

The Botanical Reintegration Village Project – Information Document

Ideally, the Liberian state would independently take measures to uphold Article 39 of the UNCRC in accordance with the UNDHR, and ensure FCS' right to rehabilitation and reintegration. However, it is evident that it has failed to do so, resulting in a vicious cycle where the marginalization and stigmatization of FCS leaves them too weak and disorganized to effectively reclaim their rights. As a one-year project goal, we hope to provide our three-month rehabilitation and reintegration program to four groups of former child soldiers at the BRV, enabling them to lead the FCS community towards overall empowerment.

PROJECT GOAL: FCS WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE PROGRAM CONTRIBUTE TO THE ELIMINATION OF STIGMATIZING BARRIERS TO SOCIAL REINTEGRATION FOR FCS WITHIN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Based on the information provided by our earlier study, we have constructed the Botanical Reintegration Village in Little Bassa, Liberia due to an intense need for reintegration programs outside of the detrimental environment of the ghettos. The BRV program would combine psychosocial counselling and medical care with specialized skills training to provide former child soldiers with the necessary foundation for social reintegration. It is designed to rotate cohorts of FCS every three months for a total of 80 FCS per year. In order to detail how our activities will lead to the desired project goal, we have formulated three sub-goals, which will be explained one by one below.

SUB GOAL 1: IDEFOCS' POSITION IS ESTABLISHED WITHIN BOTH THE INTERNATIONAL AND LIBERIAN CIVIL SOCIETY, BUILDING ITS INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO REDUCE EXISTING RISKS AND DEVELOP A PATH TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY THROUGH INCREASED ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Activity 1.1: Training in Financial Administration and Accounting

Activity 1.2: Building Institutional Capacity in Human Rights, Gender, Basic Medical Care

Activity 1.3: Establish partnerships with other local stakeholders by inviting them to the center during the initial stage (Current organizations in mind: Christian Aid, UNWomen, Liberian Gov't (Country and County))

It is our belief that the most sustainable projects are self-sufficient projects with local ownership and participatory practices. We strive for the independent management of the BRV by IDEFOCS and the FCS community in Liberia. However, in order for the BRV to remain accessible for future groups of FCS, the project will need to focus on IDEFOCS becoming a more capable organization.

First and foremost, training IDEFOCS staff in book-keeping is a crucial prerequisite for improving the BRV, reducing the costs of the project and financial risks, thus making the project more sustainable. Then, to further increase the capacity of IDEFOCS to lead the BRV project and empower FCS, the staff will undergo training by other specialized organizations such as UNWomen, Caritas Liberia, and Red Cross. UNWomen's

expertise in gender equality will enhance gender sensitivity among the staff at the BRV, and contribute to a greater understanding of how gender influences conflict and development. Next, the training from Caritas Liberia will ensure that FCS obtain vocational training that supports the long-term needs of the local environment, specifically regarding the use of non-renewable resources. Lastly, as many FCS will be recovering from drug addiction and traumatic experiences, IDEFOCS will also be trained in First Aid through a course at Red Cross Liberia. The staff will be able to spot symptoms, address medical concerns and foresee potential health complications and issues when the nurse is not on duty. Basic medical care guarantees the safety and well-being of the FCS at the BRV, reducing the risks of the project.

We recognize that more than one organization is required to tackle the obstacles that FCS are facing. Thus, IDEFOCS will be assisted in establishing further partnerships. Cooperation with other organizations can help amplify the voice of the FCS community, while IDEFOCS can learn from the organizational structure of well-established organizations. Working directly with the Liberian government and local council in Little Bassa is also putting pressure on the duty bearers. It is our aim that these three activities will contribute to making IDEFOCS a stronger organization, solidifying their position within civil society, making the BRV more sustainable in a competitive space.

SUB GOAL 2: FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS ARE PROVIDED WITH A STABLE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN OBTAIN THE NECESSARY REHABILITATIVE COUNSELLING TO ADDRESS TRAUMA, ADDICTION AND OTHER PERSONAL BARRIERS TO SOCIAL REINTEGRATION.

Activity 2.1: Build a secure and safe reintegration center away from the ghetto

Activity 2.2: to provide PTSD counseling and addiction rehabilitation

Activity 2.3: to provide informal vocational skills training through daily routines and assigned responsibilities

The residential aspect of our program is essential because a major obstacle for the social reintegration of FCS is living in the socially isolated ghettos of urban centers like Monrovia. The vicious cycle caused by marginalization of FCS, often exacerbated by their drug-use and lack of income, has been demonstrated to be nearly impossible to escape. For many FCS, the trauma and subsequent stigmatization and decreased social mobility are passed on to their partners and next of kin. The BRV provides an opportunity for FCS to remove themselves from this harmful environment.

The second sub-goal activity includes psychosocial counselling, which is intended to heal the psychological wounds of FCS. As many FCS face personal obstacles to social reintegration in the form of mental and physical trauma, it is crucial that FCS receive the necessary assistance to address their past as the harmful consequences of drug-addiction and escapism can overwhelm attempts to bridge social gaps. Therefore, in the counseling activities, we focus on improving coping mechanisms and developing the emotional skills necessary to confront and manage their individual traumas. A nurse will also provide individual medical attention to FCS every weekend.

However, counseling alone is insufficient to address the social challenges facing FCS. As mentioned before, employment opportunities are incredibly limited in Liberia and FCS often lack the necessary skills to compete. By working on the continued construction and expansion of the center and on the farm, the residents establish routines, bring a sense of purpose to their lives and increase their vocational skills for employment within two known stable sectors, agriculture and construction.

The ultimate aim of these activities is not only to encourage the participants to adapt to a more socially productive lifestyle outside of a ghetto, but also to develop a sense of capability, responsibility and self-confidence. It is our intention that after three months of residential counseling at the BRV, the FCS will be better equipped to seek out alternative living conditions and employment than they were living in the ghettos of Monrovia. For our participants to be providing visibility of the “renewed FCS” and representing the FCS community in a positive way holds tremendous power in defining overall perceptions of FCS. Once the participants are known by the community as a “new person”, the discrimination and the social stigma are expected to diminish and access to respective human rights will increase, contributing to the overall goal of this program.

SUB GOAL 3: THE EXTERNAL BARRIERS TO SOCIAL REINTEGRATION HAVE BEEN REDUCED THROUGH THE EMPOWERMENT OF FCS AND THE FORMULATION OF BEST PRACTICE METHODS OF STIGMA REDUCTION IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF LITTLE BASSA.

Activity 3.1: to educate former child soldiers on their human rights through workshops at the center where community members are welcome as well as through contact with other organizations.

Activity 3.2: to facilitate community interaction through engagement in public celebrations, workshops, and use of obtained informal skills. IDEFOCS holds 1 community event per month.

Activity 3.3: to provide a network where FCS can get their voices heard on a broader spectrum.

As stigma is a major impediment to the social reintegration of FCS, community engagement and cooperative activities will promote stronger communication between FCS and the Liberian society. By hosting monthly public events such as holiday celebrations and human rights workshops, we will provide new social networks that will help FCS find employment and be a long-term reinforcement for the behaviors learned at the BRV. Workshop topics include human rights of FCS, peace building, sustainable agriculture, gender based education and HIV/Aids awareness and prevention. Workshops will be held by educated staff and/or specialized organizations that collaborate with IDEFOCS such as UNWomen, the community health center in Little Bassa, and Christian Aid. Once every three months, the FCS at the BRV will jointly decide on an organization they would like to meet. We will then facilitate a workshop with that organization or a suitable replacement, giving the FCS more influence over their education. All workshops and public celebrations will be open to the community in order to facilitate greater interaction. FCS at the BRV will also be encouraged to do voluntary work within the community to help foster a positive perception of FCS while they develop their skills.

Through collaboration with various other organizations and government bodies, IDEFOCS aims to put FCS in touch with other stakeholders working with human rights. IDEFOCS will capitalize on its experience with

FCS inclusion within community development projects. By providing FCS with a larger audience, the BRV program lays the foundation for FCS to mobilize and reclaim their rights from duty-bearers in the near future. Collaboration with the local leadership to put policy in place that prevents the abuse of drugs in Little Bassa will also be a way for the BRV to make constructive contributions to the community, and reduce stigmatization of FCS.