

## **Ex-Child Soldier Reintegration Through Vocational Training: The Liberian Experience**

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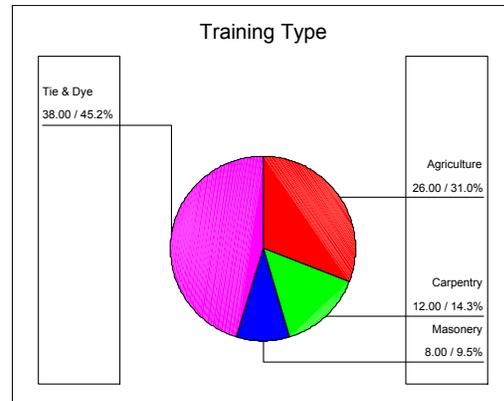
### **Ex-Child Soldier Reintegration Program in Liberia: The Vocational Training Report**

The UNCFSP funded the partnership of Livingstone College of Salisbury, North Carolina and Cuttinton University College, Suakoko, Liberia to implement an Ex-Child Soldier Re-integration Project to: (1) provide the appropriate psycho-social care and services to 100 ex-child soldiers; (2) provide 100 ex-child soldiers with basic education, vocational training and recreation skills necessary to serve as alternatives to combat as an outlet for anger and dissatisfaction; and (3) raise awareness about social problems--HIV/AIDS and gender discrimination. The partnership has completed and submitted its first annual report covering the period from September 2004 to May 2005, which specified that, among other accomplishments, training of 109 ex-child soldiers completed training in Agriculture, Tie & Dye, Masonry, and Carpentry<sup>1</sup>. However, 84 of these 109 participants completed the *Participant Survey*. This report presents the analysis of these surveys.

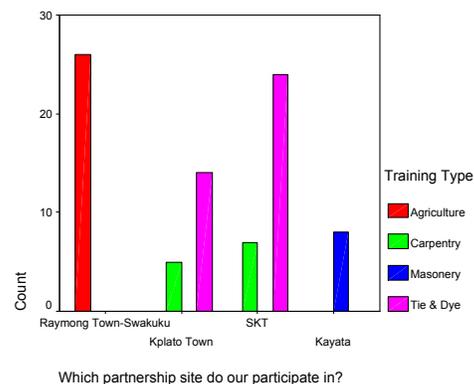
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<sup>1</sup> "Ex-Child Soldier Reintegration Project in Liberia : Livingstone College, USA and Cuttinton University College, Liberia,' *Annual Report: September 1 – May 31, 2005*, submitted to United Negro College Fund Special Programs, June 15, 2005.

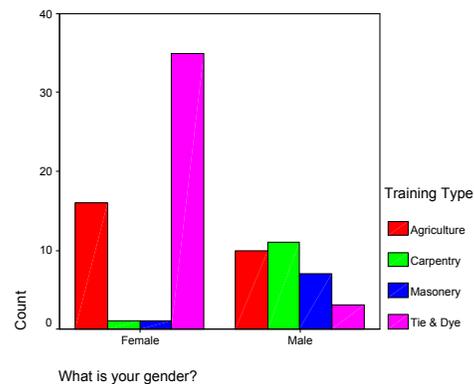
**Participants by Training Type:** As shown in the diagram below 45% of those completed the survey indicated their participation in Tie & Dye, 31% in Agriculture, 14% in Carpentry, and only 10 percent in Masonry.



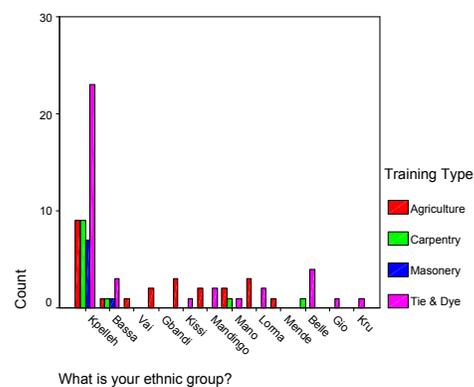
**Participants by Training Site:** Raymond Town provided training in Agriculture to all 26 participants; and, Kayata was the site training in Masonry for all 8 participants. Carpentry and Tie & Die were held at two sites: Kplato Town (where 5 participated in carpentry and 14 in Tie & Dye) and Sergeant Kollie Ta [(SKT).where 7 participated carpentry and 24 participated in Tie & Die).



**Participants by Gender:** Gender wise, nearly two-thirds of the participants (63%) were females and slightly over one-third (37%) were males. When looked at their preference for the type of training, females preferred agriculture (61.5%) and tie & dye (92.1%), whereas males chose predominately the carpentry (91.7%) and Masonry (87.5%). This pattern is consistent with gender-linked occupations in the literature.



**Participants by Ethnicity:** Participants represented 12 ethnicities, although more than one-half were from Kpellah (58.5%). Other ethnicities included Bassa, Vai, Gbandi, Kissi, Mandingo, Mano, Lorma, Mende, Belle, Gio and Kru. Agriculture and Tye & Dye had participants from more ethnic groups than the Carpentry and Masonry. It could be because of the large enrollments in the former two training types than the latter two.

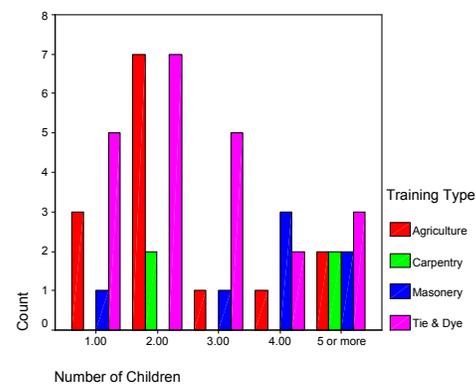
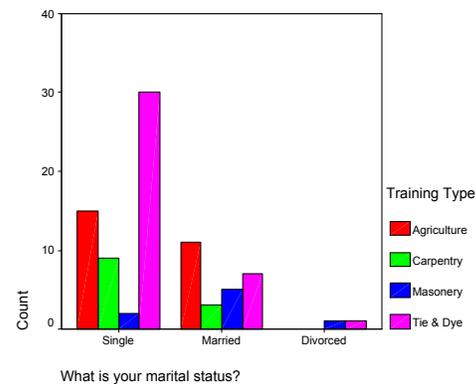
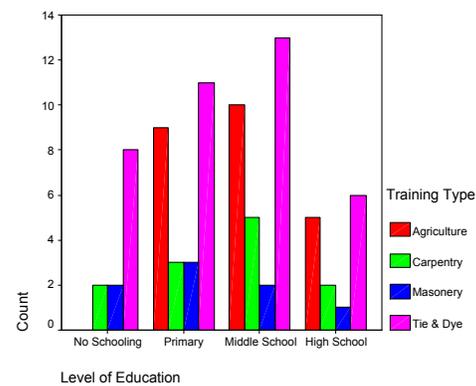
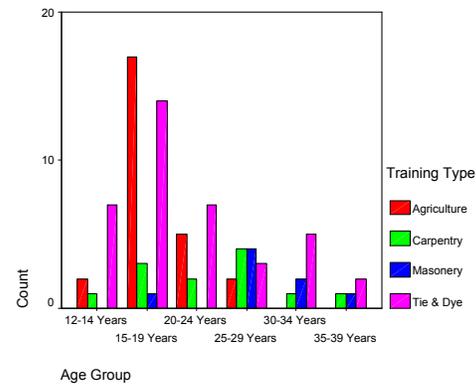


**Participants by Age:** Participants ranged between 12 and 37 years of age, averaging at 20.9 years. The majority (40%) was in the age group of 15-19 years and followed by those between 20 and 29 years (32%). Younger participants were in Agriculture training followed by the Tye & Dye. Carpentry and Masonry had relatively older participants. In other words, female participants were younger (mean age = 19.6 years) than their male counterpart (mean age = 23.1 years).

**Participants by Level of Education:** The average number of years these participants attended school was 5.3, and the highest grade level reported was 11. Most had primary or middle school education (68%). Fifteen percent had never attended school and the remaining 17 percent had some high school education. No significant differences were found by gender (mean years of schooling for males and females were 5.8 and 5.0, respectively).

**Participants by Marital Status:** Two-thirds of the participants (66.7%) said they were single at the time of training. Thirty-one percent were married and only two were divorced. While five out of the eight participants (62.5%) in the masonry training were married, 57.7% - 78.9% were single in other three trainings.

**Participants by Number of Children:** Forty-seven of the 84 participants (56%) reported having one to twelve children, with an average of three children per participant. Most (34%) reported two children. On an average female participants reported having more children (3.0) than males (2.7); married reported more children (3.2) than single (2.4) participants; and participants in carpentry training claimed more children (5.2) than those in masonry (3.7), tie & dye (2.8) or agriculture (2.6).

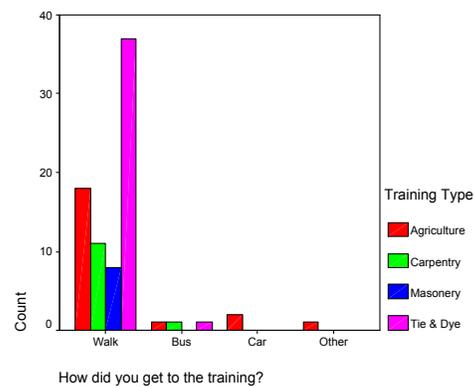
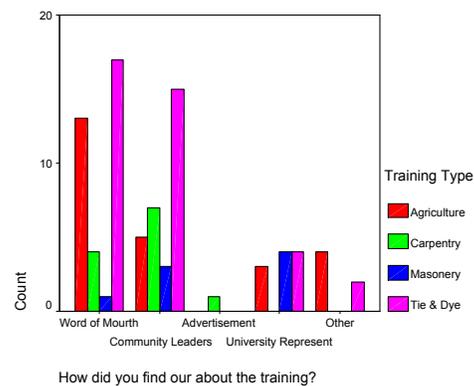
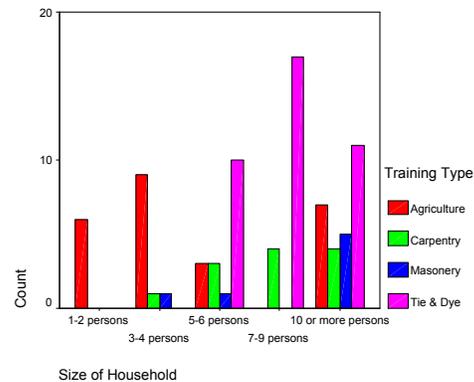


**Participants by Size of Household:** The household size of these participants is quite large with an average of 7.9 members per household. Most (79.2%) reported 5 or more members in the household and majority of those with such large households chose to participate in trainings other than agriculture. The underlying economic necessity may have played role in their decision to participate in non-agriculture trainings, hoping that it would bring them higher monetary rewards than would agriculture.

**Participants by Source of Information:** For most, the source information was ‘word of mouth’ or ‘community leaders.’ Over 78 percent of the respondents indicated they came to know about the training through these two sources. The younger participants (12-14 years) heard mostly from community leaders and their relatives, whereas others mostly learned through ‘word of mouth’ followed by ‘community leaders.’ University representatives played a key role in communicating with 50% of the masonry participants. It is not surprising that ‘advertisement’ had hardly played any role in this communication, given the low levels of education.

**Participants by Mode of Transportation:** Over ninety-two percent (or 74 out of 80) of the participants had to walk to attend the training. Among others, three attended by going in a bus, two by car, and one by other means. However, many did not know how to estimate the distance. They indicated in terms of their walking time which ranged from 10 minutes to 3 hours. Therefore it is essential to conduct training closer to the target communities, so that the participants’ walking time can be minimized.

**Participants’ Satisfaction with Training:** The perceptions of participants relating to their confidence levels of skills gained, utilization of those skills in their career building, and whether or not they would consider to serve as a trainer to future trainees are measured through a four-point scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree) on ten scale items. The reliability coefficient (alpha) for these 10 items is .67. Specific responses to these items are shown in the following table.



**Table 1: Response Patterns to Satisfaction-Scale Items**

Satisfaction-Scale Question	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The trainings helped to improve my understanding in English	84	14 (16.7)	6 (7.1)	49 (58.3)	15 (17.9)
The university made it easy for me to participate in the trainings	83	2 (2.4)	4 (4.8)	45 (54.2)	32 (38.6)
My family responsibilities did Not interfere with my ability to participate in trainings	84	2 (2.4)	13 (15.5)	36 (42.9)	33 (39.3)
I learned a lot of new information in the trainings	81	1 (1.2)	5 (6.2)	39 (48.1)	36 (44.4)
I acquired a lot of new skills in the trainings	82	1 (1.2)	0	54 (65.9)	27 (32.9)
The things that I learned in the trainings will be useful in my everyday life	82	0	2 (2.4)	52 (69.4)	28 (34.1)
I feel very confident about my abilities to apply the skills I learned in the trainings	83	1 (1.2)	7 (8.4)	47 (56.6)	28 (33.7)
This training has or will enable me to better my family	83	1 (1.2)	4 (4.8)	50 (60.2)	28 (33.7)
This training has or will enable me to better help my community	82	0	2 (2.4)	53 (64.6)	27 (32.9)
I would consider serving as a trainer	81	2 (2.5)	11 (13.6)	42 (51.9)	26 (32.1)

The above table shows that all participants, with an exception of one, agreed or strongly agreed that they acquired *a lot of new skills in the training*; and, with an exception of two, agreed or strongly agreed that *the things they learned in the trainings would be useful* in their everyday life, and that *the training had or would enable them to better help* their communities. Typical responses of these participants to the open-ended questions, “Please state how the trainings will improve your future,” “your family and your community,” are:

***My future will be improved after the training by earning money to support my family and myself.***

***The trainings will help my family and my community by improving our living condition.***

Thus the participants are confident of skills they acquired and utilization of those skills in improving their living conditions, thereby the conditions of their families and communities they live in.

Two items with which the largest number of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed were: *the trainings helped to improve my understanding in English* (20 respondents or 24%); and, *my family responsibilities did not interfere with my ability to participate in trainings* (15 respondents or 18%). Further investigation of the

20 participants, who said that the training did not improve their English, showed that they all were from SKT site, frequently female (65%), Kpelleh ethnicity (60%), single (85%), with 2 or 3 children (71%), from households with 5+ members. While none of these characteristics may be directly related to the item, the most directly related variable is their level of education. They all reported at least having 3<sup>rd</sup> grade education and 70% have middle school or high school education. Therefore, it may be construed that these participants see themselves as already educated to the extent of speaking and understanding English; and hence, they did not see much of additional gain from the training in this aspect. Similarly, those who disagreed with the statement that “family responsibilities did NOT interfere with their ability to participate in trainings” were frequently older with mean age of 24.9 years (compared to 20.9 years for all participants) and with more children (mean=3.9 vs. 3.0 for all participants). Neither family size nor gender showed notable differences. To reiterate, these respondents, as in the case of others, did agree that they acquired vocational skills from the training and that those skills would be useful for themselves, their families, and communities.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

On the whole, the objectives of the training were accomplished. Not only the participants indicated that they learnt skills, many of them specified the things they learned in carpentry (e.g., accurate measurement; finding angles; making chair, table and other furniture, etc.); tie & dye (e.g., coloring, knowing dyes, differentiating between shades, etc.); and agriculture (e.g., when and how to water plants; how to use chemicals, how to use and maintain farming tools; methods of harvesting and processing; nursery; field layout; fertilizer and manure application; crop protection; pest and disease control; soil and bed preparation for various crops, etc.). They asked for other skill-trainings such as hairdressing, bread making, and tailoring—along with current training sessions. To enhance their skills just acquired in agriculture, they want to know how to prepare their own local chemical; how to make own compost and manure; and how to use tools safely. Almost every asked for training in academics (reading and writing), health science; physical education; counseling & trauma healing. As to how to improve the quality of trainings conducted, they suggested to start training on time, to provide adequate materials and devoted instructors, and to provide transportation and food for trainees. Some agriculture trainees wanted the training to be mobile. Surprisingly, no one suggested alternative times for training, although some saw the timings interfered with their family responsibilities. Further, many asked for start-up funds or two kits each upon graduation to start their own business—to enable them to begin earnings without delay. Finally, 84 percent of the respondents said they would consider serving as trainer. In fact, many indicated they would teach the skills they learned to someone in their family and/or in community as a way of helping their families and communities. This level of enthusiasm on the part of participants speaks well of the training sessions in instilling such confidence among these child soldiers’ reintegration efforts.

As far as data collection is concerned, only 84 questionnaires were collected out of 109 participants. Therefore, instructors should make a diligent effort to collect the questionnaires from every participant in order to reduce this gap. On the positive side, the quality of data was quite satisfactory in that the missing responses were at minimum including those for open-ended questions.<sup>99</sup>