

**Research Design and Project Supervision by
Brent Preston and The Carter Center.**

Analysis and Report by Brent Preston.

**"Whether Rich or Poor, I Have
the Same Rights as a Human Being"**

**A Report on a Series of 13 Focus Groups
Conducted in Liberia by The Carter Center**

May 10 to May 25, 1998

This research project was conducted under a grant from the
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Democracy Program



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Preface

The Carter Center's involvement in Liberia dates to 1990, when Liberian and other leaders in the region invited the Center to assist in efforts to facilitate a peaceful

[REDACTED]

Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched a rebellion against Samuel Doe's authoritarian regime. Between 1991 and 1996, President Carter and Carter Center staff made numerous trips to the region and met with leaders of the various

[REDACTED]

As Liberia has moved slowly and sometimes painfully toward peace and stability, The

State Department has attempted to maximize its programming and the larger role of the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I INTRODUCTION

The Carter Center conducted a series of 13 focus group discussions throughout Liberia from May 10 to May 25, 1998. The research project described in this report was designed and supervised by Brent Preston, an independent public opinion research consultant, and Carter Center staff in Liberia and Atlanta. The focus groups were

[REDACTED]

social status. Separate groups were held with men and women in rural areas. Please see

section IV at the end of this report for a full description of the project methodology.

This report was written by research consultant Brent Preston, and contains an Executive Summary of the major findings, as well as a detailed analysis of the focus group data. The quotes included in this report are drawn directly from the verbatim transcripts of the discussions, and represent the common perceptions or opinions of the participants, except where otherwise stated.

II EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Carter Center conducted 13 focus group discussions throughout Liberia with a total of 124 participants between May 10 and May 25, 1998. This focus group research project was designed through a consultative process with Liberian human rights NGOs, senior officials of the Government of Liberia, elected representatives, US government

officials resident in Liberia and members of international organizations. The discussions were designed to assess the attitudes of ordinary Liberians on human rights, economic

leadership.

The vast majority of those who took part in the discussions participated actively and had

much to say on the topics introduced by the moderators. Opinions varied between

Participants believe that lack of communication and outside scrutiny allows human rights abuses to continue. Participants do not believe that they have the ability to

[REDACTED]

201 [REDACTED] present important source of information by most participants
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The findings listed above suggest several recommendations:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

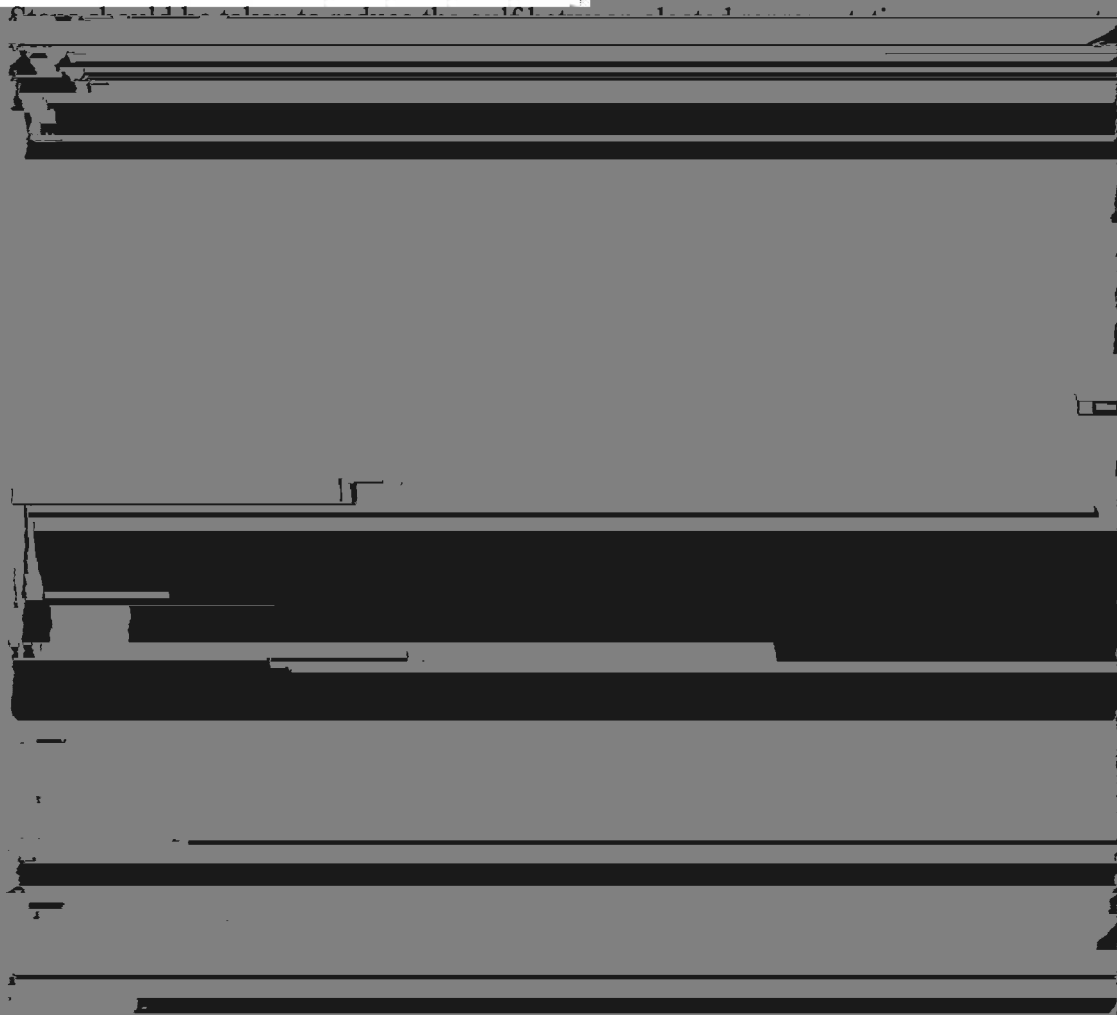
Local and international human rights organizations should focus their efforts on

helping to monitor, document and publicize human rights abuses, seek redress for those who's rights are abused and ensure abusers are held accountable, rather than seeking simply to provide human rights education.

Local human rights organizations should work to establish

[REDACTED]

organizations should examine the possibility of strengthening and improving the traditional justice system, rather than working only with the formal justice system.

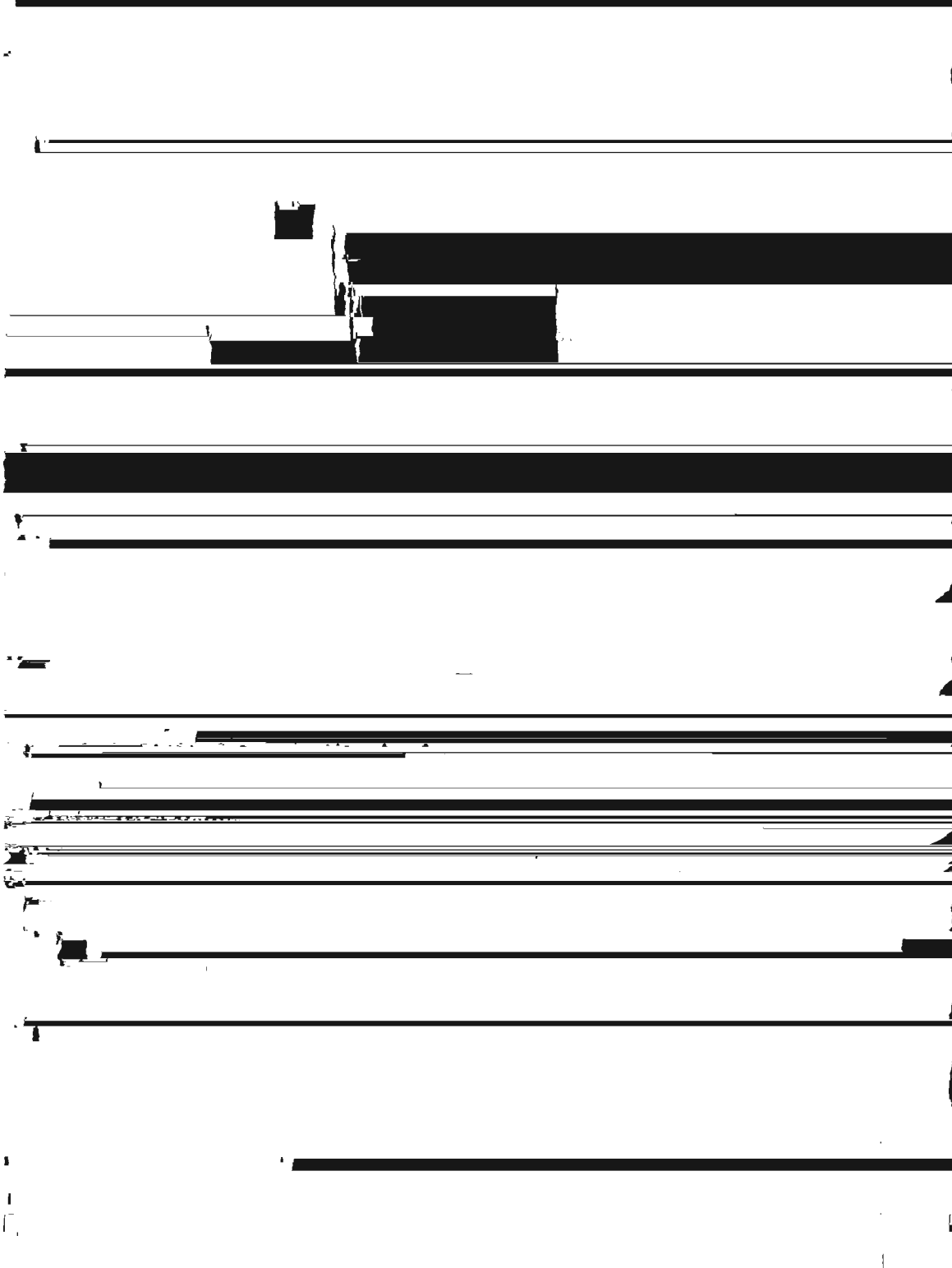


officials and ordinary citizens, and elected representatives should be aware of the fact that their constituents want and expect direct communication with their Senators and Representatives. The current system of proportional representation should be critically examined in light of the strong desire to directly elect individual representatives in the future.

III DETAILED FINDINGS

A. INTRODUCTION

Participants in all parts of the country believe that the war is over and look forward to a period of peace, reconstruction and development. In many discussions, the participants were extremely reluctant to discuss the possibility of a return to war and preferred to talk



hope that the government will also come to their aid, but expectations of the government are surprisingly low.

We have fallen on the ground, and I believe that for some of us to get up and stand it will be in our graves. Our only hope is for assistance to help us stand, especially external assistance because assistance from the government is not

forthcoming. ... Although our hearts are aching, when you think about it, the government is facing great problems.

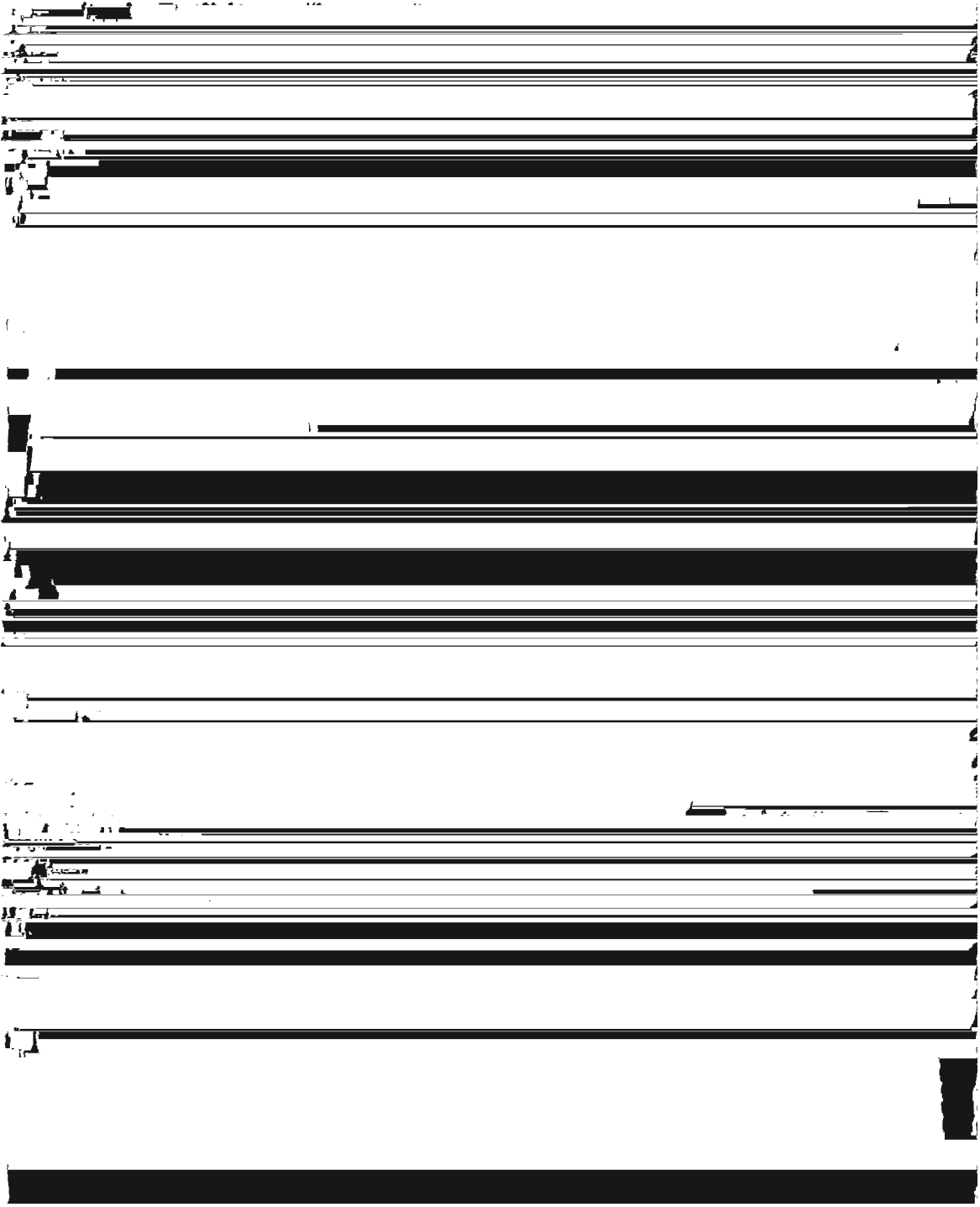
Male Participant, Gbanga

The cautious optimism and hope for a better future seen in some of the rural groups is not

shared by the urban participants. Many of the urban participants feel that in the face of

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

The primary objective of this study was to explore popular perceptions of human rights and to determine what rights and freedoms Liberians feel they are entitled to. During the consultations conducted as part of the design phase of this study, several of those interviewed expressed the opinion that Liberians, especially those who live in rural areas, are largely ignorant of their rights, and that public education is a necessary first step in improving the human rights climate in the country. The results of the focus groups do not support this belief. Participants in all parts of the country understand that they have certain basic rights and freedoms, and that these rights are inalienable. Many participants



Since I returned, there is no job. We have the right to work and get money. Right now you can not work to get money. There are no job facilities, so our rights have been abused.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

For many participants, the concept of human rights is closely linked to the existence of human rights organizations and effective means of seeking redress when their rights are

[REDACTED]

violated. This correlation was clearly revealed when participants were asked to define the term “human rights” as an introduction to the human rights portion of the discussion. For some, the definitions of the terms “human rights” and “human rights organizations”

Women's Rights

The focus group discussions show that most participants know their rights and recognize when they have been violated, with one notable exception: the area of women's rights. Both male and female participants in rural areas believe that men have more rights than

women, and that this situation will not and should not change in the foreseeable future. This exchange between a group of women in Nimba is typical:

Moderator *Do men and women have the same rights in your village?*

Participant 1 *No.*

D. ISOLATION

Participants in areas outside of Monrovia have a profound sense of isolation, and feel cut

off from the rest of the country. The lack of communication facilities and postal service,

M What kind of strength do you people want?

D? We want you to give us the help we need with this program.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

I am not satisfied with this proportional representation system. ... Right now, the

people who are over us do not come around here at all. ... Let the candidate's promises be written down during the next election. I will vote for the person who

will bring development to my town.

Male Participant, Gbanga

E. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The radio is seen as the most important source of information by most participants. Rural

M *Is the reception clear?*

All *No!*

Radio Liberia (commonly referred to as Radio Tototo, Radio Ghana, or Kiss FM, the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

not a significant source of information for rural participants, who say that they see

[REDACTED]

F. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Questions about human rights abuses and corruption (United States, 1999)

[REDACTED]

10. III *...if you were bringing it to town, they would take the*

food from you and carry it including your not. We are free now.

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

My father has a house near ELWA junction. After April 6, I left for Ghana, and

because every day the people in the area are harassing my father because he is Krahn. Every day and night.

Male Participant, Monrovia

There is no respect for human rights here in (this town) because our right to work

and earn money to sustain ourselves and our families has seen abused by the few NGOs and logging companies operating here. We have no access to jobs because



of men in Nimba is typical of attitudes toward the formal legal system:

M *What is the role of the justice of the peace or the magistrate in your areas?*

(loud laughter).

P1 *They are very bad. Bond fees in minor cases are \$500.00 and the cost of court is \$500.00. Messenger fees are \$150.00.*

P2 *They enslave us. Their (monetary) gain is their interest, and not justice.*

P3 *When they hear that the Court has come to the area, they...*

P *One of my friends encouraged me and said "Let's do rubber business." We went to Guthrie (a large rubber plantation). It is located in Bomi County. I spent US\$1,200.00 and I bought my rubber. On my way coming to town, the police seized the whole truck. They seized my truck. I used my last US\$200.00 and went to the station to bribe the police so they could release my truck. They ate my*

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Liberia.

M *When did that happened?*

P *In December.*

M *Where?*

There is also a widespread perception that police officers not only fail to prevent violent crimes in Monrovia, but that they actually commit violent crimes themselves and

collaborate with criminals.

Most of the police we see on the street at night are those that were the top fighters before. So instead of preventing crimes, they are collaborating with criminals. They know these criminals very well and sometimes they even send them to go do crime.

Female Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

H. LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Chiefs are by far the most important leaders for rural participants. Participants say that chiefs solve disputes, prevent conflicts and ensure harmony in the village. A male participant in Nimba gave a typical response when speaking of the role of the chief in his village: *"When we have problems we go to the Sub-Chief, and if no solution onward to*

Participants also talk about a number of other organizational structures within their

participant in a training session. Moderators were selected on the basis of language skills, past experience, educational background and their performance during the interviews

All moderators underwent an intensive two-day training program. The program introduced the basic concepts of focus group research, moderating techniques and small

research objectives. As part of the training program, the moderators conducted trial discussions with groups of participants at the VOA displaced persons camp outside of Monrovia. These trial discussions gave the moderators the opportunity to practice what

After returning to Monrovia, the moderators were responsible for translating and writing

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

a verbatim transcript in English of the discussions they had moderated. The transcripts were then typed at the Carter Center offices under the supervision of Gerald K.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

APPENDICES

CARTER CENTER

1998 FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Carter Center Liberia

May, 1998

1. INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduce yourself
- B. Explain what a focus group is

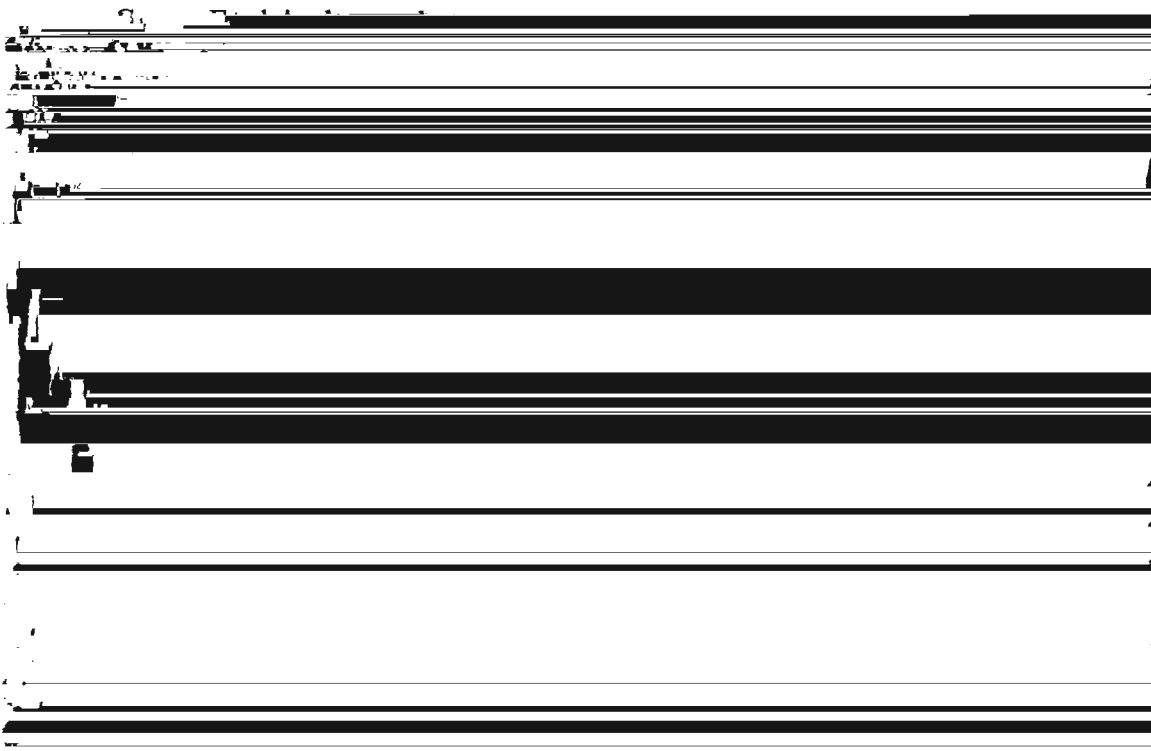
A discussion.

No right or wrong answers, just your ideas and opinions.

Be honest and say what you think.

Feel free to disagree with people: I want you to tell me your own opinions, even if they are different from other people in the group.

Everyone should participate in the discussion because everyone's opinions and ideas are important.



about how people all over Liberia are living. Explain that we work in Monrovia and it is not always easy to find out what is going on in other parts of the country

D. Explain that the tape recorder is there so we can listen to it later and take notes.

E. Have participants introduce themselves and record answers.

PROBE:

What is the best thing about living here?

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

What are the biggest problems you face living here?

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

What do you think will happen in your community/village in the future?

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

7. ACCESS TO INFORMATION (15 minutes)

“We have talked about a lot of issues today: development, human rights, leadership etc. Where do you hear about these issues? How do you hear about what is going on in Liberia?”

PROBE

Radio (probe stations/programs)
Newspapers
Local leaders

Government
NGOs (local and national)

Are you able to make your views known?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]