



Community Justice Teams Baseline Survey Results

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Summary

The objective of the Community Justice Teams project is to provide an alternative dispute resolution mechanism to Liberian citizens in high density, multi-ethnic and transient communities. These communities generally lack access to the already weak formal justice system, yet do not have the local traditional structures that other Liberians use to seek redress.

This report documents baseline data from a survey conducted between April and May 2018 in the four beneficiary communities that currently form the core of the project. It covers a range of related indicators on attitudes, knowledge and practices around justice issues. In addition to documenting baseline rates, this report provides indicative data that stakeholders can use to address issues of rule of law in Liberia in other ways.

Overall, the results show that most disputes in these communities arise from within the family, a situation that can be tricky to resolve since people are always reluctant to report their close ones to third parties. The results also show that confidence in formal law enforcement institutions (the judiciary and the police) is very weak, a situation that needs to be resolved urgently if CJT teams are going to truly play a complementary rather than adversarial role to these institutions.

Table of Contents

- Summary..... 1
- I. Introduction..... 3
- II. Community Justice Teams Project..... 3
- III. Methodology 4
 - III.1 Sampling. 4
 - III.2 Instruments. 4
 - III.3 Limitations of the study..... 4
- IV. Results. 5
 - IV.1 Demographic characteristics..... 5
 - IV.2 Knowledge and Attitudes towards Justice Issues..... 6
 - IV.3 Community Trust. 6
 - IV.4 Confidence in Local Institutions..... 7
- V. Recommendations and Concluding Remarks. 8
- VI. References..... 9

- Table 1: Distribution of respondents by level of community trust..... 7
- Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Confidence in Local Institutions..... 8

- Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Community..... 5

I. Introduction

The Accountability Lab seeks to build a new generation of active citizens and responsible leaders around the world by supporting change-makers in developing and implementing positive ideas for integrity in their communities. “By enabling people to generate the knowledge, skills and networks needed for accountability, we unleash positive social and economic change” (Accountability Lab, 2017).

In Liberia, the Lab works at multiple levels to shift accountability dynamics in a number of ways, such as: securing political and community buy-in; mobilizing citizens to become involved in civic actions; shifting mindsets and perceptions related to corruption and integrity; and bringing diverse stakeholders together to share in a common vision of transformation (Gilberds, 2016).

Due to the complex and unpredictable social systems that characterize the governance and accountability space, the Lab undertakes evaluation and research, integrating the results into its management and strategies in a process called adaptive learning. For instance, Herbst, Glencorse and Gilberds (2017) found that efforts to build governance in Liberia have so far focused on institution-building, creating laws and institutions that do not always match local norms and culture. In response to this, the Lab developed a people-centered strategy proposing to train champions and create networks that can positively affect mindsets and change behaviors, embedding accountability and transparency in local culture over time.

In this light, Accountability Lab Liberia has been working in Logan Town, Monrovia with a community-based organization called the Citizen’s Bureau to train and support a group of citizens as a Community Justice Team. These mediators, selected carefully to represent the demographics of the community, work with citizens to resolve disputes before they reach the point of violence or need to be taken to the police.

With the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Lab is scaling up the CJTs to three other communities in Liberia (West Point in Monrovia; Kokoyah Road in Gbarnga; and Bassa Community in Kakata), extending these services to citizens in a set of communities that collectively amount to almost 5% of the Liberian population (200,000 people across all 4 communities).

This report details findings from the baseline survey for this project. The survey was conducted in the four beneficiary communities between April and May 2018 and seeks to establish baselines against which success can be measured; inform the CJTs; provide indicative data on rule of law at the community level that can be used by other UNDP partners; and generate simple infographics that can be used by the CJTs and other media actors to discuss justice at the community level with the public.

The rest of the report is organized as follows: The next section gives an overview of the Community Justice Teams project and explains the context in which the survey was conducted. The third section is an outline of the methodology, followed by the results and the final section gives recommendations and concluding remarks.

II. Community Justice Teams Project

In post-conflict Liberia, internally displaced persons and returning refugees settled in droves around Monrovia, leading to one of the most metropolitan capital cities in the region. Given the very low income, high density of some communities in and around the city, disputes are very frequent.

Yet, the formal justice system is perennially weak, with The judiciary and police recently ranked as the most corrupt set of institutions in the country. Moreover, other traditional justice mechanisms which still endure in rural areas are often absent because of the more transient, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic nature of these communities.

Under the UNDP/UNMIL joint program “Strengthening the Rule of Law in Liberia: Justice and Security for the Liberian People”, this project seeks to address these issues by supporting Community Justice Teams at the local level in low-income, high-density and insecure areas of Monrovia, Gbarnga and Kakata, building on a model that has already shown success in Logan Town, Monrovia. These communities consist of migrants from across all of Liberia’s 16 ethnic groups. The community members in these areas tend to be socially, politically and economically marginalized within Liberia, with very little sense of upward social mobility or access to justice. Their demographics tend to reflect those of Liberia as a whole, with slightly more women than men in these communities, and with the majority of the inhabitants classified as young people (under the age of 35 years old).

The project will focus mainly on conducting surveys to support continuous learning, adaptation and public outreach; training and capacity development of mediators for each community; providing legal support in communities (mediating civil cases, feeding, tracking and managing criminal cases through the formal justice system) and disseminating justice information.

The intended long-term outcome is an informed community of Liberian citizens at the local level who can solve legal disputes, raise awareness of justice issues and build trust within urban, poor and insecure communities.

III. Methodology

III.1 Sampling.

Adults (18 years and above) living in the four beneficiary communities (Logan town and West Point in Monrovia; Kokoyah Road in Gbarnga; and Bassa Community in Kakata) were randomly sampled for the study. Because each survey will ultimately be used independently for project purposes, the samples for each community were not weighed by population.

III.2 Instruments.

A structured questionnaire was used, which included eighteen questions grouped into demographic information, community trust, trust in local institutions and general information and attitudes towards justice issues.

The survey was administered by trained enumerators using an app called Kobo Toolbox. Developed by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Kobo Toolbox allows structured surveys to be administered through the app whilst offline, with data uploaded and synthesized automatically when the user reaches a hotspot.

III.3 Limitations of the study.

This study suffers from two limitations as follows:

- i) As a result of mixed deployment of the survey in Kobo-toolbox, the results from West Point and Gbarnga were combined. Hence, throughout the analysis, the two towns will be considered as one in any area specific analysis.
- ii) This survey comes a few months into the implementation of the project, implying that some of the results here may already capture the effects of the program rather than baseline information.

IV. Results.

A total of 2,134 respondents completed the survey, with 439 from Logan Town, 655 from Kakata and 1,042 from Westpoint and Kbanga combined. However, 14 cases were deleted from the data because the respondents did not complete up to 25% of the questions, leaving us with 2,120 valid cases to analyse. The results that follow pertain to these 2,120 valid cases. All the analyses were conducted in Stata version 13.

IV.1 Demographic Characteristics.

As shown in figure 1, 435 respondents were from Logan town, representing 20.52% of all respondents, while 1,033 (48.73%) came from West Point and Gbangar, and the remaining 652 (30.75%) came from Kakata.

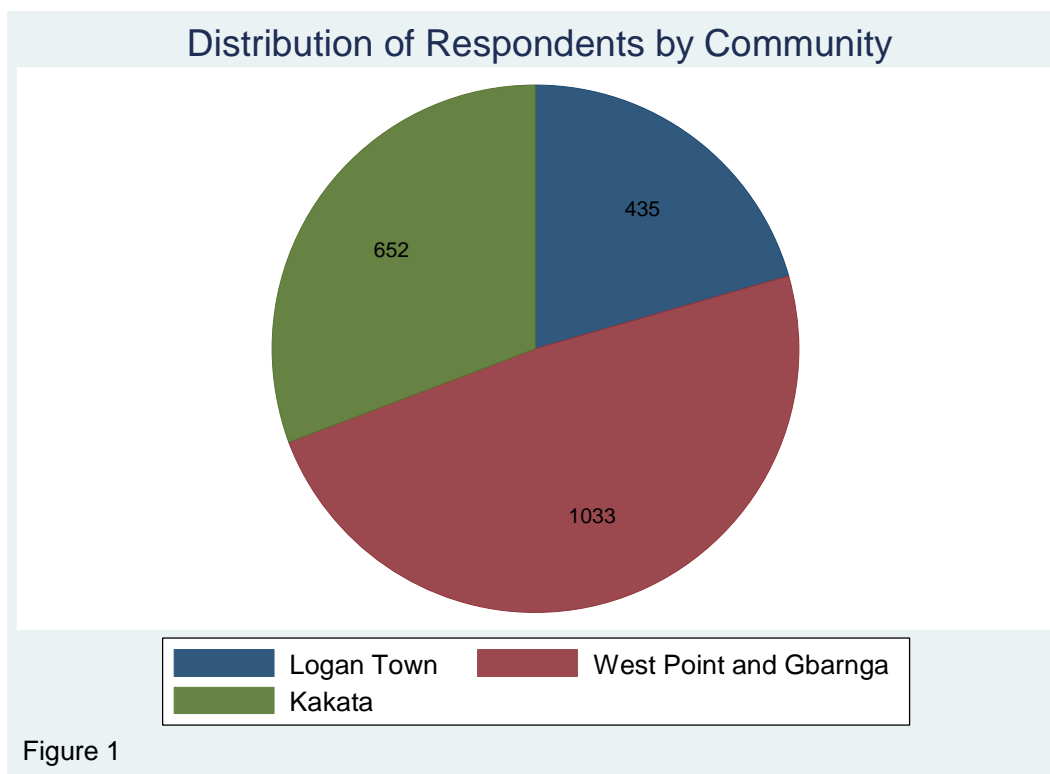


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Community

The study population is skewed towards lower age groups, with more than half of the respondents between 18 and 35 years old - that is, 1,101 respondents representing 52.01% of the study. More than a third (or 749 respondents representing 35.38% of the study) were between 35 and 50. Meanwhile, 12.61% of the study were over 50 years old. These results are shown in figure 2.

Overall, 58.57% of all respondents were women (a total of 1240 respondents with 262 from Logan Town, 562 from West Point and Gbangar and 416 from Kakata). 877 (41.43%) were male, with 173 from Logan Town, 468 from West Point and Gbarnga and 236 from Kakata.

IV.2 Knowledge and Attitudes towards Justice Issues.

Respondents were asked a number of questions aimed at understanding what the justice issues are in their communities as well as to capture their reactions to these issues. Asked to identify the main source of dispute in their community, respondents rank the family as the greatest source of dispute (43.1%), followed by financial (26.84%), natural resources (16.12%) and crime (14.04%). Even when broken down by community, this pattern remains the same across all three communities. Family tops the list in all four communities, and financial factors come second in all communities. But crime displaces natural resources as the third greatest source of dispute in Logan Town and Kakata.

Asked to identify the main obstacles to justice in their communities, financial cost came up at the top (43.08% of respondents), corruption came up second with 27.87% of respondents, followed by delays in the justice system (20.24%) and inaction from authorities (8.82%). This pattern is exactly the same across all communities but for the exact percentages.

When asked to identify the various options for resolving disputes in their communities, respondents identified community-based organizations and civil society organizations (44.38%) as the first option, followed by the police (29.57%), traditional or religious bodies (15.61%) and the courts (10.44%) in that order. The ordering is the same for all communities.

Some 62% of respondents said they had not been involved in any dispute within the last three months, while 37.90% said they had been involved in a dispute. Of those that were involved in a dispute, 45.13% were family disputes, 29.33% were financial disputes, 15.42% were due to natural resources and 10.11% were crime related.

Asked if they have sought help in resolving a dispute in the past three months, 55.21% of respondents said no. Of these, the overwhelming majority (64.64%) said they had simply not been involved in a dispute, 14.37% simply lacked confidence that any of the available avenues for dispute resolution would resolve their problem, 10.9% said they did not know how to file a complaint about their problem and the remaining 9.9% said they did not even know where to whom to refer their problems.

Around 45% of respondents said they had sought help in resolving disputes in the last three months. Among these, 49.2% said they took their problems to community based or civil society organizations, 24.2% to traditional or religious authorities, 18.7% to the police and 7.9% to the courts.

IV.3 Community Trust.

In order to gauge the level of trust in the communities, a number of affirmative statements were made and respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with these statements on a scale from one to five: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (not sure), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Respondents generally disagreed that they felt safe with respect to physical threats and violence in their communities, with 66.43% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the assertion. A plurality of respondents (48.25%) felt that their property was not safe in their communities, while 31.27% either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion. Finally, a small majority of respondents said they trusted their neighbors and the people in their community (37.91%), against 36.16% who

did not. 25.93 of respondents were neutral to the statement. These results are broken down in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by level of community trust.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel safe with respect to physical threats and violence in my community.	27.57%	38.87%	14.75%	16.93%	1.89%
I feel that my personal property is safe in my community	16.60%	31.65%	20.48%	26.44%	4.82%
I trust my neighbors and the people in my community.	11.78%	24.37%	25.93%	32.04%	5.87%

IV.4 Confidence in Local Institutions.

On a scale from 1 to 5, respondents were asked to express their level of confidence for four types of institutions: community-based and civil society organizations, the police, the courts and religious and traditional authorities. Based on the mean scores computed from these rankings, respondents had the highest confidence in civil society and community-based organizations, closely followed by religious and traditional authorities, with the court and the police coming in third and fourth respectively. Table 2 shows a detailed break down of these results.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Confidence in Local Institutions

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have confidence in the Community-based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations operating in my community	4.59%	10.46%	20.21%	50.64%	14.10%
I have confidence in the religious and traditional authorities in my community	5.87%	8.38%	15.91%	59.52%	10.32%
I have confidence in the Courts in my Community	12.55%	23.01%	21.40%	36.93%	6.11%
I have confidence in the Police in my community	21.87%	29.87%	21.87%	22.28%	4.10%

V. Recommendations and Concluding Remarks.

This study highlights a number of issues at the community level, as well as with the justice system, that require keen attention from all stake holders moving forward.

- i) Enhance the capacity of CJT teams to manage family-based disputes.** The study finds that the family is by far the greatest source of dispute across all four communities. As expected in any typical African community, respondents who experienced family-based disputes in the last three months were the least likely group to seek external help in resolving their disputes. It is therefore important that Community Justice Teams are safe spaces where sensitive, family-related issues can be discussed. Skewing the age distribution of mediators towards older members of the community, recruiting mediators with credible community and family values, and enhancing the capacity of the teams to deal with the wide range of potential issues that arise in the family will greatly aid this effort.
- ii) Eliminate or limit financial costs in the justice system.** The study finds that financial costs constitute by far the greatest obstacle to obtaining justice in all four areas. This shows that people may be more willing to make use of the justice system if they are guaranteed that the process will not live them financially exposed at the end. It is recommended that Accountability Lab Liberia, in collaboration with the CJT teams, form partnerships with law firms to provide pro bono services for the criminal and unresolved civil cases that will have to be fed to the formal justice system.
- iii) Increase efforts to build community trust.** A significantly large proportion of respondents (over 66%) reported that they did not feel safe with respect to physical threats and violence in their community, and almost half reported that they did not feel their property was safe. This result may be understood given the multi-ethnic and transient nature of this communities, leaving very little time and space for the type of community trust that exists in most African societies. Local football competitions and other community building activities can be organized to help bridge this gap.

- iv) Increased efforts to build confidence in the formal justice system while leveraging the confidence placed in community organizations and traditional authorities.** The majority of respondents who had disputes sought redress with community-based and civil society organizations. Respondents also said they had more confidence in these organizations, followed by religious and traditional authorities. In the short term, it is important to leverage this confidence to resolve disputes at the local level. However, efforts have to be made to build community confidence in official law enforcement institutions. Ultimately, it is confidence in the women and men who administer the law that is the true backbone of the rule of law in any society.

VI. References

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