

July - September 2013

Cianehdeh

ActionAid Liberia quarterly newsletter



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A word from the AAL Country Director

ActionAid Liberia's quarterly newsletter serves several purposes. It is not only an intersect between our interest in accountability at the sub national, national and international levels, and information-sharing but it also serves as a tool to commence information sharing on our new ways of working.

AAL believes in the agency of people and has hope that hegemonic narratives and actions that have affected Liberia's development will no longer find its place in our society, especially when its citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Our role in shaping the narrative that defines the struggle for women rights, gender equality and youth inclusion in subnational and national governance in Liberia is a source of pride and remains significant. We attribute our success to close to 200 communities in 8 counties. We have partnered with 25 partner organizations (working with about 35,000 direct beneficiaries). We also recognize support from state and non-state institutions, especially the media that stood in solidarity with our cause to end poverty.

As the organization transitions to a more visible human rights based platform, with a new Country Strategy: People Engaging Power for Transformative Development, we would like to re-emphasize that our mandate has not changed. It continues to be framed within a non-negotiable stance on human rights for all. It is also challenges Liberia's historical cleavages to ensure that one of the major results of our partnerships will be a progressive, inclusive and accountable state, which recognizes that all Liberians are equal and able to reach their full potential.



Korto Reeves Williams



Children of Varney Town and Dorlah Bolongei, Project Officer, on the porch of the newly built Varney

The awaited opening of Varney Town school in Montserrado is soon here

Earlier this year children, parents and teachers from the Buckingham school in Pennsylvania, USA organized a Walk-A-Thon in order to raise support for a AAL and VIDA funded school project in Varney Town, Montserrado.

In early 2011 that Volunteers for International Development Aid (VIDA) partnered with AAL to undertake the project of building a school in Varney Town. The construction of a new school was long overdue; the last one was built in 1968. That school was run-down and many children did not attend due to the poor conditions; rain leaking in during the rainy season and only one class room for all grades. So that they wanted a new school was not surprising. In the new school, there are three class rooms and place for 93 students from Varney Town and surrounding communities. The construction was finished this past month, even with solar panels provided by VIDA.

In August VIDA-representatives came to Liberia to discuss the next steps, as the school building is completed, it is important to get it up and running, with skilled teachers and sanitation facilities and so on. The Honorable Josephine Francis, AAL and VIDA, along with the community members met to discuss responsibilities, a plan was agreed upon that will be implemented this fall.

Education is a core feature for development. Without schooling and the ability to read, write and count people are hindered to escape poverty. The construction of the school is an important step towards change for the children of Varney Town. The chief and children expressed their gratitude towards AAL and VIDA for making this school a reality, and for the children in USA putting their energy into walking for a school 5000 miles away.





Banner from the parade in Zai Town

the game had passed ordinary time. Finally the boy's team from Zai Town won with a score of 3 - 2.

The girl's kickball game and the boy's football game in Kilepo Kanweaken were played against teams from Seagboken. After three rounds, the girls from Seagboken emerged as victorious, beating the home team by 10 points to 8. The boy's game ended 2 - 1 in favor of the hosting team from Kanweaken.

Outcome

The two events were popular during which energy and many happy smiles were shared. The number of participants was also high: 1,891 in total, where the majority, 1,725, were girls and boys, and 171 men and women. Specifically the sporting events proved to be valuable in bringing people together under the auspice of STAR circles, to surface issues of women's rights and the participation of young women in peace and security.

Lessons learnt

Sports events can create targeted audiences for the promotion of specific issues and can also be used as approaches to impact behavioral change. The captain of Kilepo's boy's team summarized a final indication of the events. He said that his team will continue to use the jerseys when playing in other communities and spread the word via the messages inscribed on them: "We will

Did you know?

That the title of ActionAid Liberia's newsletter "Cianeheh" means "Change" in the Krahn language.

Using sports to engage for women, peace and security

With support from UN Women, ActionAid Liberia is implementing a fourteen-month project on "Women, Peace and Security" with the primary aim of Strengthening the Participation of Young Women in Peace and Security.

As part of this project ActionAid Liberia hosted two events in August 2013, one in Zai Town in Grand Gedeh county, and the other in Kilepo Kanweake in River Gee county. The purpose of the events was to promote mutual understanding and respect as well as raise awareness among community members on issues of HIV, girls' education, female participation in peace-building and leadership, and violence against women and girls.

The events were unwrapped with parades, awareness-raising and peaked with football and kickball competitions in each of the two communities. Participants paraded with STAR circle banners, posters and jerseys with campaigning and awareness messages printed on them.

Arthur Butler Jr, ActionAid Liberia Local Rights Program Manager, held a brief inaugurating speech in both Zai Town and Kilepo Kanweaken. He elaborated on some of the messages written on the jerseys and posters. Among other things messages of HIV, female participation in leadership, peace-keeping and decision-making were conveyed. After this the thrilling sports games were begun.

The sports activities

All of the teams from Zai Town competed against visiting teams from Gblayee Town. The girl's kickball match resulted in Gblayee Town winning over the visiting team by a sensational 27 to 16. The boy's football game resulted in an exciting penalty shoot-out after



Members of the parade in Zai Town

Country Support Team visit

In September the Country Support Team from ActionAid International was in Liberia providing support to finalize AALs new Country Strategy Program. We got the chance to ask Christy, Women's human rights coordinator, representative from India and AAI, some questions about her impressions and experience of Liberia and AAL.

Was there anything that surprised you coming here?

Yes, three things. First, all the uncultivated land, secondly that people living in the rural areas do not have access to it. Thirdly, I was surprised to see just how vulnerable women are here. But many of the girls are very inspiring and told us lots of motivating stories.

How has your stay in Liberia been?

It's been good. I grew up in a place with similar nature so it feels like home.

Do you believe the development will improve? How will it look? How?

It will be better. Women are strong and will live life without being vulnerable. It requires a strong government and a strong civil society to bring about the change.

What is AAL's part in this development?

AAL, being part of civil society has a role to play in creating a movement, a wave of change. AAL has a strong part to play for women's and girl's rights at all levels.

How does Liberia stand in relation to other countries you have visited?

Liberia has challenges in terms of infrastructure, health services and education. Where I was in the most rural mountain area in Ethiopia, the people there still had access to better facilities than the communities we visited here, not far from Monrovia. Still it is amazing that you can go into a hotel here and mistake it for being in London.



Members of the AMEU Women's Forum.

AMEU Launches Women's Forum

ActionAid continues to engage learning institutions. On 17th July 2013, the African Methodist University (AMEU) of Liberia launched their Women Forum, with support from ActionAid Liberia.

The inauguration of the event took place at the university premises. Guest speaker Mrs. Thompson Williams, who is a lecturer at the University of Liberia, encouraged women to take the big step of coming together to campaign for the safety of women. She pointed out that women should have the right kind of attitude and make every effort to participate in country development and to perform at the best of their ability. She added that the country cannot progress without women taking up leadership positions, and that women have to prepare themselves for these positions.

ActionAid Program Assistant, Tete Pennoh represented the organization. She pointed out that ActionAid Liberia will continue to support women initiatives in communities and in learning institutions, especially universities where young women are vulnerable. She highlighted that education is a very important component of young women's and girl's progress.

With the slogan *Women don't sit there; do something*, Sister Catherine Kollie, Chairlady of the Women Forum, encouraged other young women to join the team and be a part of the campaign. Catherine thanked ActionAid and added that the university, through the Women Forum will continue to work with ActionAid on the



Catherine Kollie, Head of AMEU Women's Forum.



Amelia Zarbuah, Woman Representative urging both girls and boys to go to school.



Members of the STAR Circle

Voices from the project:



Pauline Innis, mother of three, STAR Circle member.

“At first when I joined the STAR Circle my husband use to get vex and the community used to call out group 666. But since AAL came back and had an awareness meeting with the community, their attitude has now changed. We are now free to host our meetings in the Town Hall. I also acquired a Certificate in Hairdressing with FAWE and today I am a professional hairdresser. Thanks to AAL I am now getting knowledge about my health, and hygiene and also about HIV / AIDS and its prevention.”



Grace Zarbuah, single mother of three, STAR Circle member

“I am 29 years old, single with three children ages 10, 8, and 2. I am a 6th Grade Drop out since 2007 and I am hoping to go back to school this year September 2013. I am also a STAR Circle Facilitator and a farmer. I also learned sewing through the FAWE skills training program. I used to be very shy and couldn't speak in public. Thanks to AAL I am now speaking about the issues that are affecting us young women in the community and we are hoping to be examples for the other girls to follow.”

Elder Gabriel Gbabo - Gbogeasay.
“I am very happy today to see the togetherness that AAL has brought to our youth. I am most grateful for the sporting materials that were brought and we promise to take very good care of them. But I am embarrass because most of girls have drop out of school, but like the AAL representative said it is never late to go school so I want to encourage our daughters to go back to school.”

Kicking ball for girl's education

In August ActionAid Liberia went to the community Gbogeasay, Monweh District in Rivercess to organize a football and kickball competition. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness and “Encouraging Girls Education & Ending Sexual Violence”.

Before the sporting activities started the AAL representative Mrs. Damowah Biah held a speech informing the community chiefs and leaders about the importance of girl's access to education to increase their independence, health and wellbeing as education enables them to make informed decisions. The community leaders were also able to give their own view on the work performed by AAL and other NGOs.

Following the meeting the town gathered to kick some ball, both football and kickball matches were played. Gbogeasay

played Beuhn, in the both sports. The Black Star Girls from Beuhn won the kickball and the boys from Gbogneesay won the football match. The event was a success, and everybody enjoyed themselves.

ActionAid in Gbogeasay AAL are currently working with 50 women between the ages of 18-35 in Gbogeasay. They are involved in STAR circles, which is the ActionAid program of and “Societies Tackling AIDS through Rights”. The women involved in the program expressed that they were very happy to be able to organize the meeting and support each other and the community. They were excited of the possibility to go back to school through the Adult Literacy Program in town and were convinced that keeping their girls and children in school is the right way to go. Some of the community members expressed a concern that so many children had dropped out, but also acknowledged that it is never too late to go back.



Winning team from Beuhn.

Child Sponsorship corner

We have a saying in Liberia: “It takes a village to raise a child”. By sponsoring a child, you become part of that village. It facilitates the attainment of education and empowerment for all children and is an important means to ending poverty and to rebuilding Liberia.

We at ActionAid Liberia are glad to work with child sponsorships as a means to ending poverty. The stories we will be sharing on this page are case studies where flashes of ActionAid Liberia’s child sponsorship programs are presented.

The quote:



Teddy, 14, Karlorwelh. “ActionAid told us about forming a Children’s Circle, which would give us a space to talk about our issues and contribute to our community’s development. I was excited to hear this, and was very proud when my community selected me to represent them and to participate in training organized by ActionAid.

Since training, I have become the Karlorwelh Children’s Circle chairperson. We meet every week. Most of the children in my community love farming, so I have asked ActionAid to help us open a children’s garden in the community, so we can learn skills and practice. We also need more training for the circle members, so we all have the confidence to speak up and represent our needs. It is great that ActionAid is here, they listen to us!”.



Taking in the children’s perspectives

Over 75 children from four communities (Vaye Town, Parker Town, Beatoe and Karnley Town) participated in a one-day festival and interactive forum in celebration of International Women’s Day.

As part of ActionAid Liberia’s (AAL) commitment to developing children’s potential and highlighting their voices on issues that affect them, the event sought to promote creative thinking, develop children’s skills, talents and potential as well provide a platform to voice their opinions on issues that affect them in the community.

The program focused on building awareness on Violence Against Women (VAW) and how it affects



children, from the children’s own perspectives. The program also included indoor and outdoor activities; the outdoor activities included parade and kickball games while the indoor activity included drawing, drama and a storytelling competition. There was also a competition where each community was to portray their understanding of VAW and how it impacts children, using drawings, skits or story telling. The community with the best portrayal received an award.

The event was interactive and children brought many issues that affect. Some of the effects highlighted by the children during the competition were a lack of parental care and support, poor performance in school, children being exposed to the use of weapons, and disunity in the family.

Future plans for child sponsorship

Promoting Rights in Schools:

AAL will continue to work with communities to promote the rights of children in school by creating awareness and implementing the promoting right’s in schools initiatives across schools in the Gbarma district. AAL will also work with Ministry of Education at national level to increase support for improved learning environments in public schools in rural areas, especially where the local rights programs are situated.

Children’s Clubs:

Children’s clubs will be established to give children safe space to discuss issues affecting them so that they can voice their opinions to the communities for appropriate actions. In addition, the club activities will include reading, drawing and writing sessions for participants. Tutoring will also be provided to help children improve their basic math and spelling skills.



Source: Draft of "Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, girls, gender equality and HIV" by UNAIDS.

Team Up to Build Up with AAL



Action in the fight against HIV/AIDS

At the moment there are several actions taken in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Liberia. AAL is of course a part of them. In October we attended a workshop organized by the Anti-AIDS Media Network (AAMIN).

AAMIN are developing a guiding document for journalists in Liberia, helping those responsible to report about HIV/AIDS cases to reduce stigmatization and fear, and give HIV a "human face". At the moment there are no updated estimates on HIV-prevalence in the country. The available numbers from the 2007 Liberian Demographic and Health Survey say that the general prevalence is 1.5%. This figure is however likely to be much higher. One reason for this lack of data is that many people do not get tested, due to fear of stigmatization or lack of service. AAMIN and journalists play an important role in helping challenge stigma, making us all understand that HIV/AIDS is a treatable condition like any other chronic disease.

AAL, along with the UN and the Liberian Government are also involved in the development of the "Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV". This is a policy document with the aim to increase the understanding about what implications HIV/AIDS have for women in Liberia, and what can be done to reduce HIV/AIDS rates. This is very important as women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, often due to sexual and gender based violence. Rape is still the most commonly reported crime in Liberia. Additionally, many women living in poverty experience an increased risk due to engaging in 'transactional sex' or sex work, in these circumstances demanding safe sex is often impossible. Figures from a size estimate report conducted by the University of Liberia reveals an estimated 1,822 female sex workers in 7 counties. Along with drug users and Men who have sex with Men they compose the most-at-risk population (MARPs) in attracting HIV/AIDS. It is important to target these groups in prevention efforts in terms of reducing stigmatization, and providing health services and support. AAL is working with the MARPs to make sure that their rights are being seen to; we also hope that the new media focus and the new women focused agenda will help raise the issue of HIV/AIDS as a societal issue, not simply a health issue.

ActionAid Liberia believes strongly in building up and improving the capacity of the AAL staff as a team and individually. That is why AAL hosts a staff retreat every year. This year's event was held between the 26th and 29th August at the Lotus Restaurant in Monrovia.

The purpose of the retreat was twofold; partly it was to provide opportunity for review, introspection and looking forward via frank and open discussions between staff members; and partly it was conducting teambuilding and icebreaker activities.

Preparation was done via online questionnaires that among other things involved finding out what the theme of the retreat was to be. Out of the five proposed alternatives the theme "Team Up, to Build Up!" was chosen with a majority of 33% votes. The questionnaires also asked questions such as: "This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and to grow", with answers being on a scale of five from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Overall, the questionnaire revealed that AAL staff are very happy in working with ActionAid Liberia and also find it very satisfactory on a more individual level.

We at AAL are now working diligently at planning the country strategy for the coming five years and are looking forward to the exciting path ahead that we are pursuing together as a team.



Marching through Buchanan, girls and women during the parade through town.

Congratulations Mr Zakir Hossain Sarker!

As part of ActionAid Liberia’s work to develop its Country Strategy Report we hosted a small competition in October. Staff could submit a short text about “The relevance of ActionAid Liberia as a development partner in the next 5 years”. The winner would receive a weekend’s stay at the Libassa Ecolodge, situated outside of Monrovia.

A number of submissions were made but only one winner could of course be selected. The winner of the competition is Zakir Hossain Sarker, HRBA and Advocacy Advisor for ActionAid Liberia.

Mr Hossain Sarker presents the Chinese proverb “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”. With this proverb in mind he argues that: “Giving someone a fish may good for the short term, but it is better to let them know how to do it so that in the long term they can take care of themselves.” Mr Hossain Sarker points out that the Human Rights Based Approach, HRBA, is ActionAid’s tool to realize this line of thought: “ActionAid is offering this unique approach for the development of Liberia and has committed to work through HRBA in the coming years. Our HRBA focuses to build active agency through supporting people living in poverty to become conscious of their rights, organise and claim their rights and ensure accountability of duty bearers.”

“Our coherent and integrated support towards empowerment and campaign initiatives will contribute to rebuild Liberia and this would be a successful case of our HRBA programming, we believe.”

We congratulate Mr Hossain Sarker for these interesting and insightful words, and wish him along with a friend, a relaxing weekend at the Libassa Ecolodge.

Celebrating the girl child

October 11 Marked the International Day of the Girl Child and ActionAid Liberia of course took part in highlighting it.

The day was spent in Buchanan, a vibrating town not far from Monrovia, in an event that was initiated by a large parade through town. Girls wore t-shirts stating “When we educate girls, Liberia will RISE!” and marched to the beat of drums and brass instruments toward the city hall, gathering followers from the streets as we marched along. School representatives from all over Liberia, NGOs and Government Ministries, among them Julia Duncan- Cassell the Minister of Gender and Development, were present. Boy and girl representatives held speeches, as well as NGOs such as PLAN Liberia, H.O.P.E., EPAG, UNFPA and the minister, all to highlight the importance of education for all girls.

Poem: One Liberia for All

By: Maryealee T. Bono-Pennoh

Our voices will tell our stories, stories that will restore
 We will say it in a clear way, hoping it touches your hearts
 Liberia is trying to move on from the old era of shooting and looting
 Education has now become the riches of the poor
 Poverty is gradually ceasing to have victory over Liberians
 Businesses are booming all over the place
 The hustle is on, but the bustle is good
 Everyone’s making it by God’s grace
 Violence and war should be our last resort
 Assuming we have grown wiser with fourteen years of Civil war
 We should swallow our pride, act wiser and understand
 Our will cannot always lead us in the right way
 Patriotism should be our GOAL
 Compromise should be in our THOUGHTS
 Peace should be the WORD
 Reconciliation the ACTION
 Extend a hand of FORGIVENESS
 Today is the DAY
 Say no to VIOLENCE.....LIBERIA is our home

May I introduce?

Mac-Arthur L. G. King,
Administrative Officer with
ActionAid Liberia.

How did you come to work with AAL?

I saw an advertisement in the paper and applied for the position. I was called to an interview. At the end of the day I was successful and began working on July 15 one year ago.

What do you like the most about working with AAL?

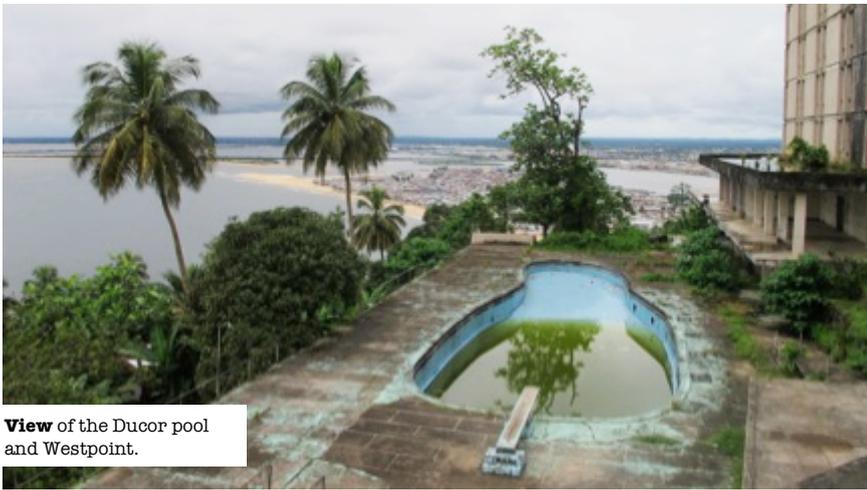
I like working with AAL because it is the vanguard of championing human rights for humans. AAL works for humanity ensuring that human rights are protected. We are all part of a social team fighting for human rights and working with people regardless of their social and economic status in society.

Within what areas of work do you think AAL could improve?

After this year of having worked for AAL I find that we need to do more in reaching vulnerable people. We are already reaching them, but we need to go beyond this and try to involve them even more. Our policies should be aligned more with community dwellers so that their plight can be addressed better. They must define their own needs towards development so that they in the end can transform their lives.

What of the projects you have worked with has made the strongest impact on you?

I am glad to have been part of the Varney Town project. Varney is a rural community and there was no school there before. With AAL presence and with help from VIDA, the children of Varney Town have now gotten a school to better their future for tomorrow.



View of the Ducor pool and Westpoint.

A place of former glory

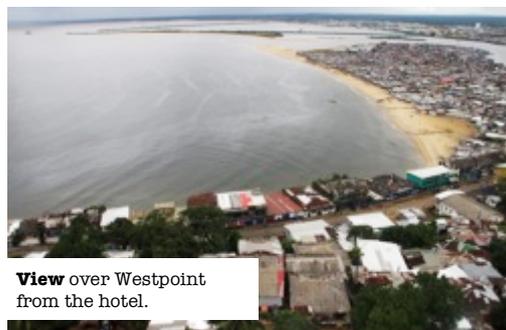
The Ducor Palace Hotel situated on the hilltop above Broad Street, Monrovia used to be a grand place, the finest hotel in Africa even. The story goes that Idi Amin swam in the pool with his gun at his side, and that Miriam Makeba sang in the hotel bar. The former Libyan leader Gaddafi was a fan and a regular guest. Today there is no one swimming in the pool, although the dancing continues in the form of teenagers practicing dance moves on the run-down pool deck. Perhaps preparing for the weekend.

When the war started in 1990, the last guest checked out and the squatters moved in. Since then the building has not been revived however the French artist François Beaurain, who painted the walls on the 5th floor aims to bring life back to the building. In 2011 the Libyan government made a pledge to restore the hotel to its former glory. But as the Arab spring came and the civil war in Libya along with it taking Gaddafi away, that promise also disappeared.

While walking around the hotel one can still imagine how it used to be. The history is captured in the walls but the sadness comes when thinking of what it still could be if the wars had not come. Today, the Ducor Hotel is an appreciated place among local and international photographers and film-makers as it offers a unique and picturesque setting with beautiful 360 degree views over Monrovia.



View of the former restaurant.



View over Westpoint from the hotel.

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