CONSOLIDATED STRATEGIC IMPACT REPORT (2014—2026)
NATIONAL EXPANSION PROPOSAL (2026)

Transforming Neurodivergence and Disability Inclusion Across Liberia: From Grassroots Action to National Systemic Leadership



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1. Executive Summary & Core Tripartite Mandate

Since 2018, **Straight From The Heart International Inc. (SFTH)** has played a pioneering role in advancing autism awareness, supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), strengthening caregiver support systems, and influencing disability policy and systems reform in Liberia. Through grassroots advocacy, strategic partnerships, and evidence-based interventions, SFTH has emerged as a leading organization promoting neurodiversity inclusion, disability rights, and equitable access to services nationwide.

A clear and integrated tripartite mandate guides the organization:

Promote Autism Awareness

To cultivate public understanding of autism and other developmental disabilities by addressing pervasive stigma, social exclusion, and harmful cultural misconceptions across both urban and rural communities.

Support Families and Caregivers

To provide structured support networks, caregiver education, peer support systems, and practical behavioral intervention resources that reduce caregiver burden, social isolation, and emotional distress.

Educate and Advocate

To establish specialized educational opportunities and promote evidence-based interventions while advancing national policies and legislative reforms that protect the rights, dignity, and inclusion of neurodivergent individuals.

Rather than functioning solely as a service provider, SFTH has positioned itself as a strategic institutional leader within Liberia's disability sector. Through active collaboration with the Alliance on Disability in Liberia and partnerships with organizations including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Sightsavers, and the Italian Association Amici di Raoul Follereau (AIFO), SFTH contributes to the design, implementation, and evaluation of national disability initiatives grounded in evidence, human rights principles, and community-driven approaches.

2. The Liberian Context: A Quantified Problem Statement

Severe structural vulnerabilities, significant policy gaps, and substantial resource deficits characterize the experiences of neurodivergent individuals and their caregivers in Liberia. These systemic barriers underscore the urgent need for coordinated national action, strategic partnerships, and sustained investment from government institutions, development partners, and philanthropic organizations.

Pervasive Cultural Stigma

Approximately 90% of communities continue to associate autism and developmental disabilities with supernatural causes, witchcraft, spiritual punishment, or curses, often resulting in children being hidden, neglected, socially excluded, or abandoned.

Severe Diagnostic Deficits

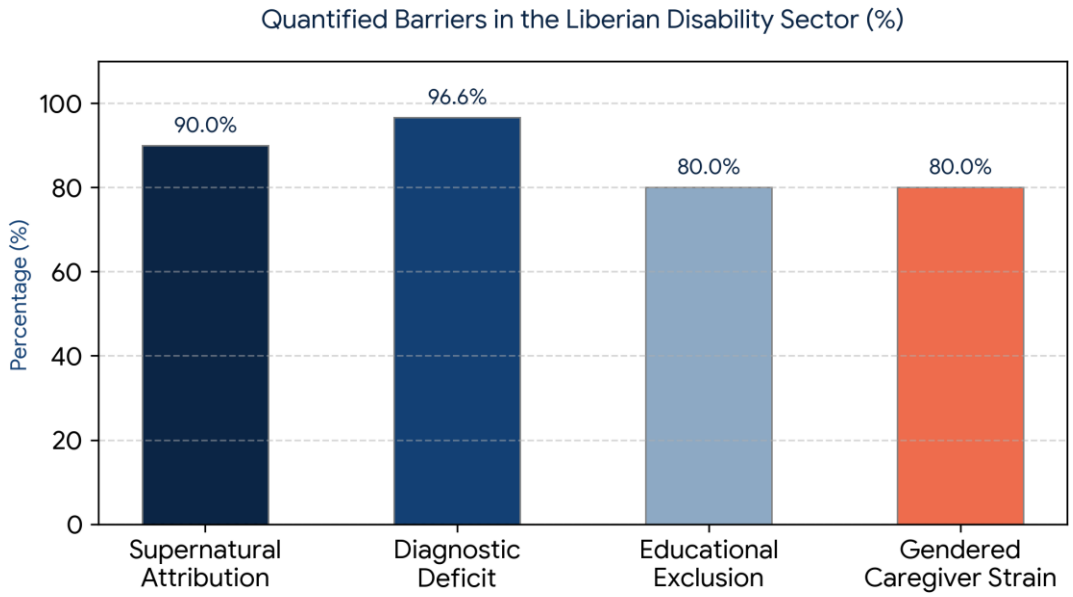
Only 1 in 30 children with autism or developmental disabilities in Liberia access diagnosis or support, underscoring the urgent need for collective action to improve children's futures.

Extreme Educational Exclusion

Fewer than 20% of autistic and neurodivergent children complete basic primary education due to limited educational infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and widespread exclusion from mainstream educational settings.

Gender-Disproportionate Caregiver Burden

More than 80% of primary caregivers are women—primarily mothers and grandmothers—who experience significant financial hardship, social isolation, stigma, and psychological distress while providing long-term care and support**.**



Systemic Barriers Affecting Neurodivergent Individuals and Their Families in Liberia: Findings from SFTH Baseline Research and Community Assessments (2025-2026)

3. Organizational Origins & Foundational Narrative

The vision for Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s specialized autism and developmental disabilities initiatives was born in November 2014 when Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara attended the prestigious Vital Voices Fellowship Program in South Africa. During the fellowship, she met Jaki Mathaga, a parent navigating the complex realities of raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an environment characterized by limited awareness, inadequate support services, and significant social challenges.

Moving beyond clinical definitions and academic literature, this personal encounter provided a profound understanding of the structural isolation, social exclusion, stigma, and emotional burden experienced by families raising children with autism and other developmental

disabilities across the African continent. Through discussions with Jaki Mathaga and observations of the challenges faced by families affected by autism, Agnes Fallah Kamara recognized the urgent need for culturally responsive autism awareness, advocacy, education, and support services in Liberia.

This transformative experience became the catalyst for establishing Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s autism and developmental disabilities initiatives and laid the foundation for what would eventually become Liberia's first organized autism awareness, education, and advocacy
movement.



The Beginning of the Journey (South Africa, 2014). *Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara (left) with Jaki Mathaga (right) during the Vital Voices Fellowship Program in South Africa in November 2014. Their meeting and discussions about the challenges faced by families raising children with autism in Africa became the catalyst for the establishment of Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s autism and developmental disabilities initiatives in Liberia.*

4. Early Community Observations in Liberia

Before attending the Vital Voices Fellowship Program in South Africa in 2014, Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara had already begun observing the significant unmet needs of children with developmental disabilities in Liberia. During a visit home, she partnered with her colleague and friend, Professor Sam, to visit communities, institutions, and residential settings where children displaying characteristics consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities were residing.

One of the earliest and most impactful visits was to an orphanage and residential care facility where several children with apparent developmental disabilities were living without access to specialized educational, behavioral, therapeutic, or medical services. The visit revealed the

profound lack of awareness, assessment, intervention, and support available to children with developmental disabilities in Liberia. It highlighted the significant barriers faced by affected children and their families.

These early observations raised critical questions regarding the availability of services, professional training, diagnostic resources, and educational opportunities for children with autism and other developmental disabilities throughout Liberia. The experience represented a turning point in recognizing the urgent need for advocacy, specialized education, evidence-based intervention services, and family support systems.

This initial exposure laid the foundation for Agnes Fallah Kamara's subsequent pursuit of specialized autism education and training, international professional collaborations, and the eventual establishment of Liberia's first autism classroom and organized autism awareness movement.



Agnes Fallah Kamara and Professor Sam during one of the earliest visits to an orphanage and residential care facility in Liberia, where children with developmental disabilities were living without access to specialized educational, therapeutic, or support services. These observations helped shape the vision for future autism awareness, education, and advocacy initiatives in Liberia.

5. International Learning and Establishment of Liberia's First Autism Classroom

The establishment of Liberia's first specialized autism classroom marked a historic milestone in the country's educational and disability-inclusion landscape. The vision emerged from the recognition that children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities in Liberia had been systematically excluded from educational

opportunities due to widespread stigma, limited professional knowledge, and the complete absence of specialized educational services.

In preparation for establishing Liberia's first autism classroom, Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara sought technical guidance and exposure to international best practices in autism education and behavioral intervention. A significant contribution to this effort came through professional collaboration with Dr. Joanne Gerenser, Jake, and the team at Eden II Programs in Staten Island, New York, one of the leading organizations in the United States serving individuals with autism spectrum disorder and developmental disabilities.

Through educational exchanges, classroom observations, professional consultation, and exposure to evidence-based instructional models, Agnes Fallah Kamara gained valuable knowledge regarding the design and implementation of structured educational environments for autistic children. The experience provided critical insights into classroom organization, individualized instruction, behavioral supports, sensory accommodations, communication systems, and family-centered practices.

The Eden II educational model emphasized the importance of individualized educational programming, visual supports, predictable routines, positive behavioral interventions, sensory-responsive environments, functional communication training, and active family participation. These principles formed the foundation for the development and operation of Liberia's first autism classroom.

The knowledge and practical experience acquired through collaboration with Eden II Programs directly informed the design, setup, and implementation of the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom at the Abundant Grace School Compound in Paynesville City, Liberia. This international partnership demonstrated the critical role of global collaboration in expanding access to evidence-based educational services for children with autism and developmental disabilities in low-resource settings and laid the foundation for the broader autism awareness and inclusion movement in Liberia.



First Visit to Eden II Programs, Staten Island, New York. Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara, Jaki Mathaga, her son, Dr. Joanne Gerenser, and members of the Eden II Programs team during a professional visit to Eden II Programs in Staten Island, New York. This experience provided critical exposure to evidence-based autism education, behavioral intervention practices, structured teaching environments, and family-centered service delivery models that later informed the establishment of Liberia's first autism classroom.

6. International Learning and Establishment of Liberia's First Autism Classroom

Following her exposure to international best practices in autism education and intervention, Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara returned to Liberia in 2018, committed to improving the lives of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. Upon her return, she quickly recognized the widespread lack of awareness and understanding of autism throughout the country. Many families and communities associated autism with witchcraft, curses, demonic possession, or spiritual punishment, resulting in significant stigma, social exclusion, and educational neglect.

Recognizing the urgent need for public education, Agnes Fallah Kamara launched Liberia's first autism awareness radio program, *Autism Conversation with Parents*, which aired weekly on Capitol FM and the Liberia Broadcasting System (ELBC). The program provided education on autism spectrum disorder, early warning signs, family support strategies, and evidence-based approaches to intervention while actively challenging harmful cultural misconceptions surrounding autism.

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Agnes Fallah Kamara and parent advocates during the Autism Conversation with Parents radio program in Monrovia, Liberia (2018). The weekly broadcasts marked the beginning of organized autism awareness, advocacy, and public education efforts in Liberia.

The radio broadcasts generated significant public interest, resulting in numerous calls from families seeking information and support. Within the first two months of outreach activities, Agnes Fallah Kamara personally met with more than 25 families raising children with autism and other developmental disabilities throughout Liberia. These interactions revealed the profound social isolation, discrimination, stigma, and lack of educational opportunities experienced by affected children and their caregivers.

In response to this urgent need, Agnes Fallah Kamara initiated the establishment of Liberia's first autism classroom. Abundant Grace School in Paynesville generously provided classroom space to support the initiative.



The original classroom space provided by Abundant Grace School in Paynesville City, Liberia, before renovation and conversion into the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom. The classroom was transformed into Liberia's first specialized educational environment designed to support children with autism and other developmental disabilities.



Agnes Fallah Kamara at the original classroom space provided by Abundant Grace School in Paynesville City, Liberia, before renovation and conversion into the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom. disabilities.

Additional support was provided by former Vice President of the Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Jewel Howard Taylor, who contributed classroom furniture and publicly endorsed the initiative. On October 20, 2018, Vice President Jewel Howard Taylor officially launched Liberia's first specialized classroom for children with autism and other developmental disabilities at the Abundant Grace School Compound in Paynesville City, Liberia.

The official opening represented a historic milestone in Liberia's educational and disability-inclusion landscape. It demonstrated national recognition of the urgent need for specialized educational services and support systems for children with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Although the program initially enrolled only ten students due to limited staffing, financial constraints, and resource limitations, the opening of the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom marked the beginning of Liberia's organized autism education movement. The establishment of the classroom laid the foundation for future autism awareness, advocacy, specialized education, workforce development, and service provision for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities throughout Liberia.



Former Vice President of the Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Jewel Howard Taylor, officially opened the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom on October 20, 2018, at the Abundant Grace School Compound in Paynesville City, Liberia. The historic launch marked the establishment of Liberia's first specialized educational program for children with autism and other developmental disabilities.

7. Building Human Capacity, Assessment, and Early Intervention Services

Recognizing that the successful operation of Liberia's first autism classroom required trained personnel, Straight From The Heart International Inc. prioritized workforce development before initiating student enrollment and service delivery. Following the official launch of the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom, the organization recruited a volunteer team consisting of teachers, social workers, nurses, and community support personnel who demonstrated a strong commitment to serving children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Through a strategic international partnership with A Friendly Face, a New York-based licensed provider of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services, Founder and Chief Executive Officer Anna Marie Dorelien generously sponsored comprehensive autism training for twenty volunteer staff members. The training program consisted of forty hours of instruction modeled after the foundational competencies of Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) training. It introduced participants to evidence-based practices in autism intervention, behavioral support, and developmental disabilities services.

The training curriculum covered foundational concepts in autism spectrum disorder and intellectual and developmental disabilities; principles of Applied Behavior Analysis; behavior assessment and intervention strategies; communication supports; data collection procedures; reinforcement systems; sensory accommodations; daily living skills instruction; ethical considerations; and family-centered approaches to care.

In addition to formal instruction, trainees received practical exposure to structured teaching strategies, visual supports, functional communication interventions, positive behavior support techniques, and individualized educational approaches that would later be implemented within Liberia's first autism classroom.

This initiative was among the first organized efforts to develop a specialized autism support workforce in Liberia. The training equipped volunteers with foundational knowledge and practical skills necessary to support children presenting with characteristics consistent with autism and other developmental disabilities. It established the operational framework for delivering specialized educational and behavioral services within the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom.

The partnership between Straight From The Heart International Inc. and A Friendly Face demonstrated the critical importance of international collaboration, professional mentorship, and capacity building in expanding access to specialized autism services in low-resource settings and laid the foundation for future workforce development initiatives in Liberia.



Volunteer teachers, social workers, and support staff participating in Liberia's first organized autism workforce training program sponsored by A Friendly Face and Straight From The Heart International Inc.



Graduates of the forty-hour autism support workforce training program are receiving certificates of completion in preparation for service delivery within Liberia's first autism classroom.

8. Assessment, Enrollment, and Early Intervention Services

Following the completion of staff training and preparation of the classroom environment, the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom initiated one of the first structured intake and assessment processes for children suspected of having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Liberia. Due to the absence of specialized diagnostic, developmental, and behavioral assessment services in the country at that time, the program implemented a multidisciplinary screening and assessment approach comprising parent interviews, developmental history reviews, direct behavioral observations, adaptive functioning assessments, and preliminary autism screening procedures. Parents and caregivers voluntarily provided informed consent and actively participated throughout the assessment process.

Initial assessments revealed that although many children presented with developmental delays and disabilities, only a subset demonstrated characteristics consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Consequently, children were categorized according to their developmental, behavioral, communication, and adaptive functioning needs while awaiting formal clinical evaluation and diagnostic confirmation. This assessment process further highlighted the significant lack of specialized developmental, educational, and diagnostic services available to children and families throughout Liberia.

Following assessment and enrollment, children participated in individualized educational and behavioral support activities designed to promote communication, independence, adaptive functioning, emotional regulation, and social participation. Drawing upon internationally recognized evidence-based practices and adapting them to the Liberian context, intervention services focused on teaching foundational developmental and functional skills.

Key Intervention Components Included:

- **Functional Communication Training (FCT)** to teach children alternative methods of communicating needs, wants, preferences, and emotions.
- **Toilet training and self-care instruction** to promote independence in activities of daily living.
- **Visual schedules, picture communication supports, and structured teaching strategies** to facilitate learning and transitions.
- **Early academic readiness activities**, including matching, sorting, colors, numbers, shapes, and pre-academic concepts.
- **Emotional recognition and self-regulation instruction** using visual supports and structured activities.
- **Social interaction, imitation, and play skills development** to improve communication and social engagement.
- **Positive reinforcement systems and token economy procedures** to encourage appropriate behaviors and skill acquisition.

- **Fine motor, cognitive, adaptive, and functional skill-building activities** to support overall developmental progress.

The classroom environment incorporated individualized workstations, visual supports, adaptive teaching materials, communication boards, social stories, reinforcement systems, and structured learning activities designed to address the diverse developmental needs of enrolled children.

These interventions represented one of the earliest organized efforts to implement structured educational and behavioral support services for children with autism and developmental disabilities in Liberia. Although resources were extremely limited, the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom successfully established foundational practices in autism intervention, family engagement, adaptive skills instruction, and behavioral support, laying the groundwork for the future development of autism services and developmental disability programs throughout Liberia.



Photo 1: Individualized workstations and structured teaching environments developed for the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom.



Visual communication supports and picture-based instructional materials are used to facilitate communication and learning.



***Toilet** training and adaptive living skills instructional supports were developed for children enrolled in the program*



Educational materials, reinforcement systems, and adaptive learning resources used during early intervention services.



An *individualized learning station incorporating visual schedules, token reinforcement systems, communication supports, and educational materials designed to promote functional communication and adaptive skill development*

The classroom environment used individualized workstations, visual supports, token reinforcement systems, communication boards, and adaptive teaching materials to promote attention, communication, independence, and the acquisition of functional skills among enrolled children.

9. National Awareness and Humanitarian Response

On April 2, 2019, Straight From The Heart International Inc. (SFTH), through the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom, organized Liberia's first official World Autism Awareness Day celebration and Autism Awareness Walk. This historic event marked the first time Liberia formally joined the international community in commemorating World Autism Awareness Day and publicly advocating for the rights, inclusion, and acceptance of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

Despite heavy rainfall, dozens of participants, including parents, educators, healthcare professionals, students, community members, disability advocates, and volunteers, marched through the streets of Paynesville City to raise awareness. Participants carried banners and placards promoting autism awareness, acceptance, inclusion, and the elimination of discrimination and stigma experienced by individuals with autism and their families.

The event was organized in response to widespread misconceptions surrounding autism in Liberia, where autism was frequently associated with witchcraft, curses, spiritual punishment, or demonic possession. The awareness walk sought to educate the public, challenge harmful cultural beliefs, promote acceptance and inclusion, and encourage national support for children and adults with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The celebration included an awareness parade, educational presentations, community engagement activities, media coverage, and visits to the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom. Government representatives, healthcare professionals, educators, community leaders, families, and advocacy organizations participated in the event, demonstrating growing national recognition of autism as a public health, educational, social justice, and human rights issue.

The inaugural World Autism Awareness Day celebration represented a historic milestone in Liberia's autism awareness and disability rights movement. It established the country's first organized national platform for autism advocacy. It laid the foundation for continued public education, community engagement, policy advocacy, and service development for individuals with autism and their families throughout Liberia.



Participants during Liberia's first World Autism Awareness Day Celebration and Autism Awareness Walk held on April 2, 2019, in Paynesville City, Liberia. Organized by Straight From The Heart International Inc., the event marked the country's first public autism awareness march. It represented a historic milestone in Liberia's autism advocacy and disability inclusion movement.



Community members, educators, and volunteers are participating in Liberia's first autism awareness walk.



Photo 2: Meeting with government stakeholders to advocate for autism awareness and support services in Liberia.



Official banner for Liberia's first World Autism Awareness Day celebration, April 2, 2019.

10. Emergency Humanitarian Relief & COVID-19 Crisis Response (2020)

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and the subsequent state-mandated lockdown restrictions created severe economic hardship for families caring for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities enrolled in the Arthur & Zwannah First Autism Classroom. To protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff, Straight From The Heart International Inc. temporarily suspended in-person classroom instruction and advised parents and caregivers to keep their children at home in accordance with national public health directives.

Home-based needs assessments conducted by the organization revealed that many families, particularly mothers and caregivers who depended on market trading and informal employment, experienced an immediate loss of income due to market closures and movement restrictions. As a result, numerous households faced significant food insecurity and lacked access to essential hygiene and sanitation supplies recommended by the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL).

In response to this humanitarian crisis, Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara launched an international online fundraising campaign to support vulnerable families affected by the

pandemic. Through the generosity of donors and supporters, the organization successfully raised more than USD $1,000 in emergency relief funds.

On April 30, 2020, at the conclusion of Autism Awareness Month, Straight From The Heart International Inc. conducted an organized emergency relief distribution program at the GSA Road facility under the supervision of Administrator Mr. Michael Gebeh. The initiative provided direct assistance to fifteen vulnerable families of children with autism and developmental disabilities, as well as seven essential volunteer staff members who continued supporting the organization's operations during the public health emergency.

Emergency Relief Materials Distributed

The emergency relief initiative represented one of the first organized humanitarian responses specifically targeting families of children with autism and developmental disabilities in Liberia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond providing essential material assistance, the initiative reinforced the organization's commitment to maintaining communication with families, reducing caregiver isolation, and ensuring that vulnerable children and their caregivers remained.

Material Distributed	Purpose
20 bags of 25kg rice	Household food security during lockdown
20 handwashing buckets with spigots	Compliance with national hygiene recommendations
5 boxes of vegetable oil	Nutritional support for vulnerable families
2 boxes of disinfectant bleach	Household sanitation and infection prevention
2 boxes of laundry detergent	Personal and household hygiene
100 locally produced cloth masks	Compliance with public health safety measures

Emergency Relief Materials Distributed

Beneficiary Reflection

"Every time I go online and receive a message from Agnes, she encourages me to take care of my daughter. This makes me confident that someone is still thinking about us. On behalf of all the beneficiaries, I want to thank the staff, the Executive Director, and everyone who contributed to this initiative that has brought smiles to our faces."

— Ms. Sowonee Kennedy, Parent Representative and Beneficiary



Ms. Sowonee Kennedy during the distribution of COVID-19 supplies



Food and hygiene packages



Journalist Rose speaking to the beneficiaries



Food and hygiene packages for the beneficiaries

11. Sustaining Liberia's First Autism Classroom Through Personal Commitment and International Academic Collaboration

Despite the successful launch of Liberia's first autism classroom in 2018, sustaining services for children with autism remained a challenge due to limited government funding, donor support, and local resources, emphasizing the need for ongoing support to ensure program continuity.

Recognizing the critical importance of continuity of care and educational support for children and their families, Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara made the difficult decision to temporarily return to the United States to secure employment while continuing to provide financial support for the autism classroom. While working full-time in the United States, she personally contributed approximately USD $1,000 per month to support classroom operations, staff, educational materials, and family assistance services in Liberia.

This personal financial commitment enabled the autism classroom to continue operating during periods of significant economic hardship. It ensured that families who had come to rely on the program continued to receive educational, behavioral, and emotional support services. The continued operation of the classroom demonstrated Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s unwavering commitment to serving children with autism and developmental disabilities despite substantial financial barriers.

During this period, Agnes Fallah Kamara pursued advanced academic training and established international collaborations, strengthening the organization's research, advocacy, and capacity-building efforts, which are vital for attracting further support and partnerships.

Professor Kristen Gillespie-Lynch is an internationally recognized researcher in autism, neurodiversity, and inclusive education. As Director of the Advanced Certificate Program in Autism at the College of Staten Island, her work emphasizes participatory autism research, neurodiversity-affirming practices, mentorship of autistic students, and the development of inclusive educational and employment opportunities for neurodivergent individuals.

Through this academic mentorship and collaboration, Agnes Fallah Kamara expanded her expertise in neurodiversity-affirming approaches, participatory research methodologies, culturally responsive autism advocacy, and evidence-based intervention practices. These experiences ultimately contributed to the development of international collaborative research examining neurodiversity, stigma, disability inclusion, and public policy in West Africa.

In 2025, this work culminated in the peer-reviewed article "Using Neurodiversity-Affirming Intersectional Approaches to Build More Equitable Societies and Shape Public Policy in Liberia and Sierra Leone," published in the Journal of Social Issues. The publication highlighted the experiences of autistic individuals and their families in Liberia and Sierra Leone and advocated for culturally responsive, neurodiversity-affirming public policies and support systems.

The journey from establishing Liberia's first autism classroom to contributing to international peer-reviewed autism research reflects Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s ongoing commitment to advancing autism awareness, education, advocacy, research, policy development, and social inclusion throughout Liberia and West Africa.



Agnes Fallah Kmara, Professor Kristen Gillespie-Lynch, and other classmates at College of Staten Island.



Agnes Fallah Kmara, Professor Kristen Gillespie-Lynch, Anna Mareie Dorelien, and other classmates at the College of Staten Island.

12. Translating Research into National Policy Action: Ministry of Health Stakeholder Engagement (2026)

Building upon the findings of the international peer-reviewed research study, Using Neurodiversity-Affirming Intersectional Approaches to Build More Equitable Societies and Shape Public Policy in Liberia and Sierra Leone, published in the Journal of Social Issues in 2025, Straight From The Heart International Inc. initiated a national stakeholder engagement process to translate research findings into actionable public policy reforms in Liberia. This effort aims to foster hope for a more inclusive future driven by your support and collaboration.

Recognizing that sustainable improvements in the lives of autistic individuals and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities require systemic policy change, Straight From The Heart International Inc., under the leadership of Founder and Executive Director Agnes Fallah Kamara, organized a national stakeholder meeting hosted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Liberia in February 2026. The meeting sought to advance neurodiversity-affirming, intersectional, and culturally responsive policies for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Liberia. Your active participation is essential to shaping these reforms.

The stakeholder meeting convened representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education, disability organizations, healthcare professionals, educators, caregivers, traditional leaders, advocates, and community representatives. The primary objectives were to:

- Present locally generated research evidence on autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and neurodiversity in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- Examine the impact of cultural beliefs, stigma, poverty, gender, and systemic barriers on autistic individuals and their families.
- Develop culturally responsive policy recommendations and pilot intervention strategies.
- Advocate for the explicit inclusion of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within Liberia's national disability, health, and education frameworks.
- The stakeholder discussions confirmed several critical findings identified through the research process, including:
- Approximately 90% of participants initially attributed autism to supernatural causes, witchcraft, curses, or spiritual punishment.
- Only one out of every thirty individuals demonstrating autistic characteristics had received a formal diagnosis.
- More than 80% of primary caregivers were women experiencing significant financial and social hardship.
- Fewer than 20% of autistic children completed primary education due to limited educational access and inadequate support systems.

Stakeholders collectively identified several priority areas for national reform, including:

- Explicit recognition of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within national laws and policies.
- Integration of autism screening and referral systems into primary healthcare services.
- Development of inclusive education policies requiring schools to accept and support learners with autism and developmental disabilities.
- Expansion of teacher training, behavioral support services, and community health worker education.
- Implementation of culturally responsive public awareness campaigns involving traditional and religious leaders.
- Establishment of caregiver support systems, economic empowerment programs, and peer support networks.

Following the stakeholder consultations, Straight From The Heart International Inc. developed and submitted a comprehensive policy brief to the Ministry of Health for onward submission to the President of the Republic of Liberia. The policy brief outlined recommendations for legal reform, healthcare integration, inclusive education, stigma reduction, caregiver support, and the development of a National Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders Strategic Plan (2026–2030).

This process represented one of the first organized efforts in Liberia to directly use locally generated, peer-reviewed autism research to inform the development of national disability policy. The stakeholder engagement process marked a significant transition in the work of Straight From The Heart International Inc.—from grassroots awareness and service provision to evidence-based national policy advocacy and systems transformation.



National stakeholder meeting hosted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Liberia in February 2026



Agnes Fallah Kamara speaking at the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Liberia in February 2026.

13. Systemic Footprint: Alliance Leadership Portfolios

Straight From The Heart International Inc.'s appointment as a Lead Implementer and Coordinator within Liberia's Alliance on Disability demonstrates the organization's institutional maturity, technical capacity, and national leadership role in advancing disability inclusion and systems reform. Rather than functioning solely as a local service provider, SFTH has been entrusted with formal mandates to coordinate and implement key national thematic priorities to strengthen Liberia's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The organization's current leadership portfolio includes the following nationally mandated initiatives, as shown in the table below.

Strategic National Mandate	SFTH Leadership Designation	Key Co-Implementing Partners	Operational Timeline
Sector-Wide Stakeholder Mapping	Lead Coordinator	WHI, UNDP, Sightsavers, NCD, AIFO	May - September 2026
National Disability Act Revision	Lead Implementer	WHI, AIFO, NUOD, NCD, UNDP	May - November 2026
Coordinated NCD Data Harmonization	Lead Implementer	IDI, NACCSOL, CHAI, Sightsavers	May - August 2026
National Accessibility Checklist	Lead Implementer	Sightsavers, DCFENET, CHAI, UNDP	September - October 2026
NUOD Governance & Capacity Building	Lead Implementer	NACCSOL, LLC, UNDP, Sightsavers	May - December 2026
Alliance Internship Program Setup	Lead Implementer	DCFENET, CAMDL, AIFO, NLA, Sightsavers	August - December 2026
National Media & Visibility Campaigns	Lead Implementer	AIFO, WHH, NLA, UNDP, Sightsavers	May - December 2026
Annual IDPD Gala & Conflict Charter	Lead Implementer	LLC, WHI, NACCSOL, NCD, Sightsavers	May - December 2026

Strategic National Mandates and Implementing Organizations



The Alliance On Disability In Liberia



SFTH Regional Director Ibrahim B Dukuly The Alliance On Disability In Liberia

14.West Point Community Autism Awareness Initiative (2026)

On April 29, 2026, Straight From The Heart International Inc. (SFTH), in partnership with the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization (WPWHDO), successfully conducted an autism awareness and community outreach program in the West Point Community, one of Liberia's largest and most densely populated informal settlements. The initiative was organized in response to recommendations from the National Multi-Sectoral Stakeholders' Meeting convened by the Ministry of Health on February 16, 2026, which emphasized the need for grassroots, culturally appropriate autism awareness and community engagement.

The campaign focused on increasing public understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), reducing stigma, and connecting families with information and support. Through extensive community mobilization, radio promotion, and collaboration with local leaders, the event attracted strong community participation. A significant achievement was the identification and registration of 35 children with suspected neurodevelopmental disabilities and their primary caregivers, creating an important foundation for future assessment, intervention, and family support services.

Beyond raising awareness, the initiative strengthened partnerships between SFTH and community stakeholders and laid the groundwork for future collaboration through a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Planned next steps include caregiver training, teacher capacity building, psychosocial support, and the development of inclusive educational opportunities for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. The West Point initiative demonstrated how community-driven partnerships can increase awareness, reduce stigma, and expand access to services for some of Liberia's most vulnerable children and families.



The Autism Awareness Team poses for a picture



A cross-section of neurodiverse children and their caregivers



Neurodiverse children and their caregivers in West Point

15. The Five-Pillar National Program Proposal (2026 Expansion)

To scale its demonstrated operational model into a coordinated national framework, Straight From The Heart International Inc. presents a multi-year strategic program designed for institutional investment and national implementation. This comprehensive model transforms SFTH's work from a localized initiative into a scalable national system centered on establishing the **Liberia Autism Support Center (LASC)**—a national demonstration and resource hub for autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, inclusive education, research, caregiver support, and policy innovation.

Pillar 1: Policy and Systems Strengthening: SFTH will advocate for the explicit inclusion of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) within Liberia's revised Public Health Law, National Disability Act, and broader development frameworks. The initiative will also support the creation of a national autism and developmental disabilities database to improve policy planning, service delivery, and resource allocation.

Pillar 2: Health Access and Diagnostic Equity: SFTH will collaborate with the Ministry of Health and healthcare partners to expand developmental screening, assessment, referral, and intervention services through Liberia's Primary Health Care system. The program will strengthen workforce capacity by training nurses, clinicians, and community health workers in early identification and referral procedures.

Pillar 3: Inclusive Education Reform: SFTH will partner with the Ministry of Education to strengthen inclusive education systems by integrating competencies in neurodiversity and developmental disabilities into teacher preparation programs, improving school readiness services, and promoting policies that ensure educational access, participation, and retention for neurodivergent learners.

Pillar 4: Community-Led Stigma Reduction and Public Awareness: Recognizing stigma as a major barrier to inclusion, SFTH will partner with traditional leaders, religious institutions, media organizations, and community stakeholders to implement culturally responsive public education campaigns. These initiatives will promote autism and developmental disabilities as neurodevelopmental conditions rather than supernatural or spiritual phenomena.

Pillar 5: Caregiver Support and Livelihood Stabilization: SFTH will address the social, emotional, and economic vulnerabilities experienced by caregivers—particularly women—through peer support programs, caregiver education, livelihood development initiatives, micro-enterprise opportunities, and mental health support services.

16. Institutional Donor Prospectus: Strategic Co-Investment Opportunity

Straight From The Heart International Inc. presents institutional donors and development partners with a strategic co-investment opportunity characterized by strong governmental engagement, established international partnerships, and demonstrated implementation capacity.

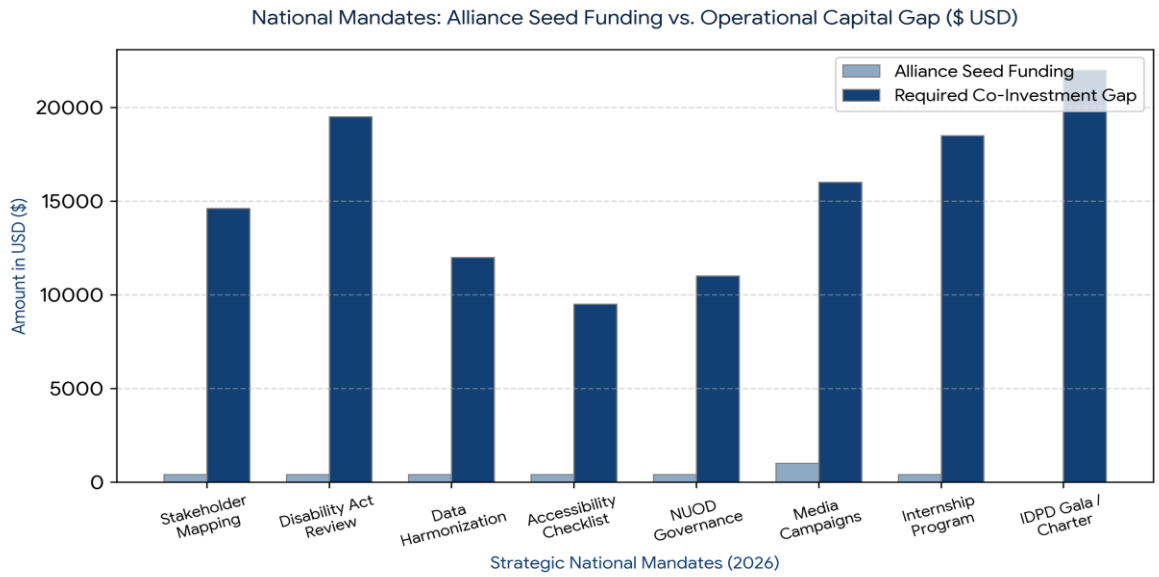
Through its leadership role within Liberia's disability sector and participation in the Alliance on Disability, SFTH has secured institutional partnerships involving the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Sightsavers, AIFO, and multiple national disability organizations. While baseline funding allocations support initial planning activities, substantial investment is required to operationalize these nationally endorsed initiatives across Liberia's fifteen counties.

Investment in SFTH, therefore, supports not a standalone project but the development of a sustainable national architecture for autism, developmental disabilities, disability rights, and social inclusion.

17. Comprehensive Budget Funding Gap

To operationalize these nationally mandated priorities, the following funding gaps require strategic donor investment:

- Sector-Wide Stakeholder Mapping: Funding Gap – USD $14,600
- National Disability Act Revision: Funding Gap – USD $19,500
- Disability Data Harmonization: Funding Gap – USD $12,000
- National Accessibility Assessment: Funding Gap – USD $9,500
- NUOD Governance and Capacity Strengthening: Funding Gap – USD $11,000
- National Awareness and Media Campaigns: Funding Gap – USD $16,000
- Workplace Inclusion and Internship Programs: Funding Gap – USD $18,500
- National IDPD Gala and Conflict Resolution Charter: Funding Gap – USD $22,000



Funding Gap Analysis and Resource Requirements Across National Disability Reform Mandates (2026)

18. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Donor Assurance Framework: To ensure

accountability, transparency, and measurable impact, SFTH will implement a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) framework aligned with national priorities and international disability rights standards.

Intended Program Impact	Illustrative Program Performance Indicators	Verification Methods
Systemic Policy Reform	• Inclusion of explicit ASD/IDD language in the Public Health Law. • Establishment of a functional, active national registry database.	• Published legislative gazettes. • Ministry of Health annual reports.
Expanded Health Access	• Total number of children screened at primary care clinics. • Percentage increase in completed, certified diagnoses.	• Electronic clinic logbooks. • Official clinical referral forms.
Educational Inclusivity	• Total number of public educators completing specialized training. • Annual retention rates of neurodivergent learners inside pilot spaces.	• Ministry of Education registry data. • Standardized school enrollment sheets.
Community Sensitization	• Total local-language broadcasts aired via regional stations. • Measurable shifts in community attitudes regarding supernatural stigma.	• Media broadcast logs. • Third-party community surveys.
Caregiver Economic Stability	• Total livelihood stabilization grants distributed to vulnerable families. • Average net income changes for participating female heads of household.	• Signed financial transfer receipts. • Household economic impact surveys.

Monitoring and Evaluation Logframe

19. CONCLUSION

When I started Straight From The Heart International, I had one simple goal—to ensure that children with autism and other developmental disabilities in Liberia would no longer be invisible. What began as a personal journey has grown into a movement that is changing lives, creating awareness, and giving hope to families across the country.

Looking back over the years, I am proud of how far we have come. We have raised awareness, trained parents and professionals, opened Liberia's first autism classroom, advocated for inclusion, and built partnerships that are helping us advance our mission. Every child we have reached and every family we have supported remind me why this work is so important.

At the same time, I know that our work is far from finished. Many families still struggle to access diagnosis, education, therapy, and community support. There is still stigma, misunderstanding, and a shortage of trained professionals. These challenges remind me that we must continue working together to build a more inclusive Liberia.

As Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Straight From The Heart International, I remain committed to expanding our programs, strengthening partnerships, supporting families, and working with government and community leaders to improve the lives of individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. I believe that lasting change happens when people come together with compassion, knowledge, and a shared vision.

I am grateful to every parent, volunteer, partner, donor, and supporter who has believed in our mission over the years. Your encouragement and commitment have made this journey possible.

This report is not just a reflection of what we have accomplished—it is a reminder that there is still much more to do. I look forward to the next chapter of our work as we continue building a future where every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and live with dignity.

Together, we can continue turning hope into action and creating a more inclusive future for Liberia.