

When asked about how people earn money in their communities, participants expressed limited recognition of opportunities, most commonly describing security, construction, domestic work, teaching, and medical careers such as nursing or being a doctor. Farming was frequently mentioned in rural areas, and work with the government or NGOs came up in Montserrado and Margibi counties. In rural Grand Cape Mount, the only employer mentioned was Sime Darby, a rubber and palm plantation. Elsewhere in Grand Cape Mount, a mining company called Tawana was described as offering low-skill jobs like security, washing, and cooking. In Montserrado, security jobs were particularly emphasized.

Most participants indicated that they do not see many opportunities for formal employment in their communities. When such opportunities were discussed, participants described them as requiring high school diplomas. In contrast, participants saw opportunities for informal self-employment in areas where BRAC ELA is already offering training, such as hair-dressing, tailoring, and baking. These were seen as low-hanging fruit that girls could engage in right away. They did not express awareness about opportunities to get involved in agricultural value chains beyond the production level, and only a handful expressed interest in agriculture.

Finding work

Focus group participants stressed the difficulty of finding work in their communities. A few participants even mentioned that it is sometimes necessary to suffer exploitation to get a job: sexually, by paying bribes, or by working for a period of time for free before being offered a job. Many stressed the importance of education, indicating that it is necessary to graduate from high school to be taken seriously by an employer.

The primary means of finding employment was identified as having personal connections at a business offering work. In fact, personal connections were seen as a necessity in finding work. Other sources of information about job opportunities included radio and newspaper announcements, asking business owners directly, or finding out through public meetings held by community chiefs or other leaders. While they disagreed on whether information on job opportunities was sufficiently available, participants generally agreed that they had enough information to start their own businesses. This contrasts with the point that most had not started their own businesses in spite of wanting to, and limited recognition of potential opportunities beyond those already emphasized by BRAC ELA programming.

Other work opportunities

However, key informant interviews, in contrast, indicated that AGYW and youth could find a wider range of opportunities. Key informant interviews indicate women are increasingly training for and working in non-traditional roles, and female job seekers in these professions are reported to be the first to be hired, in part because they are considered to be detail-oriented, willing to learn, and patient, to name a few reasons given.

According to interviews, AGYW are more and more able to engage in a wide range of livelihoods and jobs, from plumbing, electrician work, tailoring, to masonry, or heavy machine mechanic work, and baking among others.

NATIONAL LEVEL TRENDS IN AGYW SUPPLY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As emphasized by participants in the FGDs, education and training are widely seen as a means by which young people can strengthen their ability to find employment. Key informants emphasized this, along with the fact that education and training can also shape self-employment opportunities. In regard to education and training, Liberia faces the challenge that, overall, young people have lower educational performance compared to two decades ago.

This is the result of the longer-term effects of Liberia's civil war, the resulting flight of teachers, degradation of infrastructure, and since, the impact of Ebola. As a result, Liberia is significantly behind educational performance compared to other African countries. There are significant discrepancies in literacy and educational attainment by gender and location, although they are smaller for youth aged 15-24 than for the country as a whole, and young women have more schooling than women overall. Still, a gender gap remains: men aged 15-49 have completed a median of 6.5 years of schooling, compared to only 3.4 years among women.⁴³ This disparity also exists for young Liberians aged 15-24, with young men reporting a median of 6.1 years and while young women reporting 4.7 years. This means while education completion is unequal between men and women, young men have less schooling than the overall adult male population, while young women have more schooling than the overall adult female population. As one might expect these discrepancies are reflected in educational and work performance.

Table 1: Educational attainment of women aged 15-49 by County in %, and Median Years Completed⁴⁴

Characteristic	No education	Some primary	Completed primary	Some secondary	Completed secondary	More than secondary	Median years completed
Bong	55.3	30	1.4	11.9	1	0.3	0
Grand Cape Mount	56.2	30.9	1.9	10.1	0.8	0	0
Margibi	40.7	30.6	3.6	17.8	4.3	3.1	1.4
Montserrado	18.7	20.6	3	36.4	11.6	9.6	6.5
Liberia	33.2	27.7	3.4	25.4	6	4.3	3.4
Age 15-24	13.3	39.9	4.2	37	3	2.7	4.7
Urban	22.5	24.5	3.7	33.4	9	6.8	5.4
Rural	49.8	32.7	3	12.8	1.3	0.4	0

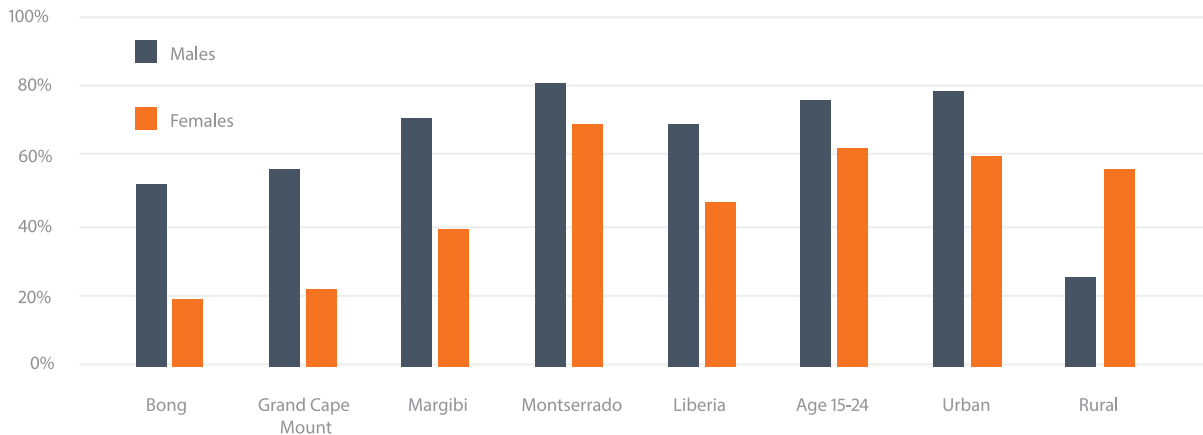
Source: LISGIS et al., 2014

43 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014).

44 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2013).

Literacy rates are low in Liberia. Yet, interestingly, literacy is higher on average for women aged 15-24 (64.2%) compared to women in other age groups, though there is still a major gap compared to men in that age group (79%). This may be as a result of emphasis by the government and international projects on targeting young people with classes and trainings around literacy and numeracy. The highest literacy rates are found in Montserrado county 71.3% for women, and lowest in Bong county, where only 20% of women are literate, compared to 53.4% of men.

Figure 7: Literacy rates among men and women aged 15-49 (%), 2013⁴⁵



Source: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International.

Despite these literacy challenges, education enrollment rates are improving, though that also remains divided along gender lines: gross enrollment for primary school is 94.1% and 34.7% for secondary school, as of 2015,⁴⁶ while 31.3% of girls of lower secondary school age were out of school in 2015, compared to 24.1% of boys.

During FGDs, BRAC ELA participants were asked if they felt that their education provided the skills they needed to find work. Overall, respondents recognized that they are gaining basic skills in school that could support future jobs. For example, proficiency in math could help participants become accountants and science class could help them later pursue nursing. They identified the connection between literacy and numeracy and succeeding at work, whether formal or informal.

However, they also noted that they were not getting hard job skills training at school and that they would need to get more education for that, whether academic or through vocational training. Some participants also complained about the quality of the schools they attended, noting that they did not have computers or libraries and were not being taught how to apply for jobs.

Regarding formal employment, participants emphasized the importance of graduating high school in increasing their chances of getting a job in the future. A participant in Grand Cape Mount indicated that jobs are available, but only to high school graduates.

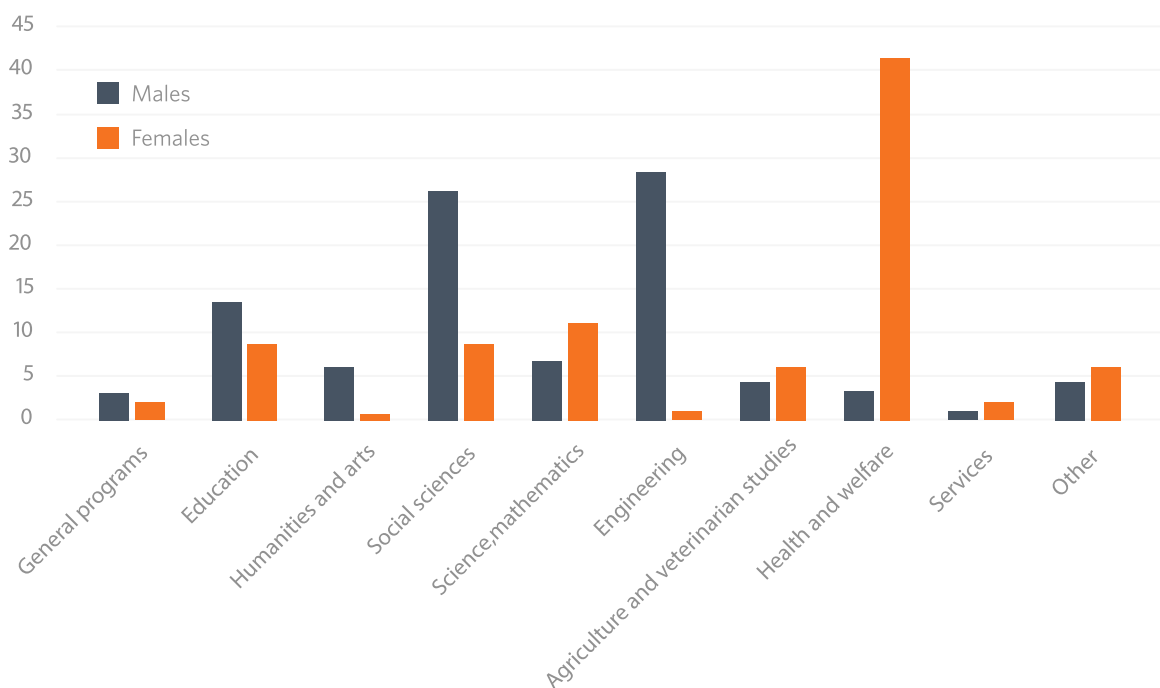
45 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2013)

46 World Bank. (2018b). Liberia DataBank. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/liberia?view=chart>

When asked about the cost of education, participants described various fees at different grade levels, ranging from 500 to 40,000 Liberian dollars, with higher costs at higher levels. Participants had mixed opinions on whether these costs were high or low. Some girls reported studying at very low-grade levels, with participants a minimum of 14 years old in 3rd to 6th grade, suggesting a gap in their education or repeated grade levels.

While education and skill are important factors in AGYW lives and can be a source of empowerment, it is important to recognize that education is not enough to ensure employment. Higher unemployment rates among educated youth show that demand isn't keeping up with the supply of educated workers.⁴⁷ Often this is an indicator of a mismatch in the supply of education and skills. Thus, the authors note a shortage of young people looking for professional work,⁴⁸ which is an area of skill that has potential for growth. Effectively, this means the demand for skilled employees exceeds the supply.

Figure 8: Preferred field of study of young students by gender (%)



Research also indicates that about 47.8% of young workers are undereducated for their job; at least 8 out of 10 young professionals do not have the recommended qualifications.⁴⁹ Figure 6 illustrates this mismatch across specific occupational categories.

47 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3. http://www.lisgis.net/pg_img/2012%20SWTS%20Final%20Report%20Oct%2023,%202013.pdf

48 The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), Revision 2008, describes professionals as persons who - increase the existing stock of knowledge, apply scientific or artistic concepts and theories, teach about the foregoing in a systematic manner, or engage in any combination of these activities. ... Tasks performed by professionals usually include: conducting analysis and research, and developing concepts, theories and operational methods, and advising on or applying existing knowledge related to physical sciences including mathematics, engineering and technology, and to life sciences including the medical and health services, as well as to social sciences and humanities ...For more information, see website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/>.

49 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3.

As noted above, by Del Mar, Elder, and Vansteenkiste,⁵⁰ under-education is not simply a matter of years of schooling, but also about quality of education. With a large share of teachers uncertified, poor physical infrastructure, the distraction of needing to earn income while in school as a survival strategy and corruption around grades, many Liberian youth struggle if credentials conferred do not equate to actual knowledge, as several key informants noted. As multiple Liberians noted in conversation, the older generation is better educated than the one behind it, though data collected also notes this more true for men than women. While this is not limited just to Liberia, it is part of the effects the civil wars and the Ebola crisis have had in terms of serious repercussions for older adolescents, a factor to recall when targeting adolescents for interventions.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector in Liberia faces challenges of gender integration, employer engagement, student employment to transition support, and remains fractured at a policy and implementation level. However, the sector also offers some bright spots with opportunities for AGYW who are able to connect with institutions that are unique in terms of their apparent gender engagement and moreover, can link young women to opportunities where their presence is gaining recognition and acceptance.

Many of Liberia's TVET system challenges can be attributed to the fact it is widely fragmented under different line ministries, lacks policy coordination, and garners mixed levels of interest from different governments, departments, and ministries. Foremost, Liberia lacks a comprehensive national policy and legal framework and coordinating agency to guide, direct, and oversee TVET for the country. Also, the absence of a credible institutional accreditation system and standardized TVET curricula has prevented the development and implementation of a nationally certified qualifications system and makes it difficult to compare the qualifications obtained in the same field from different TVET institutions.⁵¹ This is particularly pointed as this challenge was noted in studies of Liberia's TVET system since 2010.⁵² In addition, the sector lacks a unified certification system.

In general, only 10% of youth aged 15-35 participate in vocational training, and most technical and vocational education and training (TVET) providers (79%) are in Montserrado county. These youth often have higher levels of education, compared to those who do not engage, suggesting that TVET is seen as a complement rather than substitute for academic study, even though the most common areas of TVET training are for manual or low-skill vocations. This appears to be in part because many TVETs do require certain levels of education or proof of graduation from primary or secondary education to participate.

The Government of Liberia (GoL) has historically considered TVET an important opportunity area for contributing to employment and inclusive growth,⁵³ Under the former administration, the Liberia National Capacity Development Strategy included a focus on TVETs, to improve coordination among different institutions, increase their participation and leadership, engage private sector actors, and empower women and girls. Similarly, the Economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan during the post Ebola period in 2015 also focused on improving the economic context and regional economic opportunities by aligning to local policies,

50 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3. http://www.lisgis.net/pg_img/2012%20SWTS%20Final%20Report%20Oct%2023,%202013.pdf

51 Republic of Liberia, National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). (2015). National TVET Policy (2015-2020)

52 Adam Smith International (2018). "In-Depth Study on TVET/Youth Economic Empowerment and Skills Development in Liberia"

53 World Bank. (2016a). Republic of Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector.

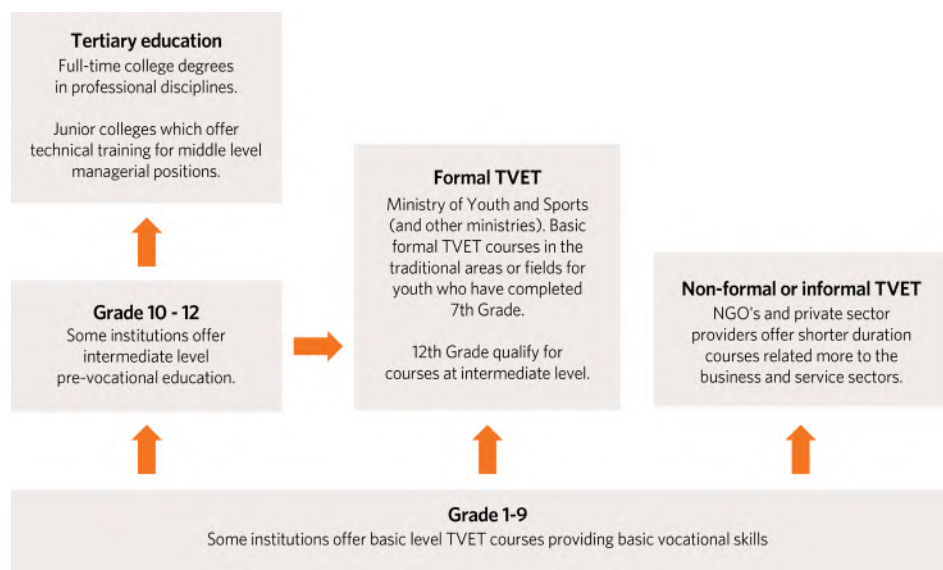
targeting several priority value chains, and improving access to quality education for children, youth and the disabled.⁵⁴

In addition, without overall coordination, some line ministries have also tackled efforts to improve TVET programming under their own sphere. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoY) has undertaken several programs intended to address youth unemployment and poverty, and among them is the National Youth Employment and Empowerment Program (NYEEP), designed to promote initiatives that increase employment opportunities for young Liberians, specifically focusing on poor and vulnerable youth in Liberia.⁵⁵ Under the NYEEP plan, there are three interventions: Youth Opportunity Project (YOP) funded by the World Bank; Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Project (YEOP) funded by the African Development Bank; and Liberia Employment and Entrepreneurship Program (LEEP) funded by the French Development Agency through Mercy Corps and the MoY.

In 2018, the government of Liberia signed a 22.7-million-euro agreement with the European Union, to standardize and reform the TVET sector. This five-year project titled, Youth Rising, aims to strengthen six TVET institutions in 5 counties of Liberia: Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC), Booker Washington Institute (BWI), Greenville and Zwedru Multilateral Schools and Cape Palmas High School (CPHS).⁵⁶

The result is that Liberia's TVETs are largely divided between 18 core formal institutions, and over 132 private informal institutions. The following figure helps illustrate the relationship of these different institutions to each other, as well as to more conventional educational institutions that offer courses in technical or vocational degrees.

Figure 9: Formal and Informal TVET Institutions in Liberia



Source: In-Depth Study on TVET/Youth Economic Empowerment and Skills Development in Liberia (2018)

54 Adam Smith International (2018). "In-Depth Study on TVET/Youth Economic Empowerment and Skills Development in Liberia"

55 Republic of Liberia, National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). (2015). National TVET Policy (2015-2020)

56 USAID. (2019). Youth Situational Analysis https://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/files/resources/Liberia%20Youth%20Assessment%20Situational%20Analysis%20Report_0.pdf

The public or formal institutions are largely funded by government financing, though also require certain fees. Based on the key informant interviews with TVET institutions in Montserrado, Bong, Margibi, and Grand Cape Mount counties, tuition fees range extremely widely, from the equivalent of \$4USD (Bong County Technical College) up to \$100 USD (Booker Washington Institute in Margibi). The tuition fees don't include cost of materials or other expenses, such as transportation costs. The informal TVETs comprise private institutions funded and managed by local TVET companies, NGOs, and church or faith-based organizations.⁵⁷ Private TVETs are outside the school system and provide on-the-job training or apprenticeships in a trade or specialized skill. The courses offered by the private TVET institutions normally focus on basic skills, are often shorter in duration compared to public TVETs, and are often more focused on business and service sector skills compared to public institutions.⁵⁸

Table 2: Formal TVET Institutions in Liberia by county, courses, requirement and skills most placed/job opportunities

Institutions	County	Courses and Requirement	Skills most placed/ job opportunities
Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC)	Montserrado County	REQUIREMENT: Secondary school dropout minimum and above. TRAINING DURATION: 18-month training COURSES: Thirteen trade areas: Heavy Duty, Auto Mechanic, Welding & Fabrication, Auto Electricity, Electricity, Electronics, Refrigeration & Air Condition, Masonry, Plumbing, Architectural Drafting, Carpentry and Graphic Arts.	Heavy Duty Mechanics, Auto Mechanics, Electricity, Masonry, Plumbing
Klay Agriculture Vocational Training Center (KAVTC)	Bomi County, Grande Cape Mount and Gbarpolu	REQUIREMENT: illiterate, primary and secondary school dropout, high school graduates as well as university students TRAINING DURATION: Six months training. COURSES: General Agriculture: vegetable production, food crop production, and animal husbandry-including piggery, poultry and fishery. It also provides training in biogas and greenhouse technology in collaboration with the Chinese Aided Project	General Agriculture (vegetable production, food crop production, and animal husbandry-including piggery, poultry and fishery)
Business Domestic Occupational Training Center	Montserrado County	REQUIREMENT: Offers specialized skills training to disadvantaged youth especially young girls and women. TRAINING DURATION: N/A COURSES: hospitality management (front office, food & beverages, housekeeping, waiter/waitress service, cookery) tailoring, event decoration, beauty culture, baking, braiding & weaving *BDOTC trains 350 youth per training cycle	Hospitality Management (Front Office, Food & Beverages, Housekeeping, Waiter/Waitress Service, Cookery)
Tumutu Agricultural Vocational Training Center (TAVTC)	Bong, Margibi, Nimba and Lofa	REQUIREMENT: high school graduate minimum and university students as well. TRAINING DURATION: six-months training COURSES: Intensive skills training in General Agriculture: vegetable, rice, root & tuber, animal husbandry (poultry and piggery) and rubber and oil production.	N/A

57 Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Education. (2016). Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021)

58 Republic of Liberia, National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). (2015). National TVET Policy (2015-2020)

Institutions	County	Courses and Requirement	Skills most placed/ job opportunities
Jilijuah Vocational Training Center (JVTC)	Bomi County	REQUIREMENT/OFFERING: for No in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), especially young girls and women TRAINING DURATION: six-months training; tuition free training program. COURSES: short term training in tailoring	N/A
Panama Agriculture Training Program	South east Liberia	REQUIREMENT: N/A TRAINING DURATION: N/A COURSES: General Agriculture (animal husbandry, vegetable production, rice production & tree crop production)	N/A

Source: based on data collected by field team from KIs and documents provided by contacts

Despite high unemployment figures, the TVET system has remained largely supply-driven. In many instances the curriculum is updated very infrequently, and the quality of trainers is a core challenge, either having themselves never acquired higher degrees of skill, or having not been retrained as the industry has evolved. In one interview it was noted that oftentimes there are challenges of retaining skilled TVET teachers, who might otherwise use their technical skills to make more money in a private sector job.

TVET systems also face major financial constraints. While many do leverage fees from students, both at the public and private institutions, these do not necessarily enable the schools to provide higher salaries or purchase or maintain equipment that meets industry standards.

In only a few instances do TVETs work to offer a dual or flex fee structure so that low income youth can participate. An example one such public TVET is the Business Domestic Occupational Training Center (BDOTC), which offers specialized skills training to disadvantaged youth, especially young girls and women. This supports them to obtain skills in hospitality such as front office operation, food and beverages, housekeeping, waiter/waitress service, cooking, and event decoration; tailoring; beauty culture; baking; braiding; and weaving. Another example is Julijuah Vocational Training Center, offering a six-month tuition-free training program in tailoring, with a special attention to those who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

A final example is the Liberia Opportunity for Industrialization Centers (LOIC), whose three branches focus on technical vocational skills, building soft skills, and job creation through small enterprise development. Up until two years ago the program had received support from the GoL, however, since then the funding has been reduced only to administration costs. According to LOIC, many of their teachers are now effectively volunteers. Participants who can afford it pay a small fee, while those who cannot can still participate. The organization also does not restrict students based on former education level, so even those with no education can enroll in a literacy and numeracy course before taking other classes.

ECONOMIC LINKAGES WITH TVET

Due to the above-mentioned challenges, engagement with the private sector remains mixed, with some success occurring on a case-by-case basis. Most employers interviewed indicated they were having difficulty hiring qualified and well-trained youth, thus, they mostly conduct in-house training to build up the capacity of young employees. Employers also indicated hiring short-term foreign or local consultants to fill the skills gap or even to support the internal training of Liberian staff.

GOVERNMENT TVET EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT PROGRAMING

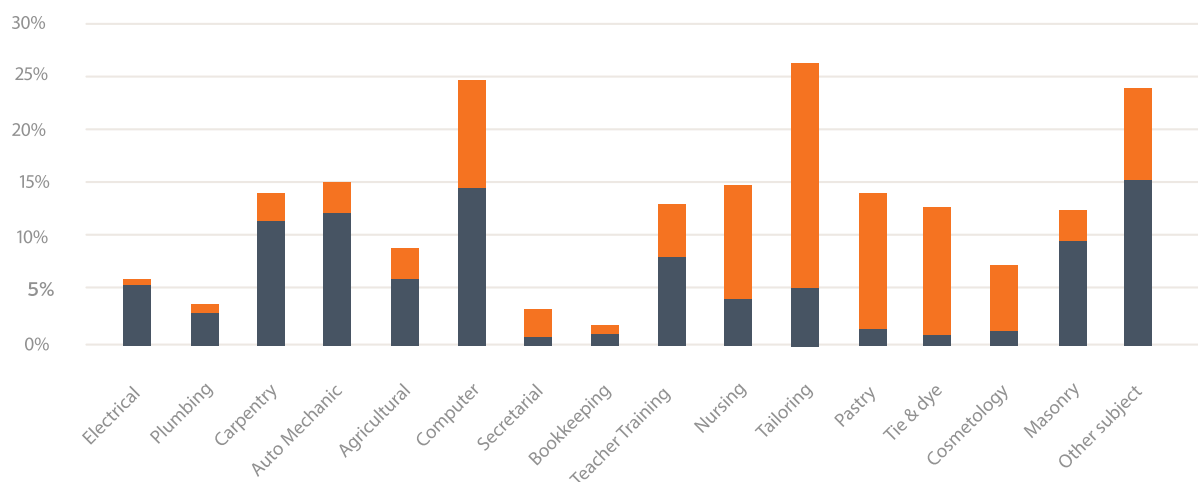
The MoY runs the Youth-on-the-Job training in Montserrado, which provides internships for youth who graduated from high schools or colleges, in various jobs such as auto mechanics, carpentry, tailoring, beauty care, air conditioning and refrigeration, welding, and fabrication. The program is also responsible for recruiting and placing semi-literate and illiterate youth in on-the-job training at various technical trade workshops in the county to enable them to compete with literate youth at technical vocational institutes and empower them to be self-reliant. According to the MoY strategic plan, 85% of its beneficiaries are either employed or self-employed with an average income of 125-175 USD monthly (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019 & Strategic and Operational Plan (2018-2023)).

TVETs on occasion do hold some appeal for employers, but they perceive them as problematic. As many noted, unlike at academic institutions, in at least some instances TVETs had used applied learning, and in several cases, linked a TVET course with an internship or apprenticeship at an employer. While these internships ran generally between 3-6 months, only some ultimately converted to employment of youth. Interviews with employers and NGOs working to improve the TVET system said this is often because the quality of the intern is still low, compared to what is needed, and that basically every medium or large employer who would hire larger volumes of youth will still do internal trainings regardless of their prior education, as overall quality is perceived as low. Therefore, these practices are a step in the right direction, but more is needed.

WOMEN IN TVET

Women are underrepresented in TVET institutions, and particularly in technical areas such as machinery and electronics because of societal perceptions of traditional gender roles. According to key informant interviews with the TVET institutions, in one example TVET center, the 2018/2019 enrollment rate shows 89% males (3,431 men) and only 11% females (434 women), which shows an enormous gap. Data from one school indicates ICT and business skills training are the only two at that institution to have more equal representation between male and female youth, though other KIs indicate, most women tend to go into heavy duty mechanic courses, plumbing courses, and other specific technical courses. This is apparently due to a perception that there's high job employment opportunities and demand in them, and that women who do work in these fields feel respected in more technical work and seen as "strong" women. While these two views cannot be reconciled without closer study, part of the distinction may be based on changing norms in the area of technical work, as well as on the location and types of students TVETs are taking on. For example, data indicates that youth in these technical programs tend to have higher levels of education, suggesting that TVET is seen as a complement rather than substitute for academic study, even though the most common areas of TVET training are for manual or low-skill vocations.

While a wide survey of data on gender and course selection has not been updated since 2010, the data does illustrate differences in gender prioritization around TVET courses:

Figure 10: Vocational training subject by gender

Source: ILO, Report on Liberia Labor Force Survey, 2010⁵⁹

AGYW VIEWS ON SKILLS TRAINING

During the FGDs, participants appreciated the role of trade skills in finding work and expressed interest in trades. When asked what kinds of skills they were interested in developing, most referenced the types of training opportunities already provided by BRAC ELA, including hair-dressing, tailoring, baking, tie-dye, soap-making, and others. This would indicate that without exposure to the broader market, or what skills could be used for, they will self-select into industries or jobs that they are familiar with but that may have limited opportunities. A few also mentioned non-traditional employment, such as plumbing and carpentry. A very strong interest in computer literacy also emerged during the FGDs. This was interesting as many communities face challenges around rural electrification, and access to computers. Other skills mentioned included catering, interior design, agriculture, and home-based crafts.

Most groups agreed that the training provided by BRAC ELA directly or through LOIC was the only training available in their communities. In Margibi, however, several other training institutions were mentioned, including Children Empowered for Sustainability Program (CESPRO) Vocational Training, with offerings such as journalism, hairdressing, and tailoring; Booker Washington Institute (BWI), offering carpentry, plumbing, and teaching; and Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute (KRTTI), offering teacher training. All of these were regarded as high-quality institutions. In Bong county, a soap-making training through the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was also mentioned. In Montserrado, Big Cat was described as offering hairdressing, tailoring, and catering courses. Graduates were reported to receive free materials to start their own businesses. Block Factory was another training institution mentioned, where participants could take free 3-month computer training programs.

59 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey." www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/presentation/wcms_156366.pdf

PROGRAM-BASED TRAINING

Trainings offered outside of traditional education or technical and vocational programs is offered by a wide range of actors and institutions. Most available jobs programs focus on the supply side of the labor market, with 79% of over 600 cases in the World Bank's Youth Employment Inventory database.⁶⁰ Skills training is more common for males than females,⁶¹ and training programs designed for girls are mostly operated by NGOs and focus on traditionally "female activities", which are already common in the market.⁶²

The strength of such shorter, less-formalized programs is they often offer less rigid opportunities for youth to be exposed to learning or building a skill that could support a livelihood activity. While supporting this view, interviews shed light on challenges of this model. As many are shorter in nature, often because of program funds limitations, timing limitations, or other constraints, courses do not provide the in-depth training requested by AGYW. Also, they do not provide an opportunity for follow-up in terms of further guidance to AGYW or youth applying the skills they've learned in a real-world setting. Finally, many are not accredited by a state body, which limits their recognition among other educational institutions, employers, or other projects.

There are also various trainings offered by different organizations and implementers. Most of the trainings are focused on life skills and business skills. For example, Liberia Business Start-up offers business skills training, business model and technical training, then provides flexible and relatively low interest rate loans to individuals to start up their business.

4-H clubs also provide training and many schools are interested in the program. Additionally, they provide value in the form of a broader social impact from being part of a network. According to the National Executive Director of 4-H Liberia, "When students figure out they're in 4-H club and learn it's a broader network, they know they have friends all over Liberia, but also from other countries as well, an international society – it makes participants happy". Teachers involved in the program may be able to engage in some after school activities with students. Unfortunately, trained teachers move around – so new teachers must be trained constantly.

BRAC has provided livelihoods training for girls (e.g. in soapmaking, hairdressing, and baking); when adolescents involved in the BRAC ELA program were surveyed about the trainings they'd like to receive, they proposed tailoring, slipper design, tie & dye, and catering in addition to those already being offered. However, several KIIs with employers noted some trainings such as those noted by participants reinforce targeting livelihoods that they believe do not actually produce sustainable returns for participants. For example, as one government representative noted, courses such as these have been taught since the 1990s and remained largely the same, and so he believes their content and relevance may be outdated.

PARENTAL VIEWS ON SKILLS TRAINING

Parents from Margibi, Grand Cape Mount, and Bong Counties were interviewed to better understand their views on BRAC ELA and the livelihood training it offered. Parents were supportive of the program and saw it as a benefit to their children. They noted the social benefits of the life skills training – especially around school retention and teen pregnancy – and felt that the livelihood activities offered by BRAC ELA have benefited them financially or would do so in the future. One parent noted, "You will not make plenty money from it, but it will sustain you and your family."

60 Adoho, F., Chakravarty, S., Korkoyah, D., Lundberg, M., Tasneem, A. (2014). The Impact of an Adolescent Girls Employment Program: The EPAG Project in Liberia. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper #6832.

61 World Bank. (2016). Republic of Liberia Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector.

62 Adoho, F., Chakravarty, S., Korkoyah, D., Lundberg, M., Tasneem, A. (2014). The Impact of an Adolescent Girls Employment Program: The EPAG Project in Liberia. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper #6832.

Parents saw the areas of training to be appropriate, including business skills training as well as training in baking, soap-making, hair-dressing, etc. One parent considered hair-dressing and petty trade to be the only employment opportunities in her community, and that BRAC ELA helped her daughter take advantage of them. Another mentioned that soap-making would be a profitable enterprise.

Parents interviewed were supportive of their daughters as entrepreneurs and considered it to be a benefit to their families. They mentioned hair-dressing, tailoring, and computer training as additional training offerings they would like to see. At least one parent mentioned that her daughter “should be a farmer,” but that she would prefer other types of activities.

4

Economic and Sector Context and Analysis

Building on a better understanding of who Liberia’s AGYW are, and of the system that provides them with skills for employment or self-employment, this section of the report analyzes the potential for Liberia’s economy to absorb and sustain new workers, by sectors and occupations. The analysis is informed by the use of secondary data in the form of trade data and reported economic growth, as well as primary data from key informant interviews and focus groups discussions. The main focus is on understanding economic opportunities that have the potential to be accessible to AGYW and that also show indications of growth, and thus the potential for employment or self-employment growth.

LIBERIA’S ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Liberia has immense economic potential due to its significant natural resources, but decades of economic extraction, conflict in the form of two civil wars, and most recently the outbreak of Ebola, have frequently set back its economic growth, a situation which has often translated into few opportunities for Liberian youth. These challenges have contributed to Liberia’s continued classification as a low-income country with a mostly agrarian economy.⁶³ While the majority of citizens are engaged in agriculture, the economic contribution of the sector to GDP has fallen to second place (34%), after services (52.2%), with industry in third place (13.8%).⁶⁴ Agricultural productivity remains low in a continuing trend that was set in Liberia’s early years, as successive governments focused on building foreign investment in extractives with little investment in the interior agricultural infrastructure and farming skill. This dependence on extractive commodities remains a core

63 CIA World Factbook. (2018). “Liberia.” Retrieved December 26, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

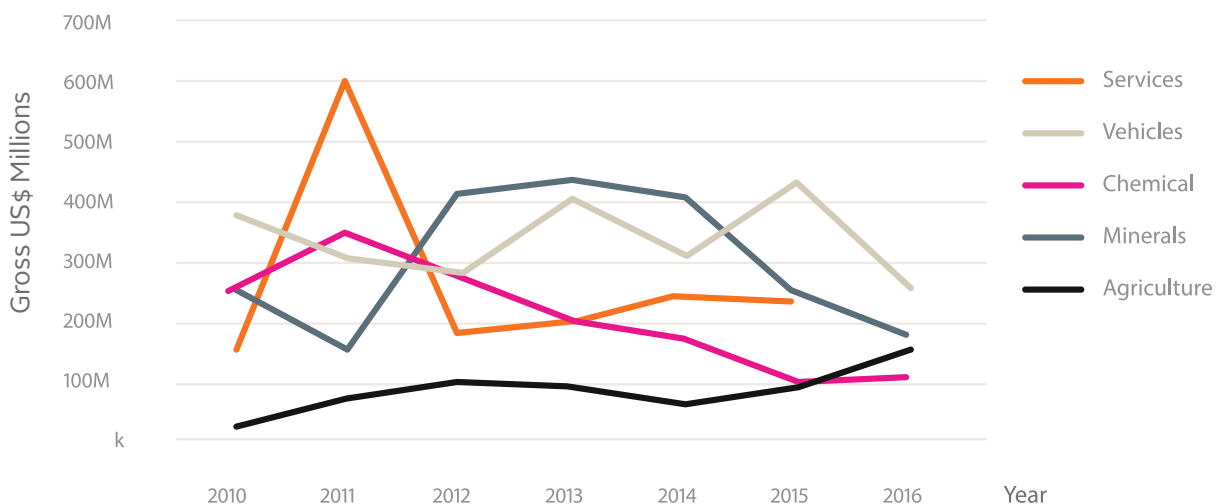
64 CIA World Factbook. (2018). “Liberia.” Retrieved December 26, 2018

driver of the economy with exports of gold, petroleum, iron ore, rubber, and cocoa making up around 82.5% of the country's total 2017 exports to the rest of the world. This dynamic has left many Liberians without the opportunity to build or demonstrate higher levels of skill required by other economic sectors.

New trade deals such as the institutionalization of duty and quota free trade with Europe, under the "Everything But Arms" Agreement, the Chinese Preferential Trade Agreement with least developed countries (LDCs), and the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) have all been noted by some KIIs as potential outlets for products other than raw materials. However, both capacity and quality would have to grow to be accepted into export markets, and small enterprises face challenges in meeting this opportunity. According to the Liberian Chamber of Commerce, Liberia has taken only minimal advantage of the duty-free preferences under AGOA due to a lack of trade competitiveness, a very small manufacturing sector, and limited access to finance.

Regardless of their links to trade, many of Liberia's businesses were harmed directly by Ebola, through the loss of staff and family, or indirectly, through reduced Liberian consumption and travel restrictions. Providing a high-level view of different segments of Liberia's economy, figure 9 below illustrates how Liberia's exports changed during the last decade. For the years Liberia was impacted by the Ebola crisis, from 2013 to 2015, it appears in fact that there is relatively little impact on exports. Agriculture decreased a little, but began to increase by 2015. Chemicals continued to fall throughout the period prior to and after the Ebola crisis. Vehicles, which is largely comprised of Liberia's flag of convenience merchant marine, fell but also recovered by 2015. Minerals, which includes many of Liberia's extractive mining concessionaires, appeared to take the largest hit. While part of this is due to the of shutdown operations during the crisis, it is estimated that a large effect was because it also coincided with a global drop in the price of iron ore, thus undermining the value of Liberia's iron ore exports. Most interestingly services continued to grow into 2014, and only dipped slightly in 2015.⁶⁵

Figure 11: Top Five Liberian Export Groups for 2010-2016⁶⁶



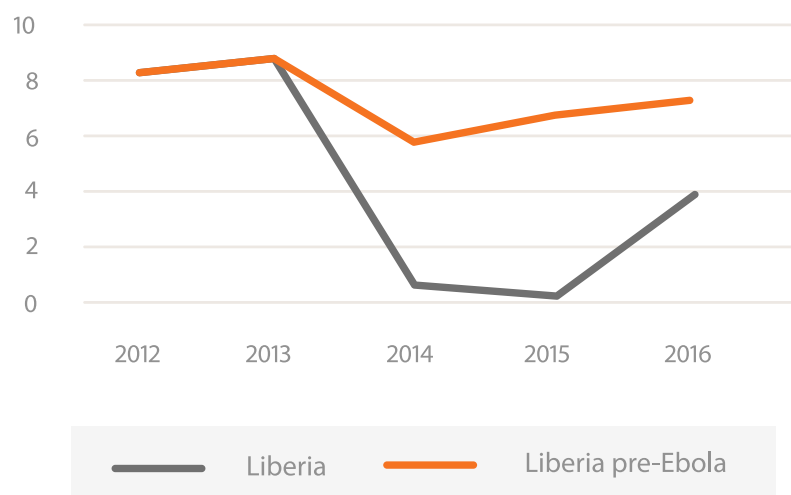
Source: Created by authors using available aggregated data from the Harvard Atlas of Economic Complexity. Please note data for services was not available for 2016.

65 Services data for 2016 is not yet available.

66 "The Atlas of Economic Complexity by @HarvardCID." The Atlas of Economic Complexity, atlas.cid.harvard.edu/explore/?country=125&partner=undefined&product=undefined&productClass=HS&startYear=undefined&target=Product&year=2016.

In contrast, the effect of Ebola directly on Liberia's GDP, a measure of Liberians overall consumption, provides a different view of what happened.

Figure 12: Liberia Impact of Ebola on Country GDP (%)⁶⁷



Source: World Bank, "2014-2015 West Africa Ebola Crisis: Impact Update"

Liberia's GDP growth, which had been an estimated 8.7% in 2013, shrank to just 0.7% in 2014. While this reflects a fall in commodity prices, it also represents the direct effect of Ebola on Liberian production, consumption, and investment in the country. During the crisis, the World Bank notes, a cell-phone based survey recorded the severe impacts Ebola had on the ground, with higher reported unemployment, and as a result, decreased incomes; lower school participation as young people were kept home, and likely a fall in nutritional wellness as less food was consumed due to both reduced supply and people's fear of traveling to public places like markets. It was estimated that there was a 40% decrease in Liberians working, which is particularly high for women as they made up a larger percent of the working population, particularly in agricultural jobs.

Finally, aid in response to the crisis made up a key portion of what constitutes investment in the country. Aid grants in Liberia are estimated to have made up almost 19% of the country's GDP in 2014 to 2015. Such a large amount of money helped soften the impacts of the commodity price drop and lost local consumption.

In order for Liberia's economy to grow out from under this history of an extractive driven economy, micro, small and medium enterprises must be developed and strengthened. These enterprises already represent the vast majority of employment in Liberia, and are the country's best bet for improving the country's resilience against future economic shocks.

67 World Bank. (2016). "2014-2015 West Africa Ebola Crisis: Impact Update." www.worldbank.org/en/topic/macroeconomics/publication/2014-2015-west-africa-ebola-crisis-impact-update.

LIBERIA'S IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

Even as Liberia continues to recover from the emotional and economic trauma of the Ebola outbreak, several factors seem to indicate that the country will continue to face limited economic growth. First, rising inflation (26.2% in October 2018 compared to 10.8% in June 2017) is having devastating effects on the cost of living for average Liberians. Additional deterioration of commodity prices could put the country at high risk of debt distress.⁶⁸ While infrastructure investments from development partners will increase demand for construction, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) projects a “bleak outlook” for other key sectors.

This perspective is further confirmed by several KIIs that indicated Liberia’s economy was likely to undergo a period of greater contraction in the near future. Part of this is due to the fact large employers in agriculture, mining, NGOs, etc. all play a role in providing a significant pool of jobs and indirect investment through those jobs and financial transactions locally. However, several large actors are planning to close down due to a range of reasons, which will diminish the amount of money being spent in the local economy, and the number of Liberians receiving a regular wage. For example, a large foreign palm oil conglomerate is expected to close down due to lack of profitability. In another example, a large food processing employer noted they had undergone a hiring freeze due to the overall slow growth in the economy. While they employ more than 100 people, they had originally expected to hire 2,000, but have not done so yet. This is due to challenges of slower than anticipated economic growth, inability to find appropriately skilled employees, and lack of resources to repair machines, among others.

In another instance, the UN which had a large operating force in country has left and moved to Mali. This has also created a noticeable economic chill.

Another negative driver noted was the effect of funding and investment shifting to nearby Sierra Leone, which appears to have a more positive investment and stronger legal environment. It is reported this has in fact been a complete flip from the previous year (2017) in terms of investment potential, perception of the legal environment, and sense of opportunity. According to KIIs corruption appears to be more of an issue with new appointments to ministerial roles in Liberia, and greater positive action taken by the new government of Sierra Leone in strengthening rule of law and enabling better investment.

The effect of this is that overall the country may experience less spending than it might normally have, meaning less money will reach the many informal businesses, often owned by AGYW or youth in general. Thus, there is an even greater need to make sure that youth are deliberately aligned to potential sources of income that are more likely to be in demand even in a slower economic environment.

WHERE ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

More positively, weaker commodity prices could offer an opportunity to build the foundation for diversification in Liberia, away from extractives, particularly in light of recent infrastructure improvements. Of 190 countries, Liberia ranks at 172 in the World Bank’s 2018 Doing Business report.⁶⁹ While scoring relatively well in the ease of doing business category (55), it scored very poorly in access to electricity (176), obtaining permits (184), ease of cross-border trade (177), credit access (105) and contract enforcement (174), suggesting major constraints to business start-ups.

68 Ibid.

69 World Bank. (2018a). Doing Business 2019 Economy Profile: Liberia.

These challenges will need to be addressed for there to be even slow change, and to allow for greater economic diversification. With the new government in power, and the Ebola crisis now over, there are hopes that there will be more effort to tackle these constraints to business startups.

The following are potential areas that will be explored further for potential to contribute to the development of, or directly support opportunities for AGYW and youth, through KII and FGD data.

ELECTRICITY: Energy production and access are expected to improve; three heavy fuel oil plants were installed in 2016, and the relaunch of the Mount Coffee hydropower plant in 2017 added 88 megawatts (MW) of capacity during the rainy season.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE: Although infrastructure remains poor overall, the government continues to repair key infrastructure and secure financing for more rapid development. Progress has been made in key economic corridors with the main highways from Monrovia to Ganta and the Guinea border now paved, as well as the road from Monrovia to Buchanan, and from Gbanga to Voinjama. In the medium term, these improvements will have important implications for rural AGYW who will be better able to get their agricultural produce to market and be better linked to urban amenities. Moreover, improving AGYW access to technical skills could allow them to more easily enter jobs in construction around infrastructure.

AGRICULTURE: While about half the land in Liberia is cultivable, only a small portion is used for farming. Farming is generally low in productivity, limited by lack of machinery, infrastructure, inputs, and storage capacity, and Liberia imports most (80%) of its staple food.⁷⁰ Despite this, agriculture is a major contributor to the Liberian economy, contributing over a third of GDP. This dependence on food imports is widely recognized, and the projects noted later in this report have worked to both broaden the array of food products created in Liberia, as well as promote the technical ability of micro and small farmers to improve productivity.

RUBBER: Rubber is the most important commercial agricultural crop, employing approximately 30,000 people, with an estimated 60,000 households involved in growing rubber trees.⁷¹ The government recently launched an Agriculture Transformation Agenda focusing on agricultural value chains, which could help make over the sector. Despite the most recent decline in rubber prices, there are plans to set up rubber export-oriented processing facilities and these are expected to stimulate increased rubber production and add value.⁷²

FISHING/AQUACULTURE: Deep-sea fishing is also significant, but Liberia has a serious problem with off-shore poaching by foreign trawlers. For AGYW local fishing and aquaculture are more important since women are principally involved in drying, smoking, transporting and selling fish. For fish ponds men dig the ponds and women are engaged in fish food production and pond maintenance.

SERVICES: Liberia's service sector is considered underdeveloped, with low quality, high-cost services in telecommunications, banking, professional services, transport, and logistics.⁷³ Still, this sector provides the most employment opportunities after agriculture and is growing in its share of the GDP.

70 U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration. (2017). Liberia Country Commercial Guide.

71 U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration. (2017). Liberia Country Commercial Guide.

72 Economist Intelligence Unit. (2018). Country Report: Liberia. Generated on December 27th 2018.

73 World Bank. (2015). Liberia DTIS Update.

TOURISM: The GOL believes that the country's natural endowment makes it a potentially desirable tourist destination and has recently begun investing more in tourism.⁷⁴ However, poor infrastructure, health conditions and a history of political instability and civil war have limited tourist growth. This might present modest employment opportunities for AGYW, especially in Bong, Grand Cape Mount, and Montserrado counties.

MANUFACTURING: Most manufactured goods are imported. Developing the manufacturing sector is key to overall development, but manufacturing is hampered by weak infrastructure and limited access to energy.⁷⁵ However, Liberia's industrial production growth rate, including mining, was estimated at 9% for 2017, or 19th in the world.⁷⁶ Manufacturing employed about 8% of the labor force in 2000⁷⁷ rising to about 11.7% in 2017.⁷⁸

MINING AND QUARRYING: This sector contributed 1.7% to GDP with gold and iron ore acting as the drivers of growth in 2017 and 2018, with non-mining sector growth remaining low.⁷⁹ Liberia is abundant in mineral resources, including iron ore, gold, and diamonds. Iron ore accounted for about 30% of export earnings in 2016 and is controlled by several large-scale operations.⁸⁰ Artisanal mining of gold and diamonds is often carried out by illegal miners, but some large companies have started investing in this area. Liberia's largest commercial gold mine, New Liberty Gold Mine in Grand Cape Mount County, began commercial production in 2016. Mining growth will be lower than forecast because of fluctuating commodity prices.

TRADE SHARE MATRIX FOR LIBERIA

While Liberia faces economic challenges, including a substantial trade deficit, it is important to recognize the country's economic prospects. Data that stem from export or import flows, which are closely tracked, can shed some light on where individuals, often AGYW, can find work or create their own livelihood opportunities. This does not mean that AGYW will work in imports or exports, but that there is money flowing into industries which in turn create adjacent economic opportunities.

TRADE BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

In considering growth potential, both the volume and performance of exports emerged as critical criteria in the sector selection evaluation. It is necessary to assess whether exports have grown only because the market size has grown or if market shares have indeed expanded. Therefore, it is important to combine the value of exports with patterns of market behavior.

One tool to analyze the dynamic behavior of recent trade is the trade share matrix.⁸¹ The matrix categorizes exports into two dimensions: (1) on the x-axis, the annual growth rate of the world market during a given time period, and (2) on the y-axis, the annual growth rate of Liberia's exports during that time period. The size of each bubble indicates the US dollar value of exports in 2017.

74 U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration. (2017). Liberia Country Commercial Guide. <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Liberia-Agricultural-Sectors>

75 Baffoe, J. and Mwasambili, R. (2018). Liberia. 2018 African Economic Outlook. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/country_notes/Liberia_country_note.pdf

76 CIA World Factbook. (2018). "Liberia." Retrieved December 26, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

77 ILO. (2010). "Report on the Liberia Labour Force Survey."

78 ILO. (2016). The ILO in Liberia. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-addis_ababa/---ilo-abuja/documents/publication/wcms_466864.pdf

79 World Bank. (2018b). Liberia DataBank. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/liberia?view=chart>

80 U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration. (2017). Liberia Country Commercial Guide. <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Liberia-Agricultural-Sectors>

81 The trade share, or Bethesda, matrix is an adaptation of the venerable Boston matrix originally introduced by the Boston Consulting Group for the analysis of firm-level strategy. For a compact and accessible treatment of the strategic implications of the Boston matrix, see Koch, R., (2009). *The Financial Times Guide to Strategy. How to Create and Deliver a Useful Strategy*. 3rd edition. London. The trade share matrix has a similar strategic dimension, but is used here primarily as a predictive device.

QUADRANT ++ indicates that both the world market and the country's exports are growing faster than average; this corresponds to the "stars" quadrant in the "Boston Consulting Group" (BCG) Matrix.

QUADRANT +- indicates that world markets are growing faster than average, but the country's exports are growing slower than average (or shrinking); this corresponds to the "opportunities" quadrant in the BCG Matrix.

QUADRANT -- indicates that the world market and the country's exports are growing slower than average (or shrinking); this corresponds to the "challenges" quadrant in the BCG Matrix.

QUADRANT - + indicates that the world market is growing slower than average (or shrinking), but the country's exports are growing faster than average; this corresponds to the "cash cows" quadrant in the BCG Matrix.

Trade Share Matrix

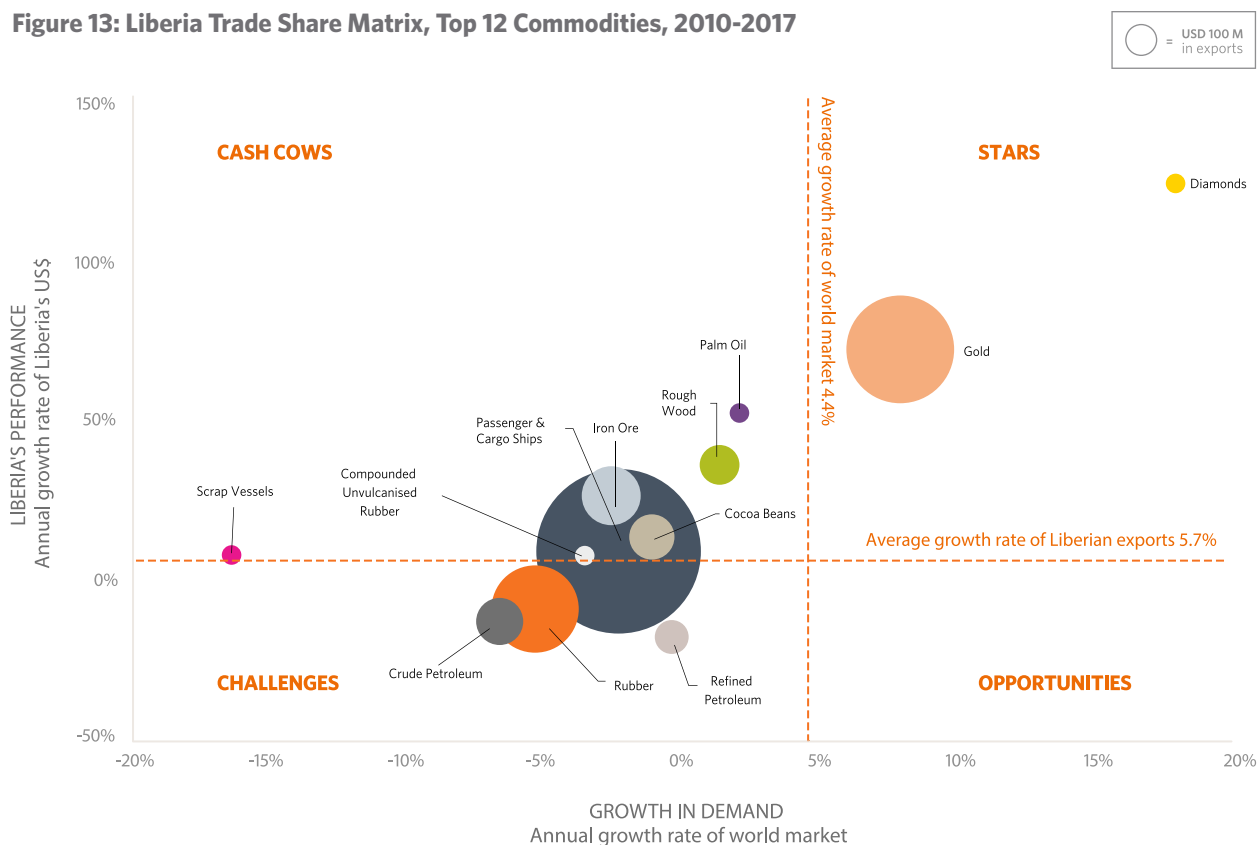


The resulting Liberia trade share matrix, which describes the top 12 export goods⁸² outlines the dynamic behavior of trade in Liberia relative to the world (see Figure 11), showing annualized (compounded annually) growth rates covering the period 2010-2017 for commodities. In order to provide the "relative" context to optimize the four quadrant titles, a frame showing the average growth of Liberia's exports (parallel to the x-axis) and the average growth of the world market (parallel to the y-axis) has been added with red dotted lines. In essence, these red lines are the relevant frame to evaluate the dynamism of an export product. A product that happened to be located right at the center of the frame (4.4% growth in demand worldwide, and 5.7% growth in Liberian exports) would be considered completely 'average' in the context of Liberian exports.

- Liberia's 'stars' quadrant, where Liberia's growth is above average in markets that are also growing at an above average rate, includes gold and diamonds.
- The "cash cows" quadrant, indicating where Liberia's performance is strong in a relatively weak market, palm oil, rough wood, cocoa beans, iron ore, part of the passenger and cargo ships, compounded unvulcanized rubber along with a rapidly fading market in scrap vessels.
- The "opportunities" quadrant, where the global market is growing faster than average but Liberia's export growth rate is below average, doesn't contain any of the top 12 commodities.
- Finally, the products found in the "challenges" quadrant, where both the global market and Liberia's exports are both growing slower than average, includes part of the passenger and cargo ships, rubber, crude petroleum and refined petroleum.

In the near future, growth rates for world demand in palm oil and other processed goods are expected to be significantly higher than the reference period.

82 These are the top 12 out of 200 products in the Harmonized System (HS) codes at the 4-digit level as reported by UN Comtrade and cleaned by CEPII.

Figure 13: Liberia Trade Share Matrix, Top 12 Commodities, 2010-2017

Source: FHI360 calculations based on export data from MIT Observatory of Economic Complexity & UN Comtrade.

Table 3: Liberia's Top 12 Commodities Exports and Growth Rate (2010 - 2017)

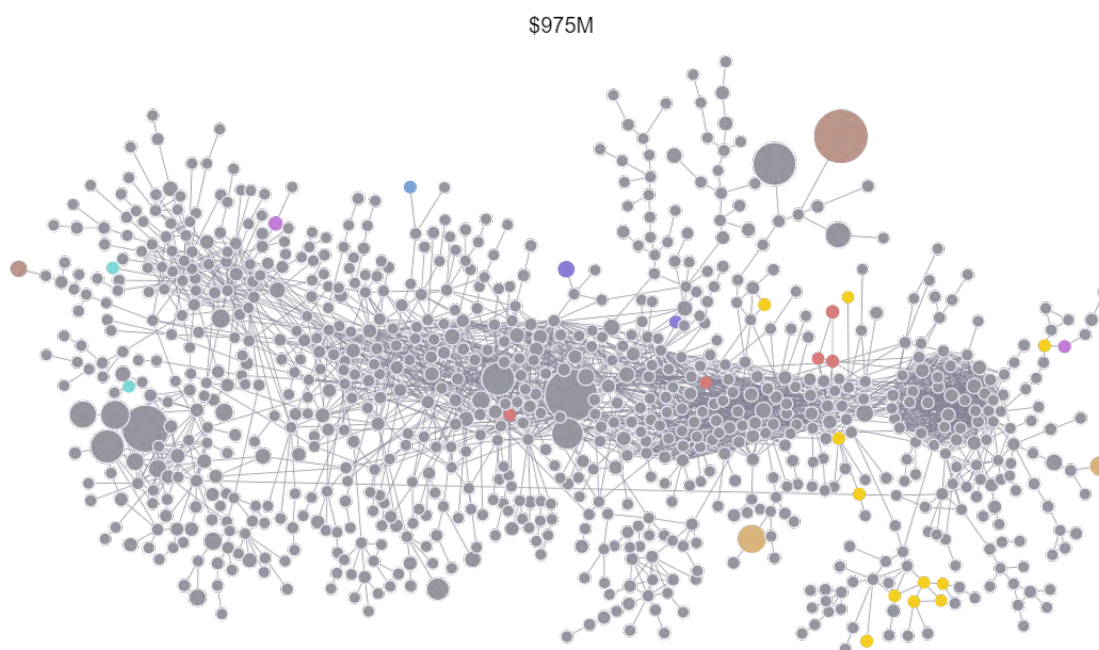
Commodity	Exports (Thousands of US\$)		Growth Rate (CAGR)
	2010	2017	
1 Passenger & Cargo Ships	256	451	8%
2 Gold	4	190	72%
3 Rubber	249	122	-10%
4 Iron Ore	14	64	25%
5 Crude Petroleum	120	43	-14%
6 Cocoa Beans	14	33	13%
7 Rough Wood	3	26	36%
8 Refined Petroleum	99	24	-18%
9 Diamonds	0	6	125%
10 Scrap Vessels	4	6	8%
11 Compounded Unvulcanise	3	6	8%
12 Palm Oil	0	5	53%

PRODUCT SPACE

Another way of identifying areas of potential economic areas of growth is through the use of product space analysis. This tool differs in that it links how difficult it is to create products, or their complexity, with the comparative advantage a country like Liberia has in producing them. A country with that comparative advantage means that they have an efficiency in producing those goods. That efficiency means they could be more likely to find buyers, thus driving growth in the sector.

Goods that Liberia exports are not only important for the currency they bring in and the economic growth they generate, but also for how those goods link back to skills requirements and abilities of people within the country. The following tool - the Product Space - is a visual way of representing the network that connects all traded goods in terms of the complexity of skill needed to make them. Specifically, this complexity indicates, "a measure of the knowledge in a society that gets translated into the products it makes."⁸³ Products towards the center of the web require more complex skills and abilities, while those on the periphery require less. Those with a color indicate a revealed comparative advantage (RCA) for Liberia, which means that the country currently exports more than its "fair share" of that product globally given the total value of Liberia's exports. Moreover, for those with a color, and closer to other products in the center, there is great potential to create spillovers in terms of skills and abilities, thus potentially driving opportunities for greater economic complexity and growth.

Figure 14: Liberia's Product Space Analysis



Source: Atlas of Economic Complexity, Harvard

83 Liberia: Finance Ministry, Partners Brainstorm on Special Economic Zones (SEZ)/Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ) Potential." FrontPageAfrica, Feb. 2019, frontpageafricaonline.com/business/economy/liberia-finance-ministry-partners-brainstorm-on-special-economic-zones-sez-staple-crops-processing-zones-scpz-potential/.

Understanding what goods Liberia exports, that have a high RCA, matters as they essentially serve a map of economic complexity at the national level. This can allow policymakers and implementers to look at the current export basket in the country, and identify the products which, if it diversified into them, might send the country onto its optimal path of greater economic complexity and, therefore, GDP growth. They can then create programs to diversify industries to capitalize on potential linkages, and/or invest in already heavily linked sectors. For Liberia, one can see that stronger clusters exist for certain agricultural goods. This can be expected given the role that agriculture plays in the country's economy. However, there are no other major clusters, which also makes sense given the economic challenges Liberia has faced. The closest nascent cluster is in metallurgic industries that deal in export of waste aluminum and copper. As can also be seen, towards the top of the graphic, Petroleum and crude is a major export, however as it is on the periphery of the product space, we can understand that this lacks complexity in terms of transferable skills, and unfortunately has little linkage to other sectors

LABOR MARKET EMPLOYMENT CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES⁸⁴

The labor market in Liberia is one defined by inequality and stagnation. Unemployment and under employment are challenges to both young men and women, though women are predominantly affected, with 44% of women and 23.9% of men aged 15-49 reporting that they had not worked in the last 12 months.⁸⁵ However, this is dramatically more severe for AGYW ages 15-24, for whom that percentage rises to about 65%.

Most employed Liberians are engaged in informal (79.9%) and vulnerable (79.5%) forms of employment. Women are over-represented in the informal sector, with 90.9% of employed women working informally compared to 69% of men. Informal work is more common in rural (86.5%) than urban areas (72.5%). There are also major regional differences in informality - in the counties of focus in this report, informal employment is lowest in Montserrado (69%), followed by Margibi (73.4%), Grand Cape Mount (80.5%), and finally Bong (89.7%). The North Western region as a group (more than one county) has the highest level of informality (73.6%).

Unemployment also varies by county. The rate of all respondents reporting not working in the last 12 months was highest at 58.3% for Margibi Country, lowest at 38.1% for Grand Cape Mount, and 47.3% for Montserrado and 57.4% for Bong County.

84 The official ILO definition of "employment" is "all those of working age who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit." Under-employment is defined by the ILO as "when the working time of persons in employment is insufficient in relation to alternative employment situations."

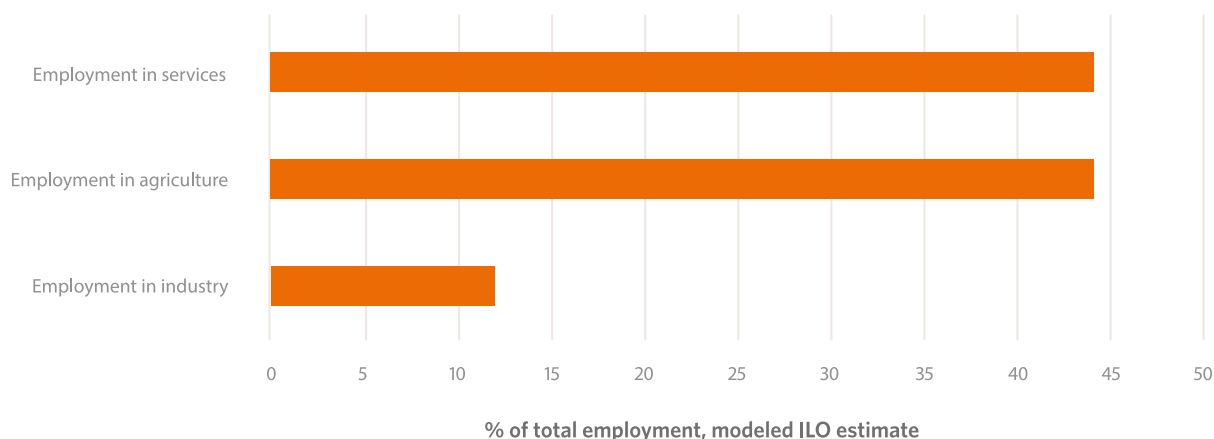
85 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014)

Table 4: Occupation of employed women aged 15-49 by location (%)⁸⁶

Location	Professional/ technical/ managerial	Clerical	Sales & services	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual	Domestic service	Agriculture	Other	Total	Number of women
Bong	0.7	0	18.4	0.3	1.1	0.3	79.3	0	100	654
Grand Cape Mount	0.9	0	42.5	0.4	3.2	0	53	0	100	255
Margibi	6	1.5	42.8	1.5	8.5	0	39.5	0.2	100	311
Montserrado	6.3	2	79.7	4.6	0.5	0.5	6.3	0.1	100	1938
Urban	5.6	1.5	66.1	3.4	1	0.8	21.4	0.2	100	2952
Rural	1.1	0.2	25.9	0.6	2.6	0.2	69.2	0.2	100	2185

Source: LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International (2014)

Sector and occupation also vary by location. Women in Bong county are most heavily engaged in agriculture (79.3%), with women in Montserrado county, unsurprisingly, least engaged (6.3%).⁸⁷ Most households have at least one non-farm enterprise (79.6%), usually a shop, and more than half of those are managed by women (56.1%). Across counties, the second-most common occupation is sales and services. In Montserrado county, roughly four of every five employed women works in this occupation, opposed to only one in five in Bong county. In Grand Cape Mount and Margibi counties, rates are similar at 42.5% and 42.8% respectively. However, Margibi county has notably more women employed in unskilled manual jobs at 8.5%, with the next-closest being Grand Cape Mount at 3.2%. While engagement in agriculture in the greater Monrovia area is at 1.8%, this rises to 49.6% in other urban areas.

Figure 15: Employment by Sector, 2016⁸⁸

Source: World Bank, ILOSTAT database, 2016.⁸⁹

86 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014)

87 LISGIS, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, National AIDS Control Program, ICF International. (2014)

88 World Bank. (2016). Database <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/jobs/country/liberia>

89 International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database.

The 2016 Household Income and Expenditure survey gathered additional information about the types of agriculture practiced by households. Cassava is the most commonly grown crop, grown by 38.9% of households, and also sold by 19.4%.⁹⁰ About a third of households grow Liberia's main staple, rice, and 5.6% sell it. Other common crops are pepper, bitter balls (African eggplant), corn, and plantain. About a third of households reported raising chickens in the previous twelve months, and more than half of rural households raise chickens for home consumption and sometimes for sale. Local chickens are preferred for their taste and represent an area with strong import substitution potential.

Most young people (aged 15-35) who are employed are working in low-quality, low-paying jobs.^{91,92} Only 14.3% of young workers are in salaried jobs, and of these, less than 15% have paid annual leave; 27.4% have employers that pay into a social security scheme; and less than half have a written contract.⁹³ The two main reasons why young people start their own businesses is because they are unable to find stable salaried work (40.8%) or they are obliged to do so by family (13.4%). World Bank analysis from 2016 shows that an individual would need to earn an annual income of USD \$1,486 to support a family of four, but only 13% of young people earn income at that level.⁹⁴ The situation is worse for young women, who are systematically paid less than men at similar education levels.

About 46.8% of young people 15-35 have not obtained stable employment. According to a survey on labor market transitions conducted in 2013, of those who are employed, 83.8% are in what they consider "satisfactory self-employment or temporary employment".⁹⁵ For youth who have transitioned to the workforce, but not directly into stable/satisfactory work, the transition takes an average of 69 months, almost 6 years.

POLICIES AND REGULATIONS WITH POTENTIAL TO SUPPORT AGYW OWNED MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES

Another important aspect of improving opportunities for AGYW Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSMEs) is the policies that improve their economic ecosystem. The following policies and regulations impact the labor market and AGYW more broadly, and so we note key considerations here – keeping in mind that the new government is now in place, which can change policy environment expectations.

INVESTMENT ACT OF 2010: Liberia's Investment Act of 2010 provides a range of policy prescriptions aimed at improving the investment climate into the country. The most relevant aspect to livelihoods for young people, according to interviewees, was the list of 16 designated areas of business that were protected specifically for ownership by Liberians. These are detailed in appendix A, but include some business areas that could potentially provide opportunities for AGYW or young Liberians. In fact, respondents noted already that young Liberian women have found some success in the protected sectors of auto and motorbike repair and small-scale sales of goods (hawking). Interestingly, though, these sectors in the investment act include no protections specifically for agriculture, in spite of this representing the largest area of GDP and employment in Liberia.

90 LISGIS. (2016a). Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2014 Agenda for Transformation: Baseline Indicators. http://lisgis.net/pg_img/Report%20on%20Agenda%20for%20Transformation%20National%20Key%20Indicators%20FINAL.pdf

91 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3.

92 World Bank. (2016). Republic of Liberia Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector.

93 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3.

94 World Bank. (2016). Republic of Liberia Liberia Skills Development Constraints for Youth in the Informal Sector.

95 De Mel, S., Elder, S. and Vansteenkiste, M. (2013). Labour market transitions of young women and men in Liberia. ILO. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 3. http://www.lisgis.net/pg_img/2012%20SWTS%20Final%20Report%20Oct%2023,%202013.pdf

SMALL BUSINESSES EMPOWERMENT ACT: Another policy that interview respondents noted was the Small Businesses Empowerment Act (SBA) which was signed into law in late 2014, aiming to “[e]nsure at least 25% of all public procurement contracts be allocated and provided to Liberian-owned (MSMEs), with at least 5% allocated to women-owned MSMEs.”⁹⁶ Frequently respondents noted this would be an ideal target for businesses looking to sell their goods and services domestically, however, this has not generated significant sales for Liberian small businesses due to a range of challenges. One core reason noted was the lack of specificity within the law concerning what constituted a Liberian owned business, which often shifted based on what the purchasing entity determined to be Liberian. Second, respondents note a lack of clarity around what products could be purchased; for example, the policy does not clarify how preference be given to a firm importing desks from abroad, versus one using Liberian carpenters to produce the desks, to then be sold under the SBA. Finally, often small businesses cannot meet a threshold needed to actually provide goods to the government of Liberia. This is due to the challenge of many businesses being unable to produce at scale, aggregate goods into a purchasable amount, or possess the ability to engage contractually with the SBA. Similarly, for those firms that could meet this demand, the law does not provide a provision for upfront payment, that would enable them to actually begin to produce ordered products. Instead, firms must have all of the financing up front, from their own pockets, to meet a requested order, which dramatically cuts down on the firms that can actually fulfill a government order.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE ACT OF 2017: In late 2017 the Liberian Parliament passed an act that would lay the groundwork for the creation of Liberia’s first special economic zone (SEZ). SEZs are areas where special business or economic laws apply so that business face a simpler operating environment, and to improve trade, employment and investment. This effort has been supported by the new President Weah, as well as the previous administration, recognizing the opportunities it would create for diversifying product trade in the country, as well as serving as a potential means to link smallholder producers to broader external markets.⁹⁷ In addition to the SEZ itself, it appears to also contain the creation of a Staple Crops Processing Zone (SCPZ), which will be based in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County.⁹⁸ This will be used to support the processing of key crops and transfer them quickly to businesses in the SEZ.

96 “Bureau of Small Business Administration.” The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, www.moci.gov.lr/2content_list_sub.php?main=25&related=25&pg=mp.

97 “The Special Economic Zones Act of 2017” http://www.moci.gov.lr/doc/MoCI.Link.SEZAct_110117.pdf

98 “Liberia: Finance Ministry, Partners Brainstorm on Special Economic Zones (SEZ)/Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ) Potential.” FrontPageAfrica, Feb. 2019, frontpageafricaonline.com/business/economy/liberia-finance-ministry-partners-brainstorm-on-special-economic-zones-sez-staple-crops-processing-zones-scpz-potential/

5

Opportunity Sectors for AGYW Employment

This following section will provide a brief overview of how other projects have addressed livelihood or employment opportunities for AGYW. This is in no way an exhaustive list, but provides some comparative examples of approaches that build on learning from other projects, and have demonstrated success in creating opportunities for AGYW and more broadly, Liberian youth.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM CONTEXT MAPPING ANALYSIS

Several programs encountered during the field collection demonstrated areas of potential overlap with BRAC ELA programming goals or geographies. These have been noted in figure 14 and Table 7 in terms of geographic overlap as well as a summary of programmatic details about each's operation. These were selected based on adjacency to BRAC ELA programming, as well as ability to respond in the timeframe of this research. As a result, this is not an exhaustive list but instead illustrative. None was as focused as BRAC ELA on the livelihoods of AGYW, and all but the Youth Opportunities Project focused on groups older than the typical age of BRAC ELA participants. However, the potential overlap — but lack of duplication — could offer opportunities for a facilitated engagement that would allow for continued support of BRAC ELA beneficiaries after their graduation from that program.

Figure 16: Program Mapping

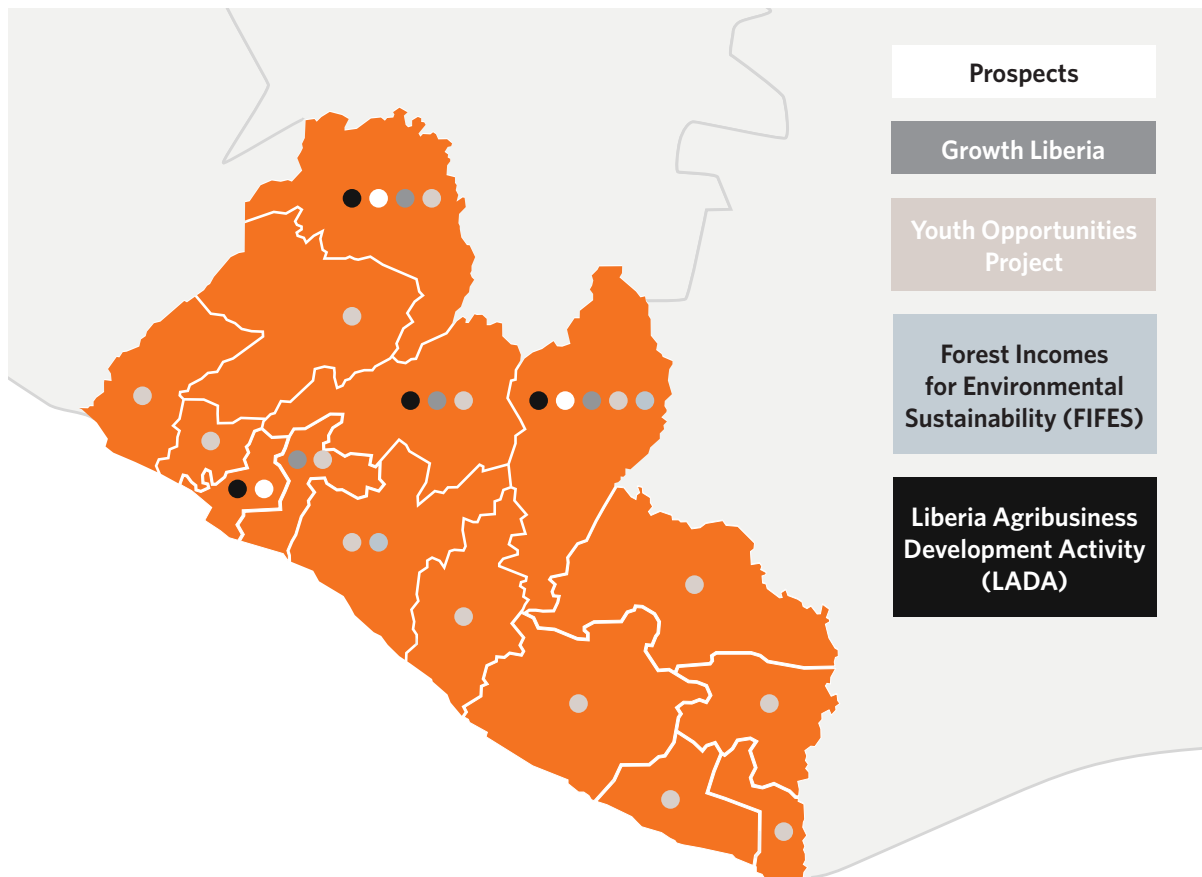


Table 5: GoL and Donor Supported Programs in Liberia Focusing on Youth and AGYW

Project	Duration	County	Project Description	Intervention Areas	# of Beneficiaries/Targets
PROSPECTS 3 (Promoting Sustainable Partnership for Economic Transformation)	Duration: September 2017 – August 2020	Bong, Ganta, Nimba and Montserrado	“PROSPECTS is a youth empowerment program which works with youth, businesses, government, education institutions and other service providers to support Liberian youth to be better positioned to take advantage of employment opportunities and to gain economic and social empowerment. PROSPECTS combine direct service delivery with efforts to stimulate positive systemic changes in terms of youths’ role in the labor and job hiring markets.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and Entrepreneurship- This involves building youth self-confidence including skills development (employability, business entrepreneurship, and life skills) and providing job placement opportunities that enhance employment and self-employment of youth • Social Business for Employment- Focuses on private sector engagement of SME’s through financial and advisory support for business development and strengthening that leads to direct youth employment • Results Learning and Research- PROSPECTS 3 will embark on research, studies, and policy analysis of its youth programming in Liberia to provide relevant and targeted information to policymakers and institutions to promote economic opportunities for youth.” 	<p>[Target]</p> <p>Employment & Entrepreneurship: Trainings - 16, 500 Apprenticeships - 1,302 Seed Funds Businesses - 1,355 Financial linkages - 105 Social Business Development Support - 25 SMEs Job Creation - 100 new jobs Business Toolkit - 15 Businesses Seminars</p>
Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity (LADA)	Duration: December 2015 – December 2020	Montserrado, Bong, Nimba and Lofa	“LADA uses a result-driven and sustainable approach to increase private sector investment in agricultural input systems, post-harvest handling, transport, and processing activities, and to strengthen the market environment with information, advocacy, and support.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results Learning and Research- PROSPECTS 3 will embark on research, studies, and policy analysis of its youth programming in Liberia to provide relevant and targeted information to policymakers and institutions to promote economic opportunities for youth.” 	<p>“To increase incomes of smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs throughout Liberia; expand access to and use of agricultural inputs; improve post-harvest activities; and streamline high-potential agricultural value chains.”</p> <p>20,000 farmers trained; 483% increase in volume of commodities with added value”</p>
Funder: USAID					
Implementer: Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA)					

Project	Duration	County	Project Description	Intervention Areas	# of Beneficiaries/Targets
<p>Grow Liberia</p> <p>Funder: Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA)</p> <p>Implementer: Adam Smith International</p>	Duration: 2013 - 2020	Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Margibi, (central)	"GROW Liberia is a business and investment advisory agency that collaborates with businesses, investors, associations, and government agencies to accelerate systemic solutions that transform high-growth industries and drive inclusive economic growth."	<p>Agro inputs - attracting more agro-distributors to set-up business in Liberia;</p> <p>Agro-dealers development program; policy business enabling environment and reduction on tax/duties on import of inputs; and busying and aggregation.</p> <p>Agro processing - packaging and industry services; industry specialization and coordination; and supplier development program</p> <p>Cocoa - higher quality and quantity of cocoa production; better selling & financing terms; and a more attractive market addressing cocoa governance shortcomings. Rubber - high value RSS processing as an alternative to latex production; access to finance and skills development</p>	Impacted total of 17,000 poor men and women
<p>Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability (FIFES)</p> <p>Funder: USAID</p> <p>Implementer: ACDI/VOCA</p>	Duration: November 2015 - November 2020	Northern and Southern Nimba and Grand Base	The FIFES activity's goal is the conservation of biodiversity in 11 Community Forests (CFs) in Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. To reach this goal, FIFES staff work with local, regional, and national stakeholders to achieve two main objectives: the creation of well-developed rural forest-based enterprises, which provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities while combatting deforestation and biodiversity loss, and the enhanced capacity of Government of Liberia (GoL) institutions and rural communities to sustainably manage and benefit from CF and buffer zone natural resources.	<p>Inclusive, sustainable economic opportunity development; local institution capacity development to more effectively implement national policies and promote better management of community forests; village savings and loans</p>	110,000 (direct and indirect beneficiaries)

Project	Duration	County	Project Description	Intervention Areas	# of Beneficiaries/Targets
Youth Opportunities Project Funder: World Bank and Government of Liberia Implementer: Ministry of Youth and Sports, Republic of Liberia	Duration: November 2015 – December 2020	Montserado County (Household Enterprise only) + All other countries	“The Project Development Objective is to improve access to income generation opportunities for targeted youth and strengthen the GOL capacity to implement its Cash Transfer Program.”	1A: Pre-employment and Social Support for youth aged 15-17 years 1B: Household Enterprise Support for youth aged 18-35 years Component two: Productive Public Works and Life Skills Support for rural youth (18-35 years) Component Three: Capacity building to implement Cash Transfer Program	[Target]: To benefit 15,000 youth, aged 15-35 years over a five-year period. Current (as of December 2018) Direct project beneficiaries – 8,010 youth (50% are female beneficiaries) Youth receiving start-up grants – 786 youth Targeted rural youth completing life skills training under the project – 3,612 youth
Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Project (YEEP) Funder: African Development Bank; Mercy Corps Implementer: Ministry of Youth & Sports	Duration: 2016 – 2019	Montserrado, Margibi and Nimba Counties	“The objectives of this project are, (i) to promote youth entrepreneurship through improving their business skills, and (ii) improve youth employability by empowering them with relevant skills required by the job market.”	Project outcome: “an expansion of businesses started by young people; increased employment and income of young people; and establishment of innovative and sustainable programs on youth entrepreneurship and employment in Liberia.”	[Target]: Tertiary level institutions, to benefit 3000 youth. Age: 18-35 both male and female participants

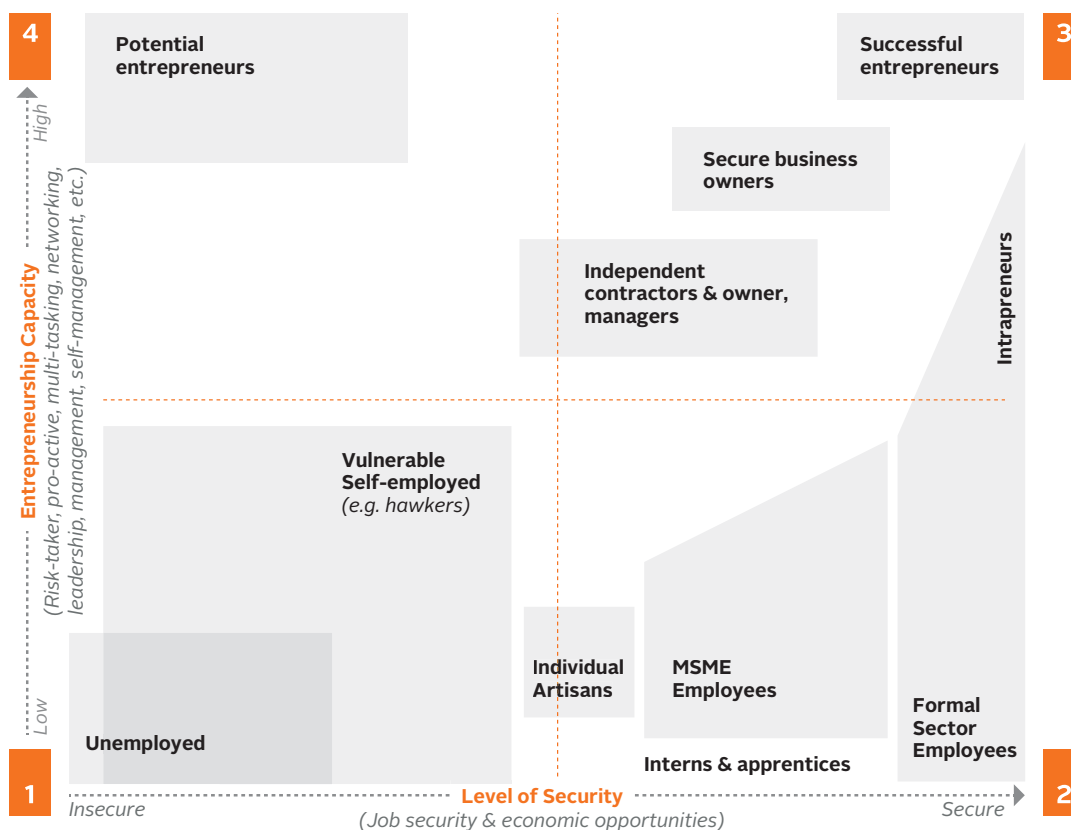
Source: all details provided directly through KIs or via secondary source data collection.

POCKETS OF GROWTH

Liberia, as noted above, has large anchor industrial sectors that have traditionally dominated its GDP, but large formal-sector actors do not provide a major source of employment in Liberia. With 70% of the working population in informal labor, many areas of economic opportunity often go unexamined.⁹⁹ In communities — at the village, town, or county level — small businesses exist, maintaining livelihoods for their owners and sometimes employees, or even growing when the opportunity arises. These small businesses emerge because of entrepreneurs' and self-employed individuals' ability to identify opportunities at this local level, and also engage with larger or more-developed firms. Because official data does not exist to track their existence, and many are informal anyway, identifying them and understanding their presence in a county market does often require more local intensive study in the region. In these pocket areas, growth has occurred and has potential to enable AGYW-owned businesses to find a stable local market, or to offer employment opportunities for AGYW within a local community.

The pockets of growth concept are laid out in Figure 15 below, illustrating how individuals and firms can move up pathways in terms of their overall economic security and ability to perform entrepreneurially.

Figure 17: Pathways to Employment for Youth Employment



99 Building Markets. (2016). "Liberian Businesses: The Engines of Economic Recovery and Growth." buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/liberian_businesses_-_the_engines_of_economic_recovery_and_growth.pdf

The boxes represent different groups of Liberia's AGYW along the pathway (size is intended to roughly illustrate population size but should not be interpreted as exactly proportional, due to data limitations). The key groups can be summarized as follows:

- Most vulnerable AGYW currently appear in the lower-left quadrant of the graphic, along with other groups of people who tend to be most vulnerable and unemployed. This quadrant represents much of the informal economy, and the majority of the population.
- The lower-right quadrant includes employees in the formal sector who are the most secure, due to the consistency of having a salaried job - receiving regular payments more frequently than someone working less formally. One important facet of this is that some of these employees may be low-performing but cannot be fired due to labor laws that may be well intentioned but might be restrictive in removing such low-performing workers.
- At the upper-right corner of this graphic are those who might be identified as true 'opportunity entrepreneurs'. They benefit from high entrepreneurial capabilities and high economic security, such as founders of large, successful formal sector firms. While there are policy choices that could further benefit and potentially expand this group, it is outside the scope of this paper to elaborate, given the focus on opportunities for AGYW.
- The upper-left corner consists of potential entrepreneurs who have entrepreneurial skills and abilities, but remain relatively insecure in terms of job or income. This population, who have many skills already, may need more tangible support to connect to opportunities (e.g. mentorship, market information, access to a new market, pitch contest opportunities, access to finance, or other forms of more conventional business support).

EMPLOYMENT SECTOR OPPORTUNITIES

Interviews with key informants indicate there are opportunities for employment for AGYW, and young people in range of sectors. These employment opportunities typically fall into groups 1 and 2, in the Employment Pathways map above (Figure 15). These are not specified according to county, unless otherwise noted. Each potential area of opportunity should be ground-truthed in an area of Liberia where a program might occur, through a study or labor market assessment, prior to targeting each sector (see programming opportunities recommendations for further detail).

Market Demand - Sectors and Products

Respondents noted the following sectors all have the potential to contain areas for employment for AGYW:

Table 6: Employment and Self Employment Opportunities Based on Employer Demand

Employment or Self Employment

Agriculture sector	Agro-processing	Woodwork/furniture production
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palm oil • Cassava • Cocoa • Artisanal rubber • Vegetables • Nursery management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin lotions • Hair products • Dried food snacks • Sauces • Pickled food 	

Employment or Self Employment

Meat production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goat Poultry Eggs 	Aquaculture	Bakeries
Packaging	Petty trade/sales of goods	Cross border trade
Agriculture Input Supplier Companies	Catering	
Tourism (medium to long-term)	ICT (long-term)	

AGRICULTURE: Multiple respondents noted that agriculture is a major area of opportunity for Liberia. This was due to the Liberia’s quality growing environment, including a climate appropriate for many crops, access to water, and hitherto a large potential domestic market that has relied largely on imports of foreign food products. Moreover, there is greater recognition in urban and rural centers about the importance of nutrition and role that fresh quality food can play in health. While there was broad recognition that youth had been leaving agriculture, crops that offered a quick harvest and profit — vegetables and fruits — were more likely to attract youth employment. If value chains are improved through skills upgrading, inputs supply, and market linkages, two respondents note this would generate higher payouts for goods, and likely bring youth back to the sector.

AGRO-PROCESSING: Similarly, agro-processing is also seen as an area one with potential opportunities. Given the limited infrastructure and cold storage capacity for food, the process of preservation, pickling, or other packaging have the potential to expand shelf life; facilitate sales; and create opportunities to brand more traditional “Liberian” foods for domestic and international markets

GOAT, CHICKEN, FISH: Nutrition is growing as a factor of concern for many Liberians. Aquaculture, or fish ponds, are another opportunity that appears to have a growing demand and is particularly suited to self-employment or a group business. As the government of Liberia is allowing foreign interests to expand fishing in Liberia, this is limiting the amount of wild-caught fish available. With limited cold value chains already, producing fish locally in ponds could serve interior and coastal fish consumption demand.

WOOD PRODUCTS: Already Liberia has a competitive advantage in the export of raw wood. For many, wood could become an additional source of value. Specifically, in addition to significant forest land, the country produces a large volume of expired rubber wood. As rubber crops age, they become less productive and lands are eventually re-planted. Felled trees can become a commodity for quality furniture or other goods. This has the potential to link both into a local furniture market as well as the tourist market for handicrafts.

AGRICULTURE SERVICES: Agricultural input or skills supply is itself a demand sector adjacent to agriculture. With many people living on subsistence farming, and inputs and markets difficult to access, many farmers underproduce agricultural goods. There is a demand for support through trainers who possess technical knowledge that can be translated into terms that most rural farmers understand and will engage with. Moreover, local sellers of inputs who have the technical skills to guide farmers to the correct product, and are able to convince them to change behavior are also needed. While this may not be a purely market driven demand, as it is not entirely clear if local communities would support this cost, it does appear to be an opportunity or gap in the agricultural rural value chain.

INTERNET AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT): ICT was noted by several respondents as an area of great need in terms of local Liberian skill, though more so in the long term. Yet there are both demand for and opportunities for the use of ICT skills in their most basic form — basic computer literacy, knowledge of common programs like Microsoft Word and Excel, and use of e-mail. Such basic skills are seen to be a need in many offices and businesses. The challenge is that in many instances, businesses requiring these skills also do not have access to computers. Thus, as businesses slowly shift towards more computer-based systems, the need for computer literate youth and AGYW will grow. Given the demand comes from more established businesses, this area is less likely to have opportunities for self-employment.

AGYW without tertiary education or technical training, would likely be best suited to more entry level opportunities for computer use, such as front desk support, making sales with a tablet or POS (point of sale) machine, back office hotel or office support. However, without more advanced technical coding, programming, or software skills, it is unlikely there will be many opportunities for self-employment in the field.

TOURISM: Tourism is perceived as another medium to long-term opportunity for Liberia, but one with potential to grow rapidly depending on the GoL and international business investment into the country. Globally, tourism already employs one in ten people, according to the World Trade and Tourism Council (WTTC)¹⁰⁰ and is expected to grow particularly in countries in Africa and Asia. Liberia possesses a unique history in its relationship to the United States, with many older buildings and roads bearing the marks of the arrival of African American settlers coming to the country. Moreover, the Gullah and Geechee people in the Southeastern United States (particularly in South Carolina) have preserved their Liberian history. In addition to historical links, food similarities and shared cultures, this connection offers another potential opportunity for Americans to visit and enjoy the country.

The country also possesses deep forests, a long coastline with beaches, and numerous opportunities for areas in eco-agricultural or cultural tourism. In Monrovia, infrastructure should grow with investment; fitting an international standard. This would likely lead to a larger number of hotels and restaurants that might interest international tourists and their expectations around tourist experiences. Opportunities are also likely to be open for Liberians, as several sectors protected under the Investment Act of 2010 law are focused on or adjacent to the tourism sector.

As the tourism sector is wide, encompassing hotels, restaurants, transportation, sales of artisanal goods, tour guides, trip planning, and entertainment, it has the potential to yield massive opportunities for young people looking to enter the industry. These include opportunities for employment as servers, cooks, tour guides, entry level hotel staff, trip organizers or travel agencies (protected), or other roles. The sector also provides opportunities for self-employment, both in urban and rural settings, for youth looking to sell wholesale mementos, create and sell artisanal goods, freelance as a tour guide, or as a driver.

SALES AND TRADE: Sales and trade are opportunities that appear to be widespread across numerous industries, and in several instances were cited as particularly fit for women, as they are increasingly already working in these jobs. Women serve as traders bringing goods and agricultural inputs from China, Ghana, and Benin, to be resold in Liberia. Many firms also require agents for everyday basic sales, both in Monrovia as well as in more rural communities. This includes businesses from Coca-Cola, which hires young women to sell beverages, to telecoms like Orange, for which young people can sell sim cards or top-up credit. Moreover, local producers

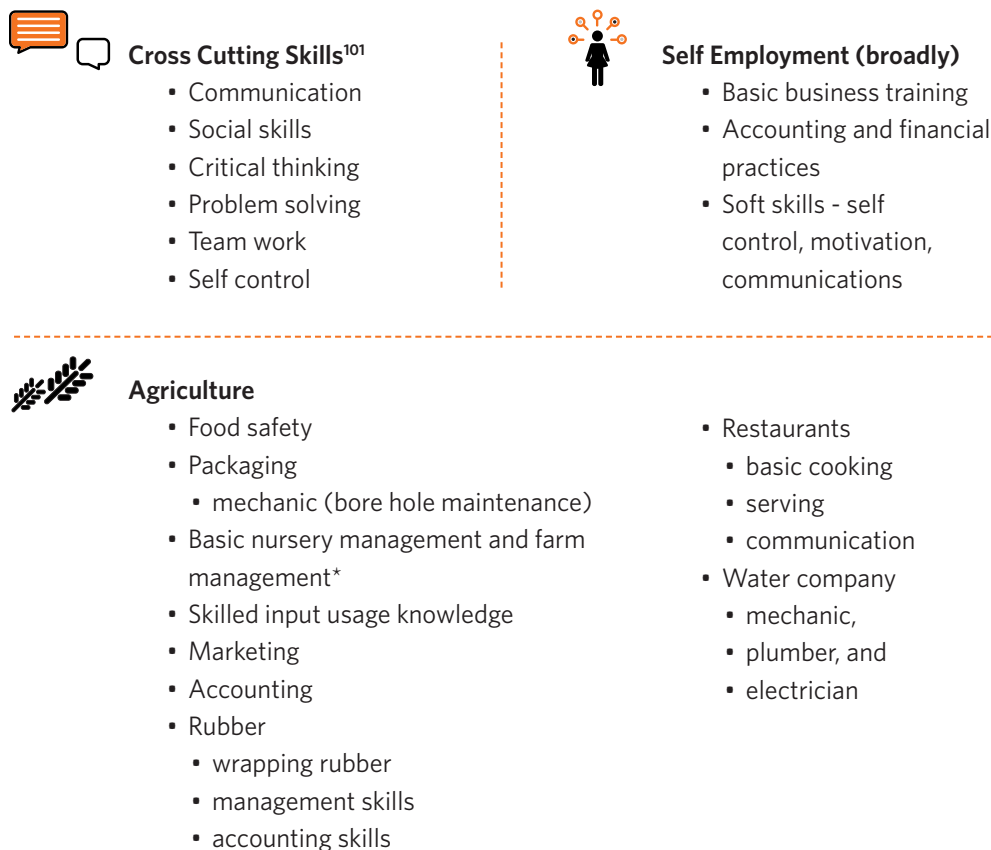
100 WTTC, www.wttc.org/.

of agricultural goods or processed food products sell goods through local community markets and roadside stalls. In more urban settings, many businesses look for sales skills in young women seeking jobs, as this often includes core skills in communication, problem solving, and confidence.

Skills needed

Better understanding the skills needed by employers for top employees is a key process needed in mapping how best AGYW can enter employment or find success in their own enterprises. Providing access to skills trainings, and helping AGYW gain skills, can give AGYW needed assets they can refer to and use when seeking jobs, particularly when many employers are already skeptical of existing training institution's capabilities. A challenge in this process however is the breadth of skills needs that exist in Liberia. Multiple KIIs noted that 'all skills' are in need, as they perceive a broad crisis in the shortage of all skills. Several firms noted the need for technical skills relevant to their industries that have been thus far hard to find (detailed below) while others noted that skills that cut across different industry areas, often called 'soft skills', are also key. These in particular were hard to identify as many companies do not think in terms of defining such skills but can still point to them when examples are given. This is particularly important to consider as well since it means these skill usually are not defined through formal degree programs. Instead they are often demonstrated in work. Thus, while this list details skills captured in conversations, it is not exhaustive of the country's employment needs.

Figure 18: Skills needed



101 While not all employers listed a broad range of skills, there is significant evidence that soft skills are valuable to youth as they are cross cutting in nature, and can allow young people to work across a broad range of circumstances. Skills relevant specifically in workforce success are detailed in the following publication: LAURA LIPPMAN, RENEE RYBERG, RACHEL CARNEY, KRISTIN ANDERSON MOORE. (2015). "Key "Soft Skills" that Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward a Consensus across Fields." at: <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-24WFCSoftSkills1.pdf>



ICT

- Computer literacy
- Mobile money software literacy
- Sales (of mobile credit)



Sales

- Printing
- Marketing
- Bookkeeping or financial management



Tourism

- Food preparation and presentation
- Customer service
- Languages
- Fashion and textiles, tailoring:
 - handicrafts (of a consistent quality)

- Broad understanding of hospitality industry
- Customer service ability
- Business management



Infrastructure Maintenance or Construction (Factories, Port, Hotels, Factories, etc.)

- Plumbing
- Electrician
- Welding & metal work
- Woodwork
- Construction & masonry

This list is illustrative of many skills needs across several sectors of opportunities. It is not exhaustive, however, and the general gap in skills existing from the quality of education and TVET system means that many are also cross cutting to other sectors. Moreover, without greater improvement in these skills, employers will continue to be forced to conduct their own internal trainings. Alternatively, they must rely on recruitment to try and link them with AGYW that possess the skills they need.

Recruitment

Understanding recruitment is crucial for AGYW looking for employment, for employers looking for skilled employees, and for programs looking to support young people in finding work opportunities. Recruitment or finding employees, particularly reflects the urban and rural divide, as much of it is based on three key vectors: word of mouth and connections; social media such as Facebook; and a limited number of web-based portals. Employers reported using a number of strategies to recruit employees.

Overwhelmingly jobs in Liberia are found through personal networks and word of mouth, both in cities and in rural communities. Some rural respondents noted vetting candidates by interviewing applicants' parents about their children: in areas where skills are in short supply, the employer is more interested in character than qualifications.

However, in urban areas, social media can play an amplifying effect of that word of mouth, as several respondents noted they had employees that found out about vacancies through a friend that had seen the opportunity on a company Facebook page. Companies in urban areas more frequently used Facebook to post about job openings, though this was not common.

More established medium and large firms use a more diversified approach. These include posting on the President's Executive Mansion government job portal; posting on social media like Facebook; reaching out to TVET institutions (for example, MVTC) to recruit recent graduates directly; or by engaging directly with a development program that builds job skills for employment, where an employer can directly request interns, or post a job.

When discussing recruitment challenges, employers noted that it is hard to find experienced and committed young employees. Furthermore, some industries – such as agriculture – are less popular due to youth perceptions.

Criteria for viable self-employment

As noted above, Liberia has many sectors with significant enough demand to be likely to offer self-employment opportunities for AGYW with the right skills, technical support or other resources. In addition to the opportunity areas noted above, sectors must meet certain criteria to be relevant to young people, but particularly for AGYW who are at greater risk when entering new industries and markets.

Low barriers of entry: Each industry contains its own barriers to entry, which can unfortunately be numerous. These can include knowledge such as understanding what opportunities exist in a business, understanding of career pathways, being able to understand what skills an employer is looking for or skills needed to succeed in self-employment, and where and when to engage in employment or look for work, amongst others. They can include physical barriers such distance to an opportunity, or access to a resource or market. Barriers can also be financial or in kind, such as being unable to afford basic resources or inputs to start a business, or access a physical resource or tool that could help jumpstart a livelihood based activity. Of course, the fewer and lower the barriers, the more accessible the sector to AGYW.

Opportunities for girls are expanding: In spite of the challenges this report has noted, interviews indicated that the number of jobs in traditionally male-dominated industries considered available to women have increased. This appears to be in large part driven by two factors. One, girls who get training in traditionally 'male' industries end up excelling because of their interest and excitement in learning new skills. Several education or training providers noted that young women end up often being the first ones to find work once they have gained these new skills. Two, employers see young women as driven, detail-oriented, patient, and able to learn on the job.

Generates fast income: AGYW have been able to find greater traction in employment in so-called non-traditional work, as well as more traditional fields, as young men have been guided by unrealistic perceptions of wealth and a job with a high payout. In many areas this has led men to lead the charge on urbanization, as it is believed jobs in urban settings will pay more for easier work compared to rural jobs. As a result of this rural-to-urban migration of young men, some employers are reported to be more willing to fill supposedly male positions with young women in rural areas. Examples of this including tapping rubber trees, sewing, and baking.

Something they can believe in: Interviews indicated that particularly for a new generation of youth — both male and female — there is a greater desire to find meaning in the work they do. As respondents noted, it specifically is a desire to be able to believe in what they do, and associate with it personally. This means that either youth will tend to want to engage in self-employment they can own in the sense of it linking to their identity, or even personalize through some form of branding. This could even be in instances where youth believe in a brand they work for is unique or well-articulated.

Value Chains with Employment Opportunity Examples

Value chains with job mapping overlays can show employment opportunities for AGYW and youth. While value chains have been traditionally used to show how goods flow through an economy, they may also be used to show the different actors at the national level, or at a micro level in a more informal economy. By mapping value chains, one can gather information about how they interact in an economy, and specifically the types of jobs they can provide, or get a sense of where there may be room for AGYW seeking self-employment to enter.¹⁰² Field interviews indicated that localized district- or town-level value chains, when supported properly, can support and stabilize microeconomic opportunities or employment.

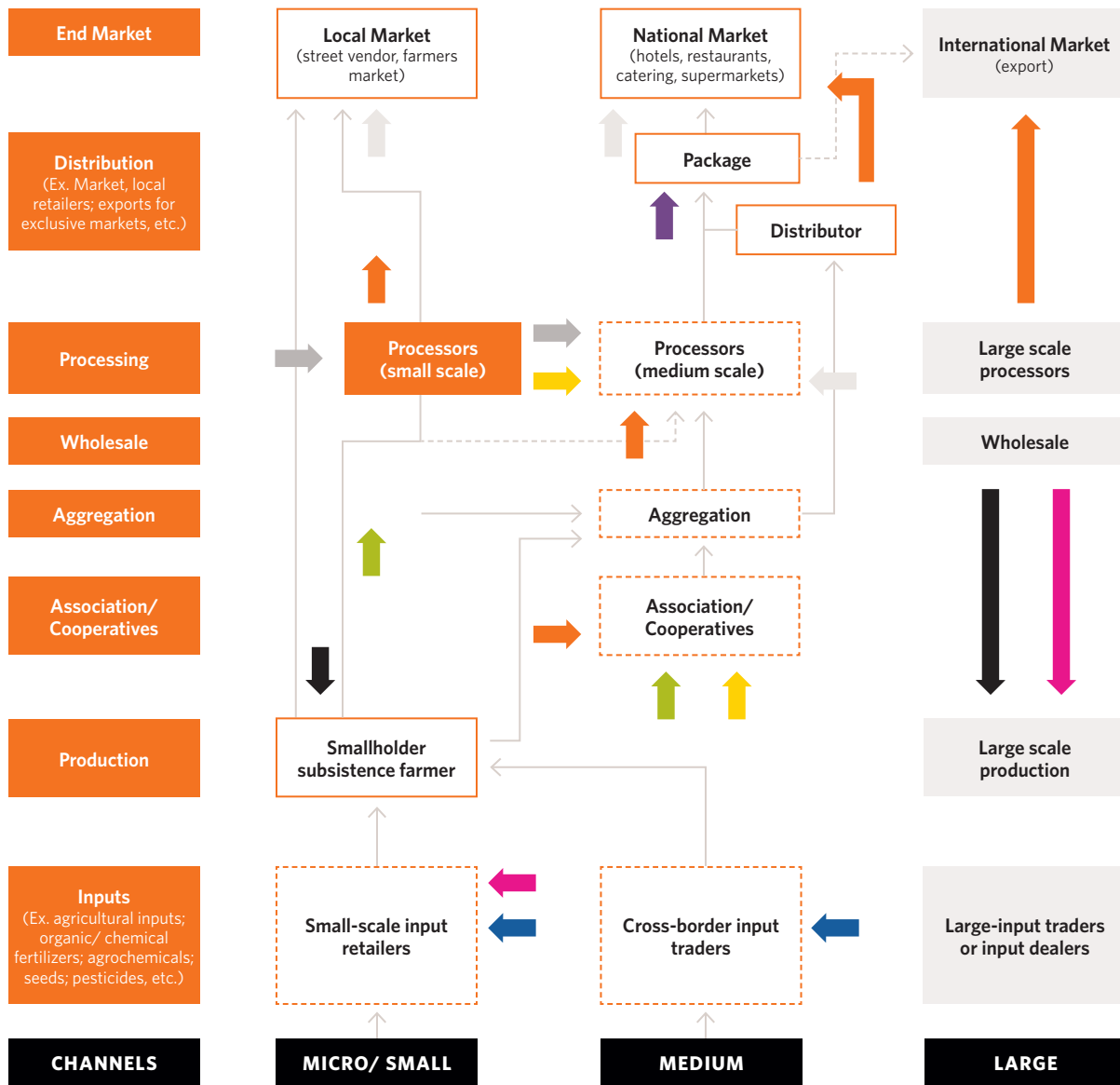
Here we provide two examples. One shows Liberian agriculture and agro-processing as a broad industry. We also illustrate a smaller micro value chain, baked goods. While it is difficult to say what potential an industry like baking might have in terms of growth opportunities countrywide, it is possible to map how baking work might be a growth industry at a city or district level, a fact that local economic expertise and interviews noted. The flow of goods is often restricted to a limited region, such as within a district or town, and typically only one or two actors are responsible for the channels of activity normally taken on by a bigger population of participants in a larger market.

Having identified dynamic, informal micro-value chains at the local level, one can then take an approach to programming that is similar to working with larger value chains. Micro-value chain analysis can then help answer questions that can inform program design, such as, “Are there opportunities within this limited value chain (e.g. cassava growing) that are accessible to AGYW?,” “What can be used to help enterprises in X city’s economic context?” and “What opportunities exist to link to larger country-wide value chains or external markets?”

The value chain with employment entry point overlay in Figure 16 is an illustrative example of the agro-processing sector in Liberia country wide. As this is high level summary view of what the sector looks like, its goal is to illustrate the nuances of employment opportunities across the different channels and stages of the value chain. This figure reads from the bottom to the top. The key, at the base of the figure, shows different types of jobs in the value chain and links each to a colored arrow to illustrate where such a job could be found. Channels, the broad groups of actors in the value chain, are noted at the bottom, broken out in to micro/small, medium, and large sized actors. Along the left hand side of the value chain there are guides to each stage agro-processed goods will move through. At each of those stages, actors in that stage are shown to the right in the value chain map. Actors and stages with dotted lines indicate these are areas where bottle necks exist or an absence of actors is causing a problem. Thin arrows leading from each actor in the value chain indicate how goods will move through the sectors, while colored arrows adjacent to the actors indicate where jobs (from the key) are added. In this example, on the far right under the ‘Large’ channel, the orange lines all the way up indicate that the sector is basically virtually integrated and has very little engagement if any with the other parts of the agro-processing value chain in Liberia.

102 Eleanor Sohnen. (2018). “Key Approaches to Labor Market Assessment”. Workforce Connections

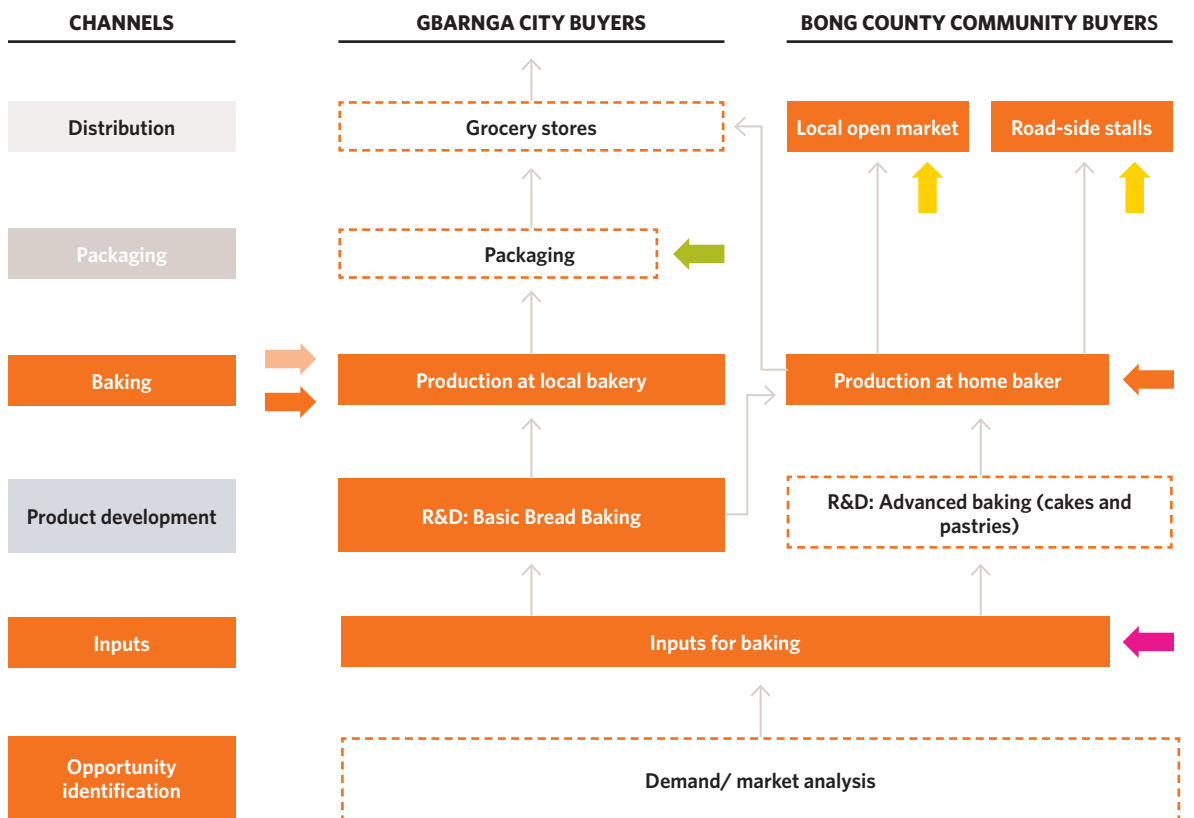
Figure 19: Agriculture and Agro-processing Value Chain with Employment Opportunity Overlay



Agro-Processing Employment Opportunities

- Agricultural Mechanic
- Cleaning & Filtering
- Food Processor
- Grading, Sorting & Packing
- Input Importer
- Nursery
- Planting
- Sales Agent
- Transportation (Driver)

Figure 20: Baked Goods Micro-Value Chain with Employment Opportunity Overlay



KEY

- Baker
- Baker Assistant
- Challenge
- Trader
- Packager
- Seller

In the micro-value chain analysis with employment overlays in Figure 18, the figure illustrates a small portion of an industry at a community level. Unlike the larger model of the value chain in Figure 17, this micro-value chain analysis is aimed to provide an illustrative understanding of the micro-economy that exists at a village level, in the Baked Goods sector. The figure is read from the base, starting with a key, that shows roles in the baked goods value chain. It also denotes solid blue boxes as stable areas, and those with dotted blue outlines as challenges or areas of bottlenecks. On the left-hand side are the stages of the value chain process, with goods flowing from bottom to the top, with value added at each stage. The boxes to the right of those stages indicate actors in the value chain at that stage. Thick line arrows indicate how goods move through the value chain, and the thick colored arrows indicate jobs that could be filled at each stage. At the top, a simplified list of channels exist, noting the county capital where goods could be sold, and the local community buyers of Bong county.

CONSTRAINTS

According to the KIIs and FGDs conducted, AGYW and youth who run micro and small enterprises face constraints that are worth noting. While these are unlikely to fall under any one project's scope, they should be kept in mind when working to identify livelihoods opportunities. Sectors with even the highest demand still face several issues. There are, however, a number of constraints to enterprise expansion and job creation even in sectors with high potential for employment. These include:

ACCESS TO FINANCE: Lack of access to finance is a major obstacle for MSMEs, constraining them from growing and expanding their business. Bank loans tend to be short-term - less than 18 months - and have high interest rates, normally between 12 - 20%.¹⁰³ As banks don't have an effective credit rating system, they tend to require collateral such as land or real estate, which most MSMEs don't have, keeping them from accessing needed financing. Additionally, banks and other program donors also noted that most people lack financial literacy, which hinders them from managing their loans properly, sometimes leading to default and major financial loss. The 2017 World Bank Enterprise Survey found that only 11% small-sized firms have accessed a bank loan or line of credit.

INFRASTRUCTURE: Roads are unpaved and impassable during the rainy season, severely limiting businesses' ability to access markets. In addition, transport costs among different road corridors are high, which makes it difficult for MSMEs to get their products to the local market and earn a livelihood.¹⁰⁴ KIIs with MSMEs indicate a key challenge with accessing and transporting goods and services, especially during the rainy season, leading to considerable loss of income. Cold-storage facilities are also insufficient, and in some cases non-existent, due to an unstable electricity supply.

ENERGY/POWER: Liberia has one of the lowest electricity access rates in the world: less than 7% of the population in Monrovia has regular access to electricity and less than 2% of the population has access in rural areas.¹⁰⁵ MSMEs are severely constrained by lack of access to reliable and affordable electricity, which is a bottleneck for operating a business.

MARKET ACCESS: Liberian firms also face difficult barriers to responding to market trends and access to quality products such as packaging, labels, storage, and processing machinery. Most of the micro and small firms use household equipment and other tools to package their products, limiting their ability to scale up production to commercial quantities.

CORRUPTION: Corruption is a major administrative and financial burden on firms, where firms are required to make "unofficial" payments to public officials to get things done whether it's to request a permit, secure a government contract, or during meetings with tax officials. The 2017 World Bank Enterprise Survey found that almost 90% of the firms in Liberia experienced at least one bribe payment request.¹⁰⁶

RECRUITMENT: Most firms in Liberia are typically micro or small in size, mostly hiring their workforce from the community through word of mouth or social media. Nearly 80% of all formal Liberian firms employ fewer than 20 people, with only a further 13% employing between 20 and 100 people.¹⁰⁷ In KIIs, various private sector and SME employers both alluded to challenges with recruiting skilled professionals. They identified lack of soft and technical skills as the main challenge for hiring and growing their business. Specific issues include:

103 "Liberian Businesses: the Engines of Economic Recovery and Growth." Building Markets, 2016, buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/liberian_businesses_-_the_engines_of_economic_recovery_and_growth.pdf.

104 World Bank Publications. "Spatial Analysis of Liberia's Transport Connectivity and Potential Growth." Issuu, 2018, issuu.com/worldbank/publications/docs/9781464812866

105 "Export Impact For Good." ITC, 2019, www.intracen.org/news/Why-SMEs-are-the-bedrock-of-the-Liberian-transformation-agenda/

106 <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/991441533638397722/pdf/129276-WP-PUBLIC-Liberia-2017.pdf>

lack of motivation, lack of technical skills in mid-level positions, lack of integrity, lack of financial management, low levels of education/illiteracy, lack of commitment, and poor customer service and communications skills. Other firms also indicated youth's negative attitudes towards work skills including, customer services, time management, commitment, and attention to detail, as the main challenge. A private firm representative said of youth, "They want easy and quick money, they don't think about the future, only about today." Youth are also not interested in agriculture, in large part due to their perception of farming as labor intensive and a non-viable business.

6

Analysis of Programming Opportunities

Based on the KIIs, FGDs, data, and secondary sources gathered on Liberia this section provides an overview of potential programming opportunities that will assist in development and support of livelihoods and employment opportunities for AGYW. These are divided into two groups below: Programmatic Opportunities and Training Opportunities.

PROGRAMMATIC OPPORTUNITIES

The programming opportunities here detail areas where BRAC might build on its ELA approach to either directly support new opportunities and growth in AGYW livelihoods, or improve the enabling environment for such opportunities.

MAP AND SHARE MICRO-VALUE CHAIN MARKET INFORMATION WITH AGYW FOR MSME MARKET LINKS

Rationale

According to both FGDs and KIIs, AGYW in Liberia lack adequate market information. This can include information such as what goods or services people are willing to buy, at what price something can be sold, where is the best place to sell, and other detailed information about a local market or value chain that can enable a young person to choose to create a business, find work, and operate successfully. Often this occurs for a range of reasons, such as the fact that much of Liberia's economy is informal, and thus formal accessible information is nearly non-existent. While pockets of information may exist in informal settings, it can be very localized, existing in the minds or experience of individual vendors, service providers; and even then, information provided by supposed experts such as friends or family may not in fact be up to date or the best information AGYW can get regarding the livelihood activity they wanted engage in.

Nonetheless, market information is a key mainstay of any entrepreneurial or livelihoods activity specifically allowing for AGYW to identify opportunities.¹⁰⁸

Opportunity

BRAC ELA can use local networks to gather market information about the communities in which BRAC ELA AGYW live. This can be done through informal interviews, or more formal KIIs and FGDs. Staff can also engage Liberian economists to build an understanding of what sectors might have the potential to offer stable incomes, or even growth in each county. This information can act as a foundation which BRAC ELA programming can base choices about which livelihoods trainings to offer in which county. This will help ensure that livelihood trainings are relevant for local markets, that oversaturation is avoided, and that girls can access skills and livelihoods that have a potential to create income grounded in local market needs.

Figure 21: Empower Market Opportunity Identification and Understanding



Information on each local market can be shared in clubs through posters and other simple learning materials, and incorporated into the livelihoods trainings offered by BRAC ELA staff. Moreover, as the program progresses, based on capabilities of staff or interest of participants, it is possible to incorporate them into the data collection to keep it up to date, further empowering AGYW to engage in understanding their communities economic systems and opportunities.

HELP AGYW OR YOUTH BUSINESSES TAKE ADVANTAGE OF RELEVANT POLICIES AND LAWS

Rationale

The research team has encountered several Liberian policies that are aimed at supporting small enterprises around the country. Each has the potential to serve as a means of linking AGYW-owned businesses with support. Moreover, given the role that projects or programs can play in providing technical support and structure, they have the ability to help AGYW form groups that can meet the requirements of policies. As a body that represents large populations of young people, BRAC could provide valuable insight into the operation and challenges of helping micro- and small business owners take advantage of such policies.

108 Additional information about opportunity identification and other soft skills relevant for young people's entrepreneurial or livelihood success can be accessed at: (2019). "What Works in Entrepreneurship Education and Training Programs for Youth? - Evidence Report." Accessed at: <https://www.youthpower.org/resources/what-works-entrepreneurship-education-and-training-programs-youth-evidence-report>

Opportunity

Liberia's Investment Law of 2010 – The Investment Law of 2010 identifies sectors that are specifically protected for Liberians. Several of these could have the potential to provide urban-based youth with employment or self-employment opportunities. BRAC could work to identify how potential protected sector work employs AGYW, to better link participants to these jobs, or identify where AGYW may be able to create their own small businesses in a protected sector. AGYW could achieve this if BRAC provides relevant technical training and support, as well as relevant market information, market linkages, and financial support (once financial knowledge has been built).

Small Business Empowerment Act – The Small Business Empowerment Act requires 25% of government requisitions to come from Liberian owned businesses. While the policy is currently challenging to take advantage of due to lack of clarity around its implementation, nonetheless government expenditure reaches throughout the country, and as a relatively consistent source of spending, it represents an opportunity for potential AGYW goods and service providers. BRAC could identify key regional government actors, and engage them in dialogue to better understand how they currently source goods and services in order to build an understanding of regional government needs and how best to engage AGYW under this policy. Then, based on the country's and youth population's capabilities, BRAC can develop livelihoods training that, combined with other programming opportunities noted here, could create a unique supply of goods or services with a specific social impact amongst AGYW in the community. Moreover, BRAC could work with AGYW to coordinate with an aggregator of goods, to then be able to provide resources to government actors.

2017 Special Economic Zone Act - While Liberia's Special Economic Zone Act has been promulgated, it has yet to be implemented. However, the development of one or more SEZs has the potential over the long-term to create a regional hub for business growth. Based on the location of such a zone, numerous adjacent business opportunities appropriate for self-employment, or the creation of new businesses in the zone, could support new jobs and livelihoods for AGYW.

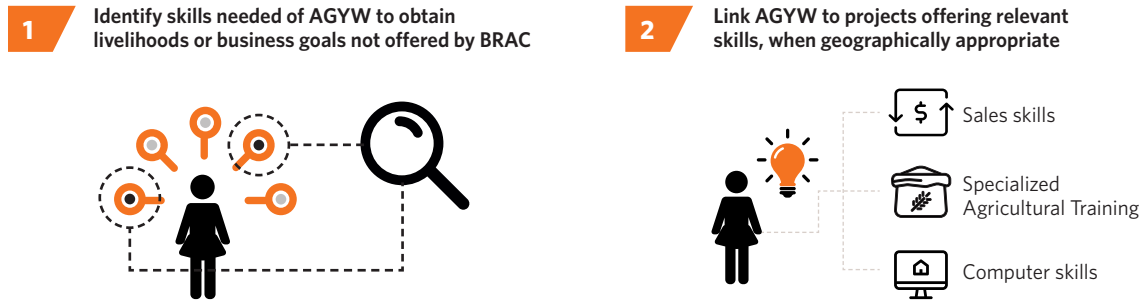
IDENTIFY SKILLS GAPS THAT COULD ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO LINK INTO PROJECTS

Rationale

Liberia as a country receives significant international assistance across all its counties and across a range of its programmatic areas. Unfortunately, in many instances during collection of data, numerous projects that engage in youth livelihoods, agriculture, or micro-enterprise were not familiar with the BRAC ELA program. The research team believes that there is an opportunity to strengthen the longer-term opportunities for AGYW livelihoods by coordinating and linking AGYW to other projects in overlapping industries and counties, that could further the impact of the interventions BRAC has already implemented. Interviews indicate that if certain thresholds of skill or population size are met, when in the right geographic regions, then participants in BRAC ELA might be able to engage with the local resources, partners, or institutions that other projects have developed.

Opportunity

As an illustrative example, while the BRAC ELA project is concluding in Bong County, Grow Liberia (noted in Table 7) has supported the formation of associations, cooperatives and input suppliers in Bong county (amongst others). Structures like cooperatives are aimed at engaging farmers in a collective process, to build technical farming talent, share knowledge, and improve the quality of farmer products. In addition, input suppliers which have been cultivated under Grow are well suited both to sell needed inputs to AGYW farmers, and to provide technical knowledge that will support and build on the technical trainings that BRAC can provide for AGYW.

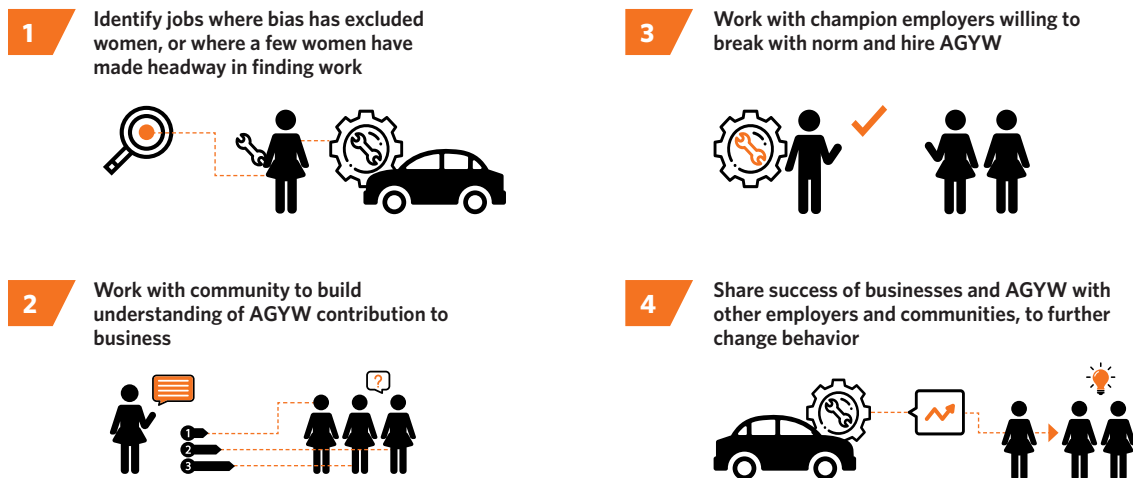
Figure 22: Link Skills Gaps to Relevant Partner Projects

Moreover, as new projects are formed, BRAC could develop regular periods of engagement and mapping with other programs, to work and integrate BRAC ELA youth into networks and link them to resources that other programs will provide. These could include associations, knowledge resources, community networks, information sharing platforms, etc.

SUPPORT MINDSET AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE REGARDING AGYW IN NON-TRADITIONAL WORK

Rationale

Respondents already report that perceptions of employers have begun to shift in recognizing that young working-age women who take non-traditional courses, or who engage in traditionally male-dominated work, perform as well as men if not better. However, much work remains on this front, particularly as this seems to be a predominantly urban or city-based phenomenon. Key informants reveal that gender bias keeps women out of agricultural roles for which they may be particularly talented. For example, interviews reveal that on two rubber plantations, women's only role in the plantation was to clean out the rubber cups that collect rubber, or to check that this was done correctly. However, interviews with technical practitioners indicate that when tapping rubber, women often display great skill, employing the precision, patience, and attention needed to do it well without damaging the tree and lowering its long-term productivity. In these instances, the farmers expressly noted the women were, however, not allowed to do these jobs.

Figure 23: Mindset and Behavior Change Around Non-traditional Jobs

Opportunity

Through its regional offices, BRAC has the opportunity to map and understand what employment opportunities exist, and have the potential to grow, that may traditionally be dominated by men. With this regional perspective BRAC staff can also judge the degree to which attempting to change this barrier will be safe for AGYW. This can include finding employers in such sectors who are receptive to the idea of AGYW placements in their company, once trained in the right skills. In such cases BRAC can work with employers to establish a regular means of feedback with the employer and AGYW to ensure they're performing to expectation, that the adolescent girl or young women is doing the job that was originally discussed, and that she also feels safe and supported in the role. Based on this, BRAC can work to share information about these experiences with other employees, through relevant local communication means, to normalize the idea of AGYW filling these roles, and to create behavior change within existing systems of employment.

Similarly, BRAC can build on its existing safespaces and community engagement model to increase frequency of engagement with family and spouses about what more technical jobs may entail in terms of opportunities, and what regular employment with a local employer can mean. This can include a dialogue with the family about the positive effects of bringing in additional income, and with the employer so that family and spouses can become more familiar with the person and the work if they are not already.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Based on details of the KIIs and FGDs, the following are also key areas where training could be used to support AGYW capacities. These could then translate either into greater employment potential, or into supporting establishment of new livelihoods.

Provide specialized technical training – According to several KIIs, technical training is actually better for girls because of the higher likelihood of employment. Specifically, mastery of more specialized technical skills — in trades like electrician work, carpentry, brick laying, and plumbing – requires higher degrees of attention to detail and concentration. According to KIIs with technical trainers, AGYW tend to be more detail-oriented and methodical. They noted this is supported by employers going out of their way to hire women who have specialized technical skills.

Deepen technical knowledge of local trainers - Often communities may have a limited population of skilled technicians, or professionals who learned by working in their field, but have never had the opportunity to improve the quality of their skills. This affects opportunities for AGYW who might engage with these trainers and only learn skills that have limited technical ability.

Develop agriculture specific skills - Given the prevalence of agriculture in Liberia, respondents noted that if AGYW do not have farming skills, it places them at a disadvantage for their own labor and even nutritional needs. Given the prevalence of farming in many rural communities, there is an opportunity to build new or strengthen farming skills, build up new techniques to improve productivity, or build skills in farm-adjacent activities, like animal/chicken rearing. BRAC could work to map where there might be the biggest impact in terms of productivity, to target skills, and survey what skills might appeal more to AGYW that skill have market value.

Training AGYW in best practices of job search and application process - the process of understanding a job market, knowing what a job is, how to search and then how to apply, are skills themselves that are difficult to acquire and often taken for granted. Such skills can be crucial in urban settings where larger firms use more formal processes (hiring searches, job postings, use of social media) and where understanding a career pathway

can help youth see a job as more than just a short-term opportunity to access a salary. In rural settings, such skills help youth stand out when searching for work, and in understanding what a job entails so that they will seek work best suited to their skills and interests, and recognize the longer term value of holding a regular salaried job. BRAC could engage or develop a curriculum around work readiness best practices, ground-truth this in both urban and rural settings in Liberia, and the adapt it to the context before rolling it out.

Awareness raising on potential agricultural market – Multiple respondents noted that, similar to global trends, agriculture is not appealing to AGYW in Liberia as it is seen as the activity of parents and grandparents. Yet at the same time, key informants noted there are opportunities in the sector for youth to make good money as there is market demand. In addition to some programming opportunities above, helping raise awareness with youth about the potential for some crops to make money could raise interest and understanding of the potential the market holds. It was noted one could start with vegetables, which have four harvest seasons a year and so four opportunities for a payout, and try to teach AGYW how to plant peppers, cabbage, tomatoes, and more high value crops so they can have a basic idea of the opportunity and potentially develop a passion for farming.

CONCLUSION

Liberia is a country with great potential, despite the challenges it has faced. As its context continues to improve, so will the opportunities for its citizens. Liberia's AGYW and youth are faced with numerous challenges, from risk of sexual assault and early childhood marriage to limited opportunities for livelihoods. AGYW and youth, in general, represent the country's inevitable next generation, and the support they get now from BRAC ELA and other programs such as the Government of Liberia's initiatives programs, education and training institutions, and policies that are better adapted to their context and needs, will help support them in carrying Liberia forward.

This report reviews Liberia's context specifically with the aim of identifying opportunities for these AGYW. Building on an analysis of participants of the BRAC ELA program, it then reviews the education and training context to understand how AGYW engage with learning and building skills. From there, the report examines Liberia's economic context and the potential for some industries to create greater opportunities for hiring or livelihoods creation for AGYW, particularly at the community level, through micro value chains. In this process, the report also examines skills broadly, as well as specific skills employers and youth alike noted as valuable for employment.

Finally, the report proposes programming opportunities that could help unlock ways to improve employment or livelihood generation for AGYW. Those are summarized below:

Opportunity	Potential Benefit
Map and share micro-value chain market information with AGYW for MSME market links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps AGYW access market information and ensure livelihood trainings are relevant for local markets Empowers AGYW to engage in understanding their communities' economic systems and opportunities
Support AGYW or youth business to take advantage of relevant policies and laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies offer a chance to link AGYW businesses to sustainable mechanisms for support Could link AGYW to sustainable unique markets for selling goods in Liberia, and also support in new jobs and livelihoods
Identify skills Gaps that could allow participants to link into Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage other projects and government initiatives that offer various trainings and link them with AGYW Support greater market linkages and orientation

Opportunity**Potential Benefit**

Support mindset and behavior change regarding AGYW in non-traditional work

- Provide specialized technical training, especially to AGYW
- Deepen technical knowledge of local trainers to enable and engage AGYWs to learn non-traditional technical skills, especially in the rural counties
- Train AGYW in best practices of job search and application process, and understanding their career pathway, to engage AGYW's in planning their futures and succeed
- Raising awareness on potential agricultural market to help AGYW develop interest in farming

Annexes

ANNEX 1:

OWNERSHIP OF THE FOLLOWING BUSINESS ACTIVITIES SHALL BE RESERVED EXCLUSIVELY FOR LIBERIANS:

- Supply of sand
- Block making
- Peddling
- Travel Agencies
- Retail sale of rice and cement
- Ice making and sale of ice
- Tire repair shops
- Auto repair shops with investments of less than US 50,000 (i) shoe repair shops
- Retail sale of timber and planks
- Operation of gas stations
- Video clubs
- Operation of taxis
- Importation or sale of second-hand or used clothing
- Distribution in Liberia of locally manufacture products
- Importation and sale of used cars (except authorized dealerships which may deal in certified used vehicles of their make).

Source: <https://investmentpolicyhub.unctad.org/InvestmentLaws/laws/113>

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