

Davis Project For Peace Proposal
Empowering Young Women Through Sexual Reproductive Health Education- Liberia.
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Problem:

What is peace for young women when they are forced to drop out of school due to early parenthood? What is peace when a 16-year-old girl is neglected by her family, trapped in impoverished conditions, and loses her value to a patriarchal man who takes advantage of her vulnerability and abuses her pride and dignity? Where is the peace? Peace is when the mind is at ease and when society promotes systems that allow young people to grow and thrive. But this is not the case in Liberia. Owing to the 14 years of civil unrest, Liberia lacks some key elements that promote the growth and well-being of young people, especially women. The country promotes a culture, where sex and sexual reproductive health are taboo to talk about amongst adults and children. Meanwhile, upon puberty, young women become sexually active oftentimes resulting in sexual relationships with their male counterparts. However, the lack of sex education and limited resources on reproductive health have forced them to engage in risky sexual practices that have left them vulnerable to either sexually transmitted diseases, or pregnancy at very young ages. For example, 67 percent of adolescent girls with no education are either pregnant or at least have their first child to care for (*Adolescents and youth* 2017)¹. In a developing country like Liberia, one cannot imagine the destitution that comes with early parenthood. This is what my team wants to fight against. A local initiative I started in my community back in 2018, created a space that allows young women to learn and share about issues affecting their development. The initiative, titled *Girls let's talk*, provided a knowledge-based system that educated young women about reproductive health, self-esteem, and confidence-building. However, the lack of funding and my relocation for school buried the dreams of the initiative. This is why my team believes that the Davis Peace Project funding is highly useful in this direction as it would be used to revive young women in Liberia.

Project Outline: The goal of our project is to initiate a knowledge-based system that empowers young women with education about their sexual reproductive health whilst creating a safe space that enhances their growth and development. Through a 5-day intensive workshop in two locations, we will provide training for 50 young women (25 in each location) between the ages of 15 to 20 on sexual reproductive health and development. We will successfully do this by developing a curriculum through the use of the educational resources provided by the World Health Organization on adolescent health and development. This curriculum and the 5-day workshops would address topics under Sex education (consent and contraceptives), Sexually transmitted diseases, Menstrual education, Hygiene and sanitation, Cervical cancer, etc. Such an educational framework promotes peace because it empowers young women with the opportunity to make sound decisions, most especially when it comes to issues regarding their health.

Project Location: The project will be executed in two phases, in two separate locations where each location is very unique for the project. Location one is the William Booth High school, a city high school dedicated to educating less privileged children, while location two is the Bahn Township (a small rural town located in Nimba County). These two locations are unique for the project because of the high levels of teenage pregnancy and high school dropout rates occurring here. For instance, in rural Bahn, teen pregnancy peaks at 50%, where 36%² of these women do not have the opportunity to return to school.

¹ *Adolescents and youth*. UNFPA Liberia. (2017, October 31). Retrieved January 2, 2022, from <https://liberia.unfpa.org/en/topics/adolescents-and-youth-4>

² *Liberia National Education Profile 2018*. Education Policy Data Center. (2019, January 16). Retrieved January 2, 2022, from <https://www.epdc.org/node/229.html>

Partnership and project sustainability: A key solution approach of the project is partnership, especially to ensure sustainability. To firstly implement the project, I will partner with the **Dr. Stefania Forte Educational Foundation** (a local NGO that promotes education and young women's empowerment) to recruit three additional young women to join my team. This is an organization that I currently volunteer with and members here already have experiences and the skills of project management. Thus, a team of 4 women would support the project execution both at the William Booth School and rural Bahn Township. Given that the 5 days workshop cannot address all of the topics on sexual reproductive health, creates the perfect avenue for the project sustainability since we would continue to use the curriculum to train girls after the workshop.

Sustaining project in William Booth: After the workshops, girls will establish a young women's club in their school to continuously learn and be empowered. Young women would meet biweekly to learn, discuss and share a topic from the curriculum. They will lead the affairs of the club as a way of stimulating their leadership potentials, but with mentorship and supervision from me, my team, and **Mrs. Yomo Konah**. We will pair the club leaders with mentors from our team to provide additional training for the club leadership. Also, our partnership with Mrs. Konah ensures success because, as an adult, she has committed her life to activities that spearhead young people's growth. We are extending our work with her as she volunteers to act as an in-school mini-counselor/ adviser for young women in the club whenever the need arises. Also, as an alumnus of the institution, I am going to use my connection with the administration to gain their support to allow the establishment of the club and to promote it as a recommended co-curricular activity for girls in the school. Every academic year, the club would graduate senior members to face the world as educated empowered women. We will also recruit new members who are qualified to join the club.

Sustaining the project in Bahn Township: To sustain the project in Bahn, we will partner with the **United Sisters Organization**. This organization is a group of passionate adult women who focus on empowering one another through entrepreneurial opportunities. However, we aim to have this organization develop a subdivision that focuses on empowering young women from our workshop. Having spoken with the chairperson of the organization Ms. Lydia Menwon, they have agreed and given their full support to be our partner. United Sisters will supervise biweekly meetings for young women to share and learn about a topic in the curriculum. They will also act as motherly figures to the girls through a foster mother-to-daughter relationship to promote counseling and advising. However, since the success of smooth supervision would rely on sharing our skills with the United Sisters women, a part of our 5 days workshop is to include a one-day workshop for the adult women to teach them about the curriculum and how we intend for them to lead the club. Also, as adults, these women are experienced and very much familiar with the culture of empowerment, so we can rely on their experience to stand for young women. Currently, United Sisters are working to build a women's center in the township, but inadequate funding is slowing this. A part of the project is to contribute with funding. Through this manner, we can also secure space for the young women's activities in the township.

Tentative Timeline: When the Davis Project for Peace chooses to fund this project, we would immediately start working to successfully implement the project. **In March**, I will begin organizing a series of zoom meetings with my team at the Stefania Forte Educational Foundation. With my experience as a college student and the skills, my team has learned from the foundation, we would begin developing the curriculum. **During this period to May**, we will also begin our recruitment process. This process will be an open call through flyers and announcements to girls of the school and the township. Their selection to participate in the project will heavily depend on their age, willingness and commitment to be involved. The project would run the entire **June**. **Earlier in June**, I would travel to Liberia to meet with my team and begin organizing logistics for the workshops. The first week of workshops would run from **June 12 to 16**. Activities would feature teaching the curriculum, discussions and active participation, games and sporting events, and a conclusive reflection. The next phase in Bahn township would run from **June 21 to 26** featuring similar activities. After each workshop, we would begin our negotiations to actively implement the sustainable part of the project.

