



**The Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia (STYL):  
A new Evidence Based Program that Reduce  
Violence and Crime among Street Youth in Liberia.**

**What Donor Look For:  
Is the cost effectiveness of programs**



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## **The cost effectiveness of NEPI programs:**

High risk men are a major security threat to Liberia post conflict development. Growing rates of crime and drugs deter investment, tourism and growth. The same men engaged in crime may be mobilized as election thugs or mercenaries. Across Liberia's cities, thousands of high-risk young men are armed robbers, drug dealers, petty criminals, and simply violent. The International Crisis Group has identified mercenary activities and arms-trafficking as one of the most serious threats to Liberia's security. This threat was highlighted by the 2010-11 conflict in Cote d'Ivoire where armed groups recruited young Liberian men as mercenaries. In Sierra Leone, similar men were recruited by all parties as election thugs. Integrating these men into society is one of Liberia's key security priorities. Given weak state capacity in the post-conflict context, frustrations are many and young men and women are often victims or perpetrators of violence. Two of the most common policy prescriptions—policing and job creation—aim to reduce crime and violence by either changing the economic incentives open to these young men or incarcerating them. Yet neither of these policy prescriptions address the root cause nor have they been proven to be effective.

STYL is innovative in that it targets the hardest to reach, most vulnerable youth with a tested and proven intervention to address the issues of violence and crime by focusing on transforming behavior. Most psychosocial training in Liberia centers around crisis management, focusing on issues like substance abuse, PTSD, child abuse, and domestic violence. Rather than individually addressing these acute problems, STYL attempts to engage street youth who are vulnerable and lack opportunities for socioeconomic survival and empowerment, 'transforming' them from excluded individuals living at the fringes of society to those working and living within the social and economic mainstream.

STYL cost \$250 and men who went through STYL committed nearly 30 fewer crimes per year and raised their incomes by \$4 a week for several months. If every crime costs Liberia just \$25, the STYL scale-up pays for itself within a year. We have also included research costs in this concept. These costs will decrease as we move from scaling to full implementation.

STYL is an evidenced-based intervention. It has been tested and proven effective through a randomized control trial (RCT) conducted by researchers from Columbia University, Harvard University and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). The findings from the RCT can be found [here](#). It has also been featured in the Washington Post and on the influential podcast, Freakonomics, highlighting NEPI's success in identifying a workable and affordable solution to rehabilitating the hardest to reach youth

## **Rigorous Testing:**

NEPI project's plan for collecting rigorous evidence of success:

Many programs never reach scale because they do not sufficiently focus on collecting rigorous evidence of success. The NEPI model emphasizes testing potential solutions and rigorously evaluating impact - often through randomized controlled trials - to identify what works and what does not, and to help scale only those solutions proven to produce results.

## **Evidence:**

Despite the strong evidence underpinning STYL, there remain substantial evaluation opportunities. STYL is an innovative and understudied approach to poverty alleviation, and this proposed scale-up continues to provide a platform for policy-relevant evaluation. Four aspects, in particular, make a scaled STYL evaluation opportunity especially unique:

- 1) The target population: "High risk" youth in fragile states remain a marginalized group that relatively few researchers have focused on.

- 2) The intervention, itself: Cognitive behavioral therapy interventions have only recently been evaluated in on-the-ground settings using the techniques and standards of development economists.
- 3) Extended treatment: The scaling of STYL presents an opportunity to take advantage of the increased sustainability of such a program, tweaking treatments to accommodate longer-term participation.

The science of scaling: While scale-ups are increasingly based on rigorous evidence bases, few evaluations exist of projects implemented at scale, and even fewer focus on various scaling mechanisms, themselves. Anecdotally, STYL's prior success was due in large part to the intimate and grassroots connections that NEPI and its capable staff maintained with participant communities. As STYL scales, NEPI will necessarily hire new staff with different qualifications to offer a similar program—evaluating such changes could provide important learning lessons for practitioners considering scaling elsewhere.

As STYL is scaled up, three key research questions may benefit from further evaluation:

1) *Extended treatment*

- a. *Therapy component*: What is the effect of offering longer-term therapies to participants, either in the form of (a) an increased program duration or (b) by adding “booster sessions” in the months following the program? The intensity of the basic STYL therapy intervention could be kept constant or “spread thinner” across this extended period to evaluate the relative effectiveness of expanding either its intensity or total duration.
- b. *Economic component*: What are the effects of offering alternative or more intensive income support? For example, (relative to STYL's one-time US\$200 unconditional cash grant) what are the effects of offering an initial grant followed by smaller cash transfers every few months for an additional 1-2 years? The intensity of the basic STYL economic intervention could be kept constant or “spread thinner” across this extended period to evaluate the relative effectiveness of increasing this intervention on its intensive or extensive margin.

- 2) *Scale-up*: How do intervention effects vary based on a facilitator's (a) “street background,” (b) professional experience, and (c) STYL delivery expertise? As NEPI scales its own staff infrastructure, it will grow its facilitator roster four-fold (from 20 to 84), with potential for significant variance among the three characteristics noted above.

*Extended treatment example*: While specific treatment arms related to extended treatment require further discussion and a full literature review of such intervention manipulations, the arms below provide an illustrative example of how we could evaluate extended treatments:

- **Therapy component**
  - Basic therapy: 8-week program, 3 sessions and 3 at-home visits per week
  - Extended Therapy: 24-week program, 1 session and 1 at-home visit per week
  - Expanded Therapy: 8-week program (3 sessions and 3 at-home visits per week) followed by 16-week “booster” program (1 session and 1 at-home visit per week)
- **Economic component**
  - Basic economic: US\$200 unconditional grant distributed following program completion
  - Extended economic: US\$40 unconditional cash transfers distributed following program completion plus US\$20 bimonthly unconditional transfers for 16 months
  - Expanded economic: US\$200 unconditional grant distributed following program completion plus US\$20 bimonthly unconditional transfers for 16 months

Given the proven effectiveness of the basic components and our interest in the relative effect of these variations as compared to the basic component, it is not necessary to include a pure comparison group. Rather, the basic therapy and economic components will serve as the benchmark upon which to judge these variations' effects. Treatment will also be stratified by county. Of 5,400 participants, we propose including half (2,700) in the evaluation.

### **NEPI Solution Proposed Pathways to Scale:**

The STYL Innovation is expected to scale up through the public sector in order to reach sustainability. NEPI has received commitment from the Liberia Youth and Sport Ministry on the STYL scale up. The Youth Ministry will work with NEPI, GC and J-PAL for the full implementation of STYL. Findings from the program will be disseminated in the following ways: (1) NEPI, GC and J-PAL in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth & Sports will organize stakeholders meetings with line ministries, multilateral donors, policy makers, civil society organizations, decisions makers from the village and national level, other relevant organizations and other public sector players to discuss rigorous evaluation of the project, its methods, cost-effectiveness and its impact for a possible scale up. The main output will be to share the study findings, discuss replication, national scale-up, and funding opportunities to cover associated costs; (2) the research team will publish the study's findings in the economic journals, disseminate results to influential parties and potential replicators; (3) The Ministry of Youth and Sports will integrate the STYL model into its overall annual budget in order for STYL to be placed on the agenda of the government for national scale up. With additional partnership with large social service agencies and multilateral donors, STYL can grow to scale without long-run support from donor and philanthropy. We see STYL as having the potential to scale the model would establish NEPI as a center of excellence, setting operational and technical standards, ensuring quality, providing TOT, and serving as a resource to organizations and government ministries delivering STYL.



For more information about our work  
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