Currently there is an estimated 85% unemployment rate for youth in Liberia.

Even though demand for engineering professionals is high, the majority of youth do not consider careers in engineering due to lack of understanding of the field and lack of role models.

Further, oftentimes engineering graduates leave the university unprepared for the jobs available. Thus, companies must train them on their own, or hire employees from outside the country.

At the beginning of the century, Liberia emerged from a decade-long civil war that decimated the country’s infrastructure, including the higher education system.

The University of Michigan College of Engineering was awarded part of a USAID grant to improve the universities of Liberia, called Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development (EHELD).

Due to the importance of agriculture and engineering in the economy of Liberia, the focuses of this grant are the engineering and agriculture programs at two major Liberian universities.

UM has the specific role to implement summer co-curricular programs, with an emphasis on female student participation.

**Educational Objective**

- Recruit quality students into engineering and agriculture
- Empower those students and excite them about their career

**Preliminary Outcomes**

- "I have been made to understand that every engineer connects one to the other, whether geology, civil, mining, electrical, etc., and even agriculture. We all can work together as a team to build our country high, the majority of youth do not consider careers in engineering due to lack of understanding of the field and lack of role models."
  - Sophomore engineer female

- "I don't see my career as just a career anymore, but as a something that is very important to the world and also as very challenging, so I need to be very prepared in order to meet up with the task out there."  
  - Sophomore engineering female

- "The Summer Start program has helped me to become more passionate about the people in my community and the country at large. It made me realize that there is a huge demand for our area of specialization as mining engineer to grow the industrial sector of Liberia. As a student of mining engineering I see myself creating things that would benefit my community. It makes me love my career and I see engineers as living engines to power the economy of a nation."  
  - Sophomore engineering male

- "My thinking about my career has been in different way, assuming that agriculture was just for subsistence and thinking that is all about one person in attitude. But from the knowledge I have achieved since the start of this summer start program, that it is a teamwork. Team working will bring relies in our agriculture sector to our nation."  
  - Sophomore agriculture male

**Conclusion and Future Work**

- We developed a pipeline of co-curricular educational programs for Liberian youth to encourage more students into engineering and agriculture
- We gathered preliminary data of the influence of these programs on student’s attitudes toward their career
- We will particularly look at the female student experience,
- These programs will be carried out the next three years, for the remainder of the EHELD grant.