

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The publication of this monograph was made possible by generous funding from the governments of Canada and Norway and the United Nations University.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
APC	All People's Congress
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
ECOMOG	The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group

## ABSTRACT

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The phenomenon of under-age and youthful soldiers in violent conflicts receives much international attention, and the participation of young people in Sierra Leone's ten-year conflict was no exception. Here and elsewhere, agencies working with children in demobilisation and reintegration programmes tend to view these young people mainly as victims of forced conscription by exploitive and unscrupulous warlords. This view might be correct for many of the very young child combatants. The older child and youth combatants, who together make up a large part of the total number of combatants in armed factions, do not entirely fit in this picture. Not seldom, practitioners are surprised by the more or less voluntary choice of these youngsters to join militias, by their commitment and loyalty to the groups and by their readiness to rejoin militias if new fighting begins or reintegration support is not forthcoming. This monograph will discuss the most important reasons, according to Sierra Leonean youth ex-combatants, leading to their decisions to join the army or rebel forces. These reasons are directly related to economic, educational and socio-political constraints, which receive little attention in the "victim" model. It is shown that the same constraints leading to the decision of many youths to join an armed faction also contribute to their prolonged stay, and, after demobilisation, make them more likely to re-conscript. If these 'root causes' are not properly addressed in the post-war reconstruction phase and peaceful alternatives are not available, youths may have little choice but to pursue violent options once again.

# INTRODUCTION

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Intra-state conflicts – the majority of contemporary conflicts in Africa – are generally characterised by multiple cease-fires and peace-accords, only to be followed by new rounds of fighting. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (henceforth DDR) programmes that deal with under-age combatants are likely to begin before a peace-deal has been reached,<sup>1</sup> or to take place while pockets of fighters still remain under arms, leaving the door open to re-conscription. Youth combatants<sup>2</sup> bring up multiple reasons why they join, stay with, and sometimes rejoin, armed factions. To determine and understand the reasons stated and their consequences is an important step towards the prevention of conscription and re-conscription of youth in armed factions as well as informing the means to draw them out of their fighting life.

Based on the reasons put forward by young ex-combatants themselves, this study distinguishes between economic, educational and socio-political causes.

Not all youth ex-combatants indicate that their conscription was by pure force. Voluntary conscription implies that young people in conflict situations have different, although obviously limited, options to choose from, and that they are to some extent capable of making well-considered choices. If this is indeed the case, a more appropriate model would be to consider that these youths joined in the context of an environment in which they perceived conscription as the best option, or the best among worst.

One can argue that in this case voluntary conscription is not voluntary at all, but coerced by circumstances. Indeed, Wessels states that “children in war zones may have so few options that it is not clear whether it is meaningful to speak of free choice.”<sup>3</sup> This is not the place to discuss the philosophical question of what is ‘free choice’; how many options one should have, and to what extent it is necessary that among these options there is something one likes, before one can speak of a making a free choice.

There is little need to argue whether youth in war-zones are limited in their options: they surely are and it is more likely that they will become involved in

militias than youth living in zones free of war. But do youths have so many fewer options than adults in the same situation? This is an important question because often young people have been represented as not having a free choice and thus being forcibly recruited, while adults in the same situation are often assumed to have joined voluntarily and thus have had a free choice. Furthermore, very little research has been done toward understanding the different ways youth have been able to prevent militia recruitment. For every combatant whose reasons for joining the fighting are documented by researchers it would be useful to also provide documentation on youths who might have joined but did not.<sup>4</sup> In all conflict countries the majority of youth does not get involved in militia life, although many live in conflict areas for many years. It might be that those who do not perceive a fighter's life as the best option for survival during these difficult times often seem to prevent recruitment, even while they are among the target group for conscription by factions. It is not unthinkable that the same characteristics that make youth such good and wanted soldiers also make them more capable of preventing recruitment.

Goodwin-Gill & Cohn state that "a very fuzzy line is often all that separates voluntary from coerced participation, and it is impossible to know precisely at what age or development stage a young person is capable of 'volunteering' in the way we would accept of an adult."<sup>5</sup> What we do know is "that ideas about when children become adults vary quite widely across cultures, and a practical (through not always *de jure*) 'adulthood' (i.e. material self reliance) often arrives early – especially for children from poor families, on a continent [Africa] where half the population is below eighteen."<sup>6</sup>

Looking to the following definition of 'agency' by Long, it is interesting to note that it includes situations of the "most extreme forms of coercion":

"The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experiences and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and the other constraints (e.g. physical, normative or politico-economic) that exist, social actors are 'knowledgeable' and 'capable'. They attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them, and monitor continuously their own actions, observing how others react to their behaviour and taking note of the various contingent circumstances."<sup>7</sup>

Nothing is said about age in the above definition. Lack of social experiences (relatively speaking) of youth compared to adults, is possibly compensated for

by the high flexibility of youth and the capability to learn quickly from social experiences.

The impact of age in the actions and decisions of combatants is discussed by Honwana. She introduces the term ‘tactical agency’, based on Michel de Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics:

“He [Michel de Certeau] sees strategies as having long-term consequences or benefits, and tactics as means devised to cope with concrete circumstances, even though those means are likely to have deleterious long-term consequences. Using de Certeau’s distinction it seems that these young combatants exercised what could be called a ‘tactical agency’ in order to maximise the circumstances created by the constraints of the military environment in which they were forced to operate.<sup>8</sup>

Conflict situations demand *par excellence* short-term maximisation of circumstances. Long-term strategies are not particularly useful in a highly unstable and unpredictable world.

Having stated that youth have agency, it is a straightforward step to analyse the causes and motivations put forward by young combatants. The examples in each of the following chapters have been drawn from interviews conducted during fieldwork in 1996/97 and in 2001/02/03 by the author, unless stated differently. Interviewees were under-age (under 18) and youth ex-combatants from all different factions. The majority of the interviewees were boys but some interviews with girls were also conducted.

## Overview of the war in Sierra Leone

In March 1991 a small group of about a hundred guerrilla fighters entered eastern Sierra Leone from Liberia. The larger part of the group was made up of Sierra Leoneans, called vanguards. These vanguards were composed of two groups, Sierra Leoneans who had received guerrilla training in Libya in 1987/88 and those who were recruited in Liberia just before the incursion. Some had fighting experience from the war in Liberia.<sup>9</sup> The majority of these vanguards had an urban background or lived in urban centres before their fighting careers began.

Other than Sierra Leoneans, the initial insurgents included some Liberian fighters, ‘special forces’ on loan from Charles Taylor’s NPFL and a few

mercenaries from Burkina Faso. The guerrilla forces named themselves the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (henceforth RUF). Its proclaimed aim was to overthrow President Major General Joseph Momoh of the All People's Congress (henceforth APC), of which the previous president, Siaka Stevens, had in 1978 declared Sierra Leone a one-party state.

The ranks of the guerrilla forces swelled rapidly through a mixture of coerced and voluntary recruitment among primary school pupils and secondary school drop-outs in the Sierra Leone/Liberia border region, of whom many found themselves working at small scale alluvial diamond mining. Some joined the RUF because they considered it as a Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) – a political party which has its support base mainly in the South and East of the country among the Mende people – uprising<sup>10</sup> against the APC party with its supporters mainly in the North of Sierra Leone among the Temne people. Many youths considered it a good opportunity to escape from the political, social and economic marginalisation of young people in Sierra Leone, something that played both on the national as well as the village level.<sup>11</sup>

The Sierra Leonean army was ill-prepared to challenge the incursion. With a total number of troops of not more than 3000, equipped with out-dated weaponry<sup>12</sup> and with most of its senior officers residing in Freetown, the government forces lost ground rapidly. The RUF met its first serious resistance when it tried to take over the eastern town of Daru, home of the Third Army Battalion. Lacking the support of Freetown and sufficient logistics, warfront army officers realised that they were fighting the battle virtually by themselves and changed tactics. In response to the threat of the RUF's youthful combatants, army officers at the warfront started to recruit and train youths as fighters and personal bodyguards, tapping into the same pool of local, patronless war-zone youngsters as the RUF.<sup>13</sup> These young fighters, loyal to their recruiting commanders and without official army numbers, were referred to as 'irregulars'.

A new phase in the conflict started in April 1992, when Capt. Valentine Strasser became the new head of state after a successful military coup. Together with other young soldiers – Strasser was 27 years of age at the time of the coup – most of whom came from the third Daru battalion, he established the National Provisional Ruling Council (henceforth NPRC). This event did not only remove the RUF's proclaimed reason for fighting – to overthrow the APC government – but it also deprived the RUF of its main source of recruits: marginalized and excluded youths. The youthful leaders of the NPRC were successfully recruiting in the provincial towns and capital among young



people without jobs or better prospects, street children and petty criminals. With access to this vast reservoir of young people the NPRC was able to expand the army from a pre-war 3–4,000 to a 1993–4 total of some 15–20,000 recruits.<sup>14</sup> Many of these new recruits received only very limited military training and serious problems arose in controlling them. Large groups involved themselves in looting, and some of these became known as ‘sobels’; soldiers by day, rebels by night. However, the expanded army succeeded in driving back the RUF, which by the time of the coup had been able to take over most parts of the eastern region, to the far eastern tip of the country. The RUF saw its routes of retreat into Liberia blocked by hostile ULIMO forces and decided to disappear into the deep jungle of the Gola Forest on the Liberian/Sierra Leonean border by the end of 1993. It abandoned what little heavy military equipment it had and retreated in the high forest to regroup, and, as became evident in 1994, re-launch a new round of fighting.

With the war apparently at an end and as a result of international pressure by non-governmental organisations and international agencies, the NPRC made a start to demobilise their considerable numbers of under-age combatants. However, from ‘94 onwards the RUF began a new campaign and by this time not only the eastern part of the country was affected. From its safe camps in the jungle it used the small bush paths to launch quick hit-and-run attacks all over the country, after which it disappeared into the forest once again. Isolated from the wider society, it was also cut off from the vast reservoir of youthful potential conscripts. Thus the RUF did not only change its military tactics, it also found it necessary to raid villages in search of consumer items, medicines and new conscripts.

As early as 1991 the government army started to make use of local game hunters as scouts during their patrols. From 1993 onwards, in response to the continued attacks of the RUF and the inadequate protection of the rapidly expanded and increasingly badly disciplined army, local communities started to organise citizen civil defence groups to protect their villages. Drawing its organisational modalities from the hunter tradition known in the South and East as *kamajo* and in the North as *tamaboro* and *kapra*, these local defence forces were comprised of a leader or initiator, a *kami* and a group of apprentices. Although coming from rural communities, similar to many of the RUF conscripts and army irregulars, most of the Kamajor youth fighters were not alienated from their villages and differed greatly from the footloose RUF and NPRC recruits. They were to a large extent under the control of the village or town chiefs, who were playing a key role in recruitment.<sup>15</sup> According to Muana, the Kamajor movement was more or less organised as a guild.<sup>16</sup>

The combined forces of the army and the Kamajors were not able to prevent the RUF, which by that time had established jungle camps in poorly accessible terrain all over the country, from coming close to the capital city Freetown early in 1995. With the RUF neither able to take over the capital and claim total victory, nor weak enough to be defeated by the combined power of the military forces and rapidly expanded Kamajor militia, peace negotiations started. A provisional cease-fire was agreed to in January 1996. In February 1996 the first democratic elections in decades were held and Capt. Julius Maada Bio (who was installed after a palace-coup in the previous month) saw himself handing over power to Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah of the SLPP. The government's new policy was to continue peace negotiations with the RUF and to sideline the army, of whose loyalty it was uncertain, and to depend increasingly on the Kamajor movement for its defence against the rebels.

While the 1996 peace negotiations went on, key RUF bases were attacked by Kamajo militias, with the support of mercenaries of the security-cum-mining company Executive Outcomes. The government argued that it was not in control of the Kamajor movement and thus unable to stop them. In November 1996 the Abidjan peace accord was signed between the Sierra Leonean government and Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone. Officially the war was over but mutual distrust between the former enemies made none of them willing to begin disarmament and demobilisation of their fighters on any significant scale.

In May 1997 a third coup by the army, disgruntled because of their sidelining by the government, took place. Most of the demobilised ex-child combatants re-enlisted and joined their former comrades once again. The new regime, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) headed by Major Johnny-Paul Koroma, invited the RUF to join the military junta. For more than eight months the AFRC and RUF were in control of Freetown and the major towns in the country. In February 1998 the West-African peacekeeping force ECOMOG, together with a few hundred loyal government soldiers, launched an attack to drive the junta out of the capital.

The Kabbah government took seat in Freetown in March 1998. Although some 5000 AFRC troops surrendered, many of the AFRC soldiers and most of the RUF units did not and retreated into the north of the country, where the civil defence movement was at its weakest. Contrary to the announcements of the newly installed government that the rebels were now on their last legs, the RUF started to regroup and rapidly expanded again. Major towns were taken over by the RUF and by the end of 1998 AFRC and rebel fighters infiltrated the capital.

On January 6, 1999, the battle for Freetown began. More than two weeks of street fighting resulted in 5–6,000 people dead, countless people mutilated by machete attacks and hundreds of houses destroyed. The AFRC and RUF were pushed back to the hinterland, but on their retreat many civilians were forced to join them to carry loads and/or join as new recruits. Again it became clear that a military victory was not possible for either of the two sides.

New peace negotiations started in May 1999 in the Togolese capital of Lomé. After two months of talks a peace accord was signed offering the rebels a blanket amnesty, RUF leader Foday Sankoh the status of vice-president and the deployment of a UN-peace-keeping force in Sierra Leone. Disarmament and demobilisation, as outlined in the peace accord, made a start but was painfully slow. The RUF's second man, Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie, unwilling to disarm, fled to Liberia with a group of hard-core fighters. After a dispute between UN-military observers and RUF commanders over the return of disarmed combatants to the RUF, the RUF seized about 500 UN peacekeepers. Protests by women in front of Sankoh's residence led to gunfire, the subsequent flight of the former rebel leader and his capture a few days later. With Sankoh in custody and tensions rising, the UN began to expand its peace-keeping force from 9,250 to 13,000 and later to about 17,500, thereby becoming the largest UN mission in the world. RUF commander Issa Sesay took over command. Meanwhile, special commando forces from the UK showed their readiness to fight in a hostage-freeing operation in September 2000 against a splinter group of the former AFRC called the 'West Side Boys'. To prevent the real prospect of annihilation, the RUF had few options open but to continue the disarmament process.

It was only by the end of 2001 that disarmament started in RUF strongholds such as the Kailahun, Kono and Kenema districts. By March 2002 the disarmament process was officially declared as completed. The reintegration process of ex-combatants into civilian society was still going on by that time and in many parts of the country it had only just begun. The official date for the closing-down of the whole DDR programme, including the various reintegration programmes, was December 2003. Presently there are no more 'ex-combatants' in Sierra Leone; everyone is alleged to be an ordinary citizen.

The chapters of this monograph are organized quite simply; the phenomena of conscription, participation and re-conscription are illustrated with interview segments and grouped and analysed as either economic (chapter 1), educational (chapter 2) or political (chapter 3) constraints. Numbers within the text refer to subsequent illustrative interview segments.

## CHAPTER 1

# ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

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### Conscription

Most African countries have more than 50% of their population below 25 years of age, and many of the world's poorest countries are in the sub-Saharan region. In combination, these factors suggest that youth in Africa have very limited livelihood prospects. Sierra Leone is no exception to this. Before the war less than 5% of the country's work force was involved in formal wage labour.<sup>17</sup>

The informal economy or 'second economy', employs the majority of urban youths in Africa's large towns and capital cities.<sup>18</sup> In the rural areas semi-subsistence agriculture is the dominant way for youths to make a living. A third option open to young Sierra Leoneans is to work in the diamond mines in Eastern Sierra Leone.

The pre-war Sierra Leonean economy was to a large extent regulated by a system based on patrimonial principles:

*"Patrimonialism involves redistributing national resources as marks of personal favour to followers who respond with loyalty to the leader rather than to the institution the leader represents. Patrimonialism is a systematic scaling up, at the national level, of local ideas about patron-client linkages, shaped (in Sierra Leone) in the days of direct extraction of forest resources, about the duty of the rich and successful to protect, support and promote their followers and friends."*<sup>19</sup>

Under this system of patronage young people were on a constant lookout for patrons or 'big men', willing to help them in continuing their education. For the less promising or less lucky ones a patron could always provide some work or cash, in exchange for loyalty and labour.

With a growing economy the system of patronage could continue to function and young people could still wait for their turn and hope for a better future.

However, in the 1980s the national economy started to decline: prices of raw materials dropped dramatically, revenues from mining activities decreased and shadow state practices and corruption prevailed. Increasing numbers of youths found themselves without support, out of school and without a job (4).<sup>20</sup> With job opportunities already poor, the outbreak of the war made the picture even more grim. Schools were destroyed, trade and business activities declined because of the dangers of ambushes, and farms were plundered for food and cash-crops (1). Those best off, the local big men and paramount chiefs, for instance, left the villages for the relatively safe towns, leaving behind the ordinary villagers and young people who now had to look for new patrons. The war gave rise to new kinds of patrons, new 'big men': warlords and commanders (2). A new economic survival option was created; engaging oneself with a militia (3).

1. *Before the war I stayed with my mother. My mother was doing business and I helped her sometimes. There was no time to play games. I went to school but I stopped in form one. There was no money left to go to school because the business of my mother was destroyed because of the war. That was the time the war came to Kailahun. At that time the situation became more difficult for us. The RUF came and asked us to join them. Because I was not doing anything and there was no person looking after me I decided to join them and take up arms to fight. I joined the rebels purposely because of the difficulties we were having. We were suffering too much. The RUF was encouraging us to help them in their fight so that later we could enjoy a proper life.*
2. *When in 1991 the war started all education and farming activities seized. During 1991 and 1992 we were doing nothing. We were just close to the barracks. You could not escape the fighting. And that led me to be with them, gradually I was getting involved in that. I started being with them, doing work for them. By that time I was a small boy. I was around them getting water for them and such. That is how the interaction started. You know, at that time it was very difficult to stay with my people, because the life was very hard. So I came to the soldiers and presented myself and made friends with them.*
3. *[Before the war] it was nice for me because at that time my father was responsible for me, during my time at the primary school. I was living with my parents. But when I was just in secondary school this rebel war came to Sierra Leone and all the economic operations in the area stopped. Even the food we had to eat was not easy to get because we were under siege.*

*There was not a vehicle moving, everywhere there were [road] blocks. Then my friends and I decided to take up arms to fight, just to survive.*

4. *There is no job facility. You will see educated youths without jobs, just moving around. If at the end of the day that particular person hears about some rebels, he can join them, just to survive. That is why most of these guys decided to join the rebels, because they were not having jobs. Some were educated, but they decided to join the rebels instead of sitting down and waste their time. That is why most of the youths joined the rebels. That is the major reason. Because of lack of jobs.*

## Participation

According to the British anthropologist David Keen, contemporary conflicts represent not only the collapse of systems, but also the creation of alternative systems, by which some may benefit, gain power and are protected.<sup>21</sup>

High ranking commanders, rebel leaders and government officials are among the key players in these conflicts and are often in a position to economically benefit from the breakdown in law and order. Looting, illegal diamond mining, logging and the plundering of cash-crop farms are some of the activities that fill the pockets of those in control.<sup>22</sup> The US State Department estimated that between 1990 and 1994 Liberian President Charles Taylor was accruing annually an estimated USD\$75 million.<sup>23</sup> Huge economic benefits can be an important incentive to war-leaders to prolong conflicts rather than settle them. But to what extent is this true for the often young, ordinary rank and file fighters? Few insurgent groups pay their fighters, and even in defending forces the soldiers may be without official army numbers. According to Outram, “none of the Liberian factions (with the partial exception of the AFL) have paid or fed their fighters.”<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact they are expected to live “from the land”, looting and plundering. But in many cases loot has to be handed over to the commanders (who in some cases re-distribute it) and few rank and file soldiers have the knowledge and contacts to make ‘big money’ out of the war.

Economic benefits for these rank and file soldiers are often minor and in most cases short-term (1). Few youth ex-combatants indicate that they expected to make huge profits out of the war and none indicates that lucre was a motivation to continue fighting. The economic gain is merely enough for sustenance, so to say. But holding a weapon gives the advantage over unarmed civilians who have food or other items (2). This is not to say that combatants *always* do

have sufficient food and supplies, and rank and files are always in a disadvantage position to their commanders. But few cases are known where combatants are worse off than the civilians in the same area.

The alternatives to combat life, to desert or escape and go to a refugee or displaced camp or to look for relatives in safer areas, are often not very attractive from a strictly economic point of view. Displaced camps operate on minimum standards. It is not so much the expectation of making huge economic gains that makes youth continue fighting but the unattractiveness of the non-fighting alternatives.

1. *My mother had other children to feed also, so I decided to leave together with some of my friends and go to the soldiers. By then, even when they went on patrol I went along with them. (...) Because you do everything for this soldier, like preparing the food, washing the clothes and fetching water, he will be responsible for you in the end and will give you some food from his ration.*
2. *I liked it in the army because we could do anything we liked to do. When some civilian had something I liked, I just took it without him doing anything to me.<sup>25</sup>*

## Re-conscription

There is a general understanding that the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants is only a first step towards a peaceful civilian life for these fighters. Peace-agreements and post-conflict scenarios usually include provisions for a DDR programme for ex-combatants. The type of conflict and its duration, the kind of peace-agreement (negotiated or military), the numbers of combatants and the numbers of factions, the amount of money and support available, are just a few factors which influence the specific design of a DDR programme.

A DDR programme has the purpose of 1) collecting the arms and ammunition of combatants, 2) breaking the command structures and 3) supporting and promoting the peaceful rehabilitation of the demobilised ex-fighters into civilian society.

The *reintegration* component often involves school fees for those willing to go back to school, apprenticeships or training at vocational institutes, affiliation

with ‘food for work projects’ and so forth. The rationale behind reintegration support is twofold: to make it more attractive for combatants to give up their weapons by offering them alternatives to their violent livelihoods and to prevent reintegrating ex-combatants from depending excessively on their families and communities, who themselves have suffered considerably during war.

Although there is extensive knowledge and experience that ought to contribute to good practices for DDR programmes, they remain dogged by shortcomings and failures. Most reintegration programmes for under-age ex-combatants include the possibility of providing school fees for those ex-combatant who want to go back to school. However, as will be discussed in more detail in the section about education, this usually involves a limited period of support after which these youths have to look for funds themselves. This leads to much frustration (2).

Other frustrations derive from ‘food-for-work’ programmes or skills training. Food-for-work programmes are aimed at enabling the ex-combatants to overcome the first difficult period after demobilisation, but they leave them with little once the programme ends. More constructive seem to be skills training programmes at vocational training institutes. It may not, however, make sense to train a team of car-mechanics and send them to their villages of birth where there might be only one or two cars around, so local markets need to be considered when deciding on the appropriateness of training.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, besides the actual skills training, the trainees need other skills to prepare them to start a business, such as business economics, reading, writing and arithmetic. They also need tools and access to loans (1).

The agricultural sector is one of the few sectors, if not the only one, capable of absorbing large numbers of poorly-educated youths. It would be wrong to assume that ex-combatants are not interested in agriculture at all. Often it is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the advantages of agriculture that prevents them from considering this option.<sup>27</sup> Evidence from post-war discussions with young people in Sierra Leone<sup>28</sup> suggests that it is not so much the arduous labour that is resented as the vulnerability of young people to manipulation by traditional rural elites. Another aspect is the high and unrealistic expectations of these youths about urban employment and the often-correct perceptions of the un-attractiveness of rural life for young people.

It is important to realise that many of these ex-combatants gave up their guns because they heard that another way of making a living was being offered to them. If this peaceful alternative is not forthcoming, they feel betrayed and,



as the following accounts make clear, may indeed start to think about going back to their former comrades who have not yet disarmed (3).

1. *Until they called for peace I fought. After that peace call I went to disarm and gave my weapon to UNAMSIL. They brought me to this institution to learn a trade. By now we have completed the course of six months. We are expecting the NCDDR to help us by providing some tools so that we can make our own survival. They promised us all kinds of things if we were willing to lay down our weapons. They said that we had to think about our future, stop fighting and that they could help us. However, now I see that they are only helping us a little bit. This difficult situation forces some of my brothers and sisters to go back to the bush [that is to re-conscript] because of lack of real support. If you do not have work you have to go back to the bush.*
2. Q: Would you go back to the soldiers if the situation goes bad again for you?

*A: You mean going back to join them. Well, why not, because presently I am not well cared for. Although she [the interviewee's care-giver] is trying it is difficult to pay my school fees, because it is becoming too expensive. And because there is nothing else for me to do here. My mother is not here, my brothers are not here. My father is dead. So who can take care for me?*

3. Q: Are there many ex-combatants who stayed in the DDR programme who have returned to the bush?

*A: The majority of these young men have returned to the bush. (...)The reason is that there is nobody taking up responsibility for them. They went and joined the rebels.*

*(...) They went to take up arms to fight saying that unless the government will pay all their benefits they will not come out of the bush. (...) If the condition is not favourable I will go back to the bush.*

## CHAPTER 2

# EDUCATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

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### Conscription

Education is the key to success, according to most Sierra Leonean youths. Notwithstanding the high numbers of unemployed educated people, without education you have even a smaller chance for a good job, they argue:

*"I want to manage my own future, I want to have control over my own household. If you are not educated, you will find it very difficult to live. If even those who are educated find it difficult, what about you who is not educated. They suffer more than the educated ones. (...) That education is my own legacy. A plantation can die down in a day, but if you are educated, wherever you go the education stays with you. My plantation will not follow me. That is why most of us really try to be educated, because we do not know if there will be any improvement in the future."*

In pre-war Sierra Leone, education, and in particular higher education, was considered more a privilege<sup>29</sup> than an entitlement. Just before the war there were about 2000 primary schools around the country.<sup>30</sup> Access to the university and overseas scholarships were, to a large extent, controlled by the government.

Most children in Sierra Leone had at least benefited from a few years of primary education. But after primary school it became more complicated. School fees (or examine fees) for secondary school were higher and these schools are located in the major villages or towns. To overcome these two setbacks there were different strategies possible. Children can leave their village and stay with relatives in town and thus be able to attend school:

*"Well really, I love being in town, because...[hesitates]...but I love my village. But in terms of education I love the town. There you have some elders who discuss matters with you. They enlighten you on topics, on subjects. But in the village there is nobody. There are no intellectual people."<sup>31</sup>*

Some of the older youth can look for patrons to sponsor their education in exchange for future loyalty and support. Yet others, without sponsorship, are attending school at intervals. They try to earn some money by seasonal labour, whether as handymen, farmers or diamond miners, then return to school and follow another term when they have saved enough money. With so many uncertainties, it is not difficult to imagine that many youths drop out of school. Lack of sponsors is cited as the main cause for this.

When the war began, the two most important preconditions for attending school were under threat: schools were destroyed (1) and incomes dropped. Only some of the major towns and villages not (yet) affected by the war still had functioning schools (3). But many villages and towns saw their schools closed down or ransacked and destroyed (2). As far as the financial side was concerned, farms and cash-crops were destroyed, looted or had to be left behind leaving the farmers with no income and thus unable to send their children to school. People with money, the patrons, fled to safer areas, leaving youths without sponsors. Because business slowed down, fewer youths were able to earn extra money. Going to the diamond areas became a common but more dangerous journey.

1. *Well, it is obvious. Before the war we were attending school, right. But as soon as the war entered Sierra Leone everything went berserk, everything was destroyed. By then there was nothing to do for us, we were just wandering around, without going anywhere. So we decided to join the army because we were doing nothing, except going up and down the area. The school was closed, everything was closed. We were in the barracks and we knew all these things, the movements of the soldiers. Our parents were already there. There was no education, that made us to join.*
2. *But then the war approached. But I said when this situation is normal I will go back to school. The reason why I took part in the war was because there was no education in our headquarters.*<sup>32</sup>
3. Q: Do you think that if the school continued to be open and running throughout the war, you would have not joined the soldiers?

*A: Yes, yes. I would not have joined because I would have been supported. (...)Presently, the best way [to prevent children joining the soldiers] would be by making the educational facilities available to them. So you keep them busy. You have to ask them about their problems and although you will not be able to help them with everything, they will appreciate it when you do at least something.*

4. Q: So what was the major reason to join?

A: *There was no education, that made us to join.*

## Participation

Whenever normal educational opportunities are blocked, with schools, apprenticeships and vocational training institutes closed down, these young people, eager to learn something, start to look out for other educational opportunities. Joining a militia, as we have seen, will give some basic economic security. But being a combatant is something that must be learned, just like any other skill. Youths were trained in war-tactics and taught about the different weapons (2), similar to, for instance, a tailor's apprentice would be trained in sewing and taught about different materials and designs. The period of training could range from a few weeks up to several months (1). But as with most professions, the skill was mostly learned by practicing it.

Less aware of or worried about the risks, to many children and youth fighting is just another skill to be learned. In a country where, even during peacetime, youths have to reach material self-reliance at a young age, they are constantly looking out for training possibilities. Linking up with a militia might not be, after all, the most irrational choice to make, if one wishes to learn something and there are no other training opportunities left.

Not all youth combatants were entirely deprived of all forms of normal education. Fighters belonging to the CDF often went on patrols for a limited period, having time in between to continue farming or learning. Several ex-RUF youth fighters told about the free "bush-schools" in the main camps of the RUF (3).

On the whole, looking back, most ex-combatants label their years with factions as a 'waste of time', referring to the advanced educational level they might have had if they did not join (they seem to forget that even if they did not join, it would have been difficult to continue their education, which was for many a reason for joining in the first place). It is unlikely however, that in all those years while they were combatants, they did not learn anything that could be of use in a post-war situation. They have detailed knowledge about certain areas of the country. Some have achieved a real interest in technical matters (2). They have learned to use their wits to survive, they have an extensive network of contacts and people and they can be organised to establish

cooperative working groups, based on their war-time organisational mode. Last but not least, their 'eyes are open' and nobody will easily manipulate or fool them again.

It is a great challenge for the government, the NGOs and the people themselves to look for positive and constructive ways in which the skills and capacities of these young people can be used to rebuild Sierra Leonean society.

1. *Yes, they trained us. They [gave] us commando training. Well, the commando training really [amounts to] this: when they give you one bullet you must kill one man, one bullet for one man. When they give you seven bullets you should kill seven rebels. [If] you don't do that they will fire [shoot] you. So we trained that training. Do the body advancing, do this crawling. Shoot for [the] target. The target shows if you are a good soldier, because they set the target and you sight the target. So that in the bush you are not firing [in a] scattered way, like...dadadadada.<sup>33</sup>*
2. *[The] AK-47 is an old weapon. The AK-58 is a recent weapon. (...) When you drop the weapon and leave it like that, when the weapon falls on the ground, it fires. Yes, it causes damage. But the AK-47, you can drop it, jump on it, and nothing will happen. Like this other one, AK-44, that's a two pistol grip. You also can drop it, let it fall, and it won't fire. The AK-58 is dangerous, whereas the AK-44 and 47 have a padlock here, so when you pull it, it will lock. It cannot easily pass, the bullet. On the AK-58, it is only small, the padlock...little and short...it is small. When you get down, the firing pin releases easily, and touches the bullet. Because the bullet is almost in the right place, and just [requires] the fire-pin to touch it. And then the bullet goes. That's the difference between AK-47, AK-44 and AK-58.<sup>34</sup>*
3. Q: Were there also schools in these camps?

*A: I have been to five different camps. One of them had a school. The rebels were convincing civilian teachers to teach in the camp. All the school materials were free.*

## Re-conscription

Sierra Leonean youths are on a constant lookout for educational and training opportunities. Whenever normal peacetime opportunities become limited, youths can choose to join an armed faction and thereby at least learn the skills

of warfare. To most young fighters the main incentive to lay down their weapons was the opportunity offered to learn a skill or to go back to school. As mentioned earlier, the reintegration component of the Sierra Leonean DDR programme was centred on starting up formal education for ex-child combatants and providing vocational training for youths and adults. But these demobilised fighters are very clear about what they will do, and what some of their colleagues have already done, if these promises are not delivered upon. (1, 2, 3&4)

How realistic is it to offer all youth ex-combatants the possibility to continue their formal education? Agencies helping these youths must be cautious not to put them on a dead-end track. For instance, a youth combatant who had joined at the age of 13 might have had only a few years of primary school. If this young person is returning to school after demobilisation, let us say at the age of 19 or 20, he is approaching his thirties before he finishes his secondary education, after which he needs to learn a profession. Throughout it all he needs sponsorship. Agencies working on the reintegration of these child and youth combatants are often reluctant, for understandable reasons, to involve themselves in such long term engagements.

It would perhaps be better practice to teach demobilised youths skills that enable them to generate their own income. If they learn a skill (plus some basic reading, writing and arithmetic) by which they are able to make some money, they can still choose to go back to school at some later stage on a part-time basis. Some youths (including ex-combatants), tapping rubber on the plantations in Liberia start work at six in the morning and finish at two in the afternoon. Afterwards, they attend afternoon classes, so eager to learn that they study till dusk.

Because education and vocational training is so high on the agenda of young people, it is both a way to catalyse their demobilisation and reintegration process and in the case of unfulfilled promises or difficulties, a major cause for their return to militias (1, 2, 3 & 4)

1. *The time I went for disarmament I gave my gun to the commander. I was scared to come but it was only because of the education that I was willing to come. But it was not completely as they promised, so I can still feel bad about it. We are struggling a lot. When you are going to school, you go with an empty stomach, there is no food. There is no material to learn, so how can you learn? If problems will happen again, you must join them, the soldiers, again, because you are struggling here. We are just managing*

*it. You know, we feel embarrassed. If the soldiers will come back here we would join them. It was in the beginning of 1999 that the soldiers revolted but unfortunately they did not reach this part. They were just stopped before they could reach Kenema.*

2. Q: Are you saying that if you drop out of school, you might go back to the soldiers?

*A: Yes, I will go back to them.*

3. *Let me tell you the fact, we are suffering. Obviously, we are suffering. And if that continues, if this particular situation continues... Really, I am not telling you lies, but the storm is not yet over. Because as a young boy, at this age, if you are attending school, without any support, it is very bad. We are just attending because of our determination. We want to have a good future. But there is no support, so how can you be determined when there is no support. Because as a student you are attending school and you need certain materials, which will help you to continue your education. For instance, textbooks, we need them but we do not have them. Other material we used to have but we do not have them. Every day the teachers urge us for that, but we just cannot afford it. We are just managing. Sometimes we are sent away from school because we do not have these materials and the fees. That is the problem.*

4. Q: Do you know about boys who have disarmed before but then decided to go back to the rebels or the army?

*A: There are plenty of them. A lot of them are in Liberia and they have not yet come back. And there are a lot of them in Daru. And some are attending school in Liberia.*

## CHAPTER 3

# POLITICAL EXCLUSION

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### Conscription

Africa is a young continent, demographically speaking. In some countries more than 50% of the population is below 18. Democracy, based on the principle that the majority of the people decide, has another meaning in this context. Here, a minority (above 18 years) of the population decides for the majority (below 18 years). Moreover, many democratic countries in Africa lack the necessary checks and balances necessary for a well-functioning democracy and are characterised by high levels of corruption and nepotism.

Few would argue that (military) dictators are preferable. On the other hand, young (military) leaders<sup>35</sup> who have seized power through other than democratic means, were not always without considerable support. Many Sierra Leoneans, and youths in particular, were happy when the National Provisional Ruling Council, headed by the 27 year old Capt. Valentine Strasser and his even younger aide in the campaign, S.A.I. Musa, replaced the APC one-party regime of president Momoh in a military coup (1). For the first time youths felt that they were heard and taken seriously and it seemed that if only there were young leaders, youths would be taken into account. (2) The youthful leaders of the NPRC successfully recruited among young people and expanded the army from a pre-war 3–4,000 to a 1993–4 total of around 15–20,000 recruits.

Politics take place at the national as well as the local level. Major decisions at the village level in Sierra Leone, before the war, were taken by the traditional authorities; the chiefs, the elders and the Secret Society leaders. With few exceptions these all belonged to the seniority of the village. Young people had little say.

Chiefs and elders manipulated youths for their own personal benefit. Youths were fined high sums of money for minor infractions, or things they did not even do. Without the money to pay their fines, they were obliged to leave the village to look for money or to escape punishment (3 & 4). Government and



NGO support was manipulated by traditional authorities in such a way that it did not reach those who were not part of the patrimonial chain. Because of these malpractices, as chiefs and elders later realised, they created their own indigene rebels.<sup>36</sup> And indeed, the RUF found willing recruits among the often young 'outcasts' of the villages.

1. (...) so many youths joined hands together to fight and overthrow the APC government from power.(...) Most of them were not forced. Some were forced but most of them were not forced. Some were just saying, let us find these [RUF] people and join them. Because their major theme was to change to government and change the system. Because that system was a rotten system, that was their major theme. Because the country is lacking job facilities and the government is not trying to encourage the youth, so let us try to remove the system. It is a rotten system.
2. They don't listen to children in Sierra Leone...if you want to say something to your father or your mother, they can say "no, don't say anything to me. I was born before you were, so I know everything." But that is not really correct. You might be born before me, but I can see something you cannot. They don't realise that in this country. So what they feel like doing when they are bigger...they think that everything that they think about is the best. And we cannot think about something that is good. They don't even count children, to know what children are really about, you know.<sup>37</sup>
3. They [the elders] levy high fines on the youth if you are sent to do a job and you refuse. Up till now the chiefs are pressuring us. They can summon you and not sooner as you appear, they start to fine you making you to pay a lot of money. (...) We beg them but they never accept it.
4. Well, my father died a long time ago. After that there was nobody who would be responsible for me and so I left school. My mother was still alive however, with my little sister. So I stayed with them to take care of them. There was nobody else there for them. That made the war to come; the elders were not really helping us. They cannot help any young person. Even if you have only minor problems, they can exaggerate it, taking it to the district chief and then, you as a young man, cannot handle the case anymore and have to run away. So at some stage there was a case brought to the chief and I was accused. So I ran away and hid. I went to my uncle in another village. By then it was the time that the war started.

## Participation

A gun can be used as a means to fulfil economic needs. It is also used to achieve political changes. The sudden power to do what one feels or perceives as the right thing to do has been an important factor in the decision of youth combatants to stay in factions. For the first time in their lives they felt they were being taken seriously and listened to. With a gun *'nobody could play with you'*, whether civilians or other combatants (1).

In the hands of a person who feels humiliated and neglected, it can be an extremely dangerous tool.<sup>38</sup> In Sierra Leonean villages, political power was to a large extent related to age. The RUF, for instance, presented a totally different system where position and promotion were foremost depending on fighting and commanding skills and dedication to the movement. The result was that young commanders were in control of fellow fighters and civilians who might easily be double or triple their own age. In fact, it presented a system in which promotion depended not on age or economic resources or 'who you know' but on 'what you can do'. In other words, it was a system based much more on principles of merit rather than on patrimonial and nepotistic ones (3). This aspect must have been particularly attractive to many young and marginalized people.

There are indications that the RUF also had stringent laws and rules on drug use, looting and rape, in the form of a Code of Conduct, which had to be learned by heart<sup>39</sup> and a 'people's court' to try any violators.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, any property obtained on the war front had to be handed over to the [RUF] 'government' and fighters were not allowed to have more than 20,000 Leones (approximately 10 US\$) at any time.

The simplicity and transparency of these rules was in stark contrast to the highly diffuse and complex rules and regulations in the villages and local courts. Village authorities were often highly manipulative in their implementation of the local customary laws and young people were normally at a disadvantage. The straightforwardness of life inside the RUF – what was allowed and what was not allowed<sup>41</sup> – must have been yet another appealing factor to young people.

1. *By then I preferred to be a soldier rather than a civilian. (...) Well, by then a young man could be a serious harassment for any young man who was not a soldier. They used to humiliate us and to molest us even up to the point where they killed some of us. So you do not have an alternative other than to join them.*

2. *Well, according to my own view, [the war started and continues] because when the rebels caught some of our brothers and sisters they took them along with them and told them the reason why they are fighting. Because of the past government, the APC government, the way the government maltreated people. No freedom of speech. When you emphasize on your rights, they take you to court or jail you. And the same bad thing with education. Most of the rebels are students, the majority are students.*<sup>42</sup>
3. *The load carrying brings some [of the captives] to the point of death. It is complete slavery. But plenty of others have turned to agba [become leaders] in the movement. The RUF promotes by ability, so some have really joined. But most now want peace, and to see their families. Small boys can be promoted above you. Some were my juniors at school. A small boy can order you “fuck you, go get water for me”. He is your superior.*<sup>43</sup>
4. *They [the rebels] fought for free education, free medical supplies, free transportation and justice. In the camp the medical treatment was free, even for those who were not going to the frontline, because they can still contribute to the movement.*

## Re-conscription

Have pre-war authorities (elders, chiefs, secret societies, patrons, and so forth) re-emerged and re-established the old modes of governance and social control in post-war Sierra Leone, or has the conflict resulted in a broad empowerment and emancipation of youth? To what extent has the political climate, which drove many marginalized youths into the hands of the various factions, changed? (4). Are chiefs and elders willing to involve the large group of youths in their political decision making processes? Are the politicians ready to pay attention to the voices and problems of the youth? With massive external support coming into the country to help the post-war reconstruction process, expectations are high and temptations to misuse the money are strong (3). To most of the demobilised youths the DDR process and the promises made are the first test of the recently re-elected Kabbah government (1); a crucial test which has not always been passed smoothly in similar circumstances (2).

But there are indications that things are changing, as the last two interviews in this section show. If there is one positive thing the war gave to Sierra Leone, according to many interviewees, it is the fact that “*now our eyes are open*” and “*nobody can fool us anymore*”.

1. *Some of the RUF rebels are serious about the peace and some are not. The reason for this is because of the promised package which they are not giving to the combatants. Some will prefer to stay in the bush rather than struggle here. (...) The best solution is to give them all what they have promised to give. If they do as they say they will come out in large numbers.*
2. *Of course, if the youth is not satisfied, there will be a problem in the future. And it can easily create another new war in Sierra Leone. And I will join them to fight if there is no encouragement from the government or any leader who is in power.*
3. *Some of the old people are accepting us. But you know, we hear that people were coming to give out micro-credits to some of us, but then they gave it to the old people because of the heavy burden they have at home.*
4. *G. is a village bordering RUF territory, and 13 km off the road. (...). The village was reached by a humanitarian agency in 1999. Some elders returned to help organise the distribution of relief. This was the nub of a grievance the meeting wanted to discuss. A young man – a Temne tailor, suspected by the elders of being an RUF member – complained bitterly about his exclusion from distribution lists. He had been one of those who hid in the bush ‘corners’. The chief tried to make him sit down, but without success. “Chief”, the young man persisted, “you ran away, and were fed by the agencies as a displaced person, whereas I stood on this ground...”. This – he concluded – made him a citizen. Angered by the boy’s arrogance the chief threatened to withdraw from the meeting. He was prevailed upon to stay. Then the chief also began to talk freely. “Yes, it is true, the humanitarian inputs bring bitterness and division between us”. “But what can we do?” “It is natural to favour family and friends in distribution of benefits...this brings division, and with division comes war...we need to find a better way”.<sup>44</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

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There is a general awareness that the number of children and youth actively taking part in African armed conflicts is increasing. Although greater attention is paid to the phenomenon of under-aged fighters (although less to the older but still youthful fighters), the reactions to the problem have, in themselves, been somewhat limiting. One reaction is to stigmatize youth as evil (as ‘bandits’ and ‘barbarians’). Another reaction is to see young fighters as victims of undemocratic military regimes or brutally exploitive warlords, a viewpoint regularly espoused by agencies working with children.<sup>45</sup> Both are true to an extent – some child combatants commit terrible atrocities, often under influence of drugs, and others have been conscripted against their will – but these are only partial perspectives.

Many youthful combatants have joined up voluntarily, as this study illustrates. Some have sought revenge for family members killed, while others have pointed to the lack of livelihood opportunities prevalent in conditions of economic collapse, given their poor educational background and poor livelihood prospects. Economic failure, political corruption and structural adjustment have wreaked havoc on education systems, and formal education in many war-afflicted countries in Africa has been ineffective in preparing young people for the economic realities of modern life.<sup>46</sup> To join a militia is quite often seen as a route to some kind of training and employment. The pay is often very poor, but learning to use a weapon is another type of education; one that is seen to be of high utility in the prevailing circumstances. There are social attractions as well; combat group comradeship frequently eases the pain of lost home and family.

This monograph has attempted to illustrate some of the factors responsible for the high numbers of youths joining militias, and to demonstrate that these causes play on three levels: they make youths join, stay with and re-join armed factions. This is by no means a group of ‘brainwashed’ or severely indoctrinated youngsters whose accounts do not make sense and can therefore be dismissed. These are, for the most part, knowledgeable young people who take rational and active decisions to maximise their situations under difficult circumstances.

An environment in which short-term tactics can be transformed into long-term constructive ones should be an important consideration in building lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

Consideration of their own explanations for why under-age ex-combatants join militias, persist in fighting and why some of them still decide to rejoin their militias after having demobilised can offer some important lessons and contribute to best practices for reversing the trend toward younger and younger fighters. Perhaps the most important lesson in this case is that it is dangerous to overlook the agency of youth; it has clearly played a critical role in the Sierra Leone conflict.

## ENDNOTES

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1. See for example Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Liberia the first organised DDR programme for under-age combatants took place in 1994, in Sierra Leone in 1993. This early implementation (with the war still going on) was possible because of the illegal status of children involved in fighting in these countries.
2. The term 'youth combatants' in this case will denote those between the ages of 12 and 25.
3. M Wessells, Recruitment of Child Soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa: an Ecological analysis, in *Comparative Social Research*, special issue, L Mjostet & S van Holde, eds., *The Comparative Study of Conscription in the Armed Forces* vol. 20, 2002, p.247.
4. K Peters, P Richards, & K Vlassenroot, What Happens to Youth During and After Wars?: A preliminary review of literature on Africa and an assessment of the debate, working paper, the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO), 2003.
5. G Goodwill-Gill, & I Cohn, *Child Soldiers: the Role of Children in Armed Conflict*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp 23–24.
6. P Richards, Militia Conscription in Sierra Leone: Recruitment of Young Fighters in an African war, in L Mjostet & S Van Holde, op cit, pp. 255–276.
7. N Long, From Paradigm Lost to Paradigm Regained? The Case of the Actor-oriented Sociology of Development, in N Long & A Long, eds., *Battlefields of Knowledge, the Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*, Routledge, London, 1992, P.22–23, quoted in J Goodhand and N Lewer, *NGOs and Mainstreaming Conflict Prevention*, unpublished paper, 2001.
8. A Honwana, Negotiating Post-war Identities: Child Soldiers in Mozambique and Angola, *Codesria bulletin* 1 & 2, pp4 – 13, 1999.
9. I Abdullah, Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL), *Africa Development Special Issue: Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: the Sierra Leone Civil War* 22, 3/4, 1997.
10. Upon entering in the east and south of the country, the people were ordered by the RUF to cut palm leaves, the symbol of the SLPP party, to decorate the villages and towns.

11. Peters & Richards, *op cit.*
12. According to an informant, “whenever you fired 10 bullets you had to drop the gun, open your zipper and pee on the arm to making it to cool down, before you could use it again.”
13. P Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: war, youth and resources in Sierra Leone*, James Currey, Oxford, 1996 (reprinted with additional material 1998).
14. Richards & Fithen, *op cit.*
15. Most of the young people who joined the Kamajo movement were still in school or had seen their education disrupted as a result of the war, see Peters & Richards 1998b, *op cit.*
16. P K Muana, *The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-insurgency*, *Africa Development* vol. 22(3/4), 1997 pp. 77–100.
17. CIA factbook, 2001, see <[www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/)>.
18. J MacGaffy, *Solving the Problems of Urban Living: Opportunities for Youth in the Second Economy*, in H D’Ameida-Topor, O Goerg, C Coquery-Vidrovitch, F Guitar eds., *Les Jeunes en Afrique*, 1992.
19. Richards, 1996, *op cit.*
20. W Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
21. D Keen, *Internationale Samenwerking 3/2002*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, 2002.
22. S Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, Hurst & Company, London, 1999 and P Atkinson, *The war economy in Liberia: a Political Analysis, Relief and Rehabilitation Network paper*, ODI, 3/1997.
23. K Cain, *The Rape of Dinah: Human rights, Civil War in Liberia and Evil Triumphant*, *Human Rights Quarterly* 21(2), 1999, pp 265–307.
24. Q Outram, ‘It’s terminal either way’: an analysis of armed conflict in Liberia, 1989–1996, *Review of African Political Economy* No.73, 1997, p362.
25. K Peters & P Richards, *Jeune Combatants Parlant de la Geurre et de la Paix en Sierra Leone*, *Cahier d’Etudes africaines*, 2–4, pp. 581–617, 1998b.
26. Simon Arthy raises this point for Sierra Leone: “In a country where over 85% of the population rely on agriculture for their economic livelihood, the relative unattractiveness of the NCDDR agricultural reintegration package offered, compared for example to the vocational training package (with its associated



financial benefits), meant that only 16% of the ex-combatants opted for agriculture, in comparison to 60% opting for skills training and short term artisan apprenticeships. See S Arthy, *Ex-combatant Reintegration-Key Issues for Practitioners Based on Lessons from Sierra Leone*, Interim paper presented at NaCSA, Sierra Leone, 2003.

27. Often it is assumed that ex-combatants are not interested in agriculture. Indeed, learning to be a motor-mechanic or driver is often preferred. However, research on the reintegration process of ex-child combatants in Liberia indicates that ex-child soldiers who have been exposed to farming during their time in a Interim Care Centre, waiting Family Tracing, were more involved in agriculture than their counterparts who did not spend time in such a centre. It seems that, if these ex-combatants learn about the value of (and the money one can make by) farming, they will be interested in agriculture.
28. S Archibald, P Richards, *Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone*, *Africa*, 2002.
29. Former president Momoh once stated that education was a privilege when he visited the Eastern province of Kailahun.
30. *Economist Intelligence Unit*, *Country Report Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia*, 1998.
31. K Peters, & P Richards, *Why we fight: voices of under-age youth combatants in Sierra Leone*, *Africa*, vol. 68(2), 1998a.
32. *Ibid.*
33. K Peters & P Richards, *op cit*, 1998b, pp. 581–617.
34. *Ibid.*
35. For example, Museveni in Uganda, Rawlings in Ghana and Sankara in Burkino Faso.
36. Archibald & Richards, *op cit*.
37. Peters & Richards 1998b, *op cit*.
38. Outram, *op cit*, Peters, *op cit*.
39. An Ex-RUF commander sums up, “I) *Thou shall not take the liberty of women. Which means that you are not allowed to have forced sex or rape of woman. II) Thou shall not loot. III) Thou shall not take a needle or thread of the masses. IV) Pay for everything you damage. V) Thou shall not destroy crops. The rest I forgot... oh wait. VI) Anything you borrow you must return it.*”
40. On the frontline the commander was allowed to summarily execute anyone who did not follow a command.

41. On the apparent contradiction between the strict rules and regulations of the RUF and the widespread atrocities committed by its fighters, see forthcoming article by this author.
42. Peters & Richards, *op cit*, 1998a.
43. *Ibid*.
44. Archibald & Richards, *op cit*.
45. Goodwin-Gill & Cohn, 1994; Human Rights Watch 1994; R Brett, & M McCallin, *Children: the invisible soldiers*, Swedish Save the Children, Stockholm 1996.
46. S Mokuwa, *Rice biodiversity education: a problem-based curriculum innovation for post-war recovery (case study of Kambia District and Freetown in Sierra Leone)*, Msc thesis, Management of Agricultural Knowledge systems, Agricultural University, Wageningen, the Netherlands, 1997.