

LIBERIAN YOUTH- the Game Changers in Liberia's Democratic Transition

Registered voters for Liberia's 2017 elections were 2,183,683, young people ages 18 – 32 constituted 52%. The youth, through various roles, massively contributed towards the peaceful democratic transition since 1944; they served as poll watchers, campaign organizers, election monitors, civic/voter educators, community peace ambassadors, etc.



For over half a decade, Naymote-Partners for Democratic Development has been working to mobilize, sensitize and prepare young Liberians to participate in Liberia's democratic processes from an informed perspective. In pursuit of this objective, NAYMOTE throughout the period leading up to the 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections, organized and implemented a series of programs which included the [Young Political Leadership School](#), [the Liberia Bus Project](#), [Liberia Decides Social Media Platform](#), [Yes to Peace, No to Violence Platform](#), [Youth Votes Count](#), [Mobile Call Center](#) and the [Youth Debates](#) all of which have positively contributed to the peaceful democratic transition witnessed by the nation after several decades. Youth population in Liberia constitutes 65%

Young Political Leadership School

The Young Political Leadership School (YPLS) provided the platform where young people from diverse political parties came together to learn about Liberia's electoral system, campaign planning, message development, voters contact or engagement, public speaking, citizens' engagements, etc.



ABOUT NAYMOTE

NAYMOTE promotes citizens' understanding of democratic processes and the long-term benefits of their participation in these processes.

Established in 2001 by students' leaders and activists, the institution has been one of the leading grassroots organizations promoting democracy, peace building, human rights and civic engagement in Liberia.

OUR MISSION

Dedicated to strengthening and promoting positive youth and community engagement in support of democratic governance and sustainable development in Liberia.

OUR VISION

A Liberian society with strong democratic culture where citizens can freely participate in decisions that affect their lives irrespective of their status.

S. D. Cooper Road, Old Field Community

□ Paynesville City, Liberia
info@naymote.com ,

(+231)770510479/0886908077

**Semester Five of the
Young Political Leadership
School starts on May 7, 2018**



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Young Political Leadership School

The program trained 330 young political leaders 65% males and 35% females; these young leaders were the game changers in Liberia's just ended elections. They managed the campaigns, led citizens' engagement events, targeted voters with clear and smart campaign messages and spoke to the hearts and souls of the voters.

The YPLS training encompasses one week of intensive classroom lectures and 11 weeks of mentorship or practicum for all participants per semester. It blends theory with practical exercises and considers participation and sharing experience as key elements in its approach. The experienced team of trainers uses visual elements and group dynamics to increase participation during training. The training sessions include lectures, discussions, role-plays, networking exercises, field trips, planning sessions and debates.



Right-Left, Former President Sirleaf, Former Swedish Ambassador Nordstron, UNSRSG Farid Zafif and U.S. Ambassador Elders attending

During the electoral period, the 330 graduates organized youth policy debates, candidates' debates, canvassed in hard-to-reach communities, held public discussions on national and community radio stations, mobilized young voters using mobile phones and social media. They also undertook bus rides to school campuses, entertainment centers and market places where they deepened young voters' understanding of the importance of their participation and making their voices heard. These graduates, as part of their practicum, reached over 85,000 young voters from April to December 2017 covering voter registration to voting. The YPLS organized young people around the principles

of decent and responsible politics in Liberia. Within two years, graduates are now playing leadership roles in government, in their schools and communities. Mr. Millias Z. Sheriff appointed as the Assistant Minister for TVET, Mr. Emmanuel M. Johnson, Assistant Minister for Youth Services both serving at Ministry of Youth and Sports. Mr. Eddie S. Tarawali, Assistant Minister for Corrections & Rehabilitation, Ministry of Justice, Mr. Abubakar Bah, Assistant Minister for Urban Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Mr. Sekou Kalaco Jamandy serving as Aide to the President of Liberia amongst others. They are truly an inspiration to many young people.

"It has been a privilege Eddie to be part of your efforts in order to dig up this gold mine of Liberia. This top notch skills, talents, hidden amongst the youth. Since you launched the Young Political Leadership School two years ago, I have been watching how we could increasingly support your efforts for the fact that you were discovering something that was not known to us, and that was the hidden capacity, the talents, the wisdom, the desire, the commitment, the energy and the resourcefulness that was hidden amongst the youth" **Farid Zarif, UNSRSG to Liberia**

"What inspires me most about the Young Political Leadership School program is that in the time of political diversity in Liberia, the YPLS brought together young people from diverse political backgrounds to unite under one goal, which was to preserve the peace by ensuring peaceful youth participation in the electoral process and today, youth have found their voices and their voices were heard" **Christine Elder, U.S. Ambassador**

Public Outreach Making the Youth Votes Count

Through its youth civic engagement program, NAYMOTE have reached 230,000 young voters directly comprising 135,000 males and 95,000 females across the country. The institution recruited, trained and deployed 320 community volunteers as canvassers across 40 out of 73 electoral districts where they conducted voter education



"Naymote is giving young people the opportunity to see beyond now, beyond religion, beyond political affiliation, beyond oneself and to have the value that Mama Liberia is our greatest denominator" **Mallias Z. Sheriff, YPLS Graduate**

"Talking and encouraging people to register and vote was challenging because elected leaders have failed to fulfill campaign promises but on the bus we were able to get more young people registering to vote in the 2017 elections. I hope those elected will not disappoint us again. This is my first election". **Pam T. Massaquoi, Bus Volunteer**



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NAYMOTE
EMPOWER, ENGAGE AND EDUCATE
SERVING LIBERIA SINCE 2001



"The young political leaders are inspiration for the future hope of Liberia. If you get young people like these into leadership roles in five, ten to fifteen years, you will have a better country," **Jeff Fox, Political Communicator and lead facilitator of the Young Political Leadership School**

Each volunteer could reach up to 12 eligible voters a day for 60 days. Volunteers provided education to young citizens about the Liberian electoral system. During their outreach, volunteers explained to voters the importance of participating in elections and provided clarity on several questions including: Why register to vote? Why participate in voters' exhibition? Why is it important to vote? Where does one vote? What does one need to know before voting? Who can vote? Where to vote? And how does one vote?. Volunteers used voters' education booklets produced by NAYMOTE to educate young voters.

Additionally, through the institution's Bus Project, volunteers undertook bus rides to school campuses, market places, entertainment centers, using the public address system. They aired Liberian music which attracted young people to gather before disseminating their messages. These young Liberians, after being entertained were educated about the electoral processes and the importance of their peaceful participation.

The Volunteers used the "Frequently Asked Questions" produced by the National Elections Commission (NEC) to provide adequate



information to voters while in some instances, delivering the message in local dialects. By doing this, many illiterate rural residents were able to adequately understand the electoral processes thereby increasing the possibility of their participation in the elections. Trained community volunteers created awareness on the roles, rights and responsibilities of voters. Also, first time voters were targeted and sensitized on the procedures to register, where to vote and how to vote. They were also encouraged to attend electoral candidates' debates in their communities to access platforms and ask candidates critical questions that matter to them. Additionally, youth volunteers organized public events including sports, theatre and coffee shop discussions where young people gathered and

were educated by the volunteers on the electoral processes. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and answers were provided. At these public events, the NEC local magistrates attended to support NAYMOTE's interventions. At the request of NAYMOTE traditional leaders and local chiefs also appeared on community radio stations to encourage citizens to peacefully participate in the electoral processes noting that traditional leaders and chiefs are highly respected and influential people in rural settings in Liberia.

The institution used mobile phones and social media to mobilize thousands of young voters across the country. Currently, NAYMOTE maintains a phone bank/directory containing over 11,000 contacts details of eligible voters across the 15 counties. The phone bank/directory has been very useful in reaching and mobilizing more young people across the country.

Under this initiative, NAYMOTE also partnered with community youth groups to conduct youth awareness campaign on electoral violence prevention and strengthened the national youth architecture for the post 2017 youth engagements. The institution embarked on

several strategies to increase youth engagements, dialogues, and civic participation to diffuse potential election prone conflict at community levels and significantly aided in reducing the number of reported incidents of electoral related violence across the 15 counties.

Yes to Peace, No to Violence Project

Under this initiative, NAYMOTE partnered with the Liberian National Police (LNP) to implement the **“Yes to Peace, No to Violence Project”** across six counties, which were considered hotspots by the LNP. The project contributed toward the peaceful conduct of the elections, increased trust between youth, political party leaders and the LNP.

The project reached thousands of young people with peace messages through community dialogues, visitations to school campuses, media engagements, community peace meetings, etc. Through the project, 100 young leaders were recruited from hotspots, trained and deployed as community peace ambassadors and liaison of the LNP. They provided regular updates to the LNP on violent activities and immediately got support from the LNP for redress. This helped reduce violent activity in these selected communities based on field trips and assessment conducted by the project management team, especially in Margibi, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Montserrado and Lofa Counties where the project was implemented. At the end of the project, young people who served as community peace ambassadors and liaison were honored as peace ambassadors due to the splendid roles they played in their communities to sustain the peace. A survey conducted by NAYMOTE also revealed that 70.7 of respondents rated the LNP high. <http://gnnliberia.com/2017/08/26/naymote-releases-survey-report-police-others/>.



All the community dialogues and engagement across the project location were facilitated by trained LNP Officers, community youth leaders and NAYMOTE’s staff. During these engagements, citizens had face-to-face encounter with senior police officers including the Inspector General of Police and asked questions about the LNP in the electoral process. At these engagements, NAYMOTE screened video documentary about the danger of electoral violence using Kenya 2008 electoral violence as a case study. At some screenings, participants even cried, especially mothers who resonated with what happened in Kenya in 2008.

As part of the project activities, the institutions also carry out a survey just before the conduct of October 2017. The survey which targeted citizens, especially young people in the project location revealed that citizens have increased trust in the LNP’s ability to carry out its impartial mandate in the electoral process and appreciated the level of professionalism they exhibited.

NAYMOTE concluded the project by holding two lessons learnt sessions in Montserrado and Bong Counties. The first session in Montserrado brought together young people from across political parties together with members of the National Elections Security Taskforce.

The taskforce is comprised of the heads of the LNP, the Armed Forces of Liberia, Liberia Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), the National Security Agency (NSA) and other key security apparatus. The second session in Bong County brought together LNP and BIN officers at the Regional Security Hub who were directly involved in the project implementation and deployed at polling centers and the young peace ambassadors. Young people from political parties as well as leaders of the LNP, AFL and BIN’s feedback was positive during the engagement highlighting few challenges including bad roads condition, logistics, and delay in payment officers’ stipend.

During a lessons learnt session, young people recommended that NAYMOTE setup a program that will keep young people and the LNP working together more. This recommendation led to the establishment of the Student Law and Justice Program. The program brings experienced Police Officers and Lawyers to the classrooms to teach students about practical law, crime prevention, conflict resolution, due process, how to access justice, etc.



Social Media and the Liberia's Elections

In 2011, NAYMOTE, for the first time, setup a mobile phone call center and built a phone bank for over 11k registered voters from across the country. The institution trained 8 volunteers to mobilize young mobile phone users to vote. Each volunteer made calls and reached 20 registered voters a day for the period of 45 days. A total of 7,200 registered voters were reached through the institution's call center activity. On Election Day, the institution hired 50 volunteers who reached 20 registered voters each on Election Day and motivated young people, especially first-time voters to turn out and vote. On Election Day, the 50 volunteers reached a total 1,000 registered voters across the country. NAYMOTE's Call Center is now considered as a best practice in the region and has been replicated in Sierra Leone and Nigeria.



In Liberia, mobile phone is the most efficient way to talk with community members about issues that matter most to them, at NAYMOTE we mobilized and educated young voters using mobile phones and this was very successful during the electoral process and even during the EBOLA outreach., currently in our phone bank we have 11,000 contact information of registered voters across the country, these contacts were collected and stored during our different programs organized across the country since 2011.

The '*Liberia Decides Platform*' is an online initiative of Naymote which covered and streamed live on Facebook all the campaign rallies and presidential debates to afford citizens who couldn't attend to access to candidate's platforms and stimulate constructive political discussions online. Peace messages were posted and shared while street talks were conducted to access citizens' views about the electoral process and the recorded video posted on the Facebook page. The platform was also used to post and share electoral information and important electoral events and dates to keep citizens informed.

'*Liberia Decides*' also used its Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram pages to mobilize young voters to participate peacefully during the elections in Liberia. Consistent messages/ information focused on the date of elections, time of elections, essence of citizens' participation in the election, legal requirements for both presidential and representative candidates, type of electoral systems, voting steps and procedures.

Through the '*Liberia Decides*' online platform, NAYMOTE has over 13,000 likes and 12,000 followers. The institution is currently using the platform to provide reliable news, updates and information about the country's political/ democratic processes. It's a powerful tool to reach Liberians all over the world at a fast pace.

Liberia's 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections was a historic election. Citizens, especially young people were excited; they played a meaningful role and voted the candidates of their choice peacefully. Young politicians propagated their political parties' ideologies and effectively campaigned for their candidates and voted. Based on the official announcement of the 2017 Presidential Runoff Elections results, the former football legend and peace icon, George M. Weah was pronounced by the National Elections Commission as Liberia's 24th President.

NAYMOTE POST ELECTIONS PROGRAMS

The School Law and Justice Program (The program brings experienced Police Officers and Lawyers to the classrooms to teach students about practical law, crime prevention, conflict resolution, due process and how to access justice, etc

The Youth Legislative Dialogue designed to improve youth understanding on the workings of the legislature, advance the culture of legislative openness and empower young people to ensure effective legislative monitoring and advocacy, etc.

The President-Meter Promoting democratic accountability, documenting, monitoring and tracking government's performances

The Young Political Leadership School (building youth leadership capacity to strengthen democratic governance and political parties)

Advocating for the passage of the Land Rights and Local Government Bills into law and supporting the Constitution referendum



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