

Proposal: Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics in Liberia

for

Brazil-Liberia

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LIHEDE

LIBERIAN HISTORY, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT, Inc.

Motto: We Dare Preserve History

Background

The Liberian nation and people suffered tremendous losses in human life, human resources, capital investments, and infrastructural developments during the 14-year Liberian civil wars from 1989 to 2003. The war displaced the entire Liberian population of about 3.4 million people and well over 200,000 Liberians lost their lives to the violence. Liberia presently has a soaring unemployment rate of up to 85 percent, while the national capital, Monrovia, with 1.4 million people, has no electricity, safe drinking water, and conducive public health, housing, and transportation services. Schools are barely functioning due insufficient teachers and textbooks. Close to 100,000 ex-combatants, mostly child soldiers are not in school, while an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 of these former child soldiers are orphans, many of whom are now roaming the streets of Monrovia fanning for themselves. The possibilities of these former child soldiers growing up as violent criminals or paid mercenaries are great if they continued to be left alone to fan for themselves in the streets without any concrete national program to assist in rehabilitating them to become productive citizens. Many of these children and adolescents were forcefully removed from their homes and families at ages as young as nine years old and drugged to fight and die in a civil war whose cause they knew nothing about. Their ordeals during the civil war will continue to have lasting impacts on their well-being in society unless they are exposed to urgent rehabilitation and psychological counseling to once more make them productive citizens.

The Liberian History, Education, & Development, Inc. (LIHEDE) has conceived the idea of establishing a Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics in Liberia, a sports academy venture, that will cater exclusively to the rehabilitation and psychological needs of former Liberian child-soldiers or ex-combatants, to help them regain their self-worth and self-confidence in order to assume their rightful roles in the reconstruction of Liberia. This proposal, therefore, details the LIHEDE Plan, for which we desire the assistance of Brazil for its implementation. The Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics will be a private, not-for-profit initiative to help former child soldiers, boys and girls ages 10-21 who are at risk or vulnerable to rejoin violent groups. The Center will use sports as a vehicle for rehabilitating these ex-combatants, with educational and counseling units or components attached to develop the whole person. It is anticipated that former child-soldiers graduating from programs initiated by the Center will serve as role models for other youths in Liberian society.

The Liberian History, Education and Development, Inc. has chosen to make this application to the Brazil for assistance because of Brazil's international soccer symbolism, role and works with Haiti and other trouble spots around the world. We communicated with you before, and we got advice that Brazil will assist with the proposed Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics in Liberia if the Liberia government and UNICEF supported the effort. We have attached support letter from the Liberia government and that our meeting with UNICEF Director Angela Kearney in Liberia ended with her agency willingness to provide funding for a specific area of the project.

The Brazilian striker and legendary international soccer star Pele is credited with halting the armed conflicts in the former Belgian Congo when his Brazilian club, Santos, played against local teams at Kinshasa and Brazzaville in 1969 led rebels to lay down their arms to watch the games. The concept of the proposed Center was derived from this momentous visit of Pele to the former Belgian Congo, which shows the pacifying and elevating prowess of sports. Sports in general and soccer in particular in Liberia is a powerful tool which can be used to reunite our people, uplift their spirit, and promote and enhance the self-esteem of a distressed and depressed children population in Liberia.

Brazil has over the years made great strides in youth development and empowerment in Liberia, and this is why we desire the assistance of Brazil regarding the proposed LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics. We note with deep appreciation that Brazil Liberia has helped the Liberian people; helped to disarm, demobilize citizens displaced by the Liberian civil war. Brazil has, in collaboration with the National Transitional Government of Liberia, other UN agencies, and NGOs, worked to protect Liberian children in the areas of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and education. Brazil's collaboration with the community of the world for Liberia protection is noteworthy, and this is why we believe Brazil would be supportive of our concept for youth empowerment through sports, education, and psychological counseling by way of the Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics.

Our model for the Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics program fits into, and will greatly be the beacon of hope and efforts at training Liberian teachers to provide psycho-social services to Liberian youths through creative and recreational activities by building community-based support networks leading to the establishment of child welfare committees, children clubs, and youth groups in the seven focus counties in Liberia. LIHEDE will be grateful if Brazil funds Phase I one the program support to vulnerable children who are orphans or otherwise displaced by the Liberian civil war. We in LIHEDE are grateful to Brazil to extend such needed services to Liberian youths and we believe establishing a partnership between Brazil, Liberia and LIHEDE through the proposed Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics will go a long way rehabilitating Liberian youths from the scares of the civil war and transforming them into competitive athletics, skilled citizens and international role models.

The LIHEDE initiative for establishing a Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics in Liberia began with a series of discussions among core LIHEDE members following a visit to Liberia in early 2005 by the LIHEDE Executive Director. During the visit many persons asked if LIHEDE could do something about the troubled youths of Liberia and how they might be re-integrated into Liberian society as productive citizens after years of living as child soldiers. This desire to do something subsequently led to LIHEDE donating a soccer ball and a set of jersey for the formation of local soccer club known as Club Bassa to promote recreation among the youths the LIHEDE executive director encountered during the visit. Subsequently, a consensus was reached among LIHEDE executives and members that the youths of Liberia needed a training outlet such as a sports academy to promote individual self-esteem, bonding, healing, leadership skills, team work, conflict resolution, and nationalism in order to maximize the potential of our youths in post-conflict Liberia. It became apparent to this core group of LIHEDE executives and members that their successful work experiences and highly developed supervisory skills could be combined in a potentially meaningful way to improve national sports program in Liberia through the establishment of a Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics. Plan is underway for LIHEDE to acquire 20 acres of land for the Center.

Rationale

The vehicle of soccer can have a much greater impact on the sons and daughters of nation such as Liberia than just what happens on the field with a ball at their feet. The opportunities for personal values development within this environment are huge. Character, leadership, discipline, integrity, responsibility, independence, self-confidence, and good sportsmanship are key attributes of a productive citizen. These are values that these former child soldiers and orphans will carry with them for life, whether or not they continue to play soccer after graduating from the Center. We in LIHEDE want to encourage Brazil to be first to join LIHEDE and Liberia and its national sport authorities in these national endeavors to make the Center for

Youth Empowerment and Athletics a reality for thousands of Liberian children who need to embrace these ideals, for their lifetime benefit and growth. With the help of many supporters like Brazil, LIHEDE will continue to create avenues for securing a promising future for the children of Liberia.

Mission/Values

The thousands of Liberian children abused during the 14-year civil war in Liberia need lots of love, hope and sport therapy to recover from their traumas. Many of these children have been abandoned by society and are now roaming the streets of Monrovia fanning for themselves. But these kids need a home and they need an opportunity to continue their education so that they are better prepared to handle any future challenges that might prevent them from contributing meaningfully to the development of the Liberian society. The LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics seeks to provide counseling services, educational services and other related services through a residential program, although initiative operation of the Center would be on a non-residential basis.

The purpose of the LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics is not only to get former child soldiers and other Liberian youths from committing crimes in Liberian society and moonlighting as paid mercenaries for illicit foreign enterprises, but also to provide for an opportunity for the youths to fully develop their athletic and individual talents through teamwork and discipline, social etiquettes, and personal character growth and development. In other words, the Center would be an "Asylum" for the care, support, discipline, restraint and education of children orphaned and displaced by the civil war who are between the ages of 10 and 21.

The Center will stress coaching Excellence, character development, skill drills and competitions, camaraderie, and a sense of community involvement as part of efforts to promote the physical, mental and moral well-being of the Liberian youths. Children at the Center will be given the opportunity to participate in team and individual sports and to compete in a fair and sportsmanlike manner, as part of their preparation to take on future challenges and responsibilities as adults and model citizens of Liberia. The children will also be instructed about democratic principles and the cultural traditions upon which the new Liberia is being built in order to strengthen the sense of nationalism. With 14-years of two brutal civil wars barely behind us, it is very important to prevent young Liberians from returning to violence in post-Conflict Liberia by giving them the opportunity to redefine themselves and their self-worth in society.

Where has this type of program worked?

In recent years, the United States and other nations around the world have relied on what is known as "Community Policing and Sports Programs" to curb youth-on-youth violence and substance abuse. These efforts, which have included increased police patrols and organizing basketball games and other sporting events in targeted communities and neighborhoods, have been credited with changing the habits of delinquent youths and other young adults from engaging in loitering, vandalizing, heavy drinking, drug dealing, and prostitution. The U.S. community policing and sports programs, it is said, reduced crime rate in the targeted neighborhoods by 45 percent in the first six months of operation and increased youth attitude

and involvement in community or neighborhood activities. Community leaders and business entities in their targeted neighborhoods were also instrumental in ensuring the success of the program by donating time and sporting equipment, uniforms, and related accessories for the young people in the neighborhood. This is why LIHEDE is appealing to Brazil to support this pilot program. LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics will not only seek to get former Liberian child soldiers off the streets but also help the youths to build their educational and social skills in order to become productive citizens and future role models for other delinquent youths.

LIHEDE believes that sports such as soccer, basketball, weight lifting, track and field, and boxing have the potential to take troubled youths off the streets and turn them into international sporting champions and legends, and this is why the Center is intended to compliment efforts at youth empowerment and development by Brazil and local Liberian government agencies by concentrating on developing the self-confidence of Liberian youths traumatized by the civil through a hybrid of sporting, educational, and psychological training and skill development assistance. The Center will have its own 20 acres of land with soccer complex devoted entirely to former child soldiers and other children orphaned by the civil war, and staffed by qualified individuals from Brazil, USA, Liberia and other countries.

How will LIHEDE measure the programs' effectiveness?

It is clear that community policing and sports programs are crimes prevention programs that have proven to be very effective in reducing and preventing violence crimes around the world. The LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics will therefore measure the success of the programs it offers by evaluating and tracking the individual successes and actions of graduates as they contribute to society using their newly acquired skills and experiences. Overall decrease in the number of youth violence incidents, the level of youth participation in the required Center programs, the number of individual wins at competitive sports, and the number of Center graduates who go on to play for professional clubs would be some of the factors used in measuring the success of the programs offered at the Center. In other words, the success of the Center's programs will be measured with respect to changing the attitudes and behavior of participants in dealing with problems and conflicts in their lives, without resorting to violence. And this is why participant at the Center will be given practical exercises and projects in mediation and conflict resolution as a means to breaking the cycle of violence that has engulfed Liberia in recent years.

Features and Key Elements of the Center's Programs

The programs and services of the LIHEDE Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics would include the following key components:

- 1) Transitional Living Education. These programs allow mainly youth age 10 to 21 to focus on education, civil duties, conflict resolution, and job skills
- 2) The Program and Day Education. Students may attend the Center and receive credits through Liberian Schools
- 3) Therapy and Workshops. Program will offers resident group therapy as well as a range of educational and recreational opportunities for participants
- 4) Speakers and Workshops. The therapy programs and workshops available to the Program participants. Program staff members and other prominent persons will be

- contacted as guest speakers. Speakers may include world-class players and retired players from America, Europe and Africa annually
- 5) Adolescent Sex Offender Treatment for boys and girls

The Center will also offer:

- A self-contained elementary classroom
- A self-contained, secure special education room
- A diverse academic curriculum including agriculture, civic, conflict resolution, English, language arts, social studies, math and reading
- Programs emphasizing social development, including classes in social skills, home living skills, careers, wellness education, sex education and physical education
- Tutoring and regular study hours
- Social activities such as school newspaper, musical competition and dances

Center Expansion Based on Future Funding

The Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics will add a variety of programs and continues to expand its services as time permits. In the first four years of operation the Center hopes to introduce in addition to soccer, boxing, basketball, weight lifting, volleyball, and track and field to its list of sporting events. LIHEDE, together with the cooperation of our international friends and partners will strive to create promising future for Liberian children, in order to continue to meet the pressing needs of the Liberian youths in a changing society.

1) Boxing Unit

The Boxing Unit of the Program will operate on a daily basis, with participants ranging from 40 to 45 teens daily on the onset. When begun, qualified instructors will help teens develop positive skills and self-confidence. The Boxing Program will hold boxing exhibitions. It will pride itself on program involving a strict regimen of exercises along with a requirement that participants maintain good grades in school and good character in the community. LIHEDE believes the program will keep many post-conflict youths of the streets by giving them an opportunity build self-confidence and endurance. LIHEDE will work with the IBF, WBO, WBA and other international boxing organizations to help in donating boxing rings and other items once the first phase of the project is in started.

2) Weight Lifting Unit

The Weight Lifting Program will work with teenagers, 12 years of age and older, to use the weight room to improve their performance in related sports.

3) Basketball Unit

The basketball Unit will seek to develop the basketball skills of Liberian youths. The Program expects to attract 250 young people who will be trained to participate in an annual national tournament.

4) Volleyball Unit

The Volleyball Unit will seek to develop the volleyball skills of Liberian youths. The Program expects to attract 250 young people who will be trained to participate in an annual national tournament.

5) Track and Field Unit

The Track and Field Unit will coordinate the track and field development of the youths. The Program expects to attract 250 young people who will be trained to participate in an annual national tournament

6) Open Recreation Unit

Boys and girls will come to the center for open recreation at any time during the hours of operation. The open recreation will include a piano, library, ping-pong, bumper pool, two pool tables, and board games.

7) Public Library Unit

LIHEDE is developing plans for a public library project, which is distinct from the Center. However, the Center does need a library for use by students and participants of the Center's programs. Like the public library project of LIHEDE, the in-house library at the Center will seek to provide quality services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through books and a variety of other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs and interests of the diverse participants and guests of the Center and changing population of Liberia. Since the foundation of Liberia, the nation has had only one modern public library, which was destroyed during the civil war. The public library is even more relevant today than in the past as it is the only institution providing free-of-charge access to all types of information. It is the gateway to the information society and performs the role of a citizen's information advice bureau. Therefore, Center's Library is to provide library service to all children of Liberia, including individuals and groups of every age, economic level, occupation, ethnic origin, philosophy and human condition. The purpose of the library is to maintain a current collection of print and non-print materials in all areas of educational, social, political, occupational, creative and spiritual.

How will the programs be financed?

We are seeking funding from Brazil for the first phrase of the Center. Other nations and organizations being contacted to support Phrase I of the Center project and its expansion in the next four years are Spain, Italy, Portugal, International Boxing Federation, World Boxing Organization, World Boxing Association, Federation of International Football Associations, Major League Sports, ADDIDAS, and private grant agencies. The programs offered by the Center will be expanded to include offices and branches in 15 political subdivisions of Liberia.

Community Involvement

LIHEDE will aid in promoting the message that violence is not conducive to national peace, unity, and development in Liberia and that every effort must be expended to discourage youth violence in the country. LIHEDE will rely on the local media and proposed LIHEDE Radio 95.7 FM to communicate the message of hope, peace, and development to the Liberian nation and people. A Private, Public, Religious Partnership will be established to promote the message of Zero Tolerance for violence and acts of corruption in society. LIHEDE will create zero tolerance

coupons and will offer to customer's discounts on menu items at the Center. Numerous businesses and citizens will be targeted to aid in this community involvement effort because LIHEDE believes that working together really does make a difference in the lives of people.

What will be the major lessons learnt from these programs?

Providing a safe and discipline-learning environment for teaching basic athletic and educational skills to former Liberian child soldiers is a worthy priority. Through effective partnerships between LIHEDE, Brazil, and the Liberian government, the local business and neighborhood communities are essential to helping the Liberian youths traumatized by the civil war to regain self-confidence in rebuilding their lives. In today's Liberian society it is very important to maintain law and order by imposing civil and criminal penalties on wrongdoers and we don't want Liberian youths to be the target of such penalties and punishments. The Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics can be very instrumental in keeping young Liberians active in a learning environment to prevent them from seeing violence as the only alternative in life. The Center will empower Liberian children to aspire to become great sportsmen such as George Weah, Edson Arantes Do Nascimento (Pele), Michiel Jordan, Mohammed Ali, and so forth. The children's needs are so great that support system as envisaged by the Center's programs and activities are bound to make a real difference in the lives of former Liberian child soldiers and ex-combatants.

How will a placement or referral be made?

In addition to issuing out about 500 coupons annually, most referrals will come from public officials who work with young people in Liberia, including the Office of Family and Children, the Department of Education, public and private school, physicians, and the juvenile court system. Referrals would be made by phone, mail, fax, or e-mail, or through community organization. LIHEDE staff will travel around the nation to facilitate such recruitment or coordination efforts.

Projected Start-up and Facilities

The Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletic for former child soldiers and ex-combatant as envisioned by LIHEDE, will target and require:

- 190 students (equivalent of 5 soccer teams with 18 players of each team)
- 6 rooms-administrative building
- 10 classrooms- building with auditorium, lockers and gym
- 5 soccer fields, one of which will be a mini-stadium to seat about 2500 spectators, which will be named after a sponsoring country or agency.
- 5 soccer teams
- 20 sets of goalkeeper's jersey and gloves
- Public Address system
- Library room to hold 5, 000 books
- Generators
- Two 18-seater buses (used or new)

In addition, the Center would need In-kind donations, but our most critical need is for financial support. Indeed, we urgently need to raise \$2.5 million to begin the Center project right after the raining seasons.

Partnership

We in LIHEDE realize that only through developing significant relationships in our community and through quality corporate and non-profit partnerships, can we ultimately reach our goals, both on and off the field. While we look forward to your continued support, LIHEDE will form partnerships and collaboration with other nations and soccer teams across the world to sustain this program. Since its foundation, LIHEDE has developed an academic curriculum for a degree-granting Liberian Studies program to be used by institutions of higher learning in Liberia covering degrees from Bsc. To PhD; conducted two major symposiums, one of which was held July 29-30 in Greensboro. LIHEDE recently visited Liberia and conducted a workshop on "Reorganizing the Liberia Military before the national elections with the aim of educating policy makers in the military about the need to professionalize and democratize the army so it can be a protector of the Liberian people and not an enemy of the people. During the visit to Liberia, we had consultative meetings with top military officials and yielded some indirect result such as a US donation of \$5million to pay \$450 dollars each to 400-500 ex-combatants. LIHEDE has a track record both nationally and internationally to plan and deliver the proposed project and find additional resources in the future. We will be willing to meet with you in the November, 2005 regarding your participation in the proposed Center for Youth Empowerment and Athletics in Liberia.

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