



**The Future of Work
in urban Liberia &
Sierra Leone**
Abridged report

December 2019
(Updated May 2021)

Preface and 2021 update

Y Care International (YCI) is at its core a partnership-based organisation, working hand in hand with YMCAs and other local youth-focused organisations in some of the world's poorest countries to create decent work opportunities for disadvantaged young women and men. To continue to meet young people's needs we need to adapt what we do to changing contexts and global realities. Whilst there is significant policy focus on youth employment, the voices of the most disadvantaged young people are silent in these debates. Recognising this, in 2019 we worked with young people in Sierra Leone and Liberia to understand their realities and aspirations and to determine how we could best contribute to future-proofing their skills and opportunities.

85% of the world's 1.8 billion young people live in developing and emerging economies and fragile states¹. In countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia the situation for young people is particularly challenging. In Sierra Leone, one third of the population is between the age of 15-35 years old with 60% of young people

not in productive full-time employment² and 75% of young workers classified as 'vulnerable' – facing high levels of job insecurity and lacking access to safety nets when they cannot work. These challenges are greater for women and disabled young people. In both countries young people with good levels of education are more likely to be in salaried employment³ but levels of literacy remain low; in Liberia only 32.8% of women can read and write⁴ and in our research 16% of respondents in Liberia and 22% in Sierra Leone had never been to school or had dropped out of school.

Before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the scale of youth unemployment and underemployment was already in crisis. Poor and vulnerable young people faced several barriers to finding and sustaining decent work – including, but not limited to, lack of access to quality education and training, exposure to crime, violence and conflict, and discrimination based on age, gender, and disability. Whilst the pandemic has affected everyone to some extent, vulnerable young people are amongst those who have suffered the most.



Focus Group Discussion - Freetown

1. (Goldin et al. 2015)
2. (Danish Trade Council for International Development and Cooperation 2017)
3. (De Mel, Elder and Vansteenkiste 2013)
4. (Central Intelligence Agency 2019)

As the capital cities, both Freetown and Monrovia became the epicentres of the outbreaks of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone and Liberia due to higher levels of people transiting through when the pandemic first struck in March 2020. To gain a better understanding of how the crisis has impacted vulnerable young people's opportunities to access and sustain decent work and to enhance the validity of our research findings we conducted 8 additional interviews in April 2021 with some of those involved in the initial research. This included the CEOs of YMCAs Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Monitoring and Evaluation officers and young researchers.

Impact on job opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted young people's access to job opportunities. In March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in both Liberia and Sierra Leone⁵ which led to nationwide policy measures to restrict mobility and prevent the spread of the virus. Curfews, lockdowns, travel restrictions and the closure of borders had a serious impact on the job market and overall economic situation of both countries. Although many sectors have been affected, the tourism, transport and entertainment sectors have been in a comparatively worse situation due to limited travel and restrictions on public gatherings. Many organisations and businesses were forced to abandon activities due to financial difficulties. Others, such as YMCAs took measures such as reducing staff salaries for a limited time to cope with the impact of the crisis. Many young people, ranging from recent graduates to the most vulnerable and marginalised experienced the knock-on effect resulting from less employment opportunities in the public and private sector.

Throughout Africa, the impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalised young people has exacerbated food insecurity, hunger and poverty and there has been dissatisfaction at government failure to provide adequate stimulus packages to support those in need⁶. Within Liberia and Sierra Leone, organisations such as YMCAs made efforts to reach the most marginalised and deprived groups⁷. Meeting basic needs – access to food and

water was prioritised. Support with career and skills development was put on hold due to restrictions and limited capacity so it remains a critical area to address.

Vulnerable young people found themselves in more difficult situations compared to before. Many had previously earned money selling goods on the street or in the markets. The restrictions reduced the number of sales and this meant that those who had been selling food as a source of livelihood were forced to eat what they usually sell. Others became dependent on handouts from the community. Whilst both young men and women were impacted it seems that young women struggled the most. In both countries young men adapted quickly to the changing circumstances. For example, many young men resorted to buying a motorbike and earning money through transportation if they lost their jobs/businesses. Young women had less opportunities to increase their source of income. Furthermore, the economic situation increased the vulnerability of young mothers. For example, one mother in her community and her children went for two days without food due to her poor financial situation.

“To get a job in the government sector, you must be connected to people in high offices. Non-governmental jobs require more years of experience. For the newly graduated with no job experience, it's very difficult. Take me as an example, I graduated in 2017 and I am unable to acquire a permanent job. What I do is make beads, I try to make use of my God given skills to create and work for myself, sell online and support myself and my child. But seriously, it is not easy, especially for youth in this country.” *Sierra Leone*

5. (T-Sum 2020)

6. (Wilton Park 2020)

7. A consortium led by Save the Children was set up including Humanity and Inclusion; Plan International; Concern Worldwide; the Foundation for Rural and Urban Transformation (FoRUT); Focus 1000; and Street Child of Sierra Leone.

“Most of the young men who’ve been in business and lost jobs, what they did was to get a motorbike which is normally used for transportation here. So, they diverted their skills into that to generate revenue. Most of those young women who were in business and lost their jobs did not know how to ride bikes, so they are deeply affected now”. *Sierra Leone*

been used to promote the selling of products made at home. For example, young people have started making home cooked food and selling it within the community, using social media as a means of promoting their products and contacting customers. Other examples of products being sold and advertised using social media include selling phones or other electrical items, arts and crafts and clothes.

Facebook Platforms to sell and/or advertise products or services online:

Sierra Leone: Freetown Buy and Sell

Liberia: Monrovia Buy and Sell

New work opportunities

In the early stages of the pandemic, some NGOs, including the YMCAs, enlisted young volunteers to carry out community awareness activities. These were short-term opportunities which did not provide income generation. In both countries school closures and a reduction in business led to more young men and boys taking up motorcycle transport jobs to earn money however the curfew and travel restrictions in place limited the income that could be made with this activity. Selling credit transfers – buying mobile credit and transferring it for a small fee also became a popular source of income. For young women and girls, childcare and cleaning jobs became available due to people spending more time at home.

Our research revealed that prior to the pandemic, many young people were ‘getting by’ through carrying out informal work and petty trading. Reduced job advertisements along with restrictions to stay at home and/or limit travel meant that young people were pushed to find creative ways to provide an income for themselves. Social distancing and increased time at home led to a significant increase in young people’s use of digital technology for education, work, or personal use in both countries.

Young people in both cities were already using online social media platforms – particularly WhatsApp and Facebook – for business purposes as well as personal use. As a result of the pandemic, it seems that the number of young people using these online platforms for income generation purposes has dramatically increased. In both countries, these platforms have

“Since the arrival of this pandemic, young people have taken it upon themselves to create a means of earning an income by selling facemasks on the street, hand sanitisers, some groups go about sensitising people about COVID. Now it has been a theme for the young people to engage in entrepreneurship, selling products online. A lot of women nowadays, they cook food and sell it online, like advertise it online, give the number to call if you want the order and deliver it at your doorstep”. *Sierra Leone*

Opportunities such as the sale of face masks and hand sanitisers have provided ways for young people to earn an income during the pandemic however it is not a long-term employment solution. Some young entrepreneurs were negatively impacted by the pandemic due to reduced business. Whilst some moved their businesses online or created new online businesses, many vulnerable young people would not have been able to take advantage of the increased online activity. Exclusion of the most vulnerable young people is likely to have increased due to a lack of digital skills, lack of access to technology (or special provisions for young people with disabilities) as well as access to finance.

“A lot of young people started initiatives, especially with businesses, and they had to slow down because of the pandemic. One friend, he sold African design clothing and so on. Because he had a physical space [shop] he didn’t know how to utilise the virtual space to market his products. At the end of the day, because people were asked to stay home his business had to close down.” *Liberia*

Job opportunities in the green economy

Climate change and urbanisation present both threats and opportunities to young people’s livelihoods. There are new opportunities in climate resilient ‘green jobs’ but our research found only limited awareness of the potential of the green and circular economies; young people in both countries were just not aware of the potential and the types of opportunities available. Whilst job opportunities in the green and circular economy in both Liberia and Sierra Leone have not been greatly impacted by the pandemic there are some updates regarding three areas in this sector: recycling, renewable energies and urban farming:

Recycling waste: In Liberia, it was noted that communities do not recycle waste therefore the collection and separation of waste to be recycled/repurposed is an area which carries enormous potential. In contrast, in Sierra Leone there has been an increasing number of start-ups aiming to deal with the problem of waste management. For example, Rugsal Trading, sells environmentally friendly paper bags and produces briquettes from coconut husks – aiming to reduce plastic pollution. Shae Recycling, Global Recycling Company, and Kangama Trading are all making tiles and paving bricks out of used plastic bottles and sand. This has created a lot of casual labour jobs for young people who can collect plastic bottles around the city and sell them by the bag. In addition, Shae Recycling

has provided waste collection jobs for young people. They charge a small fee for both organic and non-recyclable waste collection. Over time people have slowly become more receptive to the idea of recycling, recognising the positive health and job-creation benefits however this is an area which requires more attention⁸.

Renewable energies: Solar energy initiatives have grown as the private sector has started to recognise the economic potential of this renewable energy source. Easy Solar⁹ is an example of a company working to provide clean and affordable energy in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. The co-founder Nthabiseng Mosia attended the recent Leaders’ Summit on Climate¹⁰ where she highlighted the need “to raise people out of poverty and provide dignified work that reduces inequalities”. Since being established Easy Solar has created jobs for over 800 young and passionate people and it has a promising future to create more jobs for young people. Easy Solar also has a particular focus on training vulnerable young women on how to install solar panels and sell solar products.

Urban agriculture: There is more awareness about the potential benefits of urban agriculture to help generate income for young people as well as provide food security and improve knowledge about nutrition. YMCA Liberia’s CEO commented on the work carried out by Aim Global¹¹ to train people in different farming techniques. Partnerships with such organisations are a potential way of increasing expertise in this area in the future.

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone are signed up to the 2015 Paris Agreement to tackle climate change therefore it seems logical that more efforts should be made to create more job opportunities for young people in this space. Whilst there has been some progress since our research was carried out in 2019, obstacles remain regarding lack of awareness of the socio-environmental benefits, opportunities, and financial rewards in relation to green jobs. To fill this gap going forward, positive examples and success stories need to be shared amongst young people and organisations providing support to young people to raise awareness and encourage more ideas and enthusiasm for job creation in this area.

8. <https://news.grida.no/the-road-to-solutions-creative-companies-in-sierra-leone-tackle-plastic-pollution>

9. <https://easysolar.org/interact>

10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3mHL1589NA&t=6433s>

11. <https://www.agriculture1.com/agriculture-suppliers/aimglobalcompany>

Digital access amongst young people

Across Africa, it is estimated that school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education of 75% of young people. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, school closures from the end of March 2020 until early October 2020 had varied impact on young people's access to digital technology. Learning from their experience with Ebola, governments in both countries recognised the need to ensure distance learning for educational purposes whilst schools remained closed. In Sierra Leone, the Government's education response included the provision of a Radio Teaching Program whilst in Liberia, the Ministry of Education released the Teach by Radio Program, also supported by the Read Liberia project. Learning materials were also shared via online platforms. In July 2020, the Directorate of Science Learning and Innovation (DSTI) in Sierra Leone also began a partnership with the online learning platform Coursera in a bid to provide more skills development opportunities for Sierra Leoneans¹². Young people with access to a laptop or smartphone with internet access at home were able to benefit from both radio and e-learning resources. In contrast, those lacking internet access only had the option of listening to the radio. Those who had previously relied on internet cafes to access the internet were also impacted by the closure of cafes. Despite the measures taken by the government,

“Most young people already had issues in terms of using digital devices. Some of them didn't even have access to these digital devices. So first it was a case of how do we use it? Where do we get it from? Beyond that, they needed Internet, and that could be really expensive, so it was a huge challenge and that actually affected the entire educational system in our country. Even today, there are a lot of young people who have school grades affected by their challenges to access the virtual space.” *Liberia*



the reduced time which students spent at school during the pandemic is likely to have had a negative impact on their grades and level of education.

Disparities in internet tariffs: In Liberia, increased internet tariffs since the beginning of the pandemic added another obstacle for young people to have digital access. Despite a court case between the government and mobile companies¹³ regarding price hikes the situation remains the same. In Sierra Leone, internet companies made tariffs more flexible which has made it more affordable for people on low incomes. Mobile companies also started providing free educational platforms which could be accessed without needing mobile data. Inclusive initiatives like this have helped to ensure that vulnerable young people are less likely to be excluded from e-learning platforms. However, in both countries, young people with disabilities were severely affected by the closure of schools and the resulting lack of digital access. Since assisted technology is expensive, few people can afford to have it at home. Interviews suggested that e-learning spaces provided by schools and the government did not take sufficient measures to ensure that they were accessible for young people with disabilities e.g., sign language and braille was not supported.

12. <https://www.politicosl.com/articles/dsti-introduces-online-courses-boost-career-prospects>

13. Court case between Liberian Government and mobile companies (Orange and LoneStar Cell – MTN): <https://www.developingtelecoms.com/telecom-business/telecom-regulation/9963-liberian-regulators-find-against-lonestar-and-orange.html>

Recommendations for agencies and policymakers working to support young people to access decent work

We know that it's vital to look at both the supply and demand side of youth employment; we can't simply focus on upskilling young people if the jobs aren't available, or they do not take into account future changing trends. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges already faced by young people in Sierra Leone and Liberia to access decent, including a lack of decent jobs available for young people, a lack of finances and lack of government regulations to ensure that young people are treated fairly and protected when they are employed need to be addressed. Additional challenges faced by disabled young people such as stigmatisation, and a lack of infrastructure and support hindering their access equal work opportunities also need to be considered. Suggestions regarding future efforts to support employment creation for young people highlighted the need to focus on income generating activities which include short training courses to ensure transferrable skills and capacity building is combined with earning an income. The creation of jobs should be demand driven, particular within creative and new sectors. The creation of internship or traineeship schemes which lead to permanent positions would be most beneficial.

Digital literacy and access amplify the opportunities available to young people but, as women and disabled young people can be excluded from the digital economy, these trends can also amplify inequality and marginalisation. Our research found that young people, especially young women were lacking digital literacy. It also highlighted that access to digital tools is a big priority for young people but that this access was highly unaffordable. Young people will not be able to take full advantage of

opportunities in the digital economy in both informal and formal work without increased skills and more affordable connectivity. Inclusive measures need to be introduced to ensure that all young people are able to benefit from increased online activity. This includes efforts to increase digital literacy, reducing internet tariffs to increase affordability and ensuring special provisions and /or support for vulnerable young people to increase equal digital access. Digital skills interventions focussed on young women, such as funding girls 'digital champions' to do peer support and training would be a good way to ensure that girls don't get left behind. In addition, more efforts can be taken to increase digital skills required to use social media and other online platforms for income generation purposes. There is currently a lack of training programmes or other initiatives in place which could support young people in this way.

Employment is necessary for economic survival but there is also great value in improving life skills such as how to connect with and benefit others and how to become a useful part of society. We have learnt that building enterprise and employment skills alone is not as effective as simultaneously building the resilience of young people. Young people can play a huge role in improving their lives and communities if they are properly supported and equipped – but we also recognise that risks and external influences are influenced by the wider and global community in which they live. There is a need to include the most vulnerable and marginalised people in everything we do. Relationship building activities at the local level could help to mitigate exclusion of the most marginalised young people. In our research, we tried to identify new interventions with the knowledge of the potential ICT-enhanced future of work to ensure vulnerable young people in particular are equipped to face the changing future of work.

Executive Summary of 2019 report

Trends such as the rapid spread of Information and communications technology (ICT), growing populations, urbanisation, globalisation, climate change and the rise of new economic models such as the gig economy are having a strong impact on what job opportunities look like now and how they will look in the years to come. As a result, 'the future of work' has become a significant topic of interest for international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), the United Nations (UN) as well as public sector, private sector, and academia.



When focusing on the trend of ICT development, it is evident that the digital revolution and the rapid increase in digitisation, automation and artificial intelligence is not only influencing the types of job opportunities available on a global scale, but it is also having an impact on how work is carried out and how people perceive the concept of work. Yet current policy narratives often fail to consider the impact of a changing future of work on countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone in the Global South and in particular, how vulnerable young people¹⁴ in these countries can be best supported to future-proof their employability, skills and overall work opportunities. Although there is a growing amount of literature available in this arena, the voices of the most marginalised young people are often not heard in these debates. This participatory, youth-led research brings out some of the key facts about the availability and use of ICTs for the shifting market realities in transitioning economies like Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Overview and methodology

This research was conducted between May and August 2019 in Montserrado in Liberia and Freetown in Sierra Leone. Consultations were held in both countries through a survey and focus group discussions with young people and key informant interviews with

relevant stakeholders. The design of the research instruments, data collection and analysis were led by young people from both countries. This research was commissioned by Y Care International and supported by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK.

The research aimed to identify which types of work are suitable for young people living in urban Liberia and Sierra Leone which can be potentially enhanced using ICT by 2025, thereby increasing digital skills and capacity to keep up with advances in technology but also be carried out without the use of ICTs. This research also assessed how these jobs can be made more accessible and inclusive for vulnerable and marginalised young people.

Main findings from the survey

A youth-led survey was carried out with 104 vulnerable young people in the urban areas of Montserrado in Liberia¹⁵ and 100 young people in the Western Urban District of Freetown in Sierra Leone¹⁶ following the Respondent Driven Sampling technique¹⁷. All survey respondents were aged between 15 and 35 years old, which is the age group for young people defined by the African Youth Charter¹⁸. Within this group, 90% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. 55% of the respondents were young women and 10% were young people with disabilities.

14. For the purpose of this research, vulnerable young people are defined as young women and men aged between 15 and 35 years old, who are unemployed and living below the poverty line.
15. Areas in Montserrado: Central Monrovia (Broad Street, Carey Street, Clay Street, Camp Johnson Road), West Point, Bardnersville, Benson Street and Newport Street
16. Areas in Freetown: Fort street, .Jui, Henry street, Low cost junction, New England, Yuri Building, National Stadium, State Avenue, Willberforce, Cockle Bay, Kroo Bay, A.J Momoh street, Skye street, Upper Brook street, Murray town/Oloehoro, King Harman road/, Wilkinson road, Dwazark
17. Respondent-driven sampling (RDS), combines "snowball sampling" (getting individuals to refer those they know, these individuals in turn referring those they know, and so on) with a mathematical model that weights the sample to compensate for the fact that the sample was collected in a non-random way. For more information on RDS, please see: <http://www.respondentdrivensampling.org/>
18. https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf



Survey Data Collection in Freetown

The research findings show that ICTs are having a positive impact on the lives of young people, mainly because it provides them with more access to information and improved connectivity within and outside of their existing networks. Mobile phone ownership and usage is prevalent amongst those who were interviewed and spending money on phone credit is considered a priority even for those who have little or no means of income. Below is the summary of findings while a more detailed presentation and analysis of the research findings are given in the body of the report.

Young people's current work status:

- ▼ The research reveals that almost half (48%) of the survey respondents in Liberia and Sierra Leone were not working and seeking employment at the time of data collection, reconfirming existing research about high levels of youth unemployment in both countries.
- ▼ 40% of the survey respondents who consider themselves unemployed are in fact doing work informally to 'get by' and cover their living costs - in both countries, petty trading or owning a small-scale business is most common.
- ▼ Less than a quarter of the survey respondents (24% in Liberia and 22% in Sierra Leone) were employed formally with regular hours of work. Again, this aligns with existing research which highlights how the informal sector dominates youth employment²⁰.
- ▼ More than half of survey respondents with disabilities in Liberia were currently unemployed and 25% were working without receiving an income or working as a volunteer, highlighting that young people with disabilities are experiencing notable barriers to access paid employment.
- ▼ Amongst survey respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey, more young women than men confirmed that they had no source of income indicating the potential vulnerability of their economic situation (10% of unemployed survey respondents in Liberia and 17% in Sierra Leone compared with 6% of unemployed young men in both countries).
- ▼ **Supply-side of job market:** The most significant barriers preventing young people from accessing decent work are linked to the supply-side of the current job markets in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to 39% and 41% of survey respondents, respectively. The types of barriers described reflect that many young people lack relevant skills, work experience and adequate education to enable them to access the job opportunities available.
- **Demand-side of job market:** 35% of the survey respondents in Liberia and 6% of the survey respondents in Sierra Leone described barriers linked to the demand-side of the job market. The barriers described included a lack of decent jobs available for young people, a lack of finances and lack of government regulations to ensure that young people are treated fairly and protected whilst at work. A lack of adequate infrastructure i.e. wheelchair friendly ramps and lifts as well as a lack of essential support and resources also creates a barrier for young people with disabilities to access equal work opportunities.

19. (Danish Trade Council for International Development and Cooperation 2017).

20. Turray et al. 2015

21. A labour market in an economy functions with both demand and supply of labour. Demand refers to the demand for labour/employees and supply refers to the supply of labour/employees available.



- **Social norms:** In total, 7 survey respondents across the two countries considered social norms such as corruption, nepotism or the need to have ‘connections’ to get a job as well as a generally negative perception of people with disabilities as some of the main barriers for young people to access decent work. More female survey respondents and survey respondents with disabilities highlighted this area.

Young people’s access to ICTs:

- ▼ 32% of survey respondents either have no phone or only have access to a basic phone (i.e., used for voice calls and text only).
- ▼ 67% of survey respondents across both countries own a smart phone which enables them to access the internet and use apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook.
- ▼ The gender gap in mobile phone ownership across Sub-Saharan Africa is currently at 15%; however, this data typically includes both rural and urban settings whilst this research was focused on a small sample in urban areas in both countries. No significant gender gap regarding mobile phone ownership was found in this research. 90% (Liberia) and 98% (Sierra Leone) of young women survey

respondents owned a phone in comparison with 91% (Liberia) and 95% (Sierra Leone) of young men.

- ▼ All survey respondents who could be identified as having a disability own a mobile phone. Considering the small sample size, more research would be required to ascertain whether having a disability is a barrier for young people to access and own a mobile phone.
- ▼ Young women who participated in this survey were using mobile money services more regularly than young men (48% women in Liberia and 51% in Sierra Leone compared to 39% of men in Liberia and 35% in Sierra Leone).
- ▼ of respondents own at least 2 sim cards –poor internet connectivity and promotional bundle services offered by mobile service providers mean that young people frequently switch from one sim card to the other to get the best deal in terms of money and connectivity.

Affordability of ICT access:

- ▼ 23% of survey respondents in Liberia and 16% in Sierra Leone do not have any source of income and are unlikely to be able to comfortably afford mobile data, even if they do have access to a feature/smart phone with access to the internet.



- ▼ However, the results from the survey and focus group discussions indicate that spending money on mobile phones is considered a high priority for young people - even those who have no source of income can still find means to pay for mobile phone access.
- ▼ Ownership of a smart phone does not correspond with equal access to opportunities offered through access to the internet and social media. If mobile data is unaffordable it can result in the adoption of frugal practices when using a mobile phone to ensure that mobile credit lasts as long as possible.

ICTs to enhance work opportunities:

- ▼ Social media connects young people to the job market in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. 29% of survey respondents in Liberia who were currently not working and seeking employment used social media to look for or carry out work i.e. communication through Facebook or WhatsApp to friends and/or family compared with 50% in Sierra Leone.
- ▼ There is gap in access to ICTs and informal ICT skills. Results indicate that some young people are aware of how they can use ICTs to enhance their work opportunities. However, a significant number of young people (23% of the survey respondents) lack access to ICTs and a lack of confidence to use ICTs.

Young people's work aspirations:

- ▼ At least a quarter of all survey respondents in both countries (24% in Liberia and 29% in Sierra Leone) aspire to be self-employed and running a business in 5 years' time.
- ▼ Over a third of all survey respondents (39% in Liberia and 44% in Sierra Leone) mentioned that they require job specific skills training in order to achieve their work aspirations.
- ▼ 29% of survey respondents in Liberia and 19% in Sierra Leone mentioned that they need to further their education - either returning to school or continuing education.
- ▼ 22% of survey respondents across both countries mentioned that they would need to improve their business or entrepreneurial skills including basic ICT skills.

Job opportunities enhanced by ICTs in the gig economy:

- ▼ In both countries, survey respondents and focus group participants were aware that ICTs can help to enhance work opportunities for young people via access to a bigger network.

- ▼ In Liberia, the top 3 job areas identified by survey respondents which can be inclusive of vulnerable young people and enhanced by the use of ICTs are 1) micro and small enterprises; 2) the ICT/digital jobs and 3) the public/private administration jobs.
- ▼ In Sierra Leone, the top 3 job areas identified by survey respondents are 1) the transport sector jobs; 2) micro and small enterprises and 3) the hair and beauty sector.
- ▼ The creation of more ‘work on demand’ platforms and web-based platforms could help to boost business for young entrepreneurs locally and internationally and could also provide education and access to information for young people to improve their employment prospects.

Job opportunities enhanced by ICTs in the circular/green economies:

- ▼ There is high potential in both Liberia and Sierra Leone for the creation of inclusive job opportunities for young people in the circular and green economy however the research found a lack of awareness amongst young people regarding the potential within these economies.
- ▼ Existing employment opportunities linked to the circular economy in Liberia and Sierra Leone are mainly related to waste management or recycling.

“Doing research relative to the issues of ICT and work in Liberia was something exciting for me because I got to understand the reality of our economy. Additionally, the research told the actual story of what Liberian youth use their phones to do. One young person told me “I prefer to keep hungry than have my phone being out of data”. It’s TRUE and even I do that often because I am addicted to the internet.”

Female Youth Researcher, Liberia

There is also an increase in the use of solar technology and hydro power in both countries.

- ▼ Potential sectors identified in this research where young people could be involved and ICTs could also enhance work opportunities include in waste management, organic farming, renewable energies and green tourism.

Recommendations

For YCI/YMCA:

- ▼ To help reduce barriers faced by young people to access decent work it is recommended to work with the public and private sector to coordinate a programme of complementary interventions which address both supply and demand-side policies and practice. For example, linking existing training schemes – or the development of new training schemes – which lead to work placements, internships and career opportunities for vulnerable young people to gain work experience and simultaneously develop skills which improve their future employability.
- ▼ A lack of basic ICT skills and awareness of how ICTs can be used to support livelihoods was highlighted as one of the main causes why young people are not currently engaged in the digital economy. Collaborations with public and private sector should seek to ensure that basic ICT skills are provided at all levels and are inclusive for all young people – this would involve influencing work and collaborations with other NGOs/CSOs.
- ▼ YCI and YMCA partners could work in collaboration with existing online initiatives to support young people’s access to work in Sierra Leone and Liberia and ensure that they are inclusive for vulnerable young people. Alternatively, a new online platform could be created. For example, a space where local entrepreneurs can share details about their products/services and share tips/learning which could be beneficial for others. As well as providing young entrepreneurs with greater networking opportunities this would encourage knowledge sharing amongst young people.

- ▼ To further support the inclusion of young people with disabilities in both education and employment, it is recommended to support the public and private sector to enable more investment and provision of resources for young people with disabilities. Collaborations with disability focused development actors, unions and community networks, could help to amplify the voices of young people with disabilities and ensure inclusive education and work opportunities.

Youth Livelihoods Sector:

- ▼ Social media is found as a big source of information which connects young people to the job market in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is recommended that efforts are made to ensure that all young people are able to access these resources, which may improve their employability.
- ▼ Efforts are required to improve awareness amongst young people about the potential of the circular and green economy to create a sustainable future. It may be beneficial to explore this topic further and to scope potential areas of development.

Potential Future Research Areas:

Further research could help to identify the key private sector stakeholders in each of the job categories identified by young people and further investment in a feasibility study would help to explore partnership potentials.

- ▼ It is recommended that a similar piece of research is conducted with a rural focus as this research was primarily focused on urban areas of Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- ▼ More research is required in both countries to understand whether barriers such as low income are affecting how young people use their phone and the features which it can provide.
- ▼ Further research would also be helpful to understand the opportunities in the circular and green economy for young people, particularly any which include the involvement of ICTs.



Case Study 1 - Liberia

Name: Momo Thomas Vai, Jr,
Job title: CEO of MTV Decoration, Event and Clothing Line.

"I use my phone to do my Facebook online business and almost everything I do at my business is basically on the phone with customers, people booking appointments with me, people hiring me online. People can just walk into my business centre but most of my clients are online and my phone is one of the major sources of that.

We young people in Liberia misuse Facebook and social media. It should be about giving educative messages and selling as Facebook is the world biggest market. Young people should make use of their internet on their phones to sell their products, themselves and their dreams rather than just posting pictures.

When I graduated from college, I told my mom that I was going to work for people for five years and after that I will start up my own business. What I think is that you must focus on what you want to do, and my dream has been to run a business because it is what I have passion for. When I first started it wasn't easy, but after time I realised that to be successful, you have to be brave and stand the

test of time. I have been doing it for two years now and it's what I use to support my family.

My business is in three components, clothes design for events, event decorations and food - we run an open bar and restaurant. I advertise and promote this through my mobile phone, using social media like Facebook, Instagram. When it comes to business orientation on social media, I just started an online class which teaches how to run a business online, book appoints, set up a page and market your business. Upon completion of this course I will have a lot of knowledge about how to run my business.

I do have an app but that's the problem in Liberia. I introduced an app that could be easily downloaded and listed every service I am rendering. No one is interested in the app and even mobile money when customers are asked to pay they are not interested.

I want to be an inspiration for young people. I want to mentor young entrepreneurs to tell them my stories



because I see myself in the next 5 years to be very successful in what I do because I am committed and focused in what I am doing. There is a difference between career and passion which people need to realise. What I learnt in school is different from what I am now doing. I will have opportunities, my friends that know me will call me especially for those who know my ability, there are job openings and I will sit and calculate the hours I am going to work for somebody and the hours I am working for myself, having my freedom, coming at my own time, running as my own boss."

Case Study 2 - Sierra Leone

"My name is Grace. I am from a small village called Luawa Baoma from Kailahun district. I am blind, and I come from an extended family. From the side of my mother, I have four sisters and from the side of my father, I have ten brothers and I am the only girl child. I got blind when I was at the university and that led to the end of my course. I was studying Business Administration at Njala University and that was in 2009. It was a four years degree program and I was in my third year when I got blind. I have an eleven years old son who is staying with his father.

In the area of ICT, I have little knowledge in operating computers, but I can operate my phone very well. I have benefited a lot from using my phone. I use my phone to do calls and access social media. I am currently not satisfied with my ICT level and I hope to do more studies around it. In the future, I will want to be a PHD holder of ICT. I have not started studies around ICT yet but hope to start soon. My aspiration for the future; I want to be a virtuous woman but in the area of my career, I will like to be an international businesswoman. Currently, I don't



think I have enough support to achieve my dreams, as I lack the finances and connection needed to further my dreams."

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