

REPORT OF S2C PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
LIBERIA
2010 - 2011

INTRODUCTION

As part of our youth development programs, the YMCA held series of activities with young people during the years 2011 and 2012. The activities were aimed at promoting and unfolding the YMCA subject to Citizen (S2C) program concept and building the civic competence of young people to become conscious and aware of their rights, duties, and responsibilities as citizens. The activities took many forms ranging from organized lecture sessions and presentations to engagement with duty bearers and stakeholders. Details of the activities are presented here below:

S2C Catalyst training workshop

We conducted three-day training for S2C catalysts. There were a total of 52 participants from all YMCA branches across the country. There were other participants from universities and other youth-related institutions like the Federation of Liberian Youth, the Liberian National Student Union, and the Liberian Council of Churches Youth Desk. The training provided young people an opportunity to acquire an insight into the YMCA civic competence program (S2C concept) and provided a roadmap for youth involvement in civic engagement processes in post-war Liberia.

The participants were drilled into a number of training sessions and exercises to allow full participation and to allow them to grasp fully the S2C concept. Some of the lectures and presentations focused on subject vs. citizen, youth crisis in Africa, community service, youth and political violence, governance and the rule of law. The three-day training was very interactive and challenging. It was characterized by questions and answers and wide exchange of ideas among the participants and facilitators.

The training was captured and covered by two local radio stations and one newspaper. Scanned copies pictures of the news articles, as carried by the newspaper, were submitted to Gil Harper.

S2C Dissemination and rollout to youth in Monrovia

As part of plans to roll out the S2C concept to the youth of Liberia, the S2C ambassadors held weekly dialogue forums with students (mostly at the secondary level) of several schools in Monrovia. These forums were held on average four times per month and the attendance averaged 47 youth per week. The foremost focus of these forums was youth citizenship and violence. How can young people contribute to building a violence-free community? The discussions were extensive, allowing the S2C ambassadors and other youth in attendance to share their perspective on the theme “From Subject to Citizens.” Interspersed with the discussions at these forums was the screening of the documentary called “Kenya Burning”. The screening of this documentary sharpened the conscience of the youth and made them see firsthand the dangers of violence and conflicts.

On Saturday, 29 May 2010, there was an S2C training session at the Unification Town branch of the Liberia YMCA. At the gathering of about 39 young people, the youth were given basic insight into the S2C concept. In the session organized by the S2C Ambassadors, the youth discussed and internalized the S2C concept. There were smaller group discussions and reporting of who a citizen is and what roles are expected of citizens of any community. Some of the findings revealed:

- Citizens do not shift blame on other people when situations go wrong; instead citizens will strive to collectively resolve situations that hamper the development of their community
- Citizens are vocal; they comment on the ills of the community and suggest positive means of finding solutions
- Citizens are law-abiding; they walk within the confines of the law and have respect for civil authority
- Citizens are always conscious of the tempo of change in their community

Intellectual discourse series

During the period, we held series of discourses intended to create a forum for youth engagement with policy makers, civil society actors and local government authorities. On April 3, 2010, a forum was held at the Unification Town YMCA, 45 miles outside Monrovia, with the Superintendent, the chief administrator of Margibi County, addressing an audience of 157 young people. The forum was intended to enhance the students’ understanding of and involvement in the County Development Agenda, a roadmap for development designed by the local government in the county of Margibi.

Another symposium was held with secondary school and university students. The symposium was held on Wednesday, 2 June 2010. The symposium was held under the theme “**Youth Civic Competence and the Rule of Law: a recipe for building a responsible citizenry.**” Delivering an address to a gathering of 63 students, Senator John Ballout reminded the youth that they owe so much

responsibility to their country. Senator Ballout is a leading member of the Liberian parliament. He was then chairman of the Senate Committee on Defense and National Security.

Senator Ballout expatiated on the values and responsibilities of a citizen. He said, as citizens, young people should challenge and influence their local and national leaders through positive words and deeds vis-à-vis constructive civic engagements. He averred that for too long Liberian youth have lived more like subjects by engaging in meaningless and reckless deeds and mediocrity. The Senator spoke of the need for youth, especially those who associate with the YMCA, to see themselves as stakeholders in the rebuilding and democratization of post-war Liberia. And any attempt by young people to remain indifferent by standing aside as onlookers is a disservice to themselves, the nation, and posterity will hold them responsible.

There was another intellectual discourse involving three panelists – the chairman of the Liberia Anti Corruption Commission, a journalist and publisher of the Daily Observer, one of Liberia’s leading newspaper, and the Vice President of the Federation of Liberian Youth. The discourse was held on Friday, April 22, 2011. The discourse was attended by nearly 250 students from several high schools and universities. Theme for the discourse was **“Peaceful Elections through Conscious participation: a challenge for youth and student leaders.”**

Engagement with duty bearers

During the period, the National Youth Council led 44 young people on several visits to the capitol (i.e. the seat of the National Legislature). These visits consisted of four Hi-Y members and an S2C ambassador at a time. The visits were largely intended to expose young people to the workings of the legislature, how proceedings and discussions are held in plenary of the legislature. Each visit lasted well close to two hours, and whenever possible during these visits the students would meet and hold discussions with members of the lower house (House of Representatives) committee on youth and sports. The discussions centered on how young people can be given more attention and opportunity to contribute to peace and development of the nation. In this meeting a lawmaker remarked “This is a worthwhile initiative undertaken by the YMCA to expose these young students to the governance of the state. We need more of such healthy engagements. We need to educate our youth of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of this country... and one way to do it is to challenge them to visit the legislature, our first branch of government, to see and understand the work of their representatives. Continue to visit us whenever you can, not only when we are in sessions. You can also visit our various offices and talk with your lawmakers.”

We made a total of 11 visits to parliament during the period under review. Our visits were frequently interrupted and halted by executive sessions, during which journalists and visitors would be asked to excuse the chambers of the lawmakers when sensitive security and national issues are being deliberated. During these visits, we lobbied and secured the commitment of a Senator, John Ballout, who committed himself to introducing and sponsoring the ratification of the African Youth Charter in the Liberian Senate. As a result of our joint engagement with the Federation of

Liberian Youth, the Liberian Senate more than one year ago ratified the African Youth Charter and it is now before the House of Representatives for its concurrence.

As part of our civic engagement with duty bearers, we reached out to the Monrovia City Corporation to sell out the S2C program concept and enlist the city government's support and partnership. This outreach led to our first major collaboration with the city government, and this collaboration facilitated a massive cleanup of the city of Monrovia on May 7, 2011. A total of 87 youth volunteers and program beneficiaries participated in the clean up exercise.

Endorsement

S2C has been endorsed by the Youth Committee. S2C was discussed and disseminated among the entire youth council since our return from the Addis Ababa forum, but it was not until 14-17 October 2010, when it was formally endorsed at our 6th National Youth Assembly. S2C was also presented by the NGS and the former Youth President (Alston) at the Board Meeting of 28 August 2010, and the Board endorsed it as a key advocacy and civic engagement tool.

Civic & Voter Education, a build up to the 2011 Presidential & Legislative Elections

The YMCA in 2011 was one of several civil society organizations accredited by the National Elections Commission to conduct civic and voter education for the 2011 general and presidential elections in Liberia. Led by the National Youth Council, the S2C ambassadors carried out vigorous month-long voter registration awareness in Nimba, the second most populated county in Liberia. Nimba is situated in northeastern Liberia, just along the border with the Republic of Guinea. In Nimba, the YMCA collaborated with other institutions like the Nimba University Student Association, the motorcycle union, the marketing association, and with local leaders like mayors and chiefs to facilitate a massive awareness that would see citizens turning out *en masse* to register for the 2011 vote. The voter registration sensitization was carried out in partnership with the National Elections Commission with support from UNDP and IFES.

Peace Clubs

We held a two day peace club training from 18 – 19 November 2011. The training brought together 67 students from 16 schools. The training focused on peace building, conflict resolution, leadership and teamwork. As a result of the training, we are beginning to establish a more visible presence in the schools and engagement with school authorities.

S2C JINGLE PRODUCTION & AIRING

We produced series of jingles depicting youth empowerment and S2C messages. These jingles were aired on two leading radio stations (Truth FM 96 mhz and ELBC 99.9) for a period of one month (mid February – late March 2011). It is assumed that an audience of at least 500,000 people heard the jingles and understood the message portrayed. Some of the messages that were portrayed in the jingles are presented below:

- Young people are citizens and not subjects. Citizens are conscious of their rights, law-abiding, and desirous of using their talents to contribute to development of their country. Don't use the youth as troublemakers and perpetrators of violence. Stop victimizing us. We are citizens. Give us the space and influence to contribute to the development of our county Hey young people! Don't be subjects. Subjects are those who are easily used by other people to make troubles and perpetrate violence. I am a citizen. A citizen is one who takes responsibility, knows his rights, is law-abiding, nonviolent, and has a sense of purpose. Be a citizen by working towards the building of a better Liberia.
- Are people in your neighborhood beginning to dump garbage in any open space? Is the garbage piling up and there is fear of an outbreak of disease? As citizens we need to find solution to this problem. Let's take action to solve this and many similar problems. Begin to speak out against this ugly act. Do not wait for government. You can do something to make a positive change. One small and positive action can make a big difference.
- Young people are instruments of peace. Let's use our ideas and skills to promote peace and development in Liberia. Remember peace begins in our various homes. Now that we have a choice, we have a purpose. Let's pursue our purpose. We are not subjects, but citizens!
- Young people of Liberia, we can strengthen and boost democracy and good governance in Liberia by participating in debates on public issues, getting involved in discussion of local affairs. We can change our political participation from being mere onlookers to having a say in the decision making process and making our leaders accountable for what they do. We can also enhance democracy in our country by joining youth groups to promote specific developmental issues of importance to the young people.

NB: Gil has a copy of the jingles and reports of activities during the period.

Antiviolence campaign

Ahead of the October 2011 vote in Liberia, the YMCA as part of its civic competence program led a weeklong antiviolence campaign across Monrovia. The campaign targeted four violence-prone communities: West Point, PHP Community, Redlight Community, and New Kru Town. The campaign involved sensitizing community residents against electoral violence. In these communities, we sought to engage the residents

especially the youth through interactions and dialogue to promote peace and a strong sense of civic responsibility. The campaign created forums for residents in these communities to interact with community and opinion leaders in a way that reduces and mitigates the potential for electoral violence.

The antiviolenace campaign culminated in a live radio talk show just on the eve of the October 2011 elections. The talk show created a forum for further discussion with the public and set the stage for calling on all actors to refrain from violence and observe the rule of law.

These and many other engagements helped us set the stage for a more peaceful electoral process.

Youth leadership campaign

A youth training camp was held from 27 – 31 December 2011. The camp brought together 57 young people from several high schools in Monrovia and its environs. Held under the theme “From subject to citizen”, the camp was aimed at increasing and building upon the civic competence of young people.

**FINANCIAL REPORT OF S2C PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEARS 2010 & 2011**

Catalyst training wokshop	\$ 1,339.00
Training for peace club members	344.00
Jingles (production & airing)	425.00
Hi-Y & S2C animator training workshop	235.00
Youth leadership training camp	800.00
Total expenditure for the period	\$ 3,143.00

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