

LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH



KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY. Local youth participants and staff of HOPE pose next to a project banner.

ACTIVITY: Hope for a Better Future: Building Collaborative Resilience for Youth in Liberia (HOPE)

Liberia has experienced prolonged social trauma for more than a generation. Peace is difficult, even more so when mass trauma compromises trust, stability, and development daily. As in other post-conflict countries, the path to recovery through one-on-one psychotherapy is unavailable or infeasible. Community trauma healing presents an effective alternative.




HOPE introduces mindfulness, empathy, emotional control and moral and collaborative reasoning as skills to strengthen the capacity of individuals suffering from prolonged social trauma to collaboratively find local solutions to local problems and conflict.

LOCALLY LED HEALING

By creating community group healing processes through diverse approaches, HOPE accommodates local preferences and long-term conflict resolution and trauma healing practices. At the systems-level, local, national, and international partners are creating an inclusive enabling environment where local solutions can be supported and sustained.

KEY LEARNING QUESTIONS

HOPE is piloting approaches to community-led trauma healing and community resilience processes and skill-building. Based on the piloted approaches, HOPE seeks to understand how to engage youth as partners for sustainable, trauma-informed development in Liberia. Learning questions guiding HOPE include:

-  **To what extent and under what circumstances do participants have:** (a) increased feelings of safety in social interaction; (b) improved self-reliance and trauma healing capacity; (c) increased trust at the interpersonal and social levels; and (d) increased collaborative capacity?
-  **Do participants experience less violence?** Can they prevent conflict more effectively?
-  **Has local conflict resolution capacity increased?**

GOALS OF RESILIENCE

By introducing psychosocial skills that strengthen individual and collective capacity to find local solutions to local problems, HOPE's trauma-informed design seeks to strengthen individual, community, and societal resilience. HOPE focuses on youth, but its impact is also on their communities through five distinct approaches that prioritize peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and psychosocial health.

FIVE DISTINCT APPROACHES

- ✦ **Conduct Community Baseline Assessments** in each community at the beginning of the program to understand local hopes, fears, needs, interests, and attitudes.
- ✦ **Hold Safe Spaces**, micro-level interventions focusing on rebuilding psychosocial skills weakened by years of violence, in designated protected locations with groups of youth to foster trauma healing.
- ✦ **Facilitate Youth Dialogues** to engage youth in a 12-step process to create a shared vision, choose a problem or conflict, agree on a solution, monitor progress, design and enforce conflict resolution mechanisms, and adapt to changes in circumstances.
- ✦ **Engage entire communities through Tents** to begin the healing of mass trauma. Participants directly interact with the psychological effects of decades of violence, disruption, and trauma and learn to heal their mental and emotional triggers, habits, or beliefs.
- ✦ **Run Solution Accelerators** that focus on the systems level, creating an enabling environment of inclusion, common understanding and trust that can support the natural emergence of local collaborative conflict resolution processes and practices.

FIVE PARTNERS

Kennesaw State University (KSU) coordinates, implements, and monitors HOPE in close collaboration with other partners and USAID. KSU strengthens local partner capacity in research design, data collection and analysis, and program evaluation, and works closely with others to adapt approaches to the Liberian context, test impact, and advance their utility for scale-up and use in other post-conflict settings.

The **Liberia National Commission of Justice, Peace, and Caritas (NCJPC)** is a non-profit promoting peace, charity, social justice, and development. NCJPC coordinates and implements all five approaches below, including providing training for NCJPC staff and faith leaders and conducting community outreach.

The **Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT)** at the University of Liberia serves as HOPE's academic liaison, collecting field-level data and supporting community-level intervention and gender analysis design.

Sovereignty First is an organization focusing on understanding trauma dynamics and partnering with local organizations to craft and implement trauma-informed interventions. They support the design of the Solution Accelerators and adapting the diverse approaches and trainings in different communities and contexts.

TRENDS Global, a non-profit conducting research and engagement in diverse societies, leads monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts.

CONTACT THE LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

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