



Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Liberia

# PROSPECTS PSYCHO-SOCIAL PILLAR:

## Results from the Baseline Study

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*This baseline study seeks to explore the perceptions and behaviours of young people engaged in Prospects' Psycho-social program. It focuses on five key thematic areas: 1) livelihoods, 2) financial inclusion, 3) relationships and community participation, 4) life skills and risky behaviour, and 5) youth resilience. The findings indicate that youth lack confidence in their ability to acquire skills necessary to achieve financial independence. Attributing to this are low levels of self-esteem and the perception that youth voices are not valued in their communities.*

### 1. Background

Prospects Liberia is a youth employment portfolio working with a broad demographic of 12,000 Liberian youth in Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Bong counties. Through direct delivery, as well as efforts to stimulate positive systemic change, Prospects partners with the private sector, government, educational institutions and other service providers to equip young Liberians with the skills, information and opportunities to find meaningful and sustainable employment or self-employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Find out more at [prospectsliberia.com](http://prospectsliberia.com)

A core program area of the Prospects portfolio, the Psycho-social program is committed to building the self-esteem and resilience of vulnerable youth. To accomplish this, Prospects enlists youth participants, their communities, Mercy Corps and partners in selecting, planning and managing a series of youth-centred projects. Each group of selected youth participants firstly receives a set life skills training which espouses five (5) core values:

- › **Good Decisions, Good Future**
- › **Work Hard to Provide**
- › **Use my Money Right**
- › **No Man is an Island**
- › **Stay in the Game**

With these values at the core, the program uses experiential learning and adaptive management practices to ensure that the youth develop self-esteem and pre-employment skills. These skills are rigorously tested and measured throughout the program, ensuring program learning and effectiveness. Further, these skills and values are designed to better position youth to proactively take charge and lead their activities with improved community relationships and networks better support themselves in their community development initiatives.

This baseline survey was conducted amongst a subset of the project’s 152 groups during the first day of the core curriculum training. The report highlights a number of psychosocial indicators as reported by participants immediately prior to their engagement with the program.

## 2. Methodology

The baseline was conducted through a random sample of each of the community groups that were established under the psychosocial pillar of Prospects. Roughly ten per cent of each group was randomly selected to participate in the baseline during the core curriculum training. Due to the fact that most of the groups are same-sex, specific consideration into gender was not taken into account. Out of 302 baseline respondents, 178 were female and 124 were male the respondents were divided into the two age ranges of the groups 14-19 and

Table 2.1 Total Respondents

	Total	Male	Female
14-19	167	73	94
20-24	135	51	84

20-24.

Each respondent was asked questions regarding five key objectives: understanding youth confidence and readiness for productive livelihoods, level of youth inclusion in financial services, the state of youth’s life skills and risky behaviours, their relationships and participation in their community, and youth resilience.

# 3. Demographics

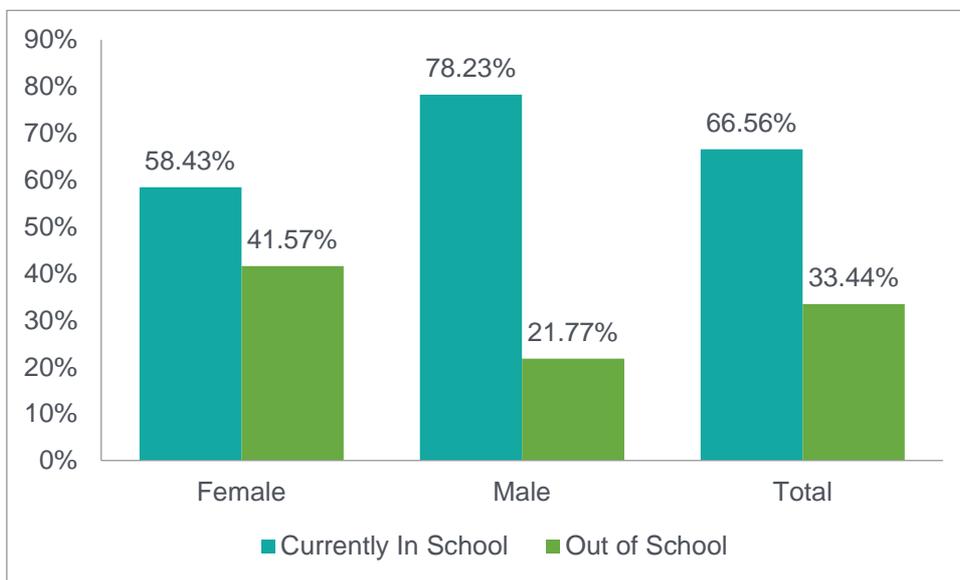
The survey represents the views of 302 group members from three counties: Montserrado, Grand Bassa, and Bong.

67% of participants surveyed are currently enrolled in school or other educational opportunities; 33% are currently out of school. The gap between young men and women which are currently enrolled in educational opportunities is large. 78% of young men are currently enrolled; only 58% of young women are enrolled. The range of education level attained spans from alternative basic education to university.

Table 3.1: Respondents by County

	Total	Male	Female
<b>Montserrado</b>	112	44	68
<b>Bong</b>	121	53	68
<b>Grand Bassa</b>	69	27	42

Figure 3.1 Respondents Education Status



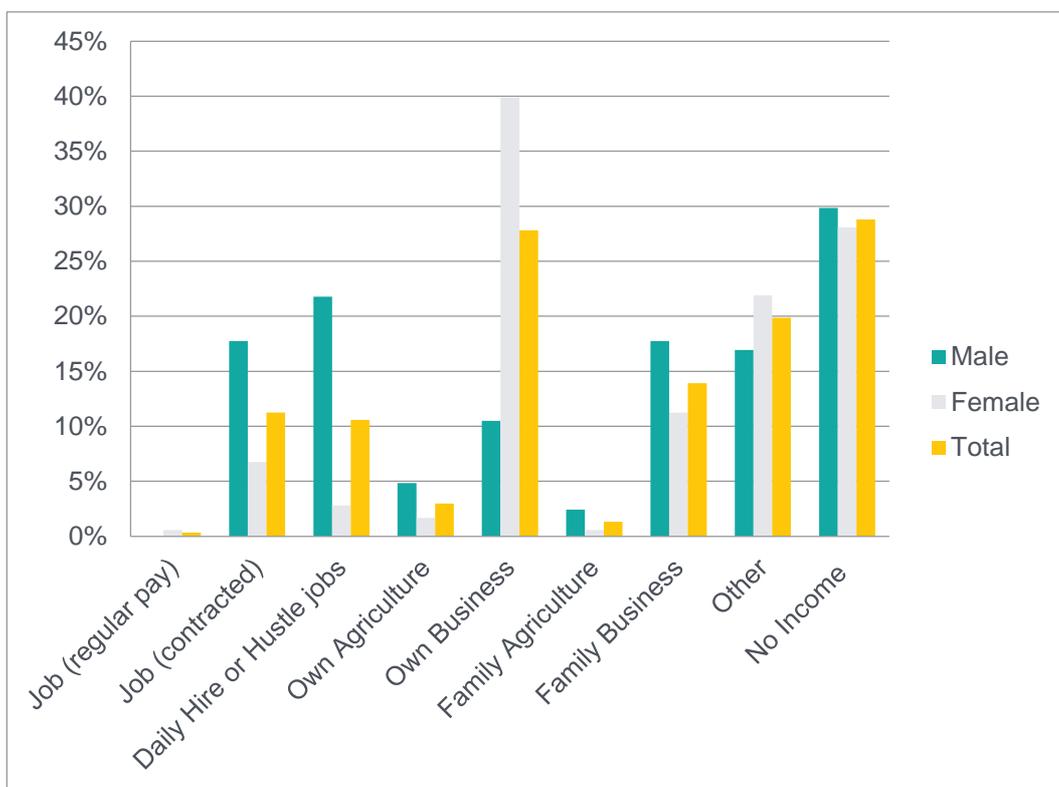
# 4. Results

## 1. Youth Livelihoods

### a. Youth Income Sources

Figure 4.1 Sources of Income for Youth

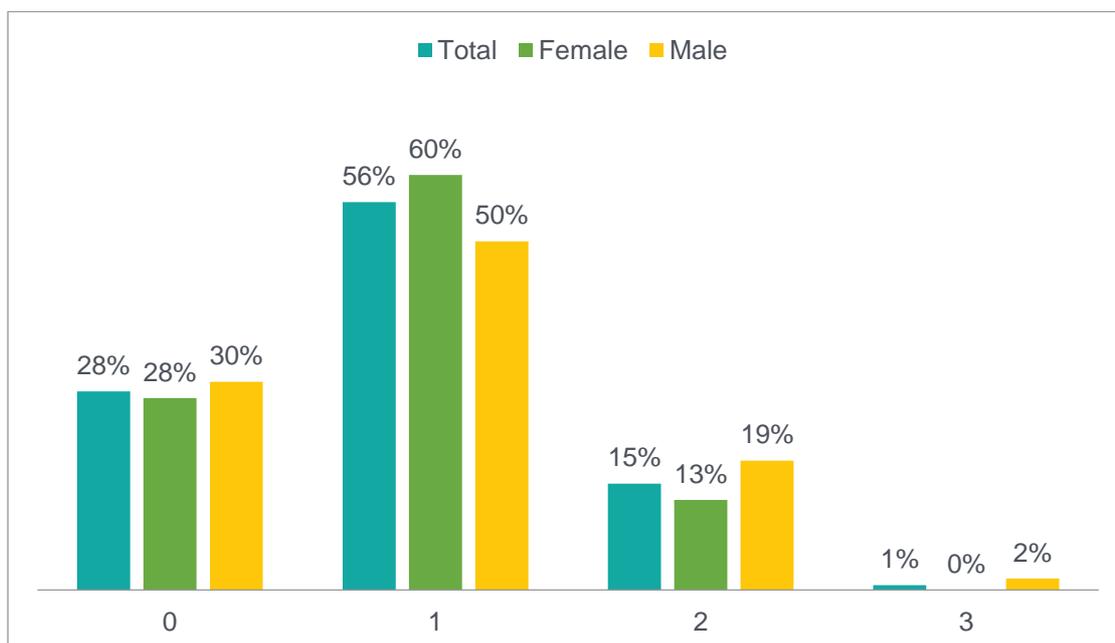
Youth in Liberia often struggle to find adequate formal employment to meet their livelihood needs. As depicted in the chart below (figure 4.1), few young people have access to jobs which are attached to a contract or regular pay, with men having greater access to contract work. Young women predominantly rely on their own small businesses, family businesses or other sources of income.



Although young

women have less access to formal jobs, fewer women report having no source of income. The next chart (Figure 4.2) depicts the number of income sources youth rely on. There was no statistical significance between the slight difference between young men and women’s number of income sources. An average of 56% of youth have 1, 15% have 2 and only 1% has three sources.

Figure 4.2 Number of Income Sources



## b. Labour Market Confidence

Youth's perception of the labour market and their lack of confidence in it are also demonstrated in their responses. Young people indicate that there is a common perception that employers are only interested in hiring people they know, discouraging them from applying for advertised work. Of youth presented with the statement, "if there was a job in the community, you think that the employer already has a candidate in mind, so you wouldn't apply," 41% of youth agreed or somewhat agreed. The lack of confidence in the labour market system was slightly higher for females (43%) compared to males (39%). Despite this being alarming the limited confidence in employers conducting a competitive application process did not have any correlation with young people searching for job opportunities through the radio and newspaper or through friends and employers.

## c. Economic Self-Confidence

Youth's level of economic self-confidence was measured based upon a series of three questions. The questions asked the respondent to agree or disagree with the statements: 1. you do not think you have the skills to get a new job, 2. the only way to improve your money situation is with the help of NGO or government and 3. you feel you have no idea how to get more money. In order to show a high level of self-confidence the respondent needed to respond with disagree or slightly disagree to all three. Overall, 19% of youth indicated that they had a high level of economic self-confidence there was no statistical significance between young men and women on their levels of economic self-confidence.

Figure 4.3 % of Respondents (You do not think you have the skills to get a new job)



When the respondents were asked if they felt they had the adequate skills to get a job 55% of young women felt that they didn't possess the skills whereas only 50% of young men felt the same although this wasn't statistically significant it the trends may still indicate lower self-confidence among women.

Youth's negative perception of the job market and their skills

also hinder them when it comes to applying for jobs. When youth were asked if they had sought employment opportunities through the newspaper, radio or in directly with an employer in the last six months, 16% reported that they had done so. There was a large discrepancy between young men and women in proactive job seeking behaviour. Looking at the two indicators of applying for jobs from the radio and newspaper and asking friends or employers women were significantly less likely to use these resources ( $P < 0.01$ ). Only 11% of young women indicated that they did whereas 23% of young men did. This could be largely due to the fact that youth have limited confidence in the open competitiveness of the application system in Liberia which is further augmented by limited self-confidence in possessing the adequate skills to obtain a job.

This limited level of self-confidence also spilled over into their belief of being able to support themselves and others. Only 11% of youth felt that they were in a position to economically support themselves and others. Young women reported a slightly higher rate than men at 11% versus 10%. The higher rate with women is interesting to note and aligns with the likelihood to have a source of income. This could also indicate the increased level of responsibility for young women as a high percentage, 49% of young women have one or more children compared to just 13% of young men.

#### d. Financial Decision Making

The survey also took into consideration how much control youth feel they have over their personal and financial lives. Five questions were considered to establish control over financial and personal decision making: 1) who gets to decide how money is spent when the money is earned by yourself; 2) given to you by your partner; or 3) given to you by your family; 4) who normally makes decisions about the work that is done to earn money; and 5) who gets to make decisions about schooling. To express financial and personal decision making control the respondent had to answer “self” or “themselves with their partners” for all five questions. Only 10% of youth indicated that they felt like they were in control of their financial and personal decision making.

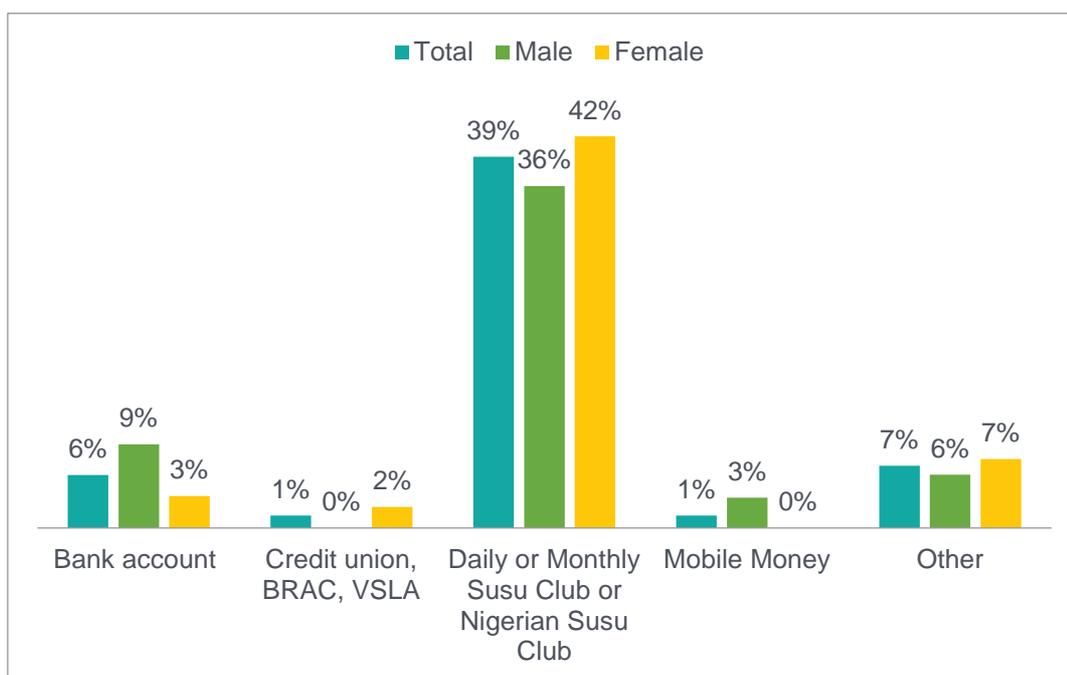
Despite youth not feeling like they had control in general over their financial decision making practices, of the youth that earn their own income 73% reported that they are able to decide independently how to spend the money. This could indicate that money provided by other people most likely has conditions attached to it whereas youth that earn income are empowered to make their own decisions.

## 2. Financial Inclusion

Respondents were asked to weigh in on youth financial inclusion and some basic financial practices. Overall youth reported that they have limited access to formal financial services and methods of saving.

Just over 50% of young people reported using some form of savings method. The methods of saving varied on the scale of formal through banks, to semi-formal through a VSLA, to informal through susu (informal savings group), family or friends. The use of

Figure 4.4 Savings Methods



informal loans is the most common amongst youth with 46% (44% M, 48% F) reporting an informal method to save. 6% of youth indicated that they used banks to save money with young men having a much higher rate at 9% compared to 3% of young women. This

may be due to a number of reasons including access to banks, information regarding saving plans for young people, or cultural or behavioural norms. Women, however, are significantly more likely at 2% versus 0% of men to be involved in a semi-formal savings group such as a VSLA ( $P < .1$ ).

Of the youth that save, 19% of young men and 13% of young women reported saving more than 3,000 Liberian dollars per month. On average young women were able to save 2,120 Liberian dollars the month prior to the survey whereas young men were able to save an average of 2,454 Liberian dollars. Of the youth that saved more than 3,000 Liberian dollars per month, 73% had at least completed junior high level education.

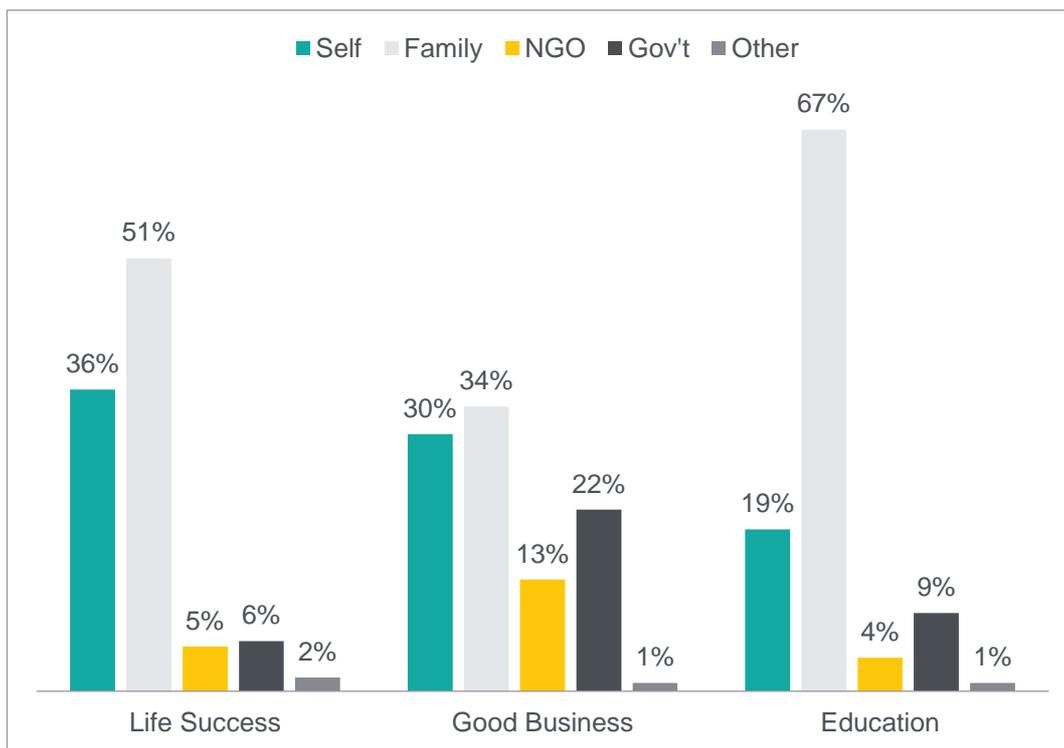
Other basic financial planning practices were measured. 5% of young people surveyed indicated that they have practiced basic financial planning principles. This number was gauged as youth that indicated that they never or only once regretted purchases, often carefully consider a purchase prior to buying, and set financial goals.

When asked if youth used various loan instruments in order to start or expand business ventures approximately 6% of all youth indicated that they had. However, of that 6%, all of the loans accessed were informal. Females have a slightly higher percentage of accessing informal loans at 7% whereas young men accessed informal loans at a rate of 4%. These results could be the result of a number of issues namely access to formal loans, dissemination of information regarding formalized loans, or youth perceptions of formalized institutions.

### 3. Life Skills and Risky Behaviour

In looking at life skills and risky behaviour for youth in Liberia the responded limited involvement in risky behaviour but that they felt little ownership over their future.

Figure 4.5 Perceptions of Responsibility



The respondents reported a limited level of autonomy over their own lives when it comes to who should be responsible for certain things. Youth respondents were asked who in their life had the responsibility to ensure certain indicators in life namely: overall success, the maintenance of a good business, and their education. Only 10% of respondents felt that they had responsibility for all

three. As noted in the chart above, youth felt that a family member was the primary person responsible for ensuring all three areas were achieved.

In judging how youth effectively manage emotions as a component of life skills, responses to three questions were considered. Two questions referred to losing patience or having confusion (a small disagreement) with other people over the last month. The other question queried the occurrence of fights or fussing between the respondent and their boy/girlfriend. 45% of youth responded either 'once' or

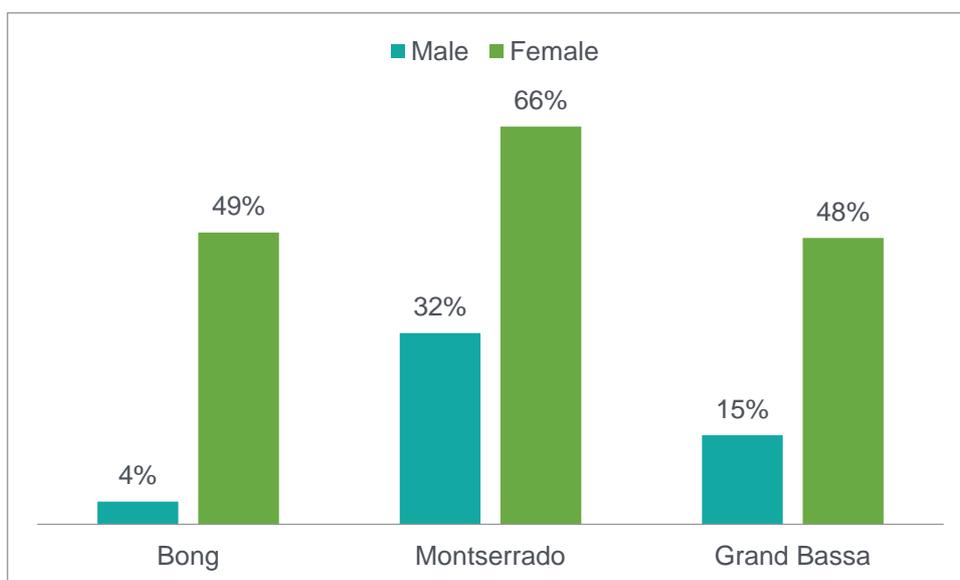
'never to all three of the questions. Young men indicated that they are slightly more likely to manage their emotions than their female counterparts. 50% of young men responded once or never to all three questions whereas only 41% of young women did. This shows that young women may need more support in understanding and managing their emotions effectively.

Despite young people's difficulties in managing their emotions the overwhelming majority feel that the use of violence is never justified. Overall, only 8% (8% F, 9% M) felt that it could be justified.

Participation in risky behaviour and knowledge of family planning practices were also considered under the umbrella of life skills. Both young men and women have a varied level of understanding of family planning practices within each of the counties Prospects is focused in.

Access to family planning and information around it had huge discrepancies in level of knowledge between male and female youth. When asked if youth knew how to get contraceptives 55% of young women and 16% of young men indicated that they are aware. Large differences in access to information exist for both sexes

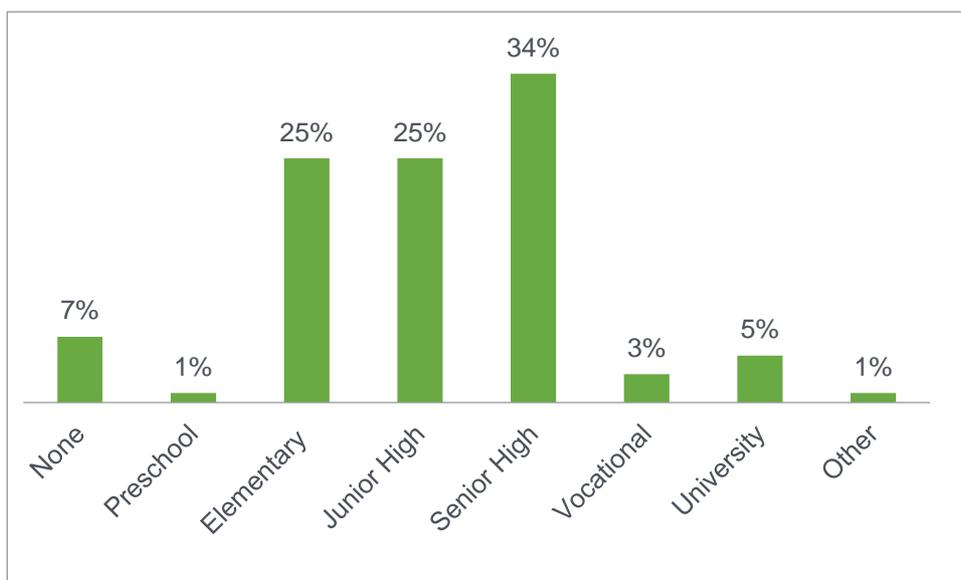
Figure 4.6 Knowledge of Family Planning



between the age ranges of 15-19 and 20-24. For young women aged 15-19, 40% know how to access family planning services versus 71% in the older age bracket. Similarly, with young men, 33% of young men aged 20-24 know how to access family planning whereas just 4% of young men aged 15-19 do. The chart above also indicates that there are large differences in the rate of knowledge based on county of residence. The greatest numbers of young women educated on family planning services are located in Montserrado County. A similar number of young women in Grand Bassa and Bong County have access and knowledge of family planning services. Young men in Bong and Grand Bassa are very limited when it comes to knowledge of and access to family planning services. This shows that the burden of family

planning generally falls in the hands of young women and even their knowledge and access is quite limited. Out of all the youth in the three counties only 58% of youth surveyed know how to access family planning services.

Figure 4.7 Highest Level of Education for Young Parents



A total of 35% of respondents indicated that they have children;

however there is a large difference in this percentage for young men and women. 49% of female respondents have children whereas only 13% of male respondents do. Of the respondents that have children an average of 33% still attend school with little difference in rates between young men and women. The chart depicts a breakdown of the highest level of education for youth with children.

The youth respondents were asked to weigh in on their opinions of exchanging sex for money or favours. More young women felt that it is wrong to exchange sex for money or goods than young men. 82% of women feel that it is wrong whereas 76% of young men believe it is wrong.

Very low levels of engagement in other forms of risky behaviour such as drugs and alcohol were reported by the respondents. When speaking of their own involvement 7% of young people indicated that they drink and only 1% indicated that they consume foods laced with drugs. When asked about their friends the numbers increased to 24% of the respondents' friends drinking and 8% doing drugs. This could be due to the fact that the respondents didn't feel as comfortable sharing with the enumerators that they themselves are involved in such activities. There could have been a common fear that they would be asked not to participate in the group. With that, the rate of responses for friends may be better aligned with reality.

The greatest limitations for young people in regards to healthy life skills seem to be access to information and the lack of ownership over their own future. When youth feel that others are in control over their success it becomes more difficult to engage and mobilise them to take the necessary measures to become successful.

#### 4. Youth Relationships and Community Participation

Youth indicated that they have high levels of participation in civic activities but they feel that they aren't often heard or valued by community members.

Overall 75% indicated that they spend an average of two or more hours per week participating in various clubs or community activities including community leadership, youth clubs, sports clubs, savings clubs, church groups, or livelihood associations.

Table 4.1: Community Engagement Scores

	Average Score
<b>Bong</b>	2.28
<b>Grand Bassa</b>	2.17
<b>Montserrado</b>	2.25

When youth were asked how valued they feel their voice is by their community the responses indicate that young men feel more valued by their community. On a scale of 1-4 with 4 indicating the most positive involvement and respect towards youth the respondents reported an

average score of 2.25. A score of 1 indicates that the respondent never feels engaged, 2 shows not often, 3 usually engaged, and

4 always. Grand Bassa County had the lowest score of the three counties at 2.17. There was also a small difference between the perceptions of young men and women, young men averaged 2.37 whereas young women averaged 2.16 showing that they feel less valued and included in community decision-making. However,

Table 4.2: Breakdown of Scores

Scores	
<b>1</b>	Never engaged
<b>2</b>	Not Often Engaged
<b>3</b>	Usually Engaged
<b>4</b>	Always Engaged

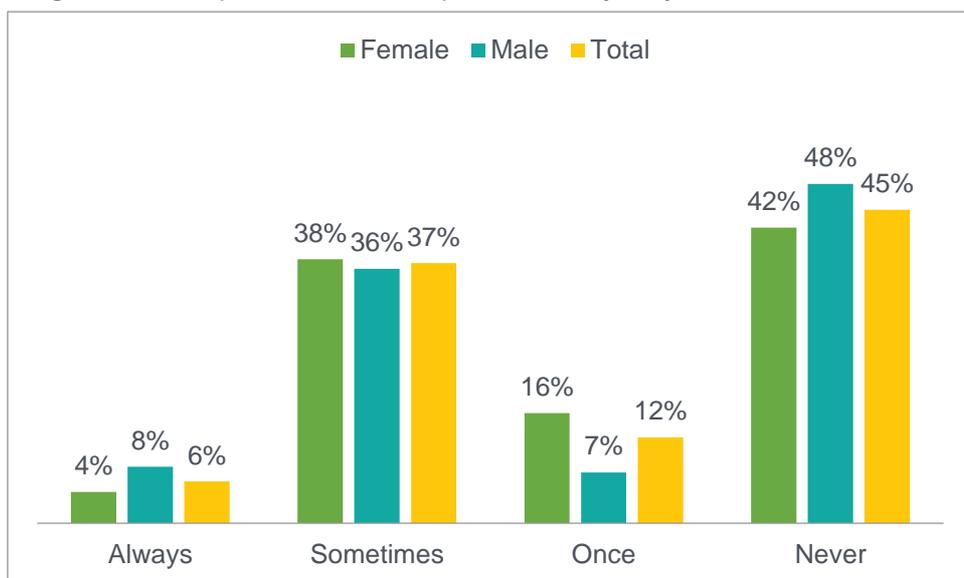
this score disputes the results to the question “How much do you think women and girls are involved in making decisions amongst youth in your community?” While responding to this question on a scale of 1-4 (never-always) young women’s scores averaged 2.75 and young men’s scores averaged 2.63.

The rates above show that youth feel that they are not often engaged or valued in various community level decision-making structures. Despite this youth feel that women are usually included. The two figures dispute each other to some extent and moving forward avenues for youth to feel more valued by the community should be explored.

An index was created to measure the level of support for traditional gender roles including financial decision making and roles and responsibilities. A score of 4 represents low support for traditional gender roles and 1 indicates a high level of support. Overall youth reported an average score of 2.73. Women had a slightly higher level of support for traditional gender roles than men at 2.71 versus 2.77. This shows that women tend to support a traditional view of their roles and responsibilities more than men. For programming this could mean that more training will need to be provided for women on how to increase their decision-making authority.

## 5. Youth Resilience

Figure 4.8: Responses to “Not Important to Anybody”

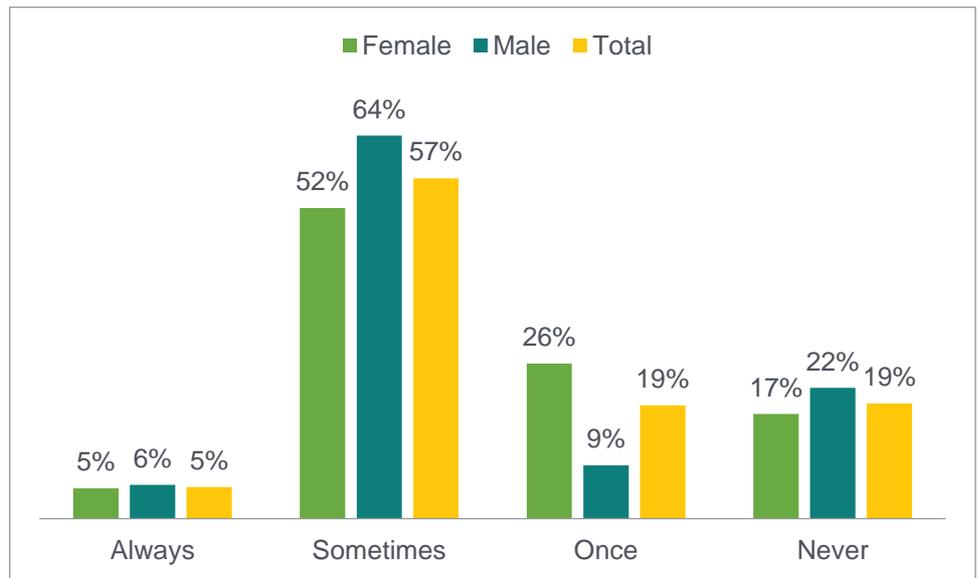


Youth were asked to rate their personal level of control over important factors in their life on a scale of 1-4 with 4 showing the highest level of control. The questions asked the respondents their level of influence in their personal success, family’s success and within their significant relationship. Young men reported an average score of 2.86 whereas young women reported an

average score of 2.79. This again reinforces the trend that women have less control over their personal surroundings and decision-making authority.

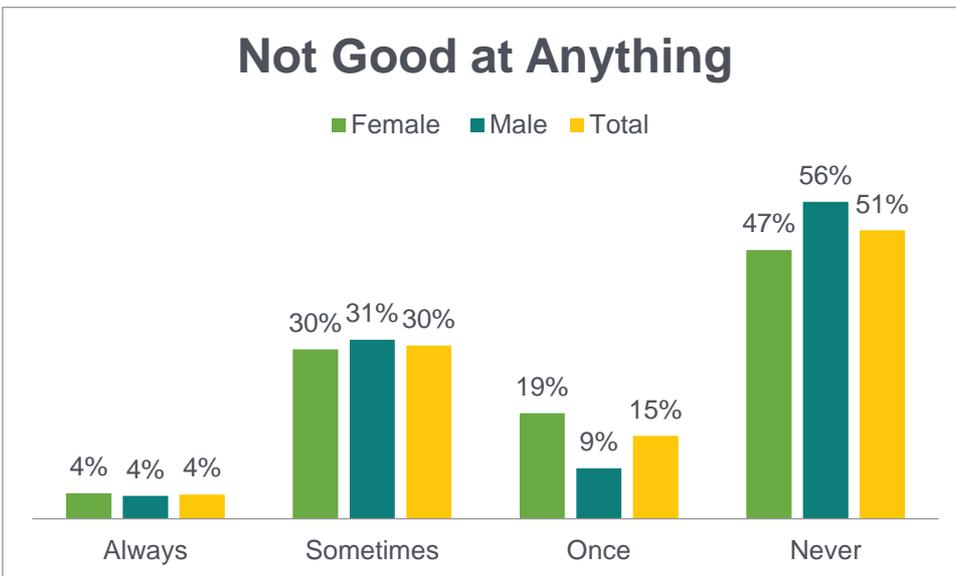
Table 4.9: Percentage of Respondents Feeling Sad or Down Hearted

Youth levels of self-esteem were measured based upon three key factors. Namely, not feeling important to anyone, feeling sad or down-hearted, and feeling as if they are not good at anything. A total of 41% of youth indicated low levels of self-esteem measured by a response of always, sometimes, or once to each of the three factors. A slightly larger number of young women indicated low self-esteem being a factor



in their life at 43%. Below each of the three individual indicators are highlighted showing that for each a greater number of men have never felt unimportant, sad, or useless.

Table 4.10: Responses to Feeling “Not Good at Anything”



The indicators above show that young women feel as if they have less control over their life and decisions and slightly lower levels of self-esteem. The two could be very much interlinked and while looking at youth resilience both young men and women should be targeted to discuss autonomy and combined decision-making authority which could also boost self-esteem.

## 5. Conclusion

From the baseline findings a clear picture of youth in Liberia is painted indicating that youth feel that they have limited autonomy over their lives and their decisions. Youth are being faced with a number of challenges including needing multiple sources of income to sustain. Despite the various sources of income, only 11% of youth indicated that they felt in a position to support themselves and their family. Beyond this youth feel that the lack the skills and the confidence to find adequate sources of income. These findings show that youth need skills beyond just technical, youth need to feel empowered to make decisions in their lives.

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### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

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