

GENDER EQUALITY IN POST- CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers the literature on gender and conflict to determine whether war acts as a catalyst for improved gender equality. It questions why some opportunities for improvement are sustained in the post-war period while others are not. The case study of Sierra Leone is used to examine the effects of factors related to war on the indicators of gender equality, which include political representation, legal change, access to education, economic opportunities and access to health care. Field research was conducted by the researcher in the fall of 2007 in Canada, the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone. The research finds that in the case of Sierra Leone, the spaces opened up through the conflict created opportunities to address gender inequalities in the immediate post-conflict period.

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Introduction: Gender Equality and Civil War

Does war create opportunities for improved gender equality? Is it possible that within the destruction of war, opportunities for changes in gender equality become available? In her introduction to an edited book on women and war, Meredith Turshen states,

Working on this book of horrors, I was tempted to conclude that wars are damnation and all warriors deprived. I searched desperately for something positive to take away. And then I found it in the meaning of social upheaval. War also destroys the patriarchal strictures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings.¹

Yet, is this destruction of social constraints sustainable in the post-conflict period?

Further, are the changes in the post-conflict period truly different from the gendered relationships of the pre-war period, or do they simply appear improved as a result of the severe destruction of conflict? The literature on gender and conflict demonstrates that the roles of women and men in conflict both conform with and defy pre-existing gender roles. But despite the focus of most recent literature on opportunities lost for improved gender equality in the aftermath of war, it is still unclear as to what factors affect or even cause this loss. The realization that the reversal of some of women's war 'gains' is not "inevitable" does not provide sufficient understanding of in which cases reversal occurs and in which it does not. This raises a variety of important questions for consideration in feminist international relations research on conflict: Does war truly act as a catalyst for improved gender equality in the post-conflict period, and what characteristics of conflict are actually causing that effect?

¹ Meredith Turshen, "Women's War Stories," in *What Women Do in Wartime*, eds. Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya (London: Zed Books, 1998), 20.

This thesis research focuses on whether conflict, in this case civil conflict, creates opportunities for lasting and improved gender equality in the post-conflict period, using Sierra Leone as a case study. Firstly, it is necessary to establish whether post-conflict gender equality actually changes compared to the pre-war and war periods. Secondly, an understanding of what factors precipitate these effects should provide some insight into why such a relationship exists.

Determining the effects of conflict on gender equality would allow positive changes to be better facilitated or supported by conflict resolution policies and programmes. It may also enable an understanding of how to recognize and deal with impediments to change, and ensure that such policies and programmes do not have a negative influence themselves. The importance of including a gender perspective in conflict resolution has already been recognized by the United Nations in Security Council Resolution 1325, and is important for developing effective methods to build long-term sustained peace.²

The question to be investigated by this thesis research is: **“Why are some positive changes for women through war sustained in the post-war period and others are not?”** This considers whether war, and which factors related to war, provides stimulus for improved gender equality.³ Gender equality is defined as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men.⁴

² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 recognizes that “an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.” United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1325 (2000),” S/RES/1325 (2000), (31 October 2000): Available at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf>.

³ Gender is defined as “the socially constructed roles played by women and men that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex.” Dorota Gierycz, “Women, Peace and the United Nations: Beyond Beijing,” in *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, eds. Inger Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith (London: Sage Publications,

The **Dependent Variable** is the change in gender equality in the post-conflict period compared with the pre-conflict and conflict periods. This change could be positive (improved gender equality following the conflict), the same (a return to the status quo of the pre-conflict period), or negative (gender equality has declined in the post-conflict period). To determine this, the following indicators of levels of gender equality in society will be investigated:

Indicators of Gender Equality:

- **Political Representation:** men and women in political positions, access to voting and decision-making structures.
- **Law and Legal Change:** existence of laws that discriminate based on gender, prosecution of those responsible for gender-based crimes.
- **Education:** Access to primary, secondary and tertiary education, levels of literacy for men and women.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Access to formal and informal employment, access to training programs for men and women.
- **Health Care:** Access to health care, both generally and for women-specific health care needs, including maternal health and health care to deal with gender-based and sexual violence.

These five indicators of gender equality have been selected based on the literature on gender and conflict. They will be the focus of this thesis in an attempt to discover to what degree opportunities are available and what factors enable or inhibit these opportunities. Their depiction in the literature is briefly explained in chapter one to provide evidence for their importance as indicators of gender equality.

Taking war as the independent variable makes for the following general hypotheses.

2001), 19. The experiences of men and women are analyzed to determine similarities and differences based on their social roles and responsibilities.

⁴ Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, Jane Parpart, with Sue Lautze, "Introduction: Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping," in *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, eds. Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005): 13.

Table I: Generalized Hypotheses of the Effects of War on Gender Equality

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H0: War has no effect on gender equality: there is no change in the indicators of gender equality from the pre-war to the post-war period
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1: War has a reversed effect on gender equality: the indicators of gender equality improve or decline during the conflict, but reverse back in the post-war period such that they are the same in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H2: War has a positive effect on gender equality: the indicators of gender equality improve in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war period
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H3: War has a negative effect on gender equality: the indicators of gender equality decline in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war period

H0 sets out the null hypothesis, that war effectively has no impact on gender equality, in which case, no further research would be necessary. Yet, the literature on gender and conflict has focused on the negative and positive effects of war on women's and men's lives, suggesting that this is not the case, and that in the least, further study is warranted. In some cases, what seems like no effect could actually be a situation where H1 is occurring; where the conflict has had an impact, but the change is reversed in the aftermath to the same situation as prior to the conflict. H2 and H3 provide much more concrete approaches, in which war either has a positive or negative impact on the indicators of gender equality. While the change in gender equality during the conflict is not set out above (except in the case of H1), such a change is extremely important, and will be considered as it is presented in the literature and in this research. However, what is largely missing from the literature is why some improvements are sustained into the aftermath, and whether they are actually *improved* as compared to the pre-war period. An improvement in gender equality during the war, as important as this might be, may only appear to be an overall improvement because of the destruction and devastation of the conflict. Thus, the comparison of the periods of before the conflict and after the conflict provides more insight into real change, and perhaps better measurement as well.

It is not surprising that, in the literature on gender and conflict, there are mixed results regarding the general hypotheses, as will be seen in the following chapter. In some areas, there may be improvement, whereas in others, there is reversal or decline. The literature presents a complex set of outcomes for the question of whether war acts as a catalyst for change in gender equality, and this was also found in this research. War results from a variety of factors, is carried out in various ways and results in numerous outcomes, depending on the type and cause of the conflict, the combatants, the means and methods of war, and the type and process of resolution. With the complexity of conflict, such a mixed outcome is to be expected. While it may not be possible to categorically state that war has a certain effect on gender equality in all cases (or any cases for that matter), and recognizing that confirming this is not possible given the limitations of a single case study, it is valuable to develop some patterns that may exist in the literature and in this research. There are patterns of relationships between the factors related to war (the independent variable) and changes in gender equality (the dependent variable), which are outlined in the literature.

Factors related to Conflict that may Influence Gender Equality

War itself is a complex variable, made up of a variety of other factors which may actually be causing a change. Thus, the **Independent Variables** of interest are the factors related to the conflict and post-conflict period. These factors, which are considered to impact on the indicators of gender equality, will also be further elaborated in chapter one on the literature on gender and conflict, to provide a basis for the hypotheses outlined below. These factors include:

- Social disruption (including changed roles that women take on during conflict)
- Demographic changes (killing of men, displacement, targeting of certain groups)

- Involvement of the international community (armed forces, donors, non-governmental organizations, international policies and programs)
- Involvement of women's organizations and civil society organizations
- Violence carried out during and after conflict (particularly gender-based and sexual violence)
- Attempts to "normalize" in the post-war period (including the role of community and religious leaders).

Other Factors Affecting Gender Equality

There are a variety of other factors that may also influence gender equality which may not be related to the occurrence of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes. These factors include:

- Change in GDP/GNP over time
- Change in cultural practices/traditions affecting gender roles and gender equality over time
- International, regional or local pressures for change in gender equality not related to the conflict (international organizations or regimes, or trade negotiations).
- Historical roles of women, existence of a women's movement in the past
- Changes in education level and economic opportunities (over time)

While these are necessary and important factors to recognize, because this research uses a single case study it will be difficult to control for each external factor noted above, and other possible influences. Nonetheless, the factors related to war have been depicted in the literature on gender and conflict as affecting certain indicators of gender equality.

The relationships outlined in the literature between the factors related to war and certain indicators of gender equality offer a series of more refined hypotheses than the generalized hypotheses outlined above, and set the stage for further analysis. These hypotheses are outlined in Table II.

Table II: Indicator Hypotheses based on the Literature on Gender and Conflict

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1A: Demographic changes and social disruption improve women's access to education during war, but this declines in the post-war period because of "normalization" processes to return to the same as the pre-war period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1B: Demographic changes and social disruption improve women's economic opportunities during war, but this declines in the post-war period because of "normalization" processes to return to the same as the pre-war period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H2A: The work of the international community and civil society improve political representation of women in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war and war periods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H2B: The work of the international community and civil society for legal changes in the post-war period improve women's legal status as compared to the pre-war and war periods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H3A: Social disruption and violence against women decrease women's access to health care during war, and this does remains static in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war period.

The chapter on the literature on gender and conflict will explain further the influence of the factors associated with conflict on the indicators of gender equality outlined above. It is clear that any results cannot be linked directly as causal factors due to the nature of the study, and the complexity of the independent and dependent variables, as well as other intervening factors. However, the elaboration of patterns and relationships as proposed in the literature on gender and conflict and reflected in the case of Sierra Leone, can still allow for important policy recommendations, and set the agenda for further research.

Methodology: Single Case Study Approach

Sierra Leone's civil war provides a case for examining whether gender equality has improved, considering that Sierra Leone has consistently ranked last or next to last in the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since the start of the conflict in 1990.⁵ Sierra Leone's poor ranking in the HDI

⁵ J. Andrew Grant, "Diamonds, Foreign Aid and the Uncertain Prospects for Post-conflict Reconstruction in Sierra Leone," *The Round Table* 94, no. 381 (September 2005): 445.

suggests that any improvement in gender equality in the post-conflict period is significant, as the country has little in terms of resources and capacity to devote to reconstruction.⁶ While recognizing the inherent challenges associated with conducting a single case study, this research will examine possible changes in gender equality in Sierra Leone to set the basis for further study. Sierra Leone also poses an interesting case because of the systematic nature of the gender-based violence carried out during the conflict, because such violence signifies gender inequality. Changes in gender equality despite this violence would provide promise for long-term changes and possibilities for international involvement.

This research will use a case study of different periods (pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict) in Sierra Leone. It will test the above hypotheses about the impact of war on gender equality, including which factor(s) impact the changes (if any) in gender equality. The Sierra Leonean civil war lasted from 1991-2002. There has been sufficient time since the end of the conflict to evaluate any recent changes in gender equality, as well as to allow for the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data.⁷ Further, the post-conflict reconstruction and rebuilding is well under way, with many donors and non-governmental organizations now beginning to remove their support, suggesting that the immediate post-war period is nearing an end.⁸ Sierra Leone held its first free and fair

⁶ This situation also helps to control for some intervening factors that might affect gender equality not related to conflict. Because Sierra Leone's national situation has not changed greatly from before the war to the current context (noting a decline in the situation during the conflict), it makes a good case for evaluating the impact of the conflict itself, rather than other factors.

⁷ However, in some cases there is little historical data available on the gender equality levels in Sierra Leone. This study attempts to pull together the data that is available to generate some initial analyses of changes in gender equality.

⁸ Whether the post-war period is complete will be discussed further, but the recognition that that is the case by the international community suggests that this is an ideal period for study of this case.

elections without the support of international forces in August 2007, indicating a more complete move towards democratic consolidation and peace.

The research approach uses triangulation, secondary qualitative and quantitative data and information has been used where available and applicable, and primary field research in Sierra Leone was conducted by the author in November and December 2007. Interviews were conducted with academics and other international experts in Canada, along with interviews with international and local non-governmental organizations in the United Kingdom and Freetown, Sierra Leone. Finally, interviews were conducted with men and women of all ages and backgrounds in Freetown, Makeni and Port Loko, Sierra Leone. Freetown, the capital, was chosen because of the many varied backgrounds of individuals living there, as well as the ease with which research could be conducted due to transportation capacity and the increased likelihood of English spoken, to reduce the need for a translator.⁹ Makeni was selected for the research as it is a regional capital in the north of the country. Makeni is a city, but much smaller than Freetown, and it was occupied by rebel forces during the conflict, allowing for more diverse experiences of participants. Finally, Port Loko was chosen as a small rural town that was occupied intermittently during the conflict.¹⁰ Five academic and expert interviews were conducted in Canada, six international organization interviews in the United Kingdom, and eleven interviews with international and local organizations in Sierra Leone. Two interviews were conducted with politicians and parastatal institutions, and with the United Nations

⁹ Participants able to be interviewed in English were those with education, so others without this ability were also sought out, with interpreters being used in areas on the outskirts of Freetown and elsewhere. Thirteen of the individual interviews were conducted in English, the rest with the assistance of an interpreter. The research received Ethics approval from Carleton University in September 2007.

¹⁰ Research was not conducted in the border areas, which had severe experiences of the conflict, due to travel and time constraints. However, many of the participants had previously lived in these regions, allowing for a diversity of responses and generally accurate information.

Office in Freetown.¹¹ Twenty-three individuals were interviewed in Sierra Leone, five from Makeni, five from Port Loko, and the rest currently living in Freetown.¹² Fourteen of the participants were male and nine were female.¹³

Participants were selected based primarily on willingness to be interviewed, with an attempt by the researcher to include diverse backgrounds and experiences of the conflict and post-conflict period. Participants were of various ages, levels of education, current and past employment, and locations during and after the war, and were asked to recommend others to participate once the interview was completed. In cases where an interpreter was used, participant selection was made with the assistance of the interpreter, based on their knowledge of the local area and community. The interview questions are included in Appendix A and Appendix B. Questions focused on the five main indicator areas and asked about experiences for each of the periods of before, during and after the war. Participants were also asked questions about their opinions on the post-war situation, the work of local and international organizations and the situation of women during and after the war. The interview questions were used to generate an overall understanding of the actual changes in gender equality in Sierra Leone, and participants' perceptions of possible changes and the general research area.

¹¹ Only one organization requested a confidential interview. All other organizations and institutions specifically asked that their participation be noted in the final thesis document, indicating that they wanted recognition for their work and the involvement of their organization.

¹² Many of the individuals living in Freetown had migrated there either to look for work or as a result of the conflict. All of the individual interviews conducted have been kept confidential in terms of participant identity and any identifying factors. Participants were of a variety of ages and ethnic backgrounds, as well as social and economic statuses; diversity of experiences was attempted to the greatest degree possible.

¹³ Although more men than women were interviewed, the representatives of local organizations interviewed were predominantly female. Many of the representatives gave their own personal perspectives and discussed their own experiences, adding to the individual interview responses.

Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first chapter presents the literature on gender and conflict, including the feminist international relations approach to studying conflict. It then outlines the factors associated with conflict thought to enable or inhibit positive changes in gender equality. The factors highlighted as influencing these changes include breakdown in social cohesion, changes in demographics, the work of women's organizations, and the role of the international community in post-conflict reconstruction.

The second chapter provides a brief background to the conflict in Sierra Leone. It includes a presentation of some of the main effects of the conflict as they relate to gender equality, including violence during and after the war, the experiences of male and female combatants, and the efforts to rebuild in the post-war period.

The third to seventh chapters will consider the changes in gender equality in the pre-war, war and post-war periods in each of the indicator areas of political representation, legal change, access to education, economic opportunities and access to health care. While there have been some improvements in gender equality in the post-conflict period in the areas of political representation, legal change, and access to education, the areas of access to health care and economic opportunities have not improved. Therefore, some of the indicator areas, but not all, have improved from the pre-war to the post-war period.

The case study demonstrates that two factors in particular have had a positive influence in the aftermath. Recognition in the post-war period of the gender inequality which underlies the systematic use of gender-based violence during the war, and the need to begin rectifying that inequality, has enabled some of the positive changes in Sierra

Leone. The second factor is the important role of the international community in supporting local organization initiatives and the implementation of international standards in the post-war period. This is particularly the case in improving the legal status of women and in access to education. At the same time, when the international community supports policies and programs that are gender blind, this can have negative impacts on gender equality, as was the case with the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programme for ex-combatants. Recognition of the impacts of these factors is not well-developed through the literature on gender and conflict, which will become apparent in the following chapter, and on which this research seeks to build.

The final chapter will provide policy recommendations for the international community with the goal of sustaining improved gender equality in the aftermath of war where there are increased possibilities as the result of conflict, or to ameliorate any deterioration in gender equality where factors inhibiting improvement are evident. While the limitations of this research are clear, some recommendations specific to the case of Sierra Leone may be made. The period between conflict and post-conflict – one of supposed reconstruction, rehabilitation and reorganization of society – is critical for shaping how the society evolves in the aftermath of social upheaval. This is also true for consolidating positive changes in gender equality resulting from conflict.

Chapter 1: Changing Gender Equality In War: Analysis of Enabling and Inhibiting Factors in the Literature on Gender and Conflict

The literature on gender and conflict has primarily focused on the experiences of women and men during and after war. However, the literature largely lacks a depiction of the gendered relationships before the conflict, which would allow for better comparison and understanding of fluctuations and changes.¹⁴ Further, an understanding of which factors have an influence on supporting or impeding any changes in these relationships and their ability to persist in the post-conflict period is essential to determining informed and effective post-conflict reconstruction approaches and programs. This chapter provides an understanding of the feminist approach to international relations theory, and presents the current literature through which the need for further study and analysis of the causes of changes in gender equality through conflict become evident. The indicators of gender equality and the effects of war on these indicators is presented, followed by a discussion of the main factors related to conflict that affect gender equality as put forward in the literature. This provides the basis upon which the previously outlined hypotheses are analyzed through case analysis.

Feminist International Relations Approaches to Gender and Conflict

Feminist analyses of war have focused considerably on the impacts of war on women, and more recently, on gender relations. Feminist international relations theorists differ in their approach from mainstream international relations theorists in that they “adopt gender as a central category of analysis for understanding how unequal social structures, particularly gender hierarchies, negatively impact the security of individuals

¹⁴ While this is not always possible in the theoretical literature, due to the extremely varied experiences of men and women in peacetime, certainly this comparison is necessary for more comprehensive case studies, to better inform the theoretical literature.

and groups.”¹⁵ In taking this approach, feminist international relations theorists have presented the experiences of women in war, and attempted to move the study of international relations to recognize these experiences and for the international community to take action to remedy violence and inequality during and after conflict.

A gender-based approach to understanding conflict suggests that the differential experiences of men and women, and the meanings of those experiences, are taken as the primary consideration.¹⁶ It is increasingly recognized that the differential experiences of men, women, boys and girls must also take into account their age, race, ethnicity, economic status, religion and other factors that influence their societal experience. More specifically, women do not all have the same experiences in war, “the type of conflict, demographic changes, and membership of a particular class or ethnic group all have profound influences on the gains and the losses of women in periods of armed conflict.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, some trends can be found through a gender lens, which has more recently attempted to incorporate other factors influencing gendered experience.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ann Tickner, “Gendered Dimensions of War, Peace and Security,” *Gendering World Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 48.

¹⁶ For more on gender roles of women which shape their experiences with men, see V. Spike Peterson, “Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’,” in *The Women and War Reader*, eds. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 41-49. In a discussion of gendered nationalism, Peterson suggests that women are often represented as biological reproducers, as reproducers of cultural norms, as signifiers of group differences, as participating in political identity struggles and as societal members more generally, all of which shape their experiences of conflict and their relationships with their male counterparts before and after war.

¹⁷ Codou Bop, “Women in Conflicts, Their Gains and Their Losses,” in *The Aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*, eds. Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen (London: Zed Books, 2001), 33.

¹⁸ Chandra Mohanty criticizes Western feminists for painting women in the “third world” as having all the same experiences. Mohanty states, “[w]hat is problematical about this kind of ‘women’ as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that this assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination.” Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51-80. Recognizing the challenges in attempting to find themes among many varied experiences, this thesis seeks to bring in the diversity of experiences as much as possible.

Feminist international relations studies of women's positions during both interstate and civil war suggest that during and after conflict women and girls take on a more public role, carrying out positions formerly assigned to men, or formerly considered masculine/male roles. In war, women are victims, combatants, supporters, resisters, mobilizers for peace, spies, cooks, "wives", smugglers, refugees, internally displaced persons, community and family leaders and caregivers and traders and market businesswomen.¹⁹ It is widely considered that women are active participants in conflict in a variety of ways.²⁰

Yet, after the conflict ends and reconstruction begins, theories differ on their interpretation of the effects of the war on women's positions. Some argue that there are long-term increased political and employment opportunities for women in the aftermath, while others suggest that women's positions return to the pre-war status quo.²¹ The latter argument is particularly salient regarding women's post-war roles after a civil conflict. The differing theories on post-conflict gender equality focus on whether gender equality improves or returns to the pre-war status quo. It must also be recognized that there is the possibility that gender equality worsens in the aftermath of war, as destruction of social norms also goes alongside destruction of infrastructure, service provision and economic and educational opportunities.

¹⁹ Turshen, "Women's War Stories," 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ The first argument is based on women's experiences during and after World War II. See Jeff Keshen, "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women during World War II," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, eds. Veronica Strong Boag, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 262. However, in civil war, while there is recognition of opportunities for increased gender equality, most authors suggest that gender roles revert to pre-war status quo in the post-war period. See Sheila Meintjes, "War and Post-War Shifts in Gender Relations," in eds. Meintjes et al., 64. Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana also argue that, "[i]n the aftermath of war, girls and women are usually urged to resume traditional gender roles instead of using the strengths they have developed to...seek broader opportunities." Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*, (Montréal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), 17.

One of the key reasons offered for why war creates new roles and opportunities for women is as a result of the disruption of social norms during conflict. This includes the understanding that gender roles are blurred during the conflict period. However, this does not diminish the severe violence and discrimination women and girls face during and after war. Codou Bop recognizes that women may make gains in terms of gender equality during conflict: “women have stepped out of their traditional roles to meet the economic demands of war. This movement between sex roles helped some women in sectors previously dominated by men and contributed to mitigating the prejudices preventing their advancement in economic and social spheres.”²² Despite these gains, Bop also recognizes losses for women in the areas of identity, bodily integrity, access to leadership roles, education, health, and economic losses.²³ Thus the areas of health, employment, education, and political decision-making roles will be considered in evaluating levels of gender equality.

During and after war, women and girls are disproportionately targeted for gender-based and sexual violence. Gender-based and sexual violence (GBV) includes “physical, sexual, and psychological violence against both men and women that occurs within the family and the community and is perpetrated or condoned by the state. In conflict situations, GBV is committed against civilians and soldiers.”²⁴ Gender-based and sexual violence are thus carried out against both men and women, but women tend to be more often targeted for gender-based violence because of unequal gender relations.²⁵

²² Bop, 25.

²³ Ibid., 33.

²⁴ Tsjearld Bouta, Georg Frerks and Ian Bannon, “Gender-Based and Sexual Violence: A Multidimensional Approach,” in *Gender, Conflict, and Development*, eds. Tsjearld Bouta, Georg Frerks and Ian Bannon (Washington: The World Bank, 2005), 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

Gender-based and sexual violence increasingly are used as weapons of warfare and have become defining characteristics in many conflicts. Genocide, rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, trafficking, sexual slavery, and the intentional spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDs, are integral elements of these new forms of conflict. The targeting of women, girls, men, and boys based on their gender roles within particular societies and cultures is systematic and thorough.²⁶

While gender-based violence occurs in peacetime, it is exacerbated in war, and often plays out through sexual violence, which is primarily experienced by women, although by no means exclusively. While it is not fully recognized in the literature, this research found that gender-based violence, when recognized in the post-conflict period as an indicator of social inequality, can stimulate the need to press for change, as was the case in Sierra Leone. This finding will be discussed further in the case study.

Beyond the violence experienced in war, any gains made in terms of increased opportunities for women may not be retained in the post-conflict period. Meintjes et al. suggest that, “[i]t seems likely that many [women] do not consciously internalise or conceptualise the changes in their roles... If women do not transform their sense of themselves during conflict, they cannot defend themselves when, in the wake of war, men reassert their claims.”²⁷ This claim is also asserted by Turshen, who states,

The study of conflict offers us insights into the fate of women when war disrupts systems of subordination... The fracturing of social ties permits some women to take on new roles and responsibilities, to become head of their household or leader of their community. And some women traders become rich. We have observed that positive gender shifts are fragile. Society may not support women’s new economic, social and political roles, and new regimes easily deny their demands for participation. Women’s war ‘gains’ – such as new opportunities for leadership – are

²⁶ Mazurana et al., 2.

²⁷ Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen, “There Is No Aftermath for Women,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 9.

often reversed in the aftermath of conflict, though the reversal is not inevitable.²⁸

Without community and even national or international support, these important changes may not be sustained in the aftermath.

This literature provides some understanding of the kinds of changes in gender equality that may result from conflict. However, in her review of a collection of cases of women's roles in post-conflict situations, Mary Caprioli suggests that an analysis of the factors allowing for opportunities gained through conflict to be preserved in the post-conflict period would be useful as it seems to be missing from this literature.²⁹ It is this gap in the literature that this thesis research seeks to begin addressing. This chapter presents the indicators of gender equality which will serve as the main focus through which to analyze the case study of Sierra Leone, and to offer some theoretical understandings of the factors that influence gender equality.³⁰

Indicators of Gender Equality in the Literature on Gender and Conflict

Political Representation

In a number of cases, conflict has resulted in an increased number of women in decision-making roles. However, this remains considerably smaller in comparison with men's political participation. Nonetheless, "even when political activities do not immediately improve women's situation, it is clear that they *generate or reinforce women's awareness of the political dimension of conflicts and of their own political*

²⁸ Meredith Turshen, "The European Commission Considers Gender & Security," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 108 (2006): 364-365.

²⁹ Mary Caprioli, "Review: *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* by Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, Meredith Turshen," *Journal of Peace Research* 40, No. 3 (May 2003): 353.

³⁰ Women and men's experiences and relationships are shaped by various factors affecting their lives and their varied experiences of conflict and post-conflict. The experiences outlined here are not meant to overlook the unique individual experiences of pre-war, war and post-war periods, nor are they meant to undermine those individual experiences.

position, be it as victims of political violence or as a muted political group.”³¹ In many cases, women have mobilized for access to the peace negotiations, for an end to the conflict, to promote elections and women’s enumeration, and to push for legal change and economic opportunities. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini argues that women’s organizations and involvement in Liberia, Northern Ireland, Guatemala and South Africa enabled the inclusion of gender issues into the peace process.³² The explanation for improved political representation through conflict is linked with the involvement of the international community in a conflict zone and the pressures from local women’s organizations.

Law and Legal Change

Legal change is often seen as a key method for combating violence against women.³³ Certainly, as women are the primary targets for sexual violence during and after war, legal changes to provide for protection and access to justice are essential to ensuring their safety and security. Further, legislative change in the post-war period may act as tools for advocacy by local and international organizations. It is through pressure from the international community and the work of local organizations that the legal status of women is considered by the literature to improve in the aftermath.

³¹ Birgitte Sorensen, *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources*, (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1998), 9. Emphasis added.

³² Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, “The Untapped Resource: Women in Peace Negotiations,” *Conflict Trends*, No. 3 (2003): 20-22. While there has been much debate about the practicality and effectiveness of quotas, “[t]o date, the use of quotas has been one of the most successful methods for guaranteeing a minimum percentage of women in official negotiations as well as in government positions.” Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace-building*, (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002): 80.

³³ “The predominant approach to combating violence against women emphasises the implementation of progressive legislation and the protection of individual rights. Democratic transition has heralded changes in legislation that provide survivors of sexual violence with increased possibilities of protection and justice... .In a country emerging from repressive governance, such constitutional and legal protection of individual rights is a significant achievement.” Tina Sideris, “Rape in War and Peace: Social Context, Gender, Power and Identity,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 144.

In terms of economic independence, women's ability to legally own and inherit property is extremely important.³⁴ The inability to own property for many women is a serious constraint, and changes to property laws in the aftermath can make a great difference in women's access to economic opportunities.³⁵ These legal changes are considered to result primarily from demographic changes through the conflict, as many women become single heads of household. There is a key link between legal changes and economic opportunities. This may begin to be addressed in post-conflict society as legislation is revised and reconsidered in new political situations.

Access to Education

Access to education is often unequal for girls and boys. According to Jeanne Vickers, who was writing in 1993, "[s]tatistical studies have shown that there is a literacy gap of 28 per cent and an educational enrolment gap of 33 per cent, between males and females in the Third World. In other words, a quarter of the female population is illiterate and a third is never enrolled in school."³⁶ In a conflict situation, this inequality may be exacerbated. "In periods of conflict, women and girls often lose access to education. At the end of the war, many young people find themselves with no education

³⁴ For example, "[i]n Rwanda, dispossession among women survivors has become an acute problem. As the genocide decimated the male population, many women were left behind as single breadwinners without legal rights or access to land." Sorensen, 19.

³⁵ "Under certain African customary laws... women are unable to inherit, own or sell land. This has devastating consequences for the economic, social and cultural rights of women." Rebecca J. Cook, "Enforcing women's rights through law," in *Women and Rights*, ed. Caroline Sweetman (Oxford: Oxfam, 1995), 11.

³⁶ Jeanne Vickers, *Women and War*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1993), 93. While certainly the statistics have changed in the last 14-15 years, this data is significant, as a number of conflicts in Africa had just started at that time, or were about to get underway. The data is aggregated and so not broken down for each state, but it does provide an understanding of a generalized pre-conflict situation.

or training and with little chance of finding work.”³⁷ This has serious ramifications for economic opportunities, and for access to other public spheres for women and girls.

For women combatants, conflict sometimes provides opportunities for employment and education, particularly when women have been involved in liberation movements. “[W]ar provides women with employment and, sometimes, educational opportunities... .In Eritrea and in Zimbabwe during the 1970s the liberation armies attracted women because they provided employment.”³⁸ For civilian women and girls, in some cases demographic changes may provide increased access to education as men and boys move away from communities leaving spaces for girls in schools.³⁹ However, the literature suggests that these changes are largely not sustained in the post-war period as combatants are demobilized and return to their home communities. As well, because educational infrastructure is often destroyed during conflict, impacting both men and women, reduced access to education may persist in the aftermath. Thus, the inequality of that access to education may increase.

Economic Opportunities

Women have often been responsible for ensuring the economic well-being of their families, but receive little recognition for this work. “[W]omen carry the responsibility for feeding their families. Indeed, authentic global food security depends to a large extent on women, who are responsible for up to 80 per cent of all agricultural production

³⁷ Bop, 32.

³⁸ Meintjes, 65.

³⁹ Rita Manchanda suggests that in Nepal, the movement of men and boys to cities to avoid the Maoist insurgency has led to an increase in women in public roles and in girls in schools as local schools had new space for female students. Rita Manchanda, “Ambivalent Gains in South Asian Conflicts,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 117. This case is not entirely positive, as girls come under the influence of the Maoists, which may make them targets by the security forces. However, the insurgency may have more equitable gender relations, making it a draw for many women.

in developing countries.”⁴⁰ Yet land ownership is largely in the hands of men, and women’s work is often considered supplementary to the family income, regardless of its importance to family survival.⁴¹ Women’s work is largely in the informal sector, and does not have many of the same protections as work carried out by men.⁴² The inequalities in access to employment and the lack of recognition of work by women are significant in understanding possible economic “opportunities” created through conflict.

In some cases in the conflict and post-conflict period women are able to engage in the informal economic sector. Women in Somalia, Palestine, Mozambique, Uganda, and Sierra Leone turned to local markets and petty trading for survival, some even engaging in the war economy and trading with rebels.⁴³ However, Codou Bop states that even women affiliated with groups that are economically advantaged in the conflict still face inequality, “since the principle of unequal access to resources also operates in wartime, women’s level of wealth remains far below that of men. Moreover, women never control the production or marketing of oil and minerals.”⁴⁴ Nonetheless, that women take on new economic roles is significant. Bop suggests that women move beyond traditional gender roles in the economic sphere, and that economic gains tend to last longer in the aftermath.⁴⁵ Yet, positive change does not come without challenges.

The informal nature of much of the trade women are involved in means that it is not often regulated, and can be risky. Many market women have begun to form small

⁴⁰ Vickers, 91.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴³ Turshen, “Women’s War Stories,” 20-23.

⁴⁴ Bop, 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25. However, Sorensen argues “[a]ccounts from various post-conflict societies suggest that women typically find it difficult to adjust to post-war society, because it often dismisses the experiences and skills they have gained and disapproves of their new self-awareness.” Sorensen, 26.

organizations to assist them in their trade.⁴⁶ The international community and local organizations have provided some assistance to support opportunities for women's economic sustainability, but it is clear that the war and post-war contexts are quite dangerous and difficult for women seeking to improve or maintain economic capacity. Thus, some women may have improved economic opportunities through demographic changes and the informal war economy during the conflict. These changes may or may not be upheld in the long-term, depending on whether social expectations that shifted during the war persist into the aftermath.

Access to Health Care

Before conflict, many states lack adequate health care systems to ensure the full health and well-being of their citizens. During conflict, health care infrastructure is often targeted and destroyed. While medical services are sometimes provided by relief organizations, there is a clear lack of medical assistance in most conflict-affected societies. The difficulty in providing adequate health care is compounded by the sheer amount of necessity, which may be too great even for the health services that existed prior to the conflict. Following war, "[t]he restoration project is enormous, not least because in these civil wars health services and health care workers are targeted for destruction."⁴⁷ This destruction means that it is extremely difficult to provide services for those who have been displaced or who have come to urban centres. For those who stay in

⁴⁶ Sorensen, 22. Other women have created new systems to ensure the security of their new roles and new resources. In Chad, "[w]omen invented new ways of making money in order to enable their families to survive... women developed *tontines*, a compulsory saving system established by groups of women who each agree to put in a certain sum of money for a given period. The total is then paid out to the members of the group in rotation. The security of the money is assured, and the sums collected allow the women to improve their business and reinvest significant amounts, as well as improve the material conditions of their lives." Women's Commission of the Human Rights League of Chad and the Editors, "Women Denounce their Treatment in Chad," in eds. Turshen and Twagiramariya, 126.

⁴⁷ Turshen, "Women's War Stories," 17.

rural areas, where health care was limited before the conflict, this situation becomes severe during and after war.

Beyond destruction of health facilities, many of the health problems experienced by victims of sexual violence and those affected by the conflict are not well dealt with.

The feelings that women describe in response to their trauma – the fear, pain, grief, guilt, anxiety, revulsion, hatred, loss of dignity, and sadness – are associated with the breakdown of social life, the loss of language and cultural meanings, the disruption of experience, of family and community. These conditions cannot be treated by existing medical, rehabilitation or public health services... We lack a conceptual framework to understand what happens to families and communities in places like Liberia and Somalia where the state ceased to exist. There is remarkably little literature on social and psychological aspects of violence in situations of prolonged civil unrest.⁴⁸

The provision of medical and psychological support for those who have experienced violence and social upheaval is often inadequate. In particular, access to health care for those who have survived sexual and gender-based violence is essential to ensuring their long-term well-being and ability to reintegrate in the post-war period. Access to health care is considered to decline in the post-war period as services for the physical and mental health needs of a population that has experienced severe trauma are largely unavailable. War seriously reduces general access to health care, and the sexual violence that is often a strategy of war compounds the health care problems of women and girls in particular. This means that conflict does not provide opportunities, during or afterwards, for improvement in this indicator of gender equality.

The indicators of gender equality elaborated above highlight some factors associated with war that may influence sustained changes in the post-war period. The factors of conflict may enable or inhibit positive changes in gender equality.

⁴⁸ Turshen, "Women's War Stories," 18.

Factors Affecting Gender Equality in the Aftermath of War

The existing literature notes some factors that may enable or inhibit positive changes in gender equality, despite that it does not directly link factors with certain kinds of changes. The main facilitating factors noted in the literature include social disruption inherent in conflict, demographic changes, the work of women's organizations and the international community. Inhibiting factors include the attempt to revert to "normalcy" in the aftermath, often carried out by community and family leaders, and continued violence against women.

Factors Enabling Change

Disruption of Social Cohesion⁴⁹

In the chaos of conflict, old notions of tradition⁵⁰ are broken down, and new roles are taken on to ensure survival. The argument that there may be some opportunities for increased gender equality through conflict is largely based on the notion that gender roles change as a result of a breakdown in social cohesion. There is often a breakdown in social, political and economic order in communities through conflict. Women, who must provide for themselves and often their families as well, face serious challenges for survival. Yet in some cases, this need for survival pushes women into new roles. "In the social chaos produced by war, women, to ensure survival, may take on roles previously reserved for men. As they do this, their sense of what it means to be a woman shifts in

⁴⁹ Disruption of social cohesion is explained by Turshen in the Introduction. Turshen states, "war also destroys the patriarchal strictures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings." Turshen, "Women's War Stories," 20. The disruption of political and social hierarchies in communities as a result of conflict may provide opportunities, although this is not without serious challenges and upheaval.

⁵⁰ The term "tradition" has various connotations. In this thesis, it will be used to explain customary relationships within local communities, some of which are empowering and others which may be problematic. This term was regularly used by participants in this thesis research, by international and local organizations and by individuals interviewed as well. It is taken to mean local customs and power structures that have been historically developed as a means of organizing social relationships.

subtle ways.”⁵¹ While this shift may provide new opportunities, as women take on new roles, they are also presented with the challenge of providing for their families and communities. For example, “during war, women tend to bear a much greater burden than men for taking care of survivors, as well as children. They also carry the main burden for ensuring food provision, while keeping social and political activities going when men are fighting away from their homes.”⁵² Social disruption as an enabling factor is also problematic due to the serious difficulties created in men’s and women’s lives, their families and communities, and their relationships.

As part of the changes in women’s socially accepted roles, they may also take on new positions through their involvement with fighting forces. Women may be involved in facilitating conflict, either as direct combatants, or in support roles in the military and rebel movements.⁵³ However, even when women do participate in fighting forces, their roles tend to be gendered. In both regular and irregular forces, “[r]elatively more women as compared to men operate in armies as cooks, messengers, health worker, porters, and the like. They are not engaged in fighting and do not carry a weapon.”⁵⁴ Women engaged with the fighting forces do not necessarily take on combat roles, and many often

⁵¹ Tina Sideris, “Problems of Identity, Solidarity and Reconciliation,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 46.

⁵² Donna Pankhurst, “The ‘sex war’ and other wars: towards a feminist approach to peace building,” in *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Haleh Afshar and Deborah Eade (London: Oxfam GB, 2004): 15.

⁵³ According to the World Bank report on *Gender, Conflict and Development*, “women’s active participation in conflicts is widely acknowledged. For instance, female combatants have been active in Algeria, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe...Although female participation varies in armies, guerrilla forces, or armed liberation movements, generally they represent between one-tenth and one-third of combatants.” Bouta et al., 11.

⁵⁴ Bouta et al., 14.

face violence and harassment, sometimes being taken as sexual slaves and considered “wives” of male combatants.⁵⁵

Yet, many authors suggest that involvement in fighting forces may provide some opportunities for women. In terms of women combatants, “[t]here is a tendency toward more equal gender relations as compared to those in pre-conflict society.”⁵⁶ In some cases, women are very supportive of the conflict seeing it as providing opportunities for equality.⁵⁷ However, in spite of promises for improved gender equality by armed groups, in the post-war period there is often not a great deal of change.⁵⁸ Cynthia Enloe studies women in liberation armies – which are thought to offer more opportunity for gender equality than other armed movements – and argues that these women were given gendered positions that were the most likely to be demobilized after the war.⁵⁹ Thus, opportunities for women through fighting forces may not be sustained in the aftermath.

However, it is increasingly recognized that involving women as combatants does change gender relations to some degree, if not in the fighting forces themselves, then in the community and society. “The history of women’s participation in liberation or

⁵⁵ This was particularly the case in Sierra Leone, but is not limited to that conflict. Of the Revolutionary United Front, the main rebel group in the Sierra Leone conflict, Human Rights Watch states, “RUF rebels committed crimes of sexual violence in the course of their military operations, during which thousands of women and girls were abducted and forced to ‘marry’ rebel ‘husbands.’ These abducted women and girls were repeatedly raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence throughout the duration of their captivity, which in many cases lasted years.” Thus, women and girls in the fighting forces had many different roles, and faced a number of traumatic experiences, many of which went unrecognized in the peace process. See Human Rights Watch, “‘We’ll Kill You if You Cry’: Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict,” *HRW Index* 15, no. 1 (January 2003): 26.

⁵⁶ Bouta et al., 15.

⁵⁷ Writing about the war in El Salvador, Inger Skjelsbaek notes that, “women share their conflict experiences with men. The gendered structure of the conflict is characterized by a new unity between men and women, and not separation... This unity seems to have been attractive to these women. The slight romanticization of the conflict which can be detected in their testimonies reflects a feeling that they regarded the conflict as a refuge from the gender culture they knew from childhood.” Inger Skjelsbaek, “Is Feminism Inherently Peaceful?,” in eds. Skjelsbaek and Smith, 57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Enloe, “Women in Liberation Armies,” in *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women’s Lives*, (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1983), 161.

revolutionary struggles in a number of conflict areas in the last 25 years has demonstrated that armed conflict may create opportunities for women's greater participation in decision-making within the family, within the community and on a national scale in a post-conflict country."⁶⁰ While involvement in fighting forces may provide some opportunities for training, education, and changing gender relations, in many ways gender roles are maintained even when women take on combat roles. The lack of recognition of women in fighting forces has meant that in the post-conflict period, they often do not receive the same support as male combatants, and that any gains during the conflict are often lost in the aftermath.⁶¹

A key consideration is the experience of women and girls in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. Many such programmes have not adequately recognized the varied roles that women play in fighting forces, nor have they provided the necessary support to women and girls who have been involved in combat.⁶² Women who were involved in fighting forces may also be difficult to identify as they may fear stigmatization⁶³ from their communities due to their perpetration of violence or the sexual violence they experienced.⁶³ Women and girls in fighting forces are often rejected by their communities, particularly if they have children from the conflict.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Linda Etchart and Rawwida Baksh, "Applying a Gender Lens to Armed Conflict, Violence and Conflict Transformation," in *Building Sustainable Peace: Gender Mainstreaming in Conflict Transformation*, eds. Rawwida Baksh, Linda Etchart, Elsie Onubogu, and Tina Johnson (London: The Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005): 16.

⁶¹ "In the case where relatively more egalitarian gender relations are prevalent in armed forces, these tend to revert to pre-existing patterns when peace arrives. Whereas all ex-combatants from both regular and irregular armies have difficulties reintegrating into civilian life, the process is often more complex for female soldiers, especially because reintegration tends to go hand-in-hand with the reintroduction of pre-conflict gender relations." Bouta et al., 16.

⁶² Such programmes tend to have a narrow definition of ex-combatant, which excludes those in non-combat roles, primarily women. Bouta et al., 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁴ In a study of girls in fighting forces, Susan McKay states, "[c]ommunity members often react with hostility and fear to girls coming back from a rebel fighting force... Consequently, returning girls are

While some socially approved gender norms are broken down during conflict, in the aftermath the roles of women and girls as supporters and as part of the fighting forces is largely ignored, and when it is recognized, they face significant challenges to reintegration. This has certainly been the case in Sierra Leone.

The disruption of social cohesion through conflict is also often highlighted as creating economic and social opportunities for women due to shifts in societal roles. Codou Bop suggests that this is facilitated by the situation where “women have stepped out of their traditional roles to meet the economic demands of war. This movement between sex roles helped some women in sectors previously dominated by men and contributed to mitigating the prejudices preventing their advancement in economic and social spheres.”⁶⁵ The change in social expectations may be a significant factor in possible opportunities for women, but this tends not to be sustained after war. In the attempt to regain normalcy in the post-conflict period, often a reversion of gender roles occurs, which will be discussed in the following section on factors inhibiting change.

Demographic Changes

A consideration in which some of the social and economic responsibilities remain with women in the post-conflict period is through demographic changes due to the war. “The consequences of conflict and the resulting systems have a series of repercussions for different elements of the population... . [S]hifts in demographic composition result when men and boys are killed or flee, as seen in Afghanistan, Angola, Chechnya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo, Palestine, Peru, Sierra Leone, Somalia and

often provoked, stigmatized, and poorly accepted by community members and at school, if they attend. Girls returning with children conceived and born in a rebel force are especially stigmatized.” Susan McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, (2005): 393.

⁶⁵ Bop, 25.

Rwanda... [S]uch demographic changes shift responsibility for these public goods back into the private sphere and back onto women.”⁶⁶ In looking at women in Nepal, Rita Manchanda suggests that as men flee the conflict (since they are primarily targeted by the Maoist insurgency or picked up by police), women are left to take on greater economic and public roles.⁶⁷ These women did not necessarily consider that they had taken on these roles because the men were gone, however. According to Manchanda, “Women who now plough the land do not rationalise their action as necessitated by the absence of men. They explain it as a practical demonstration of ‘there’s nothing women can’t do, if we have to do it’. It is an assertion of capability.”⁶⁸ In this example, the absence of men required and enabled women to take on new roles, which affirmed for them their capacity to succeed in areas that would not normally have been accessible to them.

While demographic changes result in women taking on male-dominated roles, this may not result in greater public roles, as women may not fully get recognition for this work (or remuneration, particularly in a war economy). Demographic changes may provide for some new opportunities in that there are simply fewer men to fulfill public roles in the post-conflict period, but this also results in a burden for women in terms of the continuing need to provide for their families and communities.⁶⁹ In some cases, the

⁶⁶ Mazurana et al., 5.

⁶⁷ Manchanda suggests, “The men have left Nepali women to negotiate the survival and security of their families with the police and the Maoists. Women have had to break tradition and take on the ‘male’ job of ploughing the land. Traditional society does not allow women to plough the land, on pain of social ostracism and punitive action.” Manchanda, 117.

⁶⁸ Manchanda, 117.

⁶⁹ Another demographic impact of conflict includes displacement, and women and girls are disproportionately displaced. Jennifer Turpin, “Many Faces: Women Confronting War,” in eds. Lorentzen and Turpin, 4. Women are also often responsible for children and the elderly, making their role during flight extremely difficult. It is evident that women face many hardships related to their gender roles as women, particularly as it relates to nurturing and as carriers of cultural norms. Skjelsbaek, 72. Once in refugee camps or camps for internally displaced persons, women and girls suffer from disease, experience a lack of adequate shelter and sanitation, and often face increased risk for violence when leaving the camp for water or firewood. Jodi York, “The Truth About Women and Peace,” in eds. Lorentzen and Turpin, 24.

loss of a husband may even lead to the loss of status within a community. In South Africa, during the struggle against apartheid, “[w]idowhood could mean the loss of status...it is not so much the economic loss as the cultural loss and the loss of position within the community that has an impact on widows.”⁷⁰ Thus, while changes in demographics through conflict can enable or require women to take on roles previously assigned to men, such changes can also create serious challenges, both cultural and economic. It may be the case that widespread demographic changes, where the male population in whole communities or regions is reduced, creates new opportunities, while smaller changes over a longer period creates more difficulties, as only some women are affected. Therefore, new roles for women as a result of demographic changes in war may present opportunities, but do not necessarily always result in sustained positive change.

Civil Society and Women’s Organizations

Civil society and women’s organizations at the local and national levels are considered to provide some support for changing gender roles, as they empower women to carry out new activities, and to challenge male-dominated structures of public participation. These organizations carry out a variety of activities, including providing necessary services and lobbying for peace or change.

At the local level, women have sought to strengthen solidarity among themselves...In these associations the women jointly undertake income-producing work, or seek to heal the physical, moral and psychological wounds of war. At the national level, women have developed survival strategies and reconstruction plans for communities destroyed by war. They have engaged in lobbying belligerents to lay down their arms, and they organise consciousness-raising campaigns to help women become more fully integrated into the decision-making structures of the peace

However, this movement away from community structures and environments may mean that women and girls have opportunities to access training and education, as well as new roles.

⁷⁰ Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes, “South African Women Demand the Truth,” in eds. Turshen and Twagiramariya, 35.

process in which they invest more and more energy. In face of the painful abuse of which they are victims, particularly the assaults on their bodily integrity, women have learned to unite, to organise in order to bring about a collective solution to their problems, and to ask for assistance or to request protection of their rights by appealing to international authorities.⁷¹

Women's organizations not only empower the women involved in them, they also work for societal change, and often focus directly on the challenges women face in the conflict-affected society. These organizations provide opportunities for continued changes in gender equality. "Women can use solidarity networks to achieve such key goals as: raising women's consciousness about the fundamental inequalities that exist in gender relations; ensuring recognition of the part that women play in reconstruction and reconciliation; and campaigning for women to have a more prominent role in the decision-making structures and processes that shape transitions."⁷² In this way, women's organizations can play a key role both during and after the conflict. According to Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes, in South Africa it was women's organizations that pressured the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to get gender issues on the agenda. These organizations attempted to improve women's involvement in the TRC and to ensure that the experiences of women in the conflict were not lost in the aftermath.⁷³ It is in this way that women's organizations, both at the local and national levels, have been important in ensuring lasting change in gender equality.

Women who resist the war or who mobilize for peace may find some new opportunities for engagement with the political process. Yet, despite their work, these

⁷¹ Bop, 23.

⁷² Sideris, "Problems of Identity, Solidarity and Reconciliation," 56.

⁷³ Goldblatt and Meintjes, 29.

women often have little involvement in formal post-conflict reconstruction processes.⁷⁴ Not only are women's concerns of peace not included in the peace negotiations, women mobilizing for peace often do not get physical access to the peace table. This is recognized by Rehn and Sirleaf in their statement, "[w]omen have sacrificed their lives for peace. They have challenged militarism and urged reconciliation over retribution...They have contributed to peacebuilding as activists, as community leaders, as survivors of the most cataclysmic horrors of war. They have transformed peace processes on every continent by organizing across political, religious and ethnic affiliations. But their efforts are rarely supported or rewarded."⁷⁵ By contrast, when women do have access to the peace negotiations (or when they create it for themselves), it is suggested that they are able to change the dynamics of the negotiations and integrate issues of women's rights into the post-conflict agenda.⁷⁶ In terms of formal peace processes, "[w]hen compared to men, women are more likely to put gender issues on the agenda, introduce other conflict experiences, and set different priorities for peace building and rehabilitation, and they may bridge political divides better. Women's increased participation may also generate wider public support for the peace accords."⁷⁷ This is crucial, as widespread public support for peace negotiations means that any

⁷⁴ "Transitions from war offer unique opportunities to reshape domestic norms, institutions, and practices, especially in the realm of internal security and policing. Yet peace treaties, peacekeeping and peace-building missions, and new civilian police forces are designed primarily to ensure the national – *public* – peace, and secondarily to guarantee private peace *in the realms that are most visible to the empowered public*. In both cases, this peace is largely measured by men, of men." Tracy Fitzsimmons, "The Postconflict Postscript: Gender and Policing in Peace Operations," in eds. Mazurana et al., 188.

⁷⁵ Rehn and Sirleaf, 76.

⁷⁶ "In Liberia, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, South Africa and elsewhere women succeeded in getting to the negotiations and making a difference." Anderlini, 20. In a consideration of Somali women mobilizing for peace, Rehn and Sirleaf suggest that the women had to lobby for their own participation and for their proposal for a gender representative legislature in the post-conflict period. The women were able to successfully push for a guarantee of 25 seats of 245 in the Transitional National Assembly. Rehn and Sirleaf, 78.

⁷⁷ Bouta et al., 49.

breakdown in the peacebuilding process is likely to be rejected by the public, in some ways reducing the ability of those in negotiation to become spoilers of the process.

It is increasingly recognized that the peace accords are one method of ensuring that any changes in gender equality created during conflict are sustained in the aftermath. “Because it is precisely at the peace accords where the foundations for a future society are often set, this is where important gender issues should be addressed and where a gender perspective on peace should be incorporated.”⁷⁸ It is in this context, where women have pressured for inclusion in the peace and reconciliation processes, that they have had an impact in increased gender equality in the post-conflict period, particularly in political representation and legal change. Through collaboration with international organizations, women’s organizations have been able to push for change and inclusion. This is a key area in which the international community is thought to have a particular role to play – in facilitating women’s access to the peace table and in providing training and support for local women’s organizations and their initiatives.⁷⁹ Where women’s organizations have had access to the negotiating table there has been an increased possibility for sustaining improvement in gender equality into the aftermath.

International Community

The international community, through international institutions such as the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and even donor countries, plays a key role in mitigating conflict and facilitating and funding reconstruction in the post-conflict period. In fact, “[t]he role of international agencies may be more significant than that of

⁷⁸ Bouta et al., 51.

⁷⁹ Rehn and Sirleaf, 79. However, it should be noted that not all women are able to get involved in women’s organizations, and not all women’s organizations have the same experiences in informing changes in gender equality.

governments, especially if war has weakened the state to the point of total dependence on foreign aid. The impact of international intervention on women is felt at every level.”⁸⁰

Because of the engagement of the international community in conflict-affected and post-conflict societies, it is necessary to consider the impacts this involvement has on gender equality. The international community facilitates an end to conflict, and international organisations provide services and support, particularly where the state is unable to do so. Depending on their mandate and interests, the international community can be a positive influence for change.

This positive influence clearly depends on the values and positions of the various actors and the degree to which they impose their own conceptions of equality or gender relations. While NGOs and other international organizations can provide assistance during times of upheaval, it is problematic when their own goals and methods are imposed without local consideration or consent. NGOs and other organizations may impose their own beliefs and practices on those they are seeking to assist. Turshen notes, “because there is a contradiction between religious organisations and women’s human rights in the Sudan, religious organisations with patriarchal traditions should not be the sole source of services for women. This issue arose in Rwanda in 1994 when Catholic medical missions refused to provide abortions to women who had been raped, and now society bears the problem of unwanted or abandoned children.”⁸¹ Thus, while international organizations with values that push for gender equality and provide services where they are lacking may improve opportunities for gender equality, the role of the international community in doing so is challenged, particularly because of the many

⁸⁰ Meintjes et al. 15.

⁸¹ Turshen, “Engendering Relations of State to Society in the Aftermath,” 88.

varied values and approaches of organisations that can be as detrimental as they are beneficial.

Further, these organizations and actors may also take on the state's role in some instances, which can be problematic.⁸² By providing resources and services, they in effect take the onus off the state. While this may be necessary during conflict or state failure, it can be problematic if it prevents the state from fully taking on its role in rebuilding in the aftermath. By contrast, when international organizations and donors remove services and funding once the immediate emergency situation ends, this can cause great strain. To deal effectively with the factors causing the conflict, these organizations and actors need to continue their services with a view to enabling the state and civil society to take over these roles.⁸³

Factors Inhibiting Change

Just as there are factors considered to facilitate lasting changes in gender equality, there are also factors that tend to inhibit continued improvement of gender equality in the aftermath. The two key factors in the literature include “normalization” of societies after conflict, including a return to pre-war gender roles, and the continued experience of violence against women in the aftermath.

⁸² Meredith Turshen, “Engendering Relations of State to Society in the Aftermath,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 88.

⁸³ The negative effects of the involvement of the international community in a post-conflict environment must also be recognized. Those from the international community brought in to intervene in the conflict have in some cases themselves committed acts of sexual or gender-based violence. Further, illicit activities may increase with an influx of foreign troops, particularly in the case of the sex trade. Barbara Bedont, “The Renewed Popularity of the Rule of Law: Implications for Women, Impunity, and Peacekeeping,” in eds. Mazurana et al., 83. Unless these negative impacts are mitigated, the positive influence of the international community may be lessened.

“Normalization” and the Return to the Status Quo

The “normalization” of society is focused on the reversion to pre-war gender roles through the attempt of a post-conflict society to normalize societal, family and community relations in the aftermath. This relates to the re-formulation of masculinity and femininity, as changes in these roles are seen as threatening and as part of the upheaval of conflict. At the end of the conflict, communities are attempting to come to grips with the destruction of the war, and to determine how best to move forward. This period of time is extremely fragile, as relapsing into conflict is common, and it is also the time period in which any opportunities created through the conflict must be consolidated in order to last into the post-conflict period. Yet,

[i]t is precisely at the time of dramatic shifts in gender roles brought about by the societal upheaval attendant on conflict that the nationalist project circumscribes the impulse to women’s social transformation and autonomy... .Women’s role in maintaining cultural identity may explain why society invariably conceptualises the return to peace as a return to the previous gender status quo, irrespective of the nontraditional roles women assume during conflict.⁸⁴

The understanding of women as cultural carriers results in a reversal to that same conception in the attempt to return to “normal” in the aftermath. Women’s new positions are seen as “abnormal” or disruptive, and as a part of the conflict period.

This return to “normal” in the aftermath is also experienced through the understanding of women’s roles as mothers and nurturers. In explaining the reversal of some of the gains made during the conflicts by women in Eritrea and Rwanda, Meintjes suggests, “[o]ne of the most significant reasons for this retrogression is that the reconstruction of societal relations entailed the reassertion of restrictive family values. Women became the bedrock of constructing the peace through their roles as mothers and

⁸⁴ Manchanda, 100.

caregivers of the nation.”⁸⁵ Women’s roles as mothers, caregivers and as cultural carriers can mean that these roles are considered appropriate in the aftermath, as these were the ‘normal’ roles for women before the war. This may prevent sustained improvement of gender equality in the aftermath.

Male family and community members may feel threatened by these changes in gender roles, and thus an attempt to “normalize” the community may occur in the post-conflict period. Tina Sideris suggests “situations of war can result in a shift in gender roles while at the same time provoking a retreat to conservative notions of masculinity and femininity. To survive, women take on roles previously reserved for men without always challenging social relations in the domestic sphere. Men, whose masculinity is threatened are forced to find ways of reasserting their manhood.”⁸⁶ One of these ways may be through violence, which is systemic in the aftermath, but it may also be through the conceptualization of women in their roles as mothers and nurturers, and in simply re-acquiring the roles taken on by women during the conflict, particularly where men return to a community after an absence during the war.

Other aspects of “normalization” are the role of religion and religious leaders, and the role of local authorities, such as chiefs in preventing improvement in the post-conflict period. According to Meintjes,

[r]eligion is just one of the institutions that determine whether the old ways will be consolidated or new ideas will be diffused in the aftermath.

⁸⁵ Meintjes, 72. In Sudan, “[m]en expect women to maintain the culture or maintain the family, often as symbols of resistance or, just as often, because of fear of losing the ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ in the face of unusual situations such as war. One effect can be to freeze the culture, impeding the natural change process. A second effect is to romanticise the role of women: as mothers, as mothers of liberation fighters, and as the ‘keepers of the hearth’.” Sondra Hale, “Liberated But Not Free: Women in Post-War Eritrea,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 125. However, Tina Sideris suggests that “[w]omen may also draw on traditional gender roles and identities to survive both during war and in the aftermath.” Sideris, “Rape in War and Peace: Social Context, Gender, Power and Identity,” 151.

⁸⁶ Sideris, “Rape in War and Peace: Social Context, Gender, Power and Identity,” 152.

Whether a conservative backlash develops depends in part on who is in control at the local level. Another determining institution is that of chieftainship... Women depend upon the good will of chiefs, who have the power to define them as virtuous or undeserving.⁸⁷

It is significant that decision-making about women's and men's lives in the post-conflict period may be determined by figures other than themselves. This suggests a lack of control for local women and men over the changes that have occurred during the conflict.

In other cases, some women have found the destruction of "normalized" roles through war increases their difficulties in the post-war period. Turshen cites women from Liberia and Sierra Leone who mourned the loss of their traditional identities after the war, and suggested that such networks could have been used to their advantage.⁸⁸ Thus family networks and traditions are not necessarily negative in the aftermath, but perhaps their usage by elites and others in the community to restore "order" in the post-war period is what inhibits gender equality gains from conflict. When the state is unable to exert full authority, as is often the case in tenuous post-conflict situations, these informal or local actors can have a significant impact on social relations. Depending on their interests, any gender equality gains may be overturned.

Violence Against Women

Civilian women and girls are disproportionately targeted for gender-based and sexual violence in wartime. Rape is one of the clearest forms of gender-based violence aimed primarily at women in wartime, and serves many purposes as a strategy of war.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Meintjes et al., 15.

⁸⁸ Turshen, "Engendering Relations of State to Society in the Aftermath," 81.

⁸⁹ "Rape is committed to boost the soldier's morale; to feed soldiers hatred of the enemy, their sense of superiority, and to keep them fighting...rape is a weapon of war used to spread political terror; rape can destabilize a society and break its resistance; rape is a form of torture; gang rapes in public terrorize and humiliate women; rape is used to terrorize and silence women and force them to flee their homes, families and communities; rape targets women because they keep the civilian population functioning and are essential to its social and physical continuity; rape is used in ethnic cleansing, it is

Women's roles as bearers of cultural identity and honour may explain why they are targeted for gender-based violence during conflict. In this context, when a woman is raped, "[h]er husband or her father or her brother are the ones who should feel injured because rape is an act against their honour... .When the fathers and the brothers and the husbands go out for revenge, it is to avenge their honour, not hers."⁹⁰ This issue is also raised by Rhonda Copelon, who suggests that the association of rape as a crime of honour is problematic. "The concept of rape as a crime against dignity and honor as opposed to a crime of violence is a core problem... .Where rape has been treated as a grave crime, it is because it violates the honor of the man and his exclusive right to sexual possession of his woman as property."⁹¹ This suggests that the conception of women as holding a family or community's honour is significant before, during and following conflict, as is their role in protecting the cultural norms of a society. The widespread incidence of violence against women in all societies also suggests inequality in relationships between men and women. While violence against women is not always directly related to women's role as carriers of honour and culture, in some cases it may be, and the inequality inherent in violence against women is significant in terms of understanding gender relations.

Rape as a policy of war has increasingly been recognised as a crime against humanity by the international community, yet its occurrence in war is not new.⁹² While

designed to drive women from their homes or destroy their possibility of production within of 'for' their community." Turshen, "Women's War Stories," 11.

⁹⁰ Asma Abdel Halim, "Attack with a Friendly Weapon," in eds. Turshen and Twagiramariya, 91.

⁹¹ Rhonda Copelon, "Surfacing Gender: Reconceptualizing Crimes against Women in Time of War," in eds. Lorentzen and Turpin, 65.

⁹² Nancy Farwell, "War Rape: New Conceptualizations and Responses," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 19, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 390. Further, "The international criminal tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (ICTY and ICTR, respectively) have issued judgments addressing rape as torture, rape as an instrument of terror, enslavement (both sexual and nonsexual), castration, and forced

rape has been the most significant form of sexual violence, in that it is pervasive, other forms of sexual violence are also experienced including forced impregnation, forced disembowelment, mutilation, torture, enforced prostitution and sterilization.⁹³ The results of sexual violence and rape, beyond the trauma of the violence, include “social stigmatisation; physical and mental injury, as many war rapes are multiple and accompanied by other forms of violence; illness (from sexually transmitted diseases, usually with negative impacts on reproductive health); and death itself (from HIV/AIDS, or assault and murder because of the stigma attached to rape survivors).”⁹⁴ Thus, sexual violence, including rape has many consequences, as well as many purposes. While it is experienced in peacetime, it is often systematized and exacerbated through conflict.

Men and boys also experience gender-based and sexual violence in war. Yet this is not often documented or considered, which demonstrates a gap in the literature and a serious failure of the international community.⁹⁵ Men and boys experience rape and sexual violence, including torture and mutilation, which is used to destroy their masculinity. This may be even more the case for those resisting combat.⁹⁶ Sexual violence is used to destroy social cohesion, which may also include an attack on notions of masculinity in an attempt to destroy the ‘enemy’.⁹⁷

nudity.” Valerie Oosterveld, “Prosecution of Gender-Based Crimes in International Law,” in eds. Mazurana et al., 68. These judgments were the first time rape has been seen as more than simply a by-product of war.

⁹³ Mazurana et al., 4.

⁹⁴ Pankhurst, 16.

⁹⁵ R. Charli Carpenter argues that “international efforts to address gender-based violence in the context of the civilian protection agenda have relied on the assumption that women and girls are the major victims of such violence, ignoring the fact that, in conflict situations, adult men and adolescent boys also face major risks of abuse and violence based upon culturally constructed notions about gender roles.” R. Charli Carpenter, “Recognizing Gender-Based Violence Against Civilian Men and Boys in Conflict Situations,” *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 1 (March 2006): 97.

⁹⁶ Bouta et al., 37.

⁹⁷ While men and boys also experience sexual violence, women and girls are most often targeted for this type of violence in conflict. Etchart and Baksh, 24. Nonetheless, further documentation of these experiences is necessary to uncover clearer meanings of sexual violence.

Violence that occurs during the conflict does not end when the peace agreement is signed. “The use of violence as a means to resolve problems and disputes, backed up by increased circulation of weapons, and nurtured by the militarism which governs the conduct of armed conflict, bleeds on in the post-war context. This commonly translates into high levels of criminal violence and increased violence within households and families.”⁹⁸ For many, the violence experienced in war simply reverts from the public back to the private sphere. “Levels of domestic violence, nonpolitical rape, and sexual harassment may actually increase in postconflict periods as returning soldiers, who are over-whelmingly male, redirect their aggression to their households, demanding a return to prewar societal patterns of interaction and responsibilities.”⁹⁹ In reporting on a workshop held in Dakar in 1998, Anu Pillay suggests that the participants, primarily women, “reported that violence during war escalated into the most atrocious and heinous acts of brutality and torture and intensified in the aftermath of conflict. Mass rapes became gang rapes, mass murders turned into serial killings. Legitimizing violence as a means to end conflict effectively legitimised the use of violence to resolve conflict in the home.”¹⁰⁰ Violence is the result of unequal gender relations, and further exacerbates such inequalities.¹⁰¹ As a result, violence in post-war society continues to create difficult situations for men and women, and the impact of violence against women prevents full achievement of opportunities for gender equality in the post-conflict period.

⁹⁸ Suzanne Williams, “Contested terrain: Oxfam, gender, and the aftermath of war,” in *Gender, Development and Humanitarian Work*, ed. Caroline Sweetman (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2001), 19.

⁹⁹ Fitzsimmons, 188.

¹⁰⁰ Anu Pillay, “Violence Against Women in the Aftermath,” in eds. Meintjes et al., 35.

¹⁰¹ According to Pillay, “[u]nequal power relations between men and women are manifested in social practice and in beliefs and values that promote male superiority and female inferiority.” *Ibid.*, 40.

Violence may be used strategically in war to destroy communities and terrorize the enemy, but it may also be used within families and communities to undermine access to political and economic resources and opportunities. Turshen suggests “in Uganda, as in many civil wars, both government and rebel forces used violence systematically to strip women of their economic and political assets. Women...are not only constructed as property in which the assets available for transfer are women’s productive and reproductive labour, but are also targeted for their property, which is often livestock and land for the army.”¹⁰² Violence in war, which continues into the aftermath inhibits opportunities for change created through conflict, and may further increase inequalities.

Conclusion

There is increasing literature on the impacts of war on women, and recognizing the many varied roles that women play in conflict. While the literature has provided some explanations for why there are opportunities through war in certain circumstances and not others, these are insufficient. That there are not clear opportunities in all areas, or for all women, suggests some serious challenges for gender equality in the aftermath of war. Yet these challenges are primarily left unaddressed. Meintjes et al. suggest that equity and social justice are part of the transformation of women’s roles in the aftermath. They argue, “[s]ubstantive equality means a fundamental shift towards the provision of specific rights related to women’s gender roles, for example reproductive health rights, rights to further education and affirmative action.”¹⁰³ While certainly some changes in gender roles in the post-conflict period may provide opportunities for improved gender

¹⁰² As cited in Pillay, 38.

¹⁰³ Meintjes et al., 5.

equality, this suggests that these changes are only a start, and more complete equality requires a more comprehensive shift in society.

The next chapter presents a history of the conflict in Sierra Leone, as a background for analysis of the case study. Consideration of the gendered experiences of the pre-war, war and post-war period will be included as possible based on the existing literature and information. After a brief overview of the conflict, an analysis of the indicators of gender equality and the factors influencing change will follow.

Chapter 2: History of Sierra Leone and Background to the Conflict

The ability of a conflict to create change in gender equality depends on the characteristics of that conflict: the causes of the conflict, why it was fought, the methods through which it was fought and how it was resolved. This chapter provides a brief overview of the history and the conflict in Sierra Leone. It provides the basis for the following analysis of what factors have enabled changes in gender equality through the five indicators of political representation, legal change, access to education, economic opportunities and access to health care.

History of Sierra Leone before Independence

Sierra Leone was a key trading location during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and became a British colony in 1808. Freetown was a location for the resettlement of former slaves and other Black settlers in London and North America.¹⁰⁴ This small but significant group went on to become the Krio, an elite class located primarily in Freetown. The rest of Sierra Leone, called the “hinterland” became a British Protectorate in 1896, in order that the British could guarantee their control of interior trade.¹⁰⁵

While the Krio were initially favoured in politics by the British, as Independence neared, the many other ethnic groups in the rest of the Protectorate were able to garner some political representation. The Sierra Leone People’s Party, the leading party following Independence in 1961, was not a Krio-led party. Although ethnicity and

¹⁰⁴ According to Arthur T. Porter, “[t]he purpose of the Colony at its inception...was to secure a home on the continent of Africa for the ‘Black Poor’ who were at the time living in and around London. They arrived in the Colony in 1787, and were joined five years later by some eleven hundred negroes (sic) from Nova Scotia. The latter were former American slaves who had supported Britain in the American War of Independence and, as compensation, had been settled as free men in Canada. Further, shiploads included about 500 Maroons who had been deported to Nova Scotia from the West Indian Island of Jamaica.” Arthur T. Porter, “Religious Affiliation in Freetown, Sierra Leone,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 23, no. 1 (Jan., 1953): 4.

¹⁰⁵ Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 40.

regional politics have shaped Sierra Leone's history, it should be noted that the conflict was less an ethnic one than one resulting from a failed state, mass corruption and patrimonial politics. Although this chapter will not fully discuss the causes of the conflict, background to the conflict is essential to understanding how gender relations may or may not have been affected.¹⁰⁶

Background to the Conflict

Sierra Leone gained Independence from Britain in 1961, and was led by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) under Sir Milton Margai. In 1967, the All People's Congress (APC), led by Siaka Stevens, was elected and ruled until the early 1990s. Despite the longevity of its government, the APC rule undermined political legitimacy through rigging elections and suppressing their opposition.¹⁰⁷ Further, corruption was rampant.¹⁰⁸ In 1978, the APC established one-party rule, and in 1985, Siaka Stevens passed the Presidency onto his handpicked successor, Brigadier Joseph Momoh. "By first appointing Momoh (at the time head of the national army) to parliament in 1978, and in choosing him as his successor in 1985, Siaka Stevens left no doubt about the primacy of one-party government over state institutions."¹⁰⁹ Thus a lack of democracy and a severe economic situation marked the period prior to the conflict.

¹⁰⁶ For a good overview of the causes of the conflict see John Bobor Laggah, Joe A.D. Allie, and Roland S.V. Wright, "Sierra Leone," in *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji (London: Zed Books, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Jimmy D. Kandeh, "Transition Without Rupture: Sierra Leone's Transfer Election of 1996," *African Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (September, 1998): 93.

¹⁰⁸ "Siaka Stevens had been at the apex of the neo-patrimonial polity since the late 1960s. One of the significant elements of his leadership during this era was that there seemed to be hardly any difference between the national treasury and his private accounts. In fact, the President and his close associates, including senior members of his party machine, relied on state funds for their personal wealth which greatly increased both their ability and necessity to stay in power." Sahr John Kpundeh, "Limiting Administrative Corruption in Sierra Leone," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, no. 1 (March, 1994): 140.

¹⁰⁹ Jimmy D. Kandeh, Ricardo René Larémont and Rachel Cremona, "Ethnicity and National Identity in Sierra Leone," in *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*, ed. Ricardo René Larémont (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2005), 201.

During this time, attempts by international organizations to reform the economic and political institutions appear to have only worsened the problems the country faced. Alfred B. Zack-Williams notes, “For most of the 1980s government expenditure outstripped revenues... . The immediate effect of [structural] adjustment was to worsen the economic and political situation, as devaluation and deregulation triggered off widespread inflation, unemployment and the pauperisation of the mass of the Sierra Leonean people.”¹¹⁰ Adjustment attempted to deal with the clientelism rampant in Sierra Leonean politics, which led to increased discontent within the government and wider population, particularly those that had formerly profited from this system. Paul Richards argues that the conflict was directly related to patrimonialism.¹¹¹ These economic and political problems continued with the change in leadership in 1985. Under Momoh there was increased economic stagnation and inflation, including the soaring of prices of commodities.¹¹² “By all accounts, Momoh was an unmitigated disaster as head of state. More predatory but less repressive under Momoh than Stevens, the state continued to atrophy as informal channels of accessing its offices and resources displaced bureaucratic ones... . The RUF insurrection would not have been possible with an effective state machinery in place.”¹¹³ In an attempt to deal with the economic problems and to appease the international community Momoh approved a multiparty constitution in 1991.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Alfred B Zack-Williams, “Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Civil War, 1991-98,” *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1999): 145.

¹¹¹ “In the 1980s, through a combination of circumstances, the resources available for patrimonial redistribution in Sierra Leone went into sharp decline...The Sierra Leone war...is a product of this protracted, post-colonial, crisis of patrimonialism.” Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), xviii.

¹¹² Zack-Williams, 146.

¹¹³ Kandeh et al., 202.

¹¹⁴ Kandeh, 94.

However, by this time, the damage had already been done and the agenda for conflict was set in motion.

Conflict in Sierra Leone

Conflict broke out in Sierra Leone when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered the country from Liberia on 23 March 1991, led by former army corporal Foday Sankoh.¹¹⁵ Myriam S. Denov states that “the RUF’s so-called democratic revolution appeared to be fought not through the political realm, but instead through the pillage of rural institutions and industrial assets, the mass looting of village property and, perhaps most disturbingly, brutal violence against the very civilians it was claiming to liberate.”¹¹⁶ This type of violence characterised the conflict and was carried out by all parties. The RUF focused much of its efforts in the first year in the countryside, and did not directly confront the government in Freetown at that time. Instead, the Sierra Leonean military chose to remove the APC government.¹¹⁷

In 1992, Momoh was removed from office by the military who then formed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by army Captain Valentine Strasser. The NPRC promised to end government corruption and establish multi-party elections.

¹¹⁵ Ibrahim Abdullah argues that the rebel movement was not taken very seriously. He also suggests that, “[t]here is, I would argue, no revolutionary theory which guided the practice of the movement. If there is any theory, and certainly not a revolutionary one, it evolved on an *ad hoc* basis as a result of their experiences in the forest.” Ibrahim Abdullah, “Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998): 203 and 224, respectively. Yekutiel Gershoni also suggests that the RUF did not have a revolutionary ideology beyond gaining power. Yekutiel Gershoni, “War Without End and an End to a War: The Prolonged Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 40, no. 3 (December, 1997): 60. However, this argument is disputed by Paul Richards, who argues that the rebels had a clear revolutionary message. He states, “the war has a clear political context, and the belligerents have perfectly rational political aims, however difficult it may be to justify the levels of violence they employ in pursuit of these aims. The rebel leadership has a clear political vision of a reformed and accountable state.” Richards, xvii. Nonetheless, that the movement was characterized by mass killing and atrocities carried out against civilians, as well as abductions of children into the rebel forces is not disputed.

¹¹⁶ Myriam S. Denov, “Wartime Sexual Violence: Assessing a Human Security Response to War-Affected Girls in Sierra Leone,” *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 3 (September, 2006): 322.

¹¹⁷ Richards, xviii- xix.

In 1996, when the NPRC was unable to resolve the conflict with the RUF, Strasser was replaced with his deputy, Julius Maada Bio.¹¹⁸ Elections were held in February and March 1996, with Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) elected President.

The new government increasingly relied on Civil Defense Forces (CDFs) who were groups of former traditional hunters that became local defense and security forces to protect their communities from attack by the rebels.¹¹⁹ The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) had been increasingly tied to involvement with the RUF and had a history of difficult relations with the government.¹²⁰ This culminated to the point in May 1997 when the military ousted the Kabbah government, and established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC coup "had the blessing of Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, whose fighters rallied to the cause of their 'sobel' allies in the military."¹²¹ Civil society and the international community worked to remove the illegal regime, particularly because of its ties to the RUF.¹²²

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations imposed sanctions on the regime, and Nigerian-led military offensives through the Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of ECOWAS eventually removed the AFRC regime in 1998 and reinstated Kabbah.¹²³ In 1999, the RUF and former soldiers of

¹¹⁸ Zack-Williams, 149-151.

¹¹⁹ The largest and most well-known of these groups was the Kamajors.

¹²⁰ Some members of the SLA became known as "sobels" or soldier/rebels, which were members of the army who would carry out rebel activity at night. It thus became increasingly difficult for civilians to trust the military. The SLA was threatened by the increasing use of the CDFs by the government against the rebels, and were concerned that they would challenge the army's status. See Zack-Williams, 152.

¹²¹ Kandeh, 107.

¹²² Ibid., 107.

¹²³ Kandeh, 107.

the RSLMF invaded Freetown and ousted Kabbah for a second time.¹²⁴ Because of the second coup, the Kabbah government signed the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999, which provided for a power-sharing mechanism with the rebels, and enabled the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).¹²⁵

Despite the work of women and women's organizations in facilitating the peace, they were primarily denied access to the formal peace negotiations.

[w]omen played a major role in the peace process that led to the end of the conflict. After enduring years of destruction and chaos, women began to assume constructive roles as mediators and peacemakers... . Although two women representatives were involved in the Lomé negotiations, the only woman whose signature was appended to the Lomé Peace Agreement was Miss Coleman, who was a representative of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU). Despite their active roles in the conflict, women have been marginalized in the formal peace process, which has certainly served to perpetuate gender inequalities in the post-conflict period.¹²⁶

In the end, the Lomé Accords did not hold due to cease-fire violations and problems with demobilization. The peace process was particularly challenged when the RUF kidnapped hundreds of UNAMSIL peacekeepers in May 2000.¹²⁷ With the disruption of the peace process, in May 2000, civilians demonstrated in Freetown in front of Sankoh's residence, prompted by the activism of a group of women who were treated poorly by Sankoh during a meeting a few days prior. Several protestors at the mass demonstrations were

¹²⁴ The RUF controlled many of the key diamond mining regions. Yusuf Bangura, "Strategic Policy Failure and Governance in Sierra Leone," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 4 (December, 2000): 562.

¹²⁵ UNAMSIL replaced the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), which was established in 1998. The Lomé Accord announced amnesty for past crimes for the RUF and others, but the United Nations indicated that it would not consider the amnesty to apply to international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and serious violations of international humanitarian law. Human Rights Watch, 13.

¹²⁶ "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone," in *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth & Reconciliation Commission*, Volume 3b. (Accra: Graphic Packaging Ltd, 2004): 193-194.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch, 13.

killed, and Sankoh was consequently arrested.¹²⁸ Shortly after, several hundred British troops were deployed to Sierra Leone. By June 2000, UNAMSIL numbered 11,350, which would later be increased to 17,500.¹²⁹

Another cease-fire agreement was signed between the government and RUF, and the DDR process continued. Elections were held in 2002, re-electing Kabbah. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was mandated through the Lomé Accords and established in an Act of Parliament in 2000, began its public hearings in 2003.¹³⁰ The Special Court for Sierra Leone was created to try those responsible for violations of International Humanitarian Law since November 1996. Presidential elections held in August 2007 saw the return of competition between the SLPP and the APC. The All People's Congress, which was the party in power just prior to the outbreak of conflict, won the election over the Sierra Leone People's Party. Political institutions and civil society have been rebuilt in the post-conflict period, with some demographic changes in representation. However, there has been little increase in the number of women in government and parliament in the post-war period.¹³¹

Effects of the Conflict

¹²⁸ Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, "From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone," ed. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini (Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004): 17.

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch, 14.

¹³⁰ Rosalind Shaw states that the TRC was "[f]unded through and coordinated by the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva, and assisted by consultants from the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in New York," although it was a national commission. Thus, while the TRC was based on the local context and nationally run, it was funded and supported internationally and with the help of international experts. Rosalind Shaw, "Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1 (2007), 183-184.

¹³¹ The number of women in Parliament remained the same for the 2007 elections as compared with the 2002 elections. "Interview No. 9", (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007. Zainab Bangura is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, after years as an activist for women's participation in political affairs, and a former candidate for President in 2002. The Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is also a woman (responsible for Gender Affairs specifically).

The conflict in Sierra Leone resulted in an estimated 75,000 people killed, 2 million displaced and 20,000 mutilated.¹³² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Sierra Leone reports that civilians were targeted by all of the armed groups in the conflict. Of the violations reported to the TRC, 66.5 percent of the victims were male, and 33.5 percent were female.¹³³ According to a study by Physicians for Human Rights conducted in 2002, between 215,000 and 275,000 Sierra Leonean women and girls may have been subjected to sexual violence during the conflict.¹³⁴ While both men and women were killed and forcibly recruited into the rebel groups, violence against women and girls was most often of a sexual nature.

Human Rights Watch reported in 2003 that there have been some accounts of sexual violence against men and boys, particularly by the RUF, but most of the reports indicate sexual violence being carried out against women and girls.¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch states,

RUF rebels committed crimes of sexual violence in the course of their military operations, during which thousands of women and girls were abducted and forced to “marry” rebel “husbands.” These abducted women and girls were repeatedly raped and subjected to other forms of sexual

¹³² Danny Hoffman, “The Civilian Target in Sierra Leone and Liberia: Political Power, Military Strategy, and Humanitarian Intervention,” *African Affairs* no. 103 (2004): 216.

¹³³ “Findings,” in *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth & Reconciliation Commission*, Volume 2. (Accra: Graphic Packaging Ltd, 2004): 34. The report indicates that 11,429 of the 14,995 victims known to the Commission had information on sex and age. The percentage data comes from the 11,429 victims.

¹³⁴ As cited in Denov, 320. This can be compared with the estimation that 50,000 women were raped in Bosnia in the mid-1990s. Gerard J. DeGroot, “A Few Good Women: Gender Stereotypes, the Military and Peacekeeping,” in *Women and International Peacekeeping*, eds. Louise Olsson and Torunn L. Tryggstad (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 36. However, many more women likely experienced other forms of sexual violence. In a report on health and human rights in humanitarian crises, it is noted that, “[a]s in Bosnia and Liberia, the rape of women and girls has been widespread and systematic in Sierra Leone...sexual violence by rebel forces is a longstanding practice in the civil war and has been well documented.” Peter Salama, Bruce Laurence and Monica L Nolan, “Health and Human Rights in Contemporary Humanitarian Crises: is Kosovo More Important than Sierra Leone?” *BMJ*, 319, (11 December 1999): 1569.

¹³⁵ There is a lack of information on the sexual violence experienced by men and boys. Human Rights Watch, 42.

violence throughout the duration of their captivity, which in many cases lasted years.¹³⁶

Denov also recognizes the gender-based violence experienced by women and girls, suggesting that sexual violence was carried out far more often than other forms of mutilation, such as amputations, which were used to terrorize society and prevent civilians from voting.¹³⁷ In the field research conducted for this thesis, participants interviewed recognized that both women and men suffered, but most suggested that women suffered more. The director of one local non-governmental organization, when asked whether men and women experienced the war differently responded that,

[t]here is always a difference. Nobody can, well some men tried to say they have been raped, but nobody have (sic) ever used a sharp object to put into, excuse me, into the anus of a man. Yet they have done that to women. Nobody have (sic) split open the male's belly to see what is inside, let us just come and see is it a man or a woman inside? But they did that to women... So there are a lot of big differences in the way of torture, emotional grief, anything. Physically they were beaten they were battered, there is a lot anyway. There is a great difference.¹³⁸

Most organizations in Sierra Leone, whether local or international, recognized the severe gender-based violence that women faced during the conflict. While both men and women experienced violence in gendered ways, women particularly experienced sexual violence. While it is highly likely that some men did experience sexual violence as well, this was not brought up as a clear factor in the conflict. Women were considered to have suffered on both fronts, as human beings, and specifically as women.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch, 26.

¹³⁷ Denov, 320. Various forms of violence directed specifically at women and girls are highlighted in "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone."

¹³⁸ "Interview No. 8", TEDEWOSIL, November 22, 2007. A list of the local and international organizations interviewed in Sierra Leone is provided in Appendix C.

¹³⁹ "Interview No. 19", MARWOPNET, November 27, 2007. The representative for MARWOPNET, the Mano River Women's Peace Network stated, "Men of course and women experienced the civil war in Sierra Leone differently. One, they had women who were raped, either gang raped or taken as sex slaves, and their children they abducted and used as child soldiers, the same women, their husbands

The rebel forces also included a large number of children, many of whom were abducted. “In Sierra Leone, between 1992 and 1996, children were thought to constitute 80 percent of the RUF camp complement, while girls themselves constituted 30 percent of RUF forces.”¹⁴⁰ Women and girls carried out a variety of roles in the conflict. While girls in fighting forces shared many experiences with boy soldiers, they performed additional roles that were consistent with gendered conceptions. Augustine Park suggests that “during the war, girl soldiers not only fought, mined for diamonds and fulfilled other duties for armed groups, such as spying – as boys did – but also cooked, cleaned and performed sexual services.”¹⁴¹ Girls and women in fighting forces often carried out tasks that reinforced stereotypes of gender roles.

This violence was not only carried out by the RUF but also by the AFRC and the CDFs. UN and ECOMOG peacekeepers have also been implicated in accounts of sexual violence, albeit to a much lesser extent than the Sierra Leonean armed forces. Further, Human Rights Watch states that “[b]oth ECOMOG and UNAMSIL peacekeepers have sexually exploited women and solicited child prostitutes.”¹⁴² Sexual violence has been

were killed, so they suffered on three fronts. For men, if they were abducted, they were either forcefully conscripted, that was all. But the women suffered sexual violence, and most live with the trauma today, some got children out of the forced marriages and they are always a reminder of the experience. So they have their suffering differently from the men.” According to the organization, “The mission of the Mano River Women’s Peace Network is to advocate for and promote at all decision-making levels the involvement of women and youth in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict in the Mano River sub-region, throughout Africa and the world, to serve as a catalyst through which sustainable peace, human security and justice can be attained by ensuring gender responsive policies and building women’s/girls’ capacity for socio-economic, political empowerment and human development for all.” Mano River Women’s Peace Network, “Vision and Mission,” (2004-2005), Available at: http://www.marwopnet.org/vision_en.htm.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine S. J. Park, “‘Other Inhumane Acts’: Forced Marriage, Girl Soldiers and the Special Court for Sierra Leone,” *Social and Legal Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 321.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch has documented some cases of sexual violence by peacekeepers, including UNAMSIL and ECOMOG, and suggest that investigations into the allegations of sexual violence have been inadequate. Human Rights Watch, 48-50.

used to terrorize civilians, and to disrupt social order.¹⁴³ The complete destruction of social norms through sexual violence has traumatised many civilians and left great social destruction in the aftermath. While the breaking down of social norms can at times provide liberation from gender inequalities, in this particular case, it served to further victimize communities.

The personal testimonies gathered during this thesis research in Sierra Leone outlined the individual and community experiences of participants during and after the war.¹⁴⁴ A number of male participants stated that women experienced rape and gender-based violence, including being “bush wives”. Most female participants did not mention rape or sexual violence in particular, except as something that happened to a friend, relative or community member in their direct experience. The violence experienced by the men interviewed usually involved either physical violence or loss of property. Many felt that damage had been done to them personally as they lost all they had in the war. Although some women mentioned loss of property as well, their testimonies focused on their experience of displacement, lack of amenities and their experiences with their children. Women with children told their testimonies based on their experience of childbirth and providing for their children.¹⁴⁵ A female participant in Port Loko dealt

¹⁴³ Civilians were forced by the RUF to carry out sexual violence, including sexual violence committed by children. “The rebel forces have used sexual violence as a weapon to terrorize, humiliate and punish, and to force the civilian population into submission. The rebels sought complete domination by doing whatever they wanted with women, including sexual acts that, by having added the additional element of assailing cultural norms, violated not only the victim but also her family or the wider society.” Human Rights Watch, 35.

¹⁴⁴ While women interviewed did not discuss any personal experiences of sexual violence during or after the conflict, this may be a result of the unwillingness of participants to express any personal experience with sexual violence to an outsider. Discussion of sexual violence in general was even less common outside of Freetown, except for being mentioned by men.

¹⁴⁵ Women participant’s stories were marked by their pregnancies and the illness of their children, while men mentioned their wives, parents and siblings, but rarely their children. Women regularly had to deal with children’s illness, that their children were out of school during and after the war, and that they had to get food for their children, as suggested by their testimonies. One participant in Makeni sent her

with many abuses while she was pregnant and had her children with her. According to her testimony,

When I had my first child, six days after delivery, then there was an attack. We were captured, I was with them for 17 days. I had to run away from them and go to Makeni...After that I had to leave again for Kabala. That was the time I gave birth to the second child...The day I delivered her...we were captured again for another one week. So we had to spend the night, up to 11 hours, and it was raining. That caused the child to fall sick. So I had to try again to get to Freetown. During that time I was looking after her, and that was the time a man, a boy, raped her. She was 1 year and 10 months... . [N]o effort was put towards the case. So I decided to leave everything and leave the matter to God. So I had to bring the child to Port Loko, we are trying, little by little.¹⁴⁶

Women's experiences of the conflict included challenges related to their gendered roles, as childbearers, caretakers, mothers and wives. Men and women both experienced violence and displacement, which was particularly sustained over longer periods in the provinces, as these areas were often occupied longer than Freetown.¹⁴⁷

That the rebels and other factions would take property and food items from people as they encountered them was a common theme in both the provinces and in Freetown.

Women were often the ones going out to look for food, but this became increasingly risky when the war intensified, as was the case in Freetown during the rebel invasions of 1997 and 1999. A man in Freetown expressed that, "my wife usually used to move from her house...in the east end, where they used to find food to take care of the family. And no

children to Freetown and stayed in her home because there was not enough money for her to go as well. She experienced the war in Makeni, where her belongings were stolen and she had little food and amenities, a common experience in the provinces. "Interview No. 15", (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ "Interview No. 31", (Port Loko), December 8, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ While most women participants, except one woman who had been physically beaten and another whose arm had been amputated by the rebels, did not mention experiences of violence, this is possibly due to a different understanding of violence than the men participants. They may also have been less willing to discuss violence they experienced for fear of stigma or shame. Some women expressed that their husbands had been confronted by the rebels. Several of the men mentioned that their wives had been in confrontation with the rebels, but the men were usually also involved in that experience. In one testimony of a man in Makeni, his wife was pregnant and carrying poyo (palm wine) and the rebels caught her and put her in jail. He went to rescue her so they jailed him instead and released her. "Interview No. 13", (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

one is selling that food, unless the rebels, so it is not easy, they will disturb you, beat you, so you take a risk to go there, because there is no alternative, there is no way, you have to go there to get food, if not you will starve your family.”¹⁴⁸ While women often had more family responsibilities and experienced sexual violence, men were targeted by fighting forces as combatants, and either recruited or killed.¹⁴⁹ One male participant had been a child soldier with both the government and rebel forces, and another had hid from the civilian defence forces (CDF) and then the rebels, both of which were recruiting young men from the villages.¹⁵⁰ Speaking of his experience hiding from the rebels, this second participant from Port Loko stated,

they captured fifty men in Magburaka who they recruited into the RUF. All of the young boys and young men, able bodied men, all of them ran away, they hid themselves. When [the rebels] saw that the young boys were no longer around and the men, they resorted to going from one house to another to look for them. When we were told about that we went up to the roof to hide. It was (the) dry season. By then we were on the roof and the place was very hot, we stood there, and they said because they ... needed more manpower to help them attack Freetown they searched house to house to get the men to join them... . The rebels knew that all of the young men had gone into hiding, they sent another message that they are not taking any more men or boys to be recruited into the RUF, so all of the men and boys came out again. After a while they forcefully captured them again, many boys and men. After this incident, all of the boys and men went into hiding again.¹⁵¹

Women and men experienced the conflict and were targeted by the fighting factions in different ways, but there were some similarities in the hardships that they experienced including lack of access to food, employment and facilities, which still exists.

¹⁴⁸ “Interview No. 22”, November 28, 2007.

¹⁴⁹ “Interview No. 35”, (Amnesty International Sierra Leone), December 14, 2007. This interviewee suggested that men were the fighters with guns and power, and women, while they were also fighters, were more often the victims, they were raped, lost their families and were displaced.

¹⁵⁰ “Interview No. 34”, December 12, 2007 and “Interview No. 30”, (Port Loko), December 8, 2007, respectively.

¹⁵¹ “Interview No. 30”, (Port Loko), December 8, 2007.

Girls and women who became pregnant during the conflict as the result of sexual violence, or who acted as combatants in the war, faced extreme social stigmatization upon return to their communities. According to Susan McKay, “[c]ommunity members often react with hostility and fear to girls coming back from a rebel fighting force... . Consequently, returning girls are often provoked, stigmatized, and poorly accepted by community members and at school, if they attend. Girls returning with children conceived and born in a rebel force are especially stigmatized.”¹⁵² The violence experienced by women and girls during the conflict leaves its legacy in their treatment in the post-war period. The TRC recognizes that, “[w]omen who were the victims of sexual violence throughout the conflict in Sierra Leone have also suffered further blows. In attempting to resume normal family life, they have found that their husbands and in-laws reject them, precisely because of the violations they have experienced.”¹⁵³ Clearly, the aftermath of war is highly gendered in its treatment of those victimized by the conflict.

The support for women after the war was considered by local and international organizations to have been inadequate to address the trauma that women faced during the conflict. A representative of an international organization operating in Sierra Leone suggested that women had really been sidelined in the post-conflict period. “The war kept women down, they victimized women so badly and specifically to their gender, they singled women out for atrocities, and that keeps women subjugated, especially because the support after the war wasn’t good enough for them, they were forgotten about... . They haven’t had any apology or recognition of how awful what happened to them was,

¹⁵² McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces,” 393.

¹⁵³ “Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone,”: 198.

so it's kind of seen as ok to treat women like that."¹⁵⁴ That women should receive a direct apology from the government for the violence they experienced during the conflict was a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.¹⁵⁵

While the violence of the conflict has diminished in the post-war period, those that survived such violence have received little recognition or compensation and gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, continues at a high rate. The Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) stated,

[w]omen have always suffered violence... [T]raditionally in this country, there are a lot of barriers, traditional beliefs that act as barriers against women. There is the issue of domestic violence, there is the issue of inheritance, and in fact that has generated or stacked up the development of the three gender bills in parliament. After the war, we noticed that there [were] rampant complaints of rape, indecent assault and things like that, because it appeared then that the violence that existed during the war was having a filtering down effect on the society.¹⁵⁶

While some initiatives have been created to deal with violence against women, such as the Family Support Unit (FSU) within the police which is intended as a reporting mechanism for domestic violence, there are still serious barriers to progress in that area. These barriers including traditional beliefs and a lack of implementation of programs and policies, as well as a serious lack of organizations available to provide support for women who have been victims of sexual or gender-based violence.¹⁵⁷

Another example of gender discrimination in the aftermath is that combatants were not all equally demobilized or provided access to training and educational and economic opportunities. According to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women

¹⁵⁴ "Interview No. 33", International Organization in Sierra Leone, December 10, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ "Recommendations," in *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth & Reconciliation Commission*, Volume 3b. (Accra: Graphic Packaging Ltd, 2004): 168.

¹⁵⁶ "Interview No. 21", (Campaign for Good Governance), November 28, 2007.

¹⁵⁷ The Gender Acts will be discussed in the chapter on Legal Change.

and Children, “The DDR made a distinction between ‘ex-combatants’ and those recruited to serve for other purposes, which made it especially hard for girls and women leaving armed groups to find reintegration support.”¹⁵⁸ Many women and girls were considered “dependents” of the male soldiers, and the role of “forced marriage” in the conflict was not recognized through this process.¹⁵⁹ Because of this, while more than 72,000 people were disarmed, females (women and girls) made up only about 7.5 percent of those participating.¹⁶⁰ While women were very much involved in the combat and other operations of the fighting forces, it is clear that the gendered perception of ‘combatant’ informed the DDR process, and left many women behind. This has also created difficulties for women and girls in reintegrating back into their communities.

The conflict in Sierra Leone has created many challenges to the everyday lives of Sierra Leoneans, both men and women. It wreaked havoc on their communities and livelihoods, which people are only starting to rebuild now. Yet conflict can also have some positive impacts. The conflict in Sierra Leone, although it was characterized by severe atrocities, has also provided some potential opportunities for improved gender equality. Where these opportunities have been seized by the international community and local organizations, there has been some movement towards positive change as will be seen in subsequent chapters.

¹⁵⁸ Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone,” in *Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone*, (September 2002): 1. Available at: www.womenscommission.org

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-5. McKay states that 6,052 boys went through the DDR process, compared with 506 girls. McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces,” 393.

Chapter 3: “Elekshon biznes na ol man biznes” – Political Representation



There are key challenges in achieving gender equality in political representation in post-conflict governments. This may be directly related to the formal peace process, as it often culminates in elections. While it is clear that women are often left out of the formal peace negotiation process, there have been some changes in terms of political representation resulting from the activity of local women’s organizations.

The political environment in Sierra Leone has changed significantly compared to the period prior to the conflict. Increasingly Sierra Leoneans are participating in elections as voters, and the transparency of the electoral process is improving. Yet, there

are still barriers to access for women in standing as candidates. There has been a great deal of mobilization on the part of local women's organizations and the international community to improve women's participation in the political process, but there are still challenges in the willingness of Sierra Leoneans to vote for women, and structural challenges in ensuring that political parties put forward women to stand for election. There is greater awareness of the need for gender equality in politics, but more needs to be done to actually move this forward in practice. To better understand this, a depiction of the pre-war and war periods will be offered before analysis of the post-war experience.

Before the War

Women in Sierra Leone have been politically active since before Independence, particularly in local politics. LaRay Denzer states that "Mende and Temne women in Freetown played a role in the system of tribal administration. They could serve as section heads and sat on tribal headman councils, but no woman was elected as tribal headman until 1960."¹⁶¹ However, this suggests that women were actively involved in community political representation, and had made some gains in access.

In terms of national politics, women in colonial Sierra Leone achieved the right to vote in 1930, so long as they met property and income requirements, the same requirements for men.¹⁶² The first woman to stand for elected office in Sierra Leone was Constance Cummings-John, who was elected to the Freetown Municipal Council in

¹⁶¹ LaRay Denzer, "Women in Freetown Politics, 1914-61: A Preliminary Study," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57, no. 4 (1987): 440. Sierra Leone has an elected President who appoints a Cabinet with the approval of the legislature. The Parliament consists of elected representatives, as well as 12 Paramount Chiefs, who are also elected. More recently, local councils have been created to decentralize power and decision-making. Beyond these formal structures, there are local traditional leaders, local chiefs, who often make political and other decisions, as will be discussed further in the following chapter.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 442. Keeping in mind, of course, that women's ability to own property and have sufficient income was limited in this period, as it remains today.

1938.¹⁶³ Cummings-John was later responsible in part for the establishment of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement in 1951.¹⁶⁴ While there was little political involvement of women immediately following WWII, Denzer suggests that "[t]he situation changed in 1951. The establishment of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement (SLWM) shook women out of their apathy."¹⁶⁵ Mabel Dove, who was Constance Cummings-John's cousin, was elected to the Legislature in 1954, the first woman in West Africa to attain such a position.¹⁶⁶ The SLWM focused on women of the lower and lower middle classes and established adult literacy classes, child care for working women, health care classes and a women's cooperative for market women.¹⁶⁷ Elections in 1951 had no female candidates, but in 1957, there were two female candidates as members of the SLPP. Although the two women won in their constituencies, election petitions were put against them and neither actually entered parliament.¹⁶⁸ However, a female paramount chief was elected to one of the seats reserved for chiefs, Madam Ella Koblo Gulama, and she eventually became Sierra Leone's first woman Minister.¹⁶⁹ In 1958 three women were on the Freetown Municipal Council and in 1960 the deputy mayor and Mende headman in Freetown were women.¹⁷⁰

As Independence neared, the political parties in Sierra Leone became polarized along ethnic lines, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) representing the Protectorate and the National Council of Sierra Leone (NC) representing the Krio population of

¹⁶³ Denzer, 444.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 445.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 447.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 447.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 448.

¹⁶⁸ Denzer states that Cummings-John was prevented from entering Parliament because of family and party pressure, and Patience Richards was unseated through the election petition against her. Denzer, 450.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 449-450.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 451.

Freetown.¹⁷¹ Just prior to talks for Independence, the list of delegates to participate in talks in London included no women. The SLWM demanded inclusion and the government allowed two women delegates, who mediated between the two parties.¹⁷²

Following Independence, women received little political support from the parties in Sierra Leone, and when Siaka Stevens and the APC gained power in 1967, “the party’s performance in rewarding political women with appointments and nomination for office was no better than that of the SLPP.”¹⁷³ The APC did have a women’s section, the National Congress of Sierra Leone Women, with a membership of about 35,000 in 1970, although it did not act independently of the party.¹⁷⁴ However, the one-party state created under the APC was not open to democratic change, and effectively left women out of the political process. As noted in 1985, “Sierra Leone, which has been a one-party state since 1977, holds intra-party elections but with few attempts at mass mobilization of the type that could incorporate the ordinary woman into the political process. Women have more chance at political participation in those one-party systems that make some attempt at genuine intra-party elections.”¹⁷⁵ While it is argued that Sierra Leone’s intra-party elections did allow for some competition within certain localities, the elections were also characterized by violence as a tactic of ousting the competition.¹⁷⁶

Denzer suggests that women in Sierra Leone did not have improved political opportunities following Independence. Writing in 1987, Denzer argues, “[a]lthough some Sierra Leonean writers have asserted that women in their country suffer relatively

¹⁷¹ Denzer, 449.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 450. The mediation role of women in Sierra Leone continued during and after the war.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹⁷⁵ Rhoda E. Howard, “Women and the Crisis in Commonwealth Africa,” *International Political Science Review* 6, no. 3 (1985): 292.

¹⁷⁶ Fred M. Hayward and Ahmed R. Dumbuya, “Changing Electoral Patterns in Sierra Leone: The 1982 Single-Party Elections,” *African Studies Review* 28, no. 4 (1985): 81.

little economic and social discrimination and have equal chances in competition, this is romanticism. It ignores the difficulties that faced women in the past and continue to face them in the present.”¹⁷⁷ Sierra Leonean women’s experience of declined political involvement after Independence is not unlike those in other sub-Saharan African states.¹⁷⁸ Women’s participation in national politics did not increase in the post-Independence period, despite the socialist and egalitarian claims of APC President Siaka Stevens.

However, while women’s national political involvement did not improve during this time, their local political involvement was significant. According to Carol P. Hoffer, “[i]n 1970, 10 of the 146 chiefdoms in Sierra Leone were headed by women.”¹⁷⁹ Beyond chiefdom, women were also involved in local political structures. As of 1979, 15.6 percent of local politicians were women, including mayors, deputy mayors and councillors.¹⁸⁰ In 1977, Constance Cummings- John became the first female mayor of the Freetown City Council.¹⁸¹

During the War

During the war, women were politically active in the peace process. Women formed a number of organizations to help facilitate the peace, including organizations

¹⁷⁷ Denzer, 452.

¹⁷⁸ In a review of the feminist leanings of African women, including women in Sierra Leone, Gwendolyn Mikell states, “In the early part of this century [20th Century], women’s declining political status was directly related to the oppressive control of the colonial regime. African women took strength from the fact that their participation was essential if their countries were to end the colonial experience and achieve independence. However, after independence, male suppression of African women’s political autonomy increased, despite the contributions women had made to nationalist politics and despite state claims to equitable approaches in education, policies, and laws.” Gwendolyn Mikell, “African Feminism: Toward a New Politics of Representation,” *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 407.

¹⁷⁹ Carol P. Hoffer, “Mende and Sherbro Women in High Office,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 151-152.

¹⁸⁰ Marnie S. Shaul, “The Status of Women in Local Governments: An International Assessment,” *Public Administration Review* 42, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1982): 495.

¹⁸¹ “Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone,” 95.

focused on ensuring free and fair elections and on encouraging women to vote in the 1996 elections. According to the TRC Report,

At the beginning of 1994, rural and urban women of all classes and ethnic affiliations organised protest marches and peace rallies across the country. From 1994 onwards, pioneering women of the likes of Amy Smythe, Elizabeth Lavalie, Dr. Kadie Sesay and Zainab Bangura, along with women's groups such as the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), Women's Movement for Peace, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Women's Forum, Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace and many others, took the lead in rallying society towards the cessation of hostilities. Women activists organised seminars, embarked on public marches, held conferences and worked tirelessly towards the elections of 26 February 1996. They educated civilians on electoral proceedings, recruited and trained observers and pressured the military rulers to respect the results of elections. Women's groups also figured prominently in influencing Brigadier Maada Bio's National Provincial Ruling Council (NPRC) military government to hold democratic elections in the first place. These efforts were led by the group known as Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN). The Women's Forum, an umbrella body for women's NGOs in Sierra Leone, organised a march on 9 February 1996 to petition the then Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) concerning the upcoming elections. Eventually, women helped monitor the conduct of the polls on 26 February, which led to the assumption of office by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.¹⁸²

The work of women such as Dr. Kadi Sesay and Zainab Bangura, and the role of women's organizations in ensuring that elections proceeded and in ending the conflict suggests that women were very politically active in Sierra Leone. Yet their formal political representation did not fully reflect this.

As a result of the elections in 1996, women represented 3.8 percent of the total Ministerial positions.¹⁸³ They also held about six percent of the total seats in Parliament in 1996.¹⁸⁴ According to the TRC Report, in the 2002 elections,

¹⁸² "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone," 193. See Lynda R. Day, "Dr. Kadi Sesay: Sierra Leone Feminist and Advocate for Democracy," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 25, no. 1 (1997): 20.

¹⁸³ *Human Development Report 1998: Consumption for Human Development*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998): 241.

more than 165 women contested in various capacities, with 46 women running for parliamentary seats. Seven of the eight political parties contesting the 2002 general elections and chieftaincy positions fielded women. The last election also saw the emergence of the first woman Deputy Speaker of the House of Parliament, the first woman Presidential candidate and the first two women Presidential running mates. In total the election saw 18 women, two of whom are Paramount Chiefs, become members of Parliament. The previous parliament had only eight women in total. The current government has at the time of writing, three women cabinet Ministers and three deputy Ministers compared to only two cabinet Ministers and two deputy Ministers in the previous administration.¹⁸⁵

According to the 2005 *Human Development Report*, women have 14.5 percent of the total seats in Parliament.¹⁸⁶ At the Ministerial level, women represented 13 percent of the total Ministerial positions as of January 2005.¹⁸⁷ Despite women in Sierra Leone achieving formal political equality at Independence, there is still an unequal proportion of women in government.¹⁸⁸ There has been some improvement in women's political representation since the end of the conflict, including a slight increase in the number of female Paramount chiefs. However, there was no substantial improvement in the number of women in Parliament and Cabinet after the 2007 elections, as discussed below.

After the War

The 2007 elections were widely considered free and fair, despite a few logistical problems and small disturbances. The success of the elections was largely due to the work of local organizations and the international community, as well as that of the

¹⁸⁴ As outlined in *Human Development Report 1998*, 241.

¹⁸⁵ "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone," 226.

¹⁸⁶ This data is for seats in Parliament as of March 1, 2005. See *Human Development Report 2005: International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2005): 306. This percent remained the same in 2006, and new data for the 2007 elections has not yet been made available.

¹⁸⁷ *Human Development Report 2005*, 319.

¹⁸⁸ To put this level into some context, Canada, which ranked fifth in the Human Development Index in 2005, has 24.7 percent of seats in Parliament held by women. In South Africa, which ranked 121 out of 177 in the 2008 Human Development Index, 32.8 percent of the permanent seats in Parliament are held by women. Sierra Leone ranked 176/177 in the Index in 2005 and 177/177 in 2008.

National Electoral Commission (NEC), headed by Christina Thorpe. This was the main response from academics, international organizations and local organizations in Sierra Leone as well as by participants interviewed for this study. Dr. Augustine Park suggests that civil society organizations played an important role in the elections, including the Campaign for Good Governance and National Electoral Commission.¹⁸⁹ Further, the 50/50 Group stated, “I would say the 2007 elections were the best elections in Sierra Leone because there is a lot of awareness on the part of the people and the politicking itself went on with a lot of awareness, people knew their rights, they knew what was to be done. Because it was transparent, the NEC tried as much as possible to be transparent, that helped. I believe the results were the will of the people.”¹⁹⁰ Many of the individual participants expressed the good work of the NEC and their current satisfaction with the election, as well as hopes that the new government will create change for Sierra Leone.¹⁹¹

Of the 23 individuals interviewed, every single person indicated that they voted in the 2007 elections, and the primary reason given for voting was because they had a right to vote, to exercise their franchise, and to create a change for Sierra Leone.¹⁹² Regardless of whether these responses are accurate, it is evident that the importance of voting is widely understood and espoused by Sierra Leoneans. What is perhaps more significant is the ability of women to stand as candidates for election, and the willingness of Sierra Leoneans to vote for women.

¹⁸⁹ “Interview with Dr. Augustine Park”, September 24, 2007.

¹⁹⁰ “Interview No. 9”, (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

¹⁹¹ A few of the organizations in Sierra Leone that were interviewed indicated that there were some challenges with the electoral process, such as that a final report by the NEC has not been produced, and that there was some concern with the polls from certain regions having been disqualified without adequate justification. However, the overwhelming response from organizations and individuals was that they felt the elections were free and fair and reflected the will of the people of Sierra Leone.

¹⁹² Most also indicated that they voted in 2002, even a few that would have been underage, but fewer voted in 1996, because they were not in Sierra Leone or were not qualified to vote (again primarily because of age).

In the interviews with individuals in Sierra Leone, every participant stated that they would vote for a woman if she ran in a future election, particularly in the parliamentary elections.¹⁹³ However, most also put qualifications on their responses, that they would vote for a woman if she had certain qualities they were looking for in a candidate. One woman from Port Loko stated that she would vote for a woman candidate “but it’s only if they meet what I am looking out for, if they meet the criteria, I will not just vote because the person is a woman.”¹⁹⁴ However, while most participants indicated that they would vote for a woman in the future, some indicated that they had not done so in past elections. A woman from Freetown stated that in 1996 she did not vote for the female candidate for President because this woman would not get a majority of votes, so she didn’t want to waste her vote. Instead she chose from among the candidates with a possibility of winning.¹⁹⁵ The lack of overall support for female candidates means that even those interested in voting for them are sometimes deterred from doing so.

Despite the apparent willingness of the individuals interviewed to vote for female candidates, when they were asked if other Sierra Leoneans would vote for women, the responses were much more varied. Only about half of the responses were affirmative. A man from Freetown indicated that in the past, “women were not voted for much. Because people think that women should not have power, there were not many women in politics. Some men think that women should always be submissive to men, under the authority of men... .Most men think that women in the home are slaves... .If you do not

¹⁹³ When first asked this question, most participants assumed the question was focused on a woman candidate for President, and to this their responses were much more varied, although some said they were willing because of the work of the female President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

¹⁹⁴ “Interview No. 3”, November 15, 2007. This was a common sentiment among those interviewed. Some participants also indicated that women have particular characteristics that make them suitable in politics, such as being less corrupt than male politicians and that they will be better able to champion the needs of women.

¹⁹⁵ “Interview No. 7”, November 21, 2007.

practice it in the home, then you cannot do it in politics.”¹⁹⁶ There are still strong attitudes towards having women engaged at an equal level in both the private and public spheres. However, this was not only a male attitude, there was also recognition that many women are not willing to vote for other women. “[T]hat’s a big problem because [in] Sierra Leone, we are having a male-dominated political arena in our country. People are not willing, even we as women are not willing to vote for women candidates.”¹⁹⁷ Willingness to vote for female candidates has not necessarily improved, as there are still beliefs that women should not be engaged in the political process as candidates.

At issue is not only the willingness of Sierra Leoneans to vote for women, but also the ability of women to stand as candidates for election. MARWOPNET suggested that “there is increased willingness. But then again we have hiccoughs, elections generally here involve a lot of resources, and women don’t have resources. So even though the willingness is increasing, the ability to bring about women into parliament is really a problem... when it comes to politics, you have to fight your way through.”¹⁹⁸ Beyond resources, female candidates also face challenges in their communities. The Human Rights Commission noted one case in which a woman standing for election in a southern district received a letter from the male secret society indicating that she should not run, and that they would not vote for her.¹⁹⁹ While she did win, this indicates some clear challenges for women candidates. The ability of women to stand as candidates thus depends on their ability to mobilize resources and deal with negative campaigns against them. In a number of instances, women were simply not given the symbol to stand for

¹⁹⁶ “Interview No. 25”, December 6, 2007.

¹⁹⁷ “Interview No. 3”, November 15, 2007.

¹⁹⁸ “Interview No. 19”, (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

¹⁹⁹ “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

election, which means that they were not selected to represent their political party as a candidate in their constituency. Rather the party symbol was given to another candidate, usually a male candidate. The Forum for African Women Educationalists argued that,

[w]e tried to get the political parties to have 30 percent [women candidates]... . They made us promises, promises, promises, but then at the end when they awarded the symbols, they only awarded symbols I think to 20 women or 25 women or something out of 60 [women] who regionally asked for it... . And then, because we know that we have the kind of parliamentary system where before we had proportional representation... . It was so easy, we had more women in parliament.²⁰⁰

Women must overcome great challenges to run as candidates in an election, aside from the issue of whether there is willingness in the population to vote for them.

Party willingness to put forward female candidates is now a clear focus for women's organizations in Sierra Leone. Kerry Smith at Amnesty International United Kingdom argues that having party backing provides great influence for getting elected.²⁰¹ While she argues that international pressure is encouraging parties to put forward female candidates, this did not largely happen in the last election. However, the role of political parties in improving women's participation in politics is increasingly recognized, and has become the focus of work by local women's organizations. The 50/50 Group was formed to ensure equal representation of women in politics, and now women's organizations are focusing on a campaign to ensure that political parties have thirty percent female

²⁰⁰ "Interview No. 5", (FAWE), November 20, 2007. FAWE is a pan-African women's organization focused on promoting girl child education in a number of African countries. For the 2007 election, Sierra Leone switched from a Proportional Representation electoral system to a Majoritarian system, which has been noted as preventing women's access to parliaments. Staffan I. Lindberg states, "majoritarian systems discriminate against the representation of women in legislatures... the more proportional the electoral system, the larger the share of the legislature that will be occupied by women MPs." Staffan I. Lindberg, "Women's Empowerment and Democratization: The Effects of Electoral Systems, Participation, and Experience in Africa," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, (Spring, 2004) 39, No. 1: 35. While Lindberg argues that proportional systems may not greatly increase the number of women in parliament, it is clear that majoritarian systems hinder women's access to parliament.

²⁰¹ "Interview with Kerry Smith (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007. Note, Kerry Smith is no longer with Amnesty International UK, but her time spent in Sierra Leone was as a volunteer for the organization's research mission in to the lack of access to justice for rural women.

candidates. They state, “we as women are working towards the thirty percent quota, for it to be introduced and to be included in the constitution and also the political parties registration commission, because this is the only way we will ensure that we will have 30 percent representation by women, so this is a major thing that we are working on... . We are doing a lot of lobbying on that, and hope we will be able to succeed.”²⁰² Women face challenges in getting equal representation and involvement in the political process, and this has become a clear area of work for many organizations on the ground, including attempts to change legislation. However, more will need to be done to sustain any positive changes in the longer term.

Finally, there are still concerns about the ability of women who are elected or appointed to political positions to participate and to further advance women’s issues in Sierra Leone. Zoe Dugal, a UN worker in the post-conflict period argues, “It’s one thing to get elected but it’s another thing to get influence. And in Sierra Leone, it’s not because you get elected that you will be able to do anything, it’s who you know in the party and if you know the president and if you are in the right family circle and so on.”²⁰³ Networks and personal relationships still have a great deal of influence in terms of who has power and access to resources and decision-making. While participants often noted key women in positions of power, the ability of these women to make a difference depends on the position they hold and where that position fits within the political system. That the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs is a woman does not necessarily mean that this Ministry is afforded a great deal of influence in terms of government decision-making. The ability for women in positions of power to create

²⁰² “Interview No. 9”, (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

²⁰³ “Interview with Zoe Dugal”, October 21, 2007.

increased gender equality also depends heavily on the interest and willingness of the women in these positions to do so.²⁰⁴

Most of the individual participants felt that having more women in the government would make a difference; women would advocate for women's issues, make the government more transparent, and women in positions of power serve as role models for other women, encouraging them to take up similar positions. A woman in Freetown said that women should also be heard in politics, "getting more women in parliament will make other women to do more efforts. Not only the men should speak in the nation, but getting more women, sometimes women's voice should be heard, if we don't have them in parliament, we will not be heard, no one will be there to push our case."²⁰⁵ Many participants felt that women needed greater representation in government and politics, and that this would create change if they were given positions with real power. This belief has been facilitated by the few women in positions of power since the end of the conflict, as well as the work of local women's organizations to advocate for women's involvement in politics and in other areas such as employment and education.

There is still a great deal of work to be done to further gender equality in terms of political representation in Sierra Leone, including increasing the willingness of

²⁰⁴ Kerry Smith suggests that more women in the government might make a difference but that it "[d]epends on whether they have a gendered appreciation of the policies of government and creative ways of explaining to people and thinking of ways in which they can have an equality impact. At present I would say probably not, I mean not in the past government I think did the presence of women necessarily mean better representation of women's rights in government." "Interview with Kerry Smith", (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007. Instead, she suggests that the legislation produced in support of equal rights for women (the Gender Acts, which will be discussed in the next chapter) had more to do with the work from the grassroots level than as a result of the percentage of women in government.

²⁰⁵ "Interview No. 7", November 21, 2007. The Campaign for Good Governance stated that having more women with experience and the necessary qualifications would make a difference, particularly in the area of corruption and in the representation of the interests of their constituencies. "Interview No. 21", (Campaign for Good Governance), November 28, 2007. Others had different reasons as to why having more women would make a difference for the country, including that women will represent women's issues, that women are mothers and therefore more caring, that women are less interested in gaining personal power as compared to men and that they will bring new ideas for development.

individuals to vote for female candidates in elections, getting political parties to put forward female candidates, and ensuring that women, once elected, are actually able to influence policymaking. The work of local organizations in collaboration with the international community is now focusing on changing attitudes and changing legislation that impedes women's access to political representation.

Although change in the area of political representation has been slow, and has faced setbacks, the political participation of women has improved in the post-war period compared with the periods prior to and during the war. Women both participated and were represented in politics before the war, but this was not widespread. During the war, women's formal political participation and representation declined, despite the increase in their informal participation in negotiations and peacebuilding. This informal work of women's organizations increased during the war, and has continued in the longer-term post-war period. Women's organizations continue to lobby politicians and political parties and engage in voter campaigns. The support of their efforts by the international community has led to positive steps towards improving gender equality in the aftermath. This suggests that for the case of Sierra Leone, the hypothesis in the literature that the work of the international community and civil society organizations leads to increased political representation for women in the post-war period (H2A) has been upheld, although this gain is certainly not without ongoing challenges.

Chapter 4: “If we just have these laws on paper, the women will still suffer” – Legal Change



In the area of legal change, the recent Gender Acts were a great step forward in ensuring access to justice for women in Sierra Leone. They have opened up new opportunities for addressing other inequalities in so far as the law is concerned. However, there is now a great deal of work to be done to ensure the implementation of these laws. This includes reform of the justice system and education of the local population to enable them to recognize and champion their rights.²⁰⁶ Without this, these

²⁰⁶ According to a report by the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance, “[t]he laws in Sierra Leone are a combination of the Constitution, common law, statutory law and an unwritten customary law.” Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance, *Unequal Rights: Discriminatory Laws Against Women in Sierra Leone*, (Freetown: United Nations Development Programme, 2002), 1. However, the application of these laws varies across the country, “[t]he customary legal system continues to have far more practical relevance for the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans than the formal legal system.” Open Society Justice Initiative,

laws will be little more than legislation that exists in the books but not in practice, a serious challenge in Sierra Leone. These legal changes have been pushed for by local organizations with the assistance of the international community, and their continued involvement is essential for improvement in this area. There have been positive steps in legal changes and political representation in terms of gender equality, and continued progress could make a significant difference in the lives of Sierra Leoneans in the future.

Before the War

The Law Reform Commission Act came into force in 1975, and sought to review and reform laws in Sierra Leone. Some of the reforms included laws related to marriage and inheritance. Prior to the reforms, widows were not able to inherit their husbands' estates, including property and land.²⁰⁷ According to H. M. Joko Smart,

[i]t was the view of the Commission that the days when women were regarded as the chattels of their husbands had long gone and that they should be treated on an equal basis with their husbands. Therefore, the first draft Bill allowed the surviving spouse to inherit the whole estate of the deceased (intestate) spouse. This Bill, however, raised eyebrows in government quarters and the Bills Committee of Cabinet suggested that some part of the estate should go to the children. An amended draft by the Commission now gives the surviving spouse one-third and the children the remainder.²⁰⁸

Thus, women were at this stage viewed as needing more rights of inheritance, although not to the degree proposed by the Commission. Further, in the case of polygynous

"Between Law and Society: Paralegals and the Provision of Primary Justice Services in Sierra Leone," (New York: Open Society Institute, 2006): 9.

²⁰⁷ An example of the control of property, land and other resources by men is given by David M. Rosen who, writing about the protests by Kono women over their control of the sale of food crops in 1971, states, "[i]n Kono, jural rights in land are invested in men. As members of peasant households, women have access to land as wives, sisters, or daughters of male household heads. As wives, however, women gain *de facto* control over land, because wives actually organize farm production." However, when women challenged the *de jure* control of the land by men based on women's role in cultivating the land, their claims were rejected on the basis that only men had legal rights to land. David M. Rosen, "The Peasant Context of Feminist Revolt in West Africa," *Anthropological Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January, 1983): 40-41.

²⁰⁸ H. M. Joko Smart, "Recent Trends in Law Reform in Sierra Leone," *Journal of African Law* 31, no. ½ (Spring, 1987): 144.

marriages, the inheritance assigned to the widow would be further divided based on the number of wives in the household.²⁰⁹ These changes do not demonstrate legal equality in the case of inheritance, but they do demonstrate an understanding of the need to begin to address discrimination.

The ability of women to use their social networks to negotiate within their marriages is discussed by Rosalind Shaw, in her research on the Temne in Sierra Leone. According to Shaw, Temne “women were never anchored to the extent of being trapped in their marriages. A wife could withdraw her cooperation and refuse to cook, to work on the farm, or to have sex with her husband; she could go back to her natal home and require her husband to beg formally for her return; she could take a lover and perhaps leave her husband for him; and ultimately she could divorce and remarry. Women’s protests had force because men were dependent upon their wives, and most were reluctant to lose one.”²¹⁰ Although this does not suggest full equality, it does suggest that women have been able to use the power they do have within their relationships, as well as their social networks, to better their situation. While women’s equal legal status in marriage may not have been recognized at this time, certainly their ability to negotiate their space and relationships is significant.²¹¹ However, it should also be noted that legal reforms related to women’s equality in marriage, divorce and inheritance have been established in the post-conflict period, as will be discussed below.

²⁰⁹ Smart 144.

²¹⁰ Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, 161-162.

²¹¹ In a study of divorce frequency among the Temne, Vernon R. Dorjahn states that acceptable reasons for a husband to divorce a wife include: unfaithfulness, refusal to cook or do farm work, thievery, and desertion, among others. This is contrasted with the acceptable reasons for a wife to divorce a husband which include: violence or disrespect, failure to adequately provide for the wife and children, and thievery, among others. Vernon R. Dorjahn, “The Marital Game, Divorce, and Divorce Frequency among the Temne of Sierra Leone,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 173. This suggests that both husband and wife are able to initiate divorce, and that women do have some means for ending a marriage.

After the War²¹²

The violence carried out during the conflict was recognized in the immediate post-war period, and its gender-based nature was considered to be a result of unequal gender relations that existed prior to the conflict. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made a number of recommendations to improve gender equality out of the recognition of women's experiences before and during the conflict. The Report states,

[w]omen and girls were the deliberate targets of sexual violence and rape by all the armed groups during the conflict. Women continue to be victims of gender-based violence. The Commission has noted the submissions made by women's groups, which point to the failure of successive governments to protect women and girls during the conflict and post-conflict periods.²¹³

This recognition of women's experience and the need for an apology and action by the government has resulted in tools for activism for local and international organizations.²¹⁴ According to Jamesina King, who is now the Chair of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, the TRC was fundamental in ensuring movement forward for women in the post-war period. "During the course of its work, women's organizations saw the TRC not only as a means to address the harms done to women victims, but also as a forum in which to advocate for legal reform. The inequality that women had faced in society

²¹² The major legal changes that took place during the war included the creation of a multiparty constitution in 1991, and three Commissions of Inquiry into the corrupt practices of the previous government established by the NPRC in 1992. Other legal changes largely involved electoral procedures, and a widely popular "clean-up campaign" designed to improve the appearance of cities in Sierra Leone. Despite the electoral changeover in 1996, the ongoing conflict and instability meant that the period during the war did not see great legal change related to gender equality. Because this is the subject of this chapter, the period of during the war has been omitted. For more on other legal changes during the conflict, see Kpundeh, 139-157, Kandeh, 91-111, and Joseph A. Opala, "Ecstatic Renovation!": Street Art Celebrating Sierra Leone's 1992 Revolution," *African Affairs* 93, no. 371 (April, 1994): 195-218.

²¹³ "Recommendations," 168.

²¹⁴ The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) argued that "in post-conflict reconciliation or reconstruction, it's good to do gender analysis, so you meet women's post-war needs. You don't lump them together, you don't just say this community suffered so we treat them as one, you have to be specific about women's needs, because they suffered differently." "Interview No. 19", (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007. Unfortunately, this was not always well done in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation processes in Sierra Leone.

before the war, and continued to face afterwards, had only been exacerbated by the gross violations they suffered during the conflict.”²¹⁵ This recognition by the TRC of gender inequality has made a significant impact on the push for change in the aftermath.

Another key recognition of the gender-based violence experienced in the war was the recent decision by the Trial Chamber of the Special Court of Sierra Leone to allow a new charge of ‘Crimes Against Humanity- Other Inhumane Acts (Forced Marriage)’. This decision is significant as it was the first of its kind, and more specifically because it recognized crimes against humanity perpetrated within an armed group.²¹⁶ However, much is still needed to address gender-based violence beyond legal indictments.²¹⁷ Further, legal change in many areas has been slow in addressing discrimination against women and girls, and the Special Court has not always been open to hearing about crimes of sexual violence, as was the case in the trials of former CDF commanders.²¹⁸

In the post-war period, as of 2006, women continued to face legal impediments to gender equality, particularly as the result of multiple legal systems and discriminatory laws. According to Amnesty International, “[t]reated as minors under the guardianship of a male family member, women lack formal equality in marriage and the ownership or administration of common property, either during the marriage or when it has ended. . . . Women’s access to justice and redress is severely impeded.”²¹⁹ Since the end of the conflict, the Law Reform Commission has included gender on its agenda for legal

²¹⁵ Jamesina King, “Gender and Reparations in Sierra Leone,” International Centre for Transitional Justice; Available at: <http://www.ictj.org/static/Africa/SierraLeone/SierraLeoneExecSum.pdf>. King is the Chair of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

²¹⁶ Park, 328.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 330.

²¹⁸ Michelle Staggs Kelsall and Shanee Stepakoff, “‘When We Wanted to Talk About Rape’: Silencing Sexual Violence at the Special Court for Sierra Leone,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1 (2007): 355-374.

²¹⁹ Amnesty International, “Sierra Leone: Women face human rights abuses in the informal legal sector,” (17 May 2006); Available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGAFR510022006>.

reform.²²⁰ According to the TRC, since the end of the war there has been increased work to incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into national legislation.²²¹

The Gender Acts dealing with domestic violence, inheritance of property and customary marriage were passed in June 2007 as part of constitutional reforms completed prior to the election of the new government.²²² Awareness about the need for changes in legislation was a result of the conflict, and the recognition of discrimination and violence against women. A representative of UNIOSIL argued that one factor was that because many men died during the war, it became necessary to address the issue of inheritance of property in a more systematic way, particularly as more women became heads of the household.²²³ On a broader level, the amendment of discriminatory legislation was also a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which recognized that discrimination against women and girls resulted in violence during and after the conflict and has prevented full equality. The Report states,

Women and girls in Sierra Leone, before, during and after the conflict, were subjected to discrimination by practice, custom and law. There is no basis to justify the discrimination that women have endured in Sierra Leone. The legal apparatus that entrenches discrimination against women must be dismantled. The Commission recommends the repeal of all statutory and customary laws that discriminate against women.²²⁴

²²⁰ "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone," 225.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 225-226. This was a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that the government must implement its obligations under CEDAW. "Recommendations," 172. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has also been reviewing discriminatory laws to bring them in line with CEDAW. Rawwida Baksh, "Gender Mainstreaming in Post-conflict Reconstruction," in eds. Baksh et al., 89.

²²² The acts are as follows: The Registration of Customary marriage and Divorce Act, 2007; The Domestic Violence Act, 2007; and The Devolution of Estates Act, 2007.

²²³ "Interview No. 37", (UNIOSIL), December 18, 2007.

²²⁴ "Recommendations," 172.

In an attempt to address the issue of domestic violence, which was also a growing concern following the conflict, the government created the Family Support Unit within the police force, and the criminalization of domestic violence has improved women's access to justice.²²⁵ It is clear that although the Parliament was responsible for passing the legislation, the role that local and international organizations played in the passing of the Gender Acts was fundamental in putting pressure on parliamentarians to do so, and in demonstrating the need for these legal changes.

Many local organizations in conjunction with international organizations pushed for this new legislation to be passed. The Mano River Women's Peace Network explained the process,

The Law Department of the Government made a draft, lawyers had to do a better draft, and then civil society members pressed on, and on the 20th of March...women came out in large numbers to lobby with the President to make sure the bills were passed before he left office. So he had to issue a certificate of emergency, because normally the parliamentary procedure is long, he could not have gone through in that short period remaining.²²⁶

Most organizations recognized their own work and that of other local women's organizations, international NGOs on the ground in Sierra Leone, and even the involvement of international campaigns to put pressure on the government from outside the country to pass the legislation. Individuals interviewed recognized the involvement

²²⁵ "Interview No. 37", (UNIOSIL), December 18, 2007. According to an Amnesty International public statement on access to justice for rural women in Sierra Leone, "[t]he domestic violence law gives family support units in the police the necessary tools to either mediate disputes or to support women who decide to take criminal and civil action when their rights are violated." The law on inheritance rights gives women legal right to property when their husbands die, without interference from others, and the law on marriage provides for the registration of customary marriages, giving women rights guaranteed in formal marriages. Amnesty International, "Sierra Leone: Gender laws mean greater rights and protection for women," (19 June 2007); Available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR510022007?open&of=ENG-SLE>. In explaining the law on inheritance to property, a male participant stated, "the men see a lot of advantage to women. Like for example, if I married you...when I lost my life (sic)...I leave that property for my kids so that my wife will use that property to take care of my kids, the family will just...take all of the property... So if they pass that bill, it's a very good advantage for women. "Interview No. 22", November 28, 2007.

²²⁶ "Interview No. 19", (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

of civil society organization, parliamentarians, NGOs and even the UN in ensuring that the legislation was passed.²²⁷ This combination of organizations had a powerful impact on the passing of the legislation, and is now involved in ensuring that there is awareness and implementation of these legal changes.²²⁸

Aside from knowledge of these laws was the question of whether they will be implemented effectively. The implementation of legislation can be problematic when it impacts on culturally sensitive practices and disrupts a system based on power hierarchies and community norms.²²⁹ Because the changes in legislation significantly affect customary marriage, customs of inheritance, and the methods for dealing with domestic disputes, implementation will be a challenge.²³⁰ The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) argues that justice sector reform is essential to the implementation of the Gender Acts:

[T]here must be the development of access to justice in the country. A lot of courts have to be built in the provinces, there must be the decentralization of the court system in the provinces. What has happened is that there are ... courts operated by chiefs and traditional rulers, and they do not even know that the gender bill exists. And even if they are aware, they will see it as a form of Western ideologies (sic), so they will not implement it... . It will be difficult. There must be massive

²²⁷ The 50/50 Group explained that, “[w]hat happened was the 50/50 group was working with LAWCLA, we worked with them and everybody else, the lawyers, women’s groups, several other organizations got involved and we lobbied the Human Rights Committee in parliament to make sure that they support the bill once it comes in, and the Human Rights Commission, which has just been created also. It’s a combination of various organizations.” “Interview No. 9”, (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

²²⁸ All of the organizations interviewed were either familiar with the Gender Acts or had been involved with lobbying for the Acts to be passed by Parliament. Over half of the individuals interviewed were either familiar with the Gender Acts, or had at least heard about them, most over the radio. Most of those who had not heard about the Acts were living outside of Freetown. This suggests that dissemination of this kind of information is beyond urban centres is less complete than in Freetown.

²²⁹ “Customary law varies by tribe, is not codified, and is often applied unfairly. Local courts, with chairmen appointed by paramount chiefs, act as arbiters of customary law. Favoritism and excessive fines are common in the local courts.” Open Society Justice Initiative, 9.

²³⁰ Steven Archibald and Paul Richards state that “[w]omen [are] kept by customary law ‘at the bottom of the social ladder’”. Steven Archibald and Paul Richards, “Converts to Human Rights? Popular Debate about War and Justice in Rural Central Sierra Leone,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 72, no. 3 (2002): 352.

sensitization, and even the training of law enforcement officials, to ensure the gender bills are enforced, so they will accept that this is the law and that their own perception is not the law of the land.²³¹

Most of the organizations took responsibility for the implementation of the Acts, seeing it as the main focus now in ensuring that these Acts actually make a difference in people's lives. The 50/50 Group states, "[i]f we just have these laws on paper, the women will still suffer the violence and discrimination because they don't know that those are their rights. So it's now our place to ensure that we do sensitization or education of these women to let them understand and appreciate that these laws are already in force."²³²

Implementation will be a difficult process, but some of the work towards it has begun.

UNIOSIL indicated that recent training of traditional leaders and Paramount Chiefs has been taking place, in order to educate them about the Gender Acts and work with them to ensure that these acts are implemented. Other initiatives, such as the program of the Open Society Justice Initiative to provide paralegal assistance to rural Sierra Leoneans, may be positive measures towards facilitating access to justice in a variety of issues, including around the Gender Acts.²³³ This is a clear case in which the international community fostered the development of what has become a local program to foster change in the ability of Sierra Leoneans to access justice. However, it is clear that while local and international organizations are committed to the implementation of these

²³¹ "Interview No. 18", (LAWCLA), November 27, 2007.

²³² "Interview No. 9", (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

²³³ The program called "Timap for Justice" is focused on providing legal assistance to those without financial means to access a lawyer. "Common issues the community-based paralegals work on include domestic violence, child abandonment, corruption, police abuse, economic exploitation, abuse of traditional authority, employment rights, right to education, and right to health." Open Society Justice Initiative, 14. This kind of program can clearly have some benefits for informing Sierra Leoneans about their rights and providing assistance to resolve ongoing challenges in the justice sector. This is particularly important in areas where there is a lack of codified legislation, such as the customary system.

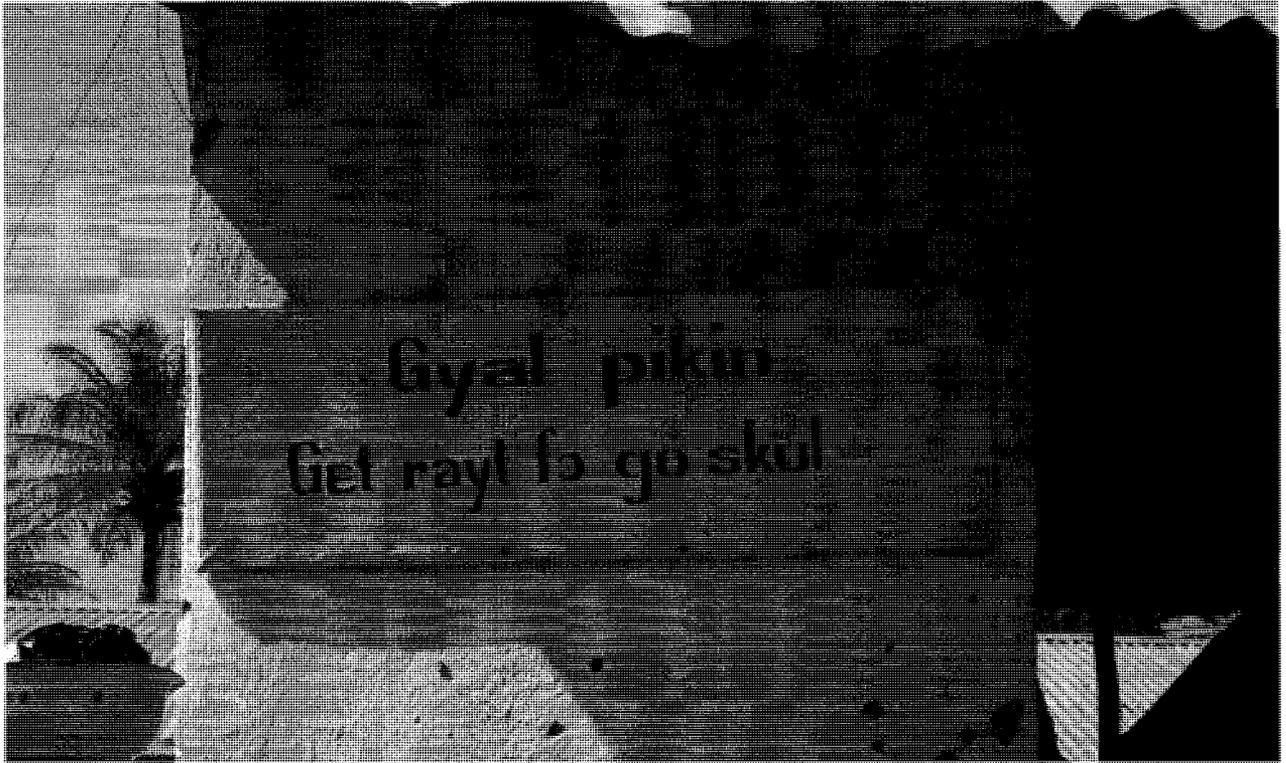
Acts, systematic implementation needs to be undertaken by the government.²³⁴ There are many challenges with following up to the passing of the Gender Acts to ensure that they are implemented. Nonetheless, the actual passing of the legislation is a positive step forward in improving gender equality and justice in Sierra Leone.

The recognition of the underlying causes of gender-based violence and the way in which the war was fought by the TRC has led to the ability of others to press for change. This work has primarily been taken up by civil society organizations, including women's NGOs, with the support of the international community. The legal status of women and girls in Sierra Leone has improved in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war and war periods, as was suggested in the hypothesis developed from the literature (H2B). The TRC recommendations laid the groundwork for lobbying and advocacy from civil society organizations and the international community, and these groups have been and will continue to be fundamental to pushing forward the process of legal change.²³⁵ This process, and its recognition of the need to go beyond simply bringing the fighting forces to the table and establishing negative peace, demonstrates some of the possible positive outcomes of mainstreaming gender into the immediate post-war peacebuilding processes.

²³⁴ UNIOSIL stated that the current “[c]hallenge is whether the government will allocate meaningfully to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and have projects on implementation of the Gender Acts.” “Interview No. 37”, (UNIOSIL), December 18, 2007.

²³⁵ Shaw argues that the TRC also brought up memories that many Sierra Leoneans simply wished to forget and that many Sierra Leoneans who testified before the Commission believed that they would receive material support. Despite the TRC’s recommendation for reparations, this has not yet occurred. Shaw states, “For those who testified before Sierra Leone’s Commission, it was not enough to have turned ‘clearing your chest’ into an art of forgetting when the conditions of their post-conflict lives remained as a constant mnemonic for violence and loss. So far, the best creative efforts of the survivors who testified, and of the authors of the Commission’s Final Report who listened to them, have been unable to turn the TRC into a mechanism that would, in fact, ‘respond to their needs.’” Shaw, “Memory Frictions,” 207. The inability of the government and international community to meet the material needs of Sierra Leoneans will be further discussed, but the work of the TRC should be recognized as providing the basis for much of the more recent legal change which has led to improved legal status for women.

Chapter 5: “Gyal pikin: Get rayt fo go skul” – Access to Education



Access to education was the one indicator of gender equality that most participants in this research agreed has improved in the post-conflict period, in contrast to the literature on the effects of conflict on access to education. However, there was recognition that there are still difficulties in sending children to school related to the costs, distances of facilities, lack of structures, human resources and materials. These difficulties have existed since before the conflict and are slowly being remedied with new projects and policies by the government and supported by local organizations and the international community.

Before the War

In Sierra Leone, access to education has always differed based on gender, urban or rural location and class. The type of education available and considered socially acceptable has also differed for males and females. According to Denzer,

[b]efore World War I the position of women in Freetown differed according to class and ethnicity. Among the socially dominant Krio ethnic group, elite women had high status and a relatively high degree of education which emphasised the cultivation of housewifery and cultural skills such as music, drama and conversation. The more prosperous families often educated their daughters in British finishing schools... . However, the majority of Krio women belonged to the lower middle and poor classes. Their status was much lower than that of the elite. While the majority had some education, girls seldom went beyond elementary school. Marriage and home were still regarded as their appropriate occupation, but economic necessity forced the majority to work outside the home. Most were self-employed as market women, petty traders, hairdressers and washerwomen, although some of the better educated were seamstresses and hospital attendants. The position of women of Protectorate origin was similar to that of poor Krio women except that very few were educated.²³⁶

The first girls' school was established by Adelaide Casely Hayford in 1923, the Girls' Industrial and Technical Training School, which continued until 1940. The school taught traditional crafts and focused on providing girls with skills training for employment.²³⁷ Rina Okonkwo suggests that the school could not attract older students and eventually focused on educating girls aged four to twelve. She states, "[s]till, the school made an impact. As one of the first African-owned and African-run schools in Freetown, it paved the way for many more African schools."²³⁸

²³⁶ Denzer, 439. In terms of the situation before the conflict, Dr. Augustine Park also states that education was sharply divided by gender and class. "Interview with Augustine Park", September 24, 2007.

²³⁷ Ibid., 440.

²³⁸ Rina Okonkwo, "Adelaide Casely Hayford Cultural Nationalist and Feminist," *Phylon* 42, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1981): 45.

In a study of secondary school students in West Africa undertaken between 1976 and 1981, of the six schools sampled in Sierra Leone (three in Freetown and three in the provinces), 37 percent of students were female.²³⁹ According to this study “[g]irls have consistently lower occupational aspirations than boys....Girls aim at the ‘safe’ jobs of teaching and nursing, which give them flexibility to cope with child-rearing and mobile husbands, but which severely limit their opportunities for promotion and a more than moderate income.”²⁴⁰ One of the explanations of this is that before the conflict it was difficult to get people to educate their girls instead of boys, because of poverty. People preferred to send their boy as he had a better prospect in terms of migrant work, and girls would get married and so their education would be wasted.²⁴¹ This theme of girls not being sent to school because they weren’t expected to have jobs after they completed their education and so families with little money would send boys to school was repeated by local and international organizations in Sierra Leone. The Director of a local women’s organization in Sierra Leone “TEDEWOSIL: Thorough Empowerment and Development of Women in Sierra Leone” stated that, “before the war, it was like, a girl child, even if you were educated, you will end up getting married, so it’s a waste of resources for family members, especially the parents to invest in the girl child. Because they are thinking that the end product is getting married, and the education will be useless.”²⁴² Similarly, a representative of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone stated that although there were no laws preventing women and girls from accessing

²³⁹ Margaret Peil, “African Secondary Students and Their Societies,” *Comparative Education* 18, no. 2 (1982): 158. One of the significant findings of this study was that “[i]n Sierra Leone there is a strong difference in educational levels between the capital...and the provinces. About a quarter of the country’s secondary schools are in Freetown, and a relatively large proportion of low to moderate-income adults have had at least some secondary schooling.” Peil, 159.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁴¹ “Interview with Kerry Smith”, (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

²⁴² “Interview No. 8” (TEDEWOSIL), November 22, 2007.

education, there were other barriers, including a tradition that suggested sending boys to school when there were limited resources was more effective as the girls would get married.²⁴³ The number of women and girls accessing education was thus limited.

The interviews conducted with local men and women in Sierra Leone indicated that those living in Freetown tended to have a higher level of education than those in the rural areas. Also, participants that were older tended to have less education than the younger participants, who were either currently in school or had recently completed school. Some of the older participants had never been to school or had barely learned to read. In giving their reasons for why they stopped their education, most participants indicated that it was because of poverty, that they had no one to provide for their school fees or other costs. A woman from Makeni indicated that she stopped school in Form 2 (Grade Eight) in 1975 because there was no one to pay her fees.²⁴⁴ This was the case for nearly half of the participants, who either stopped going to school or had to take time off of school because of financial reasons.²⁴⁵ A female participant from Port Loko mentioned gender-specific reasons for leaving school. According to her, "While I was at school I was staying with my aunt. Upon reaching class 4, because she saw that I was developing, my breasts were full, so she withdrew me from school, fearing that the headmaster would impregnate me. My aunts and uncles came to talk to her so that I would remain at school, but she refused."²⁴⁶ These beliefs around gender roles was evidently a factor in access to education before the conflict, and remains a factor today.

²⁴³ "Interview No. 17" (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

²⁴⁴ "Interview No. 12", (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

²⁴⁵ The other main reason noted for stopping school was related to the war.

²⁴⁶ "Interview No. 32", (Port Loko), December 8, 2007.

During the War

The effects of the war on education are widely recognized. A report on education in Sierra Leone by the World Bank states that the conflict “left a multitude of scars in the education sector: devastated school infrastructure, severe shortages of teaching materials, overcrowding in many classrooms in safer areas, displacement of teachers and delay in paying their salaries, frequent disruptions of schooling, disorientation and psychological trauma among children, poor learning outcomes, weakened institutional capacity to manage the system, and a serious lack of information and data to plan service provision.”²⁴⁷ Further, women and girls in Sierra Leone had less access to training and education than men and boys during the conflict.²⁴⁸

During the war, most participants and local and international organizations indicated that education came to a standstill, depending on where people were living and where the war was being fought. Fear of children being abducted, lack of resources, both financial and in terms of human resources to operate an educational system, meant that for most participants in school during that time, there was a complete suspension of education-related activity.²⁴⁹ A representative with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs stated that, “during the war everything went down the drain. Sierra Leoneans lost a whole lot. All the educational plans or what they had in

²⁴⁷ The World Bank, *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*, (Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2007), 15. “In Sierra Leone, an estimated 1,200 schools were destroyed in targeted attacks during the civil war which ended in 2001. Three thousand girls were abducted and taken as “wives” (that is, sex slaves). Many school children had their limbs amputated by combatants as part of a deliberate campaign of terror by armed groups.” As cited in Amnesty International, “Safe Schools: Every Girl’s Right,” (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2008): 36.

²⁴⁸ Etchart and Baksh, 84.

²⁴⁹ Dr. Laura Stovel suggests that, “During the war, of course, education opportunities outside of Freetown and Bo were very limited, because schools were destroyed. It was a mess and not only that, but the RUF were known to attack girls’ schools, and take them.” “Interview with Laura Stovel”, October 4, 2007.

mind went (under) the bridge. Schools were destroyed, and most universities and tertiary. Children were abducted, especially girls. They went into early marriages with the rebels. Some were killed, raped, boys were turned to be soldiers, like child soldiers.”²⁵⁰ The educational system beyond Freetown was disrupted for a great deal of the period of the conflict, depending on where the fighting was going on. Girls and boys took on new roles during the conflict, either involved in the fighting or as victims. This had the effect of exacerbating gender roles and disrupting social order. Beyond simply interrupting education, the conflict also changed the lives of young boys and girls. A representative of The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone suggests that there were “(g)irls being abducted, become sexualized, entrusted with responsibilities that they never had; the social structures in the community had disintegrated.”²⁵¹ This heightening of gender-based violence in the conflict was not restricted to women and men, but was inflicted in particular on girls and boys in gender-specific ways, and education and educational institutions were involved in this aspect of the conflict. A woman in Port Loko stated that during the conflict over 100 girls were abducted from Port Loko while they were studying for their final exams. These girls were used as human shields by the rebels, and taken as the wives of rebels.²⁵² Access to education was disrupted, but the conflict also brought a heightened experience of gender-based violence, which is an ongoing problem, and will be discussed further.

Because people were displaced and there was fear of children being abducted, many families did not send their children to school. In Freetown, during the 1997 and

²⁵⁰ “Interview No. 6”, (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs), November 21, 2007.

²⁵¹ “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

²⁵² “Interview No. 3”, November 15, 2007.

1999 attacks school was suspended. A man in Freetown stated, "I was to graduate from teachers college in 1997, but it was interrupted, by the military takeover, the AFRC takeover, it brought the whole educational system to a standstill, all over the country. We had to continue in 1998 when the rebels were driven out."²⁵³ Other participants also had their education disrupted by the conflict, but those who stopped for only a short period have been to some degree able to complete their studies following the end of the conflict.

After the War

According to the TRC Report, as of the 1985 Census 91.5 percent of all females in Sierra Leone above the age of five were considered illiterate.²⁵⁴ For 2000-2004, UNESCO statistics place literacy levels for males over the age of fifteen at 39.8 percent, and for females over the age of fifteen at 20.5 percent, meaning that 79.5 percent are considered illiterate.²⁵⁵ The Sierra Leone Population Census of 2004 places the literacy levels at 49 percent for males and 29 percent for females, of all those included in the census.²⁵⁶ The World Bank report on Education in Sierra Leone in 2007 states, "Educational attainment across the population of Sierra Leone is low, with an average of less than 4 years of education completed for males (aged 15 years or older) and less than 2 years for females." The report also states that literacy in Sierra Leone requires about six years of education.²⁵⁷

In terms of overall enrolment in education,

²⁵³ "Interview No. 26", December 6, 2007.

²⁵⁴ "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone," 92.

²⁵⁵ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Literacy and Non Formal Education Section, "Youth (15-24) and Adult (15+) Literacy Rates by Country and by Gender for 2000-2004," (September 2005); Available at: http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/html/Exceltables/education/Literacy_10YearAgeGrp_August2005.xls.

²⁵⁶ The World Bank, 24. These levels include all Sierra Leoneans counted in the Census.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 24.

[p]rimary school enrolment was stable at close to 400,000 in the late 1980s, but declined to 315,000 in 1991/92 at the start of the war. There is limited information available on enrolment during the decade of the conflict, but an estimate suggests that enrolment was about 370,000 in 1996/97, increasing to 660,000 at the end of the war in 2001/02. However, the effect of the war was different across regions, and increases in enrolment in one area may mask decreases in others. The end of the war and the government's decision to offer free primary education in 2001 led to a doubling in student enrolment between 2001/02 and 2004/05, reaching 1.3 million in 2004/05. However... a gender gap still exists, with girls comprising 45 percent of the total enrolment in primary schools in 2004/05.²⁵⁸

There is a clear distinction between boys and girls in terms of primary and secondary education. Writing in 2006, Park suggests, "at the primary school level, the percentage difference between girls' and boys' attendance is not terribly significant (43 per cent of boys and 39 per cent of girls), at the secondary school level, girls fall behind boys considerably, with one-third of boys attending secondary schools and only one-fifth of girls attending."²⁵⁹ A representative of FAWE also noted that "the dropout rate is very high. So the transition from primary to secondary education is where the problem lies... . [A] lot of our people, of our children from the primary to secondary one, the dropout rate is very [high], and it is more so with the girls."²⁶⁰ Thus, while primary education is technically accessible for all without fees, access to secondary education and above has not necessarily improved. The TRC Report has also indicated that the costs associated with education have resulted in families prioritizing the education of boys, and this has been demonstrated through a lack of access to secondary education for girls.

²⁵⁸ The World Bank, 38.

²⁵⁹ Park, 331. This is also acknowledged by the World Bank report on Education in Sierra Leone, "Gender disparities in initial access to the primary level are not large, perhaps a result of the government's effort to enroll girls in primary education; but as with other disparities, they become greater as the level of education increases." The World Bank, 117.

²⁶⁰ "Interview No. 5", (FAWE), November 20, 2007. This was also noted by a participant who is a teacher. She suggested that universities were still dominated by men because one cannot access university without completing tertiary (high school) education, and fewer women were achieving this. Further, women more often went for lower level courses even at the university or teacher training schools. "Interview No. 3", November 15, 2007.

Even in the public education system, where the government bears some of the costs in terms of providing schoolbooks and paying examination fees, it has been difficult for some families to send their children or wards to school due to financial constraints. Where families have had to prioritise which of their children's schooling they pay for, it is usually the girl children who will be kept away from school and put to work elsewhere. Many girls in post-conflict Sierra Leone have thus been deprived of the right to acquire education, in effect jeopardising their future prospects even further. Although the access and retention rates have increased for school-going children over the years, there are still acute weaknesses in the system, such as the poor availability of secondary school education for girls.²⁶¹

In the post-war period there is a significant gap in the level of education for men and women in Sierra Leone. This difference is significant, as it demonstrates a lack of further educational opportunities for girls and women.

Considering technical and vocational training, “[f]emale students made up more than 60 percent of enrolment in 2003/04; however, gender stereotyping by subject is still prevalent...with more than 95 percent of students in the technology options being male.”²⁶² Looking at tertiary institutions, such as universities and colleges, 36 percent of all enrolled students were female in 2004/05. The rate increased up to 45 percent when looking solely at teacher training colleges and distance education.²⁶³ However, as of 2004/05 “female teachers make up around 30 percent of the primary and 20 percent of the secondary school teaching force. Compared to the average of 38 percent for 20 other countries in Africa, Sierra Leone has a lower share of female teachers in primary schools.”²⁶⁴ Although enrolment of female students has increased at the tertiary level, the actual ratio compared with enrolment of male students has declined since 1998/99.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ “Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone,”: 215.

²⁶² The World Bank, 42.

²⁶³ Ibid., 43-44.

²⁶⁴ The World Bank, 72.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 43.

The allocation of government spending on education has increased significantly since the conflict. In 1996, the Sierra Leonean government spent 14.2 percent of its total expenditures on education (compared with 21.0 percent on defence). In 2003, the expenditure on education was 19.9 percent of the total expenditures (compared with 13.1 on defence). Expenditures on education in 2003 were second only to the expenditures on general public services.²⁶⁶ There have been significant changes in spending and policy on education, particularly attempts to improve the continuation of girls from primary to secondary education.

Access to education also depends on location: rural girls are considered half as likely as urban boys to continue on to secondary school from primary school.²⁶⁷ Attempts to rectify the problems with the dropout rate, particularly in rural areas have been made. The Mano River Women's Peace Network suggests that,

after the war... they are using affirmative action and we have NGOs like FAWE and other organizations working on the access of girls, making positive discrimination in favour of girls. It has become a government policy also, they go an extra mile to encourage girls especially in the North and the East, where the female literacy rate is very low... . So it has improved compared to what it was before the war.²⁶⁸

Following the conflict educational facilities have been rebuilt, and the post-war SLPP government created a policy to eliminate school fees for primary education, as well as eliminating school fees for girl children in the North and East of the country. This, along

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 31. Considering that Sierra Leone's GDP per capita grew from \$410 in 1997 to \$548 in 2003, according to the Human Development Reports of 1999 and 2005, respectively, this suggests that not only did defence expenditures decrease and a higher percentage of available funds was spent on education, but that the overall amount spent on education also increased. Even if the percentage of the GDP spent on education remained static, the growth in the GDP would mean an increase in spending on education.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁶⁸ Interview No. 19, (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

with the work of local and international organizations to promote access to education for children and particularly girls, has improved gender equality in this indicator area.²⁶⁹

Factors Influencing Improvement in Gender Equality in Access to Education

Seventeen of the individual participants in this research mentioned that women's situation has improved after the war primarily because they have greater access to educational opportunities. A male participant now living in Freetown stated that before the war, "in our village, like even the provincial people, they never thought it was right for the girl child to go to school, but now there is a program called FAWE, and we have borrowed pages from international catalogues to promote and enhance the lives of women, hence all kinds of programs, for their advancement, have been introduced, it is for them, to make the better of these programs."²⁷⁰ Participants felt that the improvement in access to education was a result from the work of local organizations, government policies with the support of and standards set by the international community.

The Women's Forum of Sierra Leone, an umbrella group for local women's organizations in Sierra Leone, argues that the work of women's organizations and the government has made a difference following the conflict in women's access to education. "Our organizations took up the fight for women, that women should be educated. The girl child should go to school, free of cost, without paying fees... . That is what is going on now for the girl child in most of the schools, the primary schools. It's only [at] the secondary schools and the universities they pay money. But the primary schools they don't pay fees, and they are given books, they are given uniforms, so the situation has

²⁶⁹ The representative of FAWE stated that after the war, Sierra Leone has "made huge strides in education. Because we have tried a lot in closing the gap in basic primary education... In terms of the number of facilities, they are able to have more access now... Things have improved for girls." "Interview No. 5", (FAWE), November 20, 2007.

²⁷⁰ "Interview No. 24", December 4, 2007.

improved for girls, for women. Women are now more educated than before.”²⁷¹ Yet despite these improvements and ongoing work, there are still some serious challenges.

Challenges

There is still a serious problem with school fees, even at the primary level, as many schools charge other ancillary fees related to the operation of the schools, or the schools themselves are not well-equipped, and many teachers still do not receive adequate pay or regular pay.²⁷² This problem is exacerbated by the urban/rural divide in Sierra Leone, as schools in the provinces tend to have worse facilities than those in Freetown. These problems certainly pose a challenge in overall access to education. The Campaign for Good Governance notes,

If you go to some places in the provinces, some schools are mostly empty, they are just some thatched houses. Even human resources, the quality of the teachers, they are also a problem. These are all things that we need to address to improve the educational system. Even though it's increasing in terms of the number of people, and girls particularly, going to school, there are still a lot of challenges and gaps that need to be addressed for [an] effective educational system.²⁷³

Beyond school facilities, there are also other problems in improving access to education.

There are still serious gender-specific problems related to teenage pregnancy, sexual harassment and access to higher levels of education. The Katanya Women's Development Association (KAWDA), a local women's organization focused on ending

²⁷¹ “Interview No. 20, (Women's Forum Sierra Leone), November 27, 2007.

²⁷² The Katanya Women's Development Association (KAWDA) suggests that in some cases parents are actually spending more on their child's education now that school fees have been abolished than they were previously. “Interview No. 11” (KAWDA), November 23, 2007. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone states, “(i)nasmuch as there is free education, a lot of times the teachers or schools demand other charges. If people come from poor families, it has a tendency to lead to prostitution to get money to pay for these charges.” “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007. While poverty and structural difficulties within the education system pose problems for everyone, they create new challenges for women and girls, many of whom are still not prioritized within the community to access education, even if they have been prioritized for access by the government.

²⁷³ “Interview No. 21” (Campaign for Good Governance), November 28, 2007.

harmful traditional practices said that in “some...districts we still have problems, because although they have facilities for a girl child there is still the mentality and the tradition. Even in the minds of the very girls themselves... . Some of them they become pregnant and they will leave school after child-bearing. So all these are problems.”²⁷⁴ A representative of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone also recognized teenage pregnancy as a clear problem with ensuring that girls complete their education.²⁷⁵ Another representative of an international organization in Sierra Leone suggested that while boys were more likely to be affected by peer pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes, girls more often faced sexual harassment, both of which affected drop out rates.²⁷⁶ Thus while there has been increased awareness raising and a premium put on educating girls, there are still serious barriers in accessing education and continuing on to higher levels, many of which are of a gendered nature. These problems are not unique to the educational sector, but permeate other indicators of gender equality as well, including access to employment. The lack of educational opportunities has also had a significant effect on access to economic opportunities for women, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

While the literature on gender and conflict suggests that access to education may increase for some women and girls during the war this was not the case in Sierra Leone. Instead, the mass destruction of infrastructure and social disruption during the conflict led to a serious decline in the provision of education, which was already divided along

²⁷⁴ “Interview No. 11”, (KAWDA), November 23, 2007.

²⁷⁵ “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

²⁷⁶ This International Organization stated, “there are added problems for females and males, there’s a problem of sexual harassment in the schools which affects the dropout rate for girls, but there’s also more peer pressure on boys to be successful or to be the big man at school.” “Interview No. 33”, (International Organization), December 10, 2007.

gender, class and urban/rural lines. In the post-war period, funding and programs from the international community along with the efforts of local organizations, have enabled an increase in overall access to education and an improvement in access for women and girls. The affirmative action policy to increase the retention rate of girl students in secondary schools in the North and East has also contributed to this improvement. This indicates that the hypothesis in the literature (H1A) does not hold for this case. The war itself did not necessarily create opportunities, but instead opened up new spaces for those with the capacity and willingness to push forward the agenda of gender equality in the aftermath. In this instance, the work of the international community and local organizations, with the agreement of the government, has been largely positive, despite ongoing community challenges. The seizing of the opportunity to increase women and girl's access to education in the immediate post-war period has a strong possibility of being sustained in the long-term and creating other positive side-effects. Thus, the immediate post-war period is fundamental to consolidating any opportunities created by the spaces opened up through conflict.

Chapter 6: “It’s easier for a woman because she can use her body” – Economic Opportunities

One factor of possible change in gender equality through conflict occurs as women take on new roles through demographic changes, as men leave to participate in the conflict or are killed. While this may have happened in Sierra Leone, what is evident is that in many cases women were required to take on economic roles to supplement the family income even before the conflict, though these roles were rarely formally recognized. Men often left the household to work in other parts of the country or were living with families elsewhere.²⁷⁷ Thus, women’s role in agricultural work and the informal sector prior to the conflict should be noted, particularly as they often took on substantial economic roles to support themselves and their families.

Before the War

Women have often taken on independent work for their own survival and for their family’s survival. They have also in some cases dominated certain sectors, such as agricultural activity and informal trading. According to E. Frances White, Krio women were significant traders in the 19th Century, even forming a loosely organized trading diaspora to facilitate trade.²⁷⁸ Women’s role in trading of cash crops and other goods is long established, as is the development of organizations to facilitate this trade, although these organizations have lasted for different periods with varying mandates and success.

²⁷⁷ One study, conducted in 1967 in Lunsar and in villages in Port Loko district, suggested that because the men in the villages had left to work in the town the women played a significant role in agricultural work. A. Raymond Mills, “The Effect of Urbanization on Health in a Mining Area of Sierra Leone,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 61, No. 1 (1967): 117. While women in the village participated primarily in agricultural activities, women in the town of Lunsar were more involved in petty street trading, a trend that has continued into the post-war period. Mills, 119.

²⁷⁸ E. Frances White, “Creole Women Traders in the Nineteenth Century,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, no. 4 (1981): 635.

Before Independence, there were few formal positions for women in Sierra Leone, even elite women in Freetown: “few opportunities existed for female employment in the 1920s and 1930s. The government was very reluctant to admit women to the clerical grades of the junior civil service. Commercial firms also preferred to employ men in clerical positions.”²⁷⁹ However, women created organizations to represent themselves in areas in which they could find employment. Recognizing the work of women in informal trading and domestic work, in 1940, two trade unions were established: the Sierra Leone Market Women’s Union (SLMWU) and the Sierra Leone Washer-women’s Union. While the latter did not last long the SLMWU was more established and focused on improving the working conditions of its members.²⁸⁰ Later on, during World War II, there was a general increase in women’s employment, followed by a subsequent decline.²⁸¹

In 1985, an article on women and agriculture in Sierra Leone indicated that women made up the majority of rice traders and that women were highly involved in thrift and credit cooperatives. According to this study, “in 1970-71...there were 83 women’s thrift and credit cooperative societies with 3,881 members, compared with only 35 men’s societies of the same type with 1, 781 members...45% of persons active in agriculture were women.”²⁸² This article stated that women were key in cultivating agricultural products, despite their lack of recognition in development strategies.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Denzer, 440.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 445-446.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 446.

²⁸² Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, “The Persistence of Women’s Invisibility in Agriculture: Theoretical and Policy Lessons from Lesotho and Sierra Leone,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 33, no. 2 (January, 1985): 306-307.

²⁸³ Ibid., 310.

Before the war, Sierra Leone faced serious challenges with unemployment, a challenge that still remains today. Some of the problems with finding ways and means to earn a living are considered part of the cause of the conflict. As one academic stated, “I think obviously the employment situation for young people, in all three contexts, prior to, during and after, have been quite dismal. That's partly why I think the political situation of young people was a factor in the war itself.”²⁸⁴ Another key characteristic of employment had to do with personal relationships, who you know as opposed to what skills you have. This was expressed as a factor before, during and after the war as well and was a theme in many of the interviews with individual participants. One participant in Freetown said that if an employer knows a family or relative then it is easier to get hired for a job.²⁸⁵ Another man in Freetown suggested that “[b]efore, when you leave school, or are going to school, you will get part-time employment, parents, friends, guardians, they will help you to get part-time employment and you will earn something before going back to school. Now [we] don't have that kind of thing, if you do you are lucky. People are trying, but not trying hard enough to create employment. A whole lot has to be done.”²⁸⁶ Relationship-driven employment was a significant aspect of formal employment in Sierra Leone.

The individual participants interviewed indicated that before the war many of them were either in school, or doing farming or petty trading. A few had more formal positions, but most were involved in the informal sector. Even those with more formal positions, working as teachers, drivers or in the media took on extra informal business in order to provide enough money for themselves and their families. And the type of work

²⁸⁴ “Academic Interview in Canada”, October 23, 2007.

²⁸⁵ “Interview No. 4”, November 17, 2007.

²⁸⁶ “Interview No. 24”, December 4, 2007.

that participants had been doing prior to the war was divided along gendered lines. Most of the women were selling food items and cloth or working with their husbands to sell palm wine and other goods, while the men were engaged in larger scale business, importing and exporting, and more formal activities like driving, working for a news broadcaster or a local NGO. While some women were involved in formal employment it is clear that most participants, and especially the women, were engaged in informal work to make ends meet. According to a report on the informal sector in Freetown in 1991, workers in “cookery shops” were primarily women, while workers in carpentry were entirely men.²⁸⁷ This is also reflected in responses from Sierra Leonean organizations.

The 50/50 Group suggests that, before the war “you have to have education to have formal jobs. So obviously it was more men who were more educated, so they had more access to formal jobs.”²⁸⁸ Similarly, the Mano River Women’s Peace Network suggests that there are, “a large number of women in the informal sector, they do little enterprises, but because of low skills and education they don’t go far, they don’t improve much but they are there. Our economy mainly is agro-based, and you have more women in agriculture, but again it’s subsistence farming. They work hard but at the end the resources are controlled by the men. So it’s a male-dominated society in Sierra

²⁸⁷ The report states, “[a] total of 43 cookery houses were interviewed and of these, eighty-seven percent are owned and managed by women.” Clarice Davies, “Profile of the Cookery, Bakery and Confectionery Industries,” *Training Opportunities in the Informal Sector of Freetown: A Research Study*, (Freetown: University of Sierra Leone, 1991), 49. By contrast, the chapter on the carpentry trade states, “[a]t the time of the survey, certain characteristics of full time workers in the carpentry trade were apparent: no women were involved and children made up between 20-50 percent of the work force.” Kenneth Kawa, “Description of the Carpentry Trade,” *Training Opportunities in the Informal Sector of Freetown: A Research Study*, 69.

²⁸⁸ “Interview No. 9”, (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

Leone.”²⁸⁹ Before the conflict, many people were engaged in the informal sector, even if they had formal employment, and the division of activities was along gendered lines.

During the War

The TRC Report suggests that agriculture and food production was particularly affected by the conflict because of the rural occupation of the rebel forces.

The war denied women of any genuine prospect of economic advancement. The Sierra Leonean economy in the pre-conflict period was already survivalist in nature particularly in the rural parts of Sierra Leone. The majority of women live in the rural areas and are engaged in subsistence farming, which forms the bedrock of food production in Sierra Leone. The RUF began the war by first occupying the rural areas in the Provinces, which immediately affected food production in the country and resulted in food insecurity. In many of the rural areas, those who farmed were compelled to supply food to the RUF on pain of death. At the same time the occupying forces had a devastating effect on output. In some areas, rural infrastructure was damaged and agricultural production was reduced, with food processing, storage and distribution systems being destroyed.²⁹⁰

Some women were able to gain opportunities through the conflict, including changes in gender roles as the result of becoming the head of household. However, this role also brought new challenges, as men were targeted and many women became responsible for their family and community in a way that had not previously been possible.²⁹¹ In an article on the experiences of market women in Sierra Leone, Christiana Solomon suggests that while limited economic opportunities before the conflict were almost non-existent during the war, some women were able to profit off of the conflict’s economic opportunities. She states, “Some market women, perhaps a small minority, took advantage of this vacuum to engage in cross-border smuggling from Guinea to Freetown transporting goods such as rice, onions, tomatoes and petroleum... . Some

²⁸⁹ “Interview No. 19”, (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

²⁹⁰ “Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone,”: 214.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 214.

market women were also engaged in a thriving trade with rebels.”²⁹² However, the majority of market women faced severe difficulties at the end of the conflict, and micro-credit loan schemes have been used to assist them in recovering their livelihoods.²⁹³ While some women have had increased access to economic opportunities, this was not the case for many, and was not often sustained in the aftermath.

Most participants in this thesis research indicated that during the conflict they were unable to continue their positions from before the war due to displacement or lack of financial capacity. Many continued to do petty trading, but this was difficult due to attacks from all parties to the conflict. A few of the men that were able to leave the country during the conflict were able to find irregular work and some training opportunities as well. Others found short-term positions with NGOs, joined the rebels or armed forces and even took to begging to survive. There was a “(r)upture in income-generating possibilities because of insecurity during the conflict period, (this) changed some people into local entrepreneurs and prevented others from doing that.”²⁹⁴ For the most part, Sierra Leoneans had few employment opportunities during the war, depending on where they were based. Many had key aspects of their employment taken from them,

²⁹² Christiana Solomon, “The Role of Women in Economic Transformation: Market Women in Sierra Leone,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 6, no. 3 (October, 2006): 417-418. When asked if any women had benefited from the conflict, the only examples from participants included women who had been with the rebels and received economic wealth through them, or women who had had relationships with the international forces. However, most participants also noted the serious challenges these women faced in the aftermath, and that any wealth or power they gained during the conflict was largely lost after the war.

²⁹³ Solomon, 419. In Sierra Leone, micro-credit schemes, which involve small loans, have facilitated the ability of market women to re-engage in their work, which was destroyed during the conflict. However, Solomon warns that the success of the micro-credit schemes depends on planning and implementation. Further, these schemes do not benefit all women, “[w]omen with disabilities have traditionally not had access to microfinance services, despite the fact that so many services target women or the most impoverished groups within a population.” Cindy Lewis, “Microfinance from the Point of View of Women with Disabilities: Lessons from Zambia and Zimbabwe,” in *Gender, Development, and Diversity*, ed. Caroline Sweetman (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2004): 30. While the focus of this chapter is microfinance as a development program, certainly such programs are often used in post-conflict settings, and the concerns of women with disabilities about their lack of access to such programs is significant.

²⁹⁴ “Interview with Kerry Smith”, (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

including a male driver in Makeni who had his car stolen by the rebels.²⁹⁵ Those in Freetown were able to continue with their employment until the invasion of Freetown in the late 1990s, whereas those in the provinces were able to continue working depending on where they lived and whether they were in an occupied region or not.

Both men and women were also involved as fighting forces during the conflict, although their experiences in this regard differed as well. The conflict period was a period of serious disruption, although it did in some instances provide some opportunities for a disruption of gender roles. According to MARWOPNET, “During the war, there was a great change because some men were in the battlefield, some were killed, so women had to take up male-dominated roles, providing for the family. It was like an eye-opener.”²⁹⁶ To some degree, women did take on new roles in terms of employment, finding ways and means to survive. However, Dugal suggests,

in Sierra Leone...it didn't mean that the women...took the jobs that the men would have had. It's more that they would have had to do some things to survive and feed their families... . It's not that they gained useful or more better paid jobs or anything like that. It's just that they had to work more and earn a living for their children, without getting the necessary education on top of it... .So it disrupted the...society, without really replacing it with something useful.²⁹⁷

Certainly the war created great challenges in what was already a difficult employment situation. Many people were displaced or were left with almost nothing, including losing their property, families and being victims themselves. Many women had extra responsibilities as a result of losing a second breadwinner, and the necessity of taking care of their families, which was a recurring theme for women participants in their

²⁹⁵ “Interview No. 13”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

²⁹⁶ “Interview No. 19”, (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

²⁹⁷ “Interview with Zoe Dugal”, October 21, 2007.

testimonies about their experience in the conflict.²⁹⁸ Rather than necessarily opening up opportunities for employment, the conflict added extra hardships and created new situations that required people to adapt. In some ways this may have allowed men and women to develop new skills, but most of the opportunities for increased employment through training or new work seems to have come after the conflict ended.

After the War

The lack of educational and employment opportunities is demonstrated through the large number of women and girls who have entered the sex trade in the post-conflict period. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children suggest that "[w]ithout support, many young people formerly with fighting forces are facing new protection problems. Some are commercial sex workers and others are living on the streets."²⁹⁹ The lack of economic opportunities is directly related to the influx in prostitution in the post-conflict period. According to the TRC,

The legacy of the conflict on the already beleaguered women of Sierra Leone is extreme poverty and limited opportunities to engage in economic activities. The absence of viable employment opportunities and the need to survive has compelled many women to become commercial sex workers. In this regard...a clear link exists between economic impoverishment and the increase in prostitution and sexual exploitation in post-conflict Sierra Leone.³⁰⁰

The engagement of women and girls (and males) in sex work has been exacerbated by the existence of the international peace operation. UN personnel have been clearly implicated in the solicitation of prostitutes in the post-conflict period in

²⁹⁸ "Interview No. 12", (Makeni), November 24, 2007. This participant suggested that during the conflict women were primarily responsible for going to the market and going out to find food.

²⁹⁹ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 8. Prostitution is widespread, and although most sex workers are female, there are some males involved in sex work as well. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 10.

³⁰⁰ "Women and the Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone,": 199.

Sierra Leone.³⁰¹ However, the international community has done little to prosecute personnel engaging in acts of sexual violence or exploitation.³⁰² Many of those who enter into commercial sex work are relying on the influx of funds and resources through the peacekeeping operation for survival. The engagement by peacekeepers in soliciting prostitutes suggests that international structures and systems to prevent exploitation of the local population by the peace support operation are ineffective.

Immediately after the conflict there appeared to be increased opportunity to receive training. According to a female participant in Freetown, life was getting better for women now because,

women's organizations have come to train women, like to do soapmaking, gara tie dyeing, catering, giving funds to women doing sales, petty business. Before the war there was not much funds, because the outside world, they were thinking that we should be able to take care of ourselves, but after the war they know we have lost many things, so they come to our aid, to help women so that they will be able to take care of themselves in the near future.³⁰³

When asked about training opportunities, most participants had had some training related to a specific job they undertook. A few of the male participants had training in masonry or carpentry and in professional driving, and some of the women in weaving or tie dyeing, and most of this training took place before or after the war, depending on the age of the participant. One man received training to be a barber and another to be a mason

³⁰¹ In interviews with peacekeepers in Sierra Leone, Paul Higate and Marsha Henry found that “[i]n many of the accounts by peacekeepers, local women were seen as actively choosing prostitution and other types of sexual exchange...Overall, peacekeepers tended not to recognize the power inequalities that shaped their relations with local women.” Paul Higate and Marsha Henry, “Engendering (In)security in Peace Support Operations,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (December, 2004): 490.

³⁰² ECOMOG soldiers in Sierra Leone have been accused of fathering children with local women and simply abandoning them upon leaving the country. According to Henry F. Carey, “[t]he West was uninterested in prosecuting Nigerians because they were willing to fight against the Revolutionary United Front...Most crimes committed by UN peacekeepers have not been condemned by UN human rights bodies.” See Henry F. Carey, “‘Women and Peace and Security’: The Politics of Implementing Gender Sensitivity Norms in Peacekeeping,” in eds. Olsson and Tryggstad, 62.

³⁰³ “Interview No. 7”, November 21, 2007. “Gara” tie dyeing is a traditional method of dyeing cloth, and a common product made and sold by women in the marketplaces in Sierra Leone.

during the war, but that training took place while abroad. Of those that received training in a trade, however, after the war only a few were actually doing work related to that trade. Others were doing small business, selling items in informal marketplaces, or were engaged in subsistence farming to provide food for their families.

In the post-conflict period, only a few participants had actual formal employment, as teachers or nurses or at the bank. More women than men participants were holding formal employment positions at the time of the interview, suggesting that increasingly there are opportunities for women to become engaged in formal employment. However it was clear that the types of formal employment available are still gendered. In the informal sector men tend to take on labourer positions and women are more engaged in agriculture and petty trading. Training and work in the trades was also divided by gender. Girls in the training were oriented to feminized trades, such as sewing and hairdressing.³⁰⁴ Similarly, of the participants in this study, none of the women interviewed were engaged in carpentry, masonry or driving. Rather they had been trained in gara tie dyeing or weaving or perhaps had had some education, but were involved in selling items at the market, or selling palm wine, or growing food to sustain their families. Some men were also engaged in trading and farming to a lesser extent.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ "Interview with Dr. Augustine Park", September 24, 2007.

³⁰⁵ In 2003, Human Rights Watch suggested that women made up only 40% of clerical staff and 8% of administrative and managerial staff. See Human Rights Watch, 22. Further, in 2004, the estimated earned income of women was \$353 US (PPP) compared with \$775 US (PPP) for males. See "Estimated earned income, female (PPP \$US)" and "Estimated earned income, male (PPP \$US)" in *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/indicators/226.html> and <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/indicators/227.html> respectively. This highlights the clear economic inequality between men and women, even considering the lack of economic opportunities for both men and women in the post-conflict period.

Many women and men mentioned difficulties in accessing jobs, and a number of women participants noted that their husbands were unemployed and that they were the primary breadwinner. A woman from Port Loko indicated that, "Life now, my husband is out of a job, and it's been four years out of a job, except for me and this thing that I am involved in (weaving), so I am the one that is going out just for me to get the home going."³⁰⁶ Four participants also mentioned that they were not engaged in trade or in business anymore because they did not have the start-up funds necessary. For example, a woman in Makeni stated that she had received training to do gara tie dyeing, but because she has no money to purchase supplies, instead she sells food items at the market. However, the money made from the market work is not enough to provide for the cost of education; her child had to leave college because there was no money to pay the fees.³⁰⁷

This difficulty in providing for families and ensuring children have access to education was a common theme, as was the high rate of unemployment or underemployment, as those with skills training often had difficulty finding regular work. Evidence of this was provided by a man with training in masonry. He had moved to Freetown in order to better find regular work, but found that his situation had not dramatically improved. He stated, "I can get odd masonry jobs here and there, but I haven't got a permanent job with monthly pay. These jobs do not come often, you might have a job today and nothing to do for the next month... . The jobs are not always there to do, masonry work is not so common, so you have to be fortunate for someone to recommend you and give you something to do, jobs are hard to come by."³⁰⁸ This lack of regularity in employment was common, as was needing someone to provide a scholarship

³⁰⁶ "Interview No. 31", (Port Loko), December 8, 2007.

³⁰⁷ "Interview No. 15", (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

³⁰⁸ "Interview No. 25" December 6, 2007.

or opportunity both in education and employment.³⁰⁹ Participants recognized that without strong networks, there would be little chance for them to find consistent and adequately compensatory work when there is so little to be had in Sierra Leone.

Factors Influencing Access to Employment

One of the factors affecting the lack of work and the gendered nature of employment in post-conflict Sierra Leone relates directly to the involvement of the international community. While it is certainly not wholly the responsibility of the international community, the gendered nature of the DDR and its incomplete process has contributed to the situation of employment today. The DDR process took a gendered view of combatants in terms of who could initially enter.³¹⁰ The longer term impacts of DDR are now becoming apparent in terms of how employment is structured. While this gendered structure of employment existed before the conflict, the DDR process essentially reinforced gendered norms of employment, rather than breaking down barriers and creating new opportunities.

Because the DDR process overlooked many women and girls involved with fighting forces, these women and girls did not have access to the services, education, and training programmes that the process provided. Denov suggests, “[g]iven the gender-discriminatory framework that saw girls (and women) only as ‘wives’ and ‘camp followers’, and not combatants, girls were not viewed as appropriate recipients of DDR benefits, such as skills training or schooling.”³¹¹ The lack of educational opportunities,

³⁰⁹ Stovel argues that dependency relationships have not significantly declined in Sierra Leone in the post-war period, and that employment is still often obtained through these kinds of relationships. “Interview with Dr. Laura Stovel”, October 4, 2007.

³¹⁰ “Interview with Dr. Augustine Park,” September 24, 2007. Park also notes that the DDR process was strongly biased towards male participants.

³¹¹ Denov, 331.

particularly for those involved in fighting forces, has had a great impact on the ability of women and girls to find economic opportunities to support themselves in the post-conflict period. According to Stovel,

the demobilization processes for ex-combatants channelled men and women into different kinds of jobs and different kinds of opportunities. So women who were demobilized were sent to do gara, tie-dyeing of cloth, or they might be sent to hairdressing school. Whereas the opportunities for men were much more diverse, and would stand them in much better stead. Women would also be sent towards soap-making, very unprofitable things... men were sent to tailoring, carpentry, mechanics...driving, or to school. While young girls were sent to school, older girls often didn't have the same kinds of opportunities.³¹²

While some women have been able to find more formal positions, and increasingly there are women in positions of authority in key institutions, albeit still in small numbers, most of the employment positions occupied by men and women still fall along gendered lines. It is significant to note that where the DDR process had an opportunity to break down traditional understandings of proper employment for men and women, it did not do this in a comprehensive manner.³¹³ These programs have the opportunity to provide a new understanding of gender norms and enable people to move away from war-related employment into new fields allowing them to lead more stable lives. But the gendered nature of the DDR process, in terms of participation and types of activities offered to individuals in the program, reinforced the strong gender norms already existing in Sierra Leone, that often prevent women from finding more lucrative forms of employment.³¹⁴

³¹² "Interview with Dr. Laura Stovel", October 4, 2007.

³¹³ In terms of the post-war period, an academic participant stated that employment is "very gendered in terms of what's available and what they're engaged in. I think girls tend to be involved in petty trading, hairdressing, looking after younger children, I think that it's extremely gendered work. Boys I think are given opportunities in terms of trades and training. But again you know whether in carpentry, things like that. So it's very gendered." "Academic Interview in Canada", October 23, 2007.

³¹⁴ LAWCLA, in their description of the DDR process demonstrated that most of the opportunities provided were geared towards male participants and for vocations that were considered suitable for them. "After the war there was DDR for the excombatants, how to demobilize and disarm and reintegration. In

The other key theme about employment related to the sheer lack of it, the difficulty that participants had in accessing employment that was sufficient to provide for themselves and their families. The largest reason provided to explain this situation was simply that the economy of Sierra Leone was unable to provide adequate levels of employment and remuneration, and that the lack of investment into the country has made providing employment an even more daunting task for a government that is politically and economically weak. This lack of economic strength has meant that in the post-war period, as Sierra Leone rebuilds, providing access to employment has been a struggle. According to a representative of the Campaign for Good Governance,

Because of the war, we had a lot of infrastructure destroyed, the structure itself, they are only rebuilding them now, and so naturally a country coming from war, in transition, will go through some of these things, with a low percentage of investors coming in. Once that happens, it becomes a problem for people to find a job. Some of the jobs, they are very high level, and because of the high percentage of illiteracy, most of the time, even take some projects that are donor driven, they have a lot of experts coming in from outside to work on them.³¹⁵

The lack of employment opportunities is compounded by the influx of international NGOs and other organizations with their own experts. This, in effect, reduces local capacity, despite the needs of international organizations to find individuals with the necessary qualifications, which can be difficult in a post-conflict context. While the DDR process did provide a great deal of training, this program was not holistically

the program that was designed by members of the international community and Sierra Leone, it was included in that program that these guys should have some education and training. So vocational training was created, like carpentry, masonry, electricians, these kind of jobs, at the end of the day they were even given tools, some went to do farming, to the agricultural sector and some went to universities, some study how to repair computers. There was creation for employment for these guys.” “Interview No. 18”, (LAWCLA), November 27, 2007. Although LAWCLA states that some employment opportunities have been made available to those who participated in the DDR process, one of the greatest problems has been the lack of a system-wide approach to increasing access to employment.

³¹⁵ “Interview No. 21”, (Campaign for Good Governance), November 28, 2007.

approached, in the sense that despite the great efforts at providing vocational or educational training, many young people are still unable to find work.

Post-conflict, there was a considerable amount of training for former child soldiers, intensive training opportunities, but this was part of the problem. The projects were not sufficiently thought through, people sold what they had received to get cash (sewing machine etc), there needed to be a different way of encouraging people to take on these things, which was forced upon them... . Some things increased, training or education, some people were given funding, mostly just for a year.³¹⁶

This demonstrates that although the training provided through the DDR program could have been extremely beneficial for participants and for stimulating the economy in the post-war period, it did not address some of the very acute short-term needs of participants to survive, nor did it create longer term opportunities, meaning that access to employment is still a real challenge for many of the Sierra Leoneans who experienced the conflict.

Challenges

Some organizations and individuals mentioned that during the conflict many Sierra Leoneans with education and access to finances fled the country and have not since returned. This has meant that in the post-conflict period there is a serious brain drain: the number of trained and qualified individuals is simply lacking. Lack of education and training affects the level of unemployment, and determines who can access employment.

According to a representative of FAWE,

Sierra Leone [is] basically a patriarchal society... . What we suffer from out here is not what they are talking about gender inequality in other parts of the world where you don't have cases of they are not being paid equally, being a man as against a woman. The question here, the problem here is to get to these jobs. To access them, very few women are at the top in Sierra Leone. In leadership positions, very few trained and qualified women.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ "Interview with Kerry Smith", November 8, 2007.

³¹⁷ "Interview No. 5", (FAWE), November 20, 2007.

It is clear that Sierra Leone faces structural problems in addressing employment because of lack of economic strength and sufficient investment, despite the massive amount of financial support being provided by the international community for local and international initiatives. However, there are also other systemic problems in terms of women's access to employment, particularly formal employment. The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) states that even when women do have the necessary education and training for a position, they face other gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

[E]ven when you have educated women, there is sexual harassment in the workplace. Women are discriminated against. Even though they have the qualification, they (employers) think about other things like women being pregnant and going on maternity leave. Some employers don't like to employ women. So men have more access for now to employment than women. And in the provinces if you are married and have children, if there is employment up country, your husband might not allow you, you might lose that chance.³¹⁸

This kind of discrimination was also mentioned by a participant who was working in a formal position at a bank. She suggested that in order to access education, some girls without financial means find relationships with older men to get money. In the case of employment, this participant suggested that women may have an easier time accessing work because they can use sex to get a position. "For the men it's kind of difficult; for the women, if you are clean and look nice and beautiful, maybe it's not your intention to do that, but the people who want to give you the job they will push you just to sleep with you. It's easier for a woman, because she can use her body."³¹⁹ Although this suggests that this is a benefit for women, this participant problematized the situation by saying that this is sometimes necessary for women to get employment. While there are difficulties in

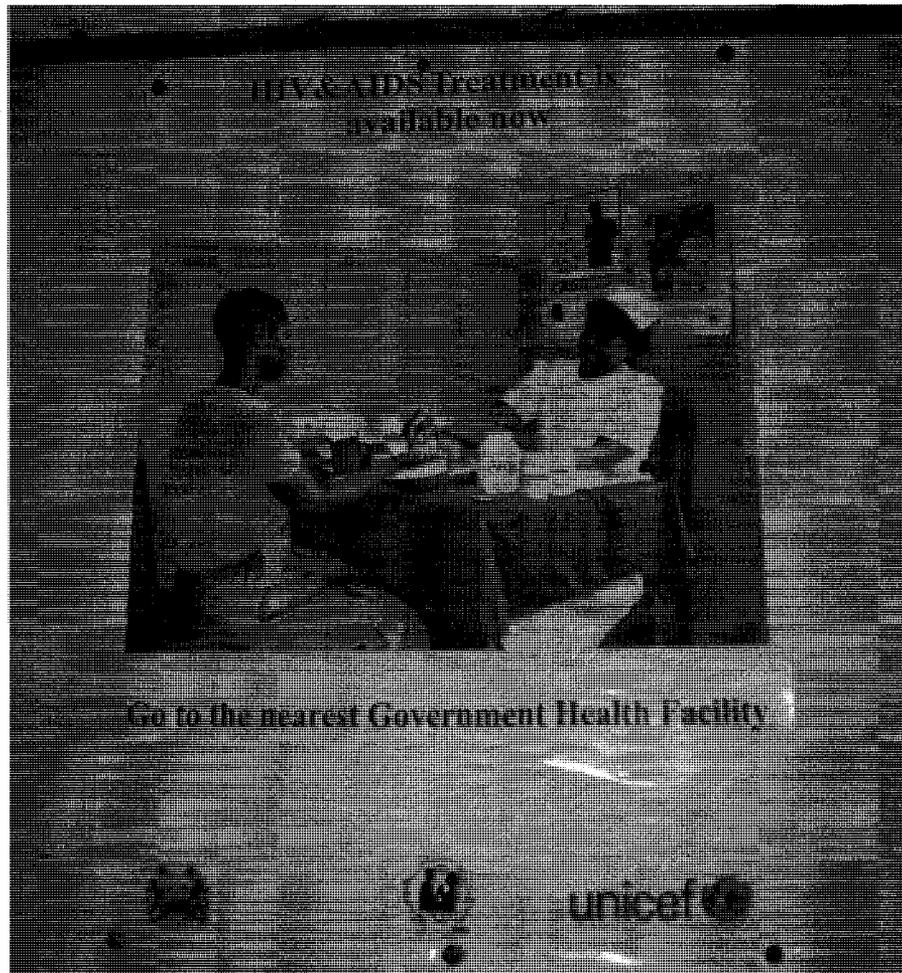
³¹⁸ "Interview No. 19", (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.

³¹⁹ "Interview No. 4", November 17, 2007.

general access to employment, sexual harassment and discrimination, particularly in the formal sector, are key barriers to employment for women in the post-war context in Sierra Leone. These barriers have great effects in the ability of women to achieve economic independence, and cut across many aspects of women's lives in Sierra Leone.

Access to employment for women was largely in the informal sector before the war. It is clear that what largely characterized this work was not its relative importance to the survival of families and communities, as informal work is a key component of providing for families in Sierra Leone even today, but the lack of formal recognition or adequate remuneration received for this work. During the war, while some women were able to benefit from the war economy, this was not without the risk of violence and was often short-lived. That demographic changes might create some opportunities during the war did not translate into sustainable changes in the post-war period. Many Sierra Leoneans lost their homes, livelihoods and family or community supports and are struggling in the aftermath. This suggests that the hypothesis that economic opportunities may increase during the war is not upheld in this case (H1B). It is clear that in the post-war period the economic situation has not improved, despite attempts by the international community to build skills and create employment opportunities. Funding for these initiatives has been short-lived and the government has not yet been able to provide employment opportunities or to generate investment. The programs that were implemented in the immediate post-war period also reinforced pre-war gender roles in employment, leading to a process of 'normalization' in the aftermath. The initial post-war period provides opportunities to use the spaces opened up through the social disruption of the war, but long-term effects must be thoroughly considered.

Chapter 7: “Caught behind rebel lines” – Access to Health Care



In a similar manner to access to employment, access to health care has not significantly improved in Sierra Leone in the post-conflict period in comparison to the pre-war and war periods. In particular, the specific health needs of women are not adequately addressed. While access to health care, in the sense of being able to access formal health care providers who are either part of the private or public health care infrastructure, was not sufficient for many before the war, it has not improved since the war.³²⁰ In some cases the lack of employment and access to financial resources of many

³²⁰ The health care system in Sierra Leone includes public health care, private health care, and traditional healing. The public health care system consists of hospitals located mainly in Freetown and in

Sierra Leoneans has made health care even less accessible. One of the clearest societal divisions in terms of accessing health care is the urban/rural divide, and this was exacerbated during the war when some communities were considered to be “behind rebel lines”. There is a great deal of work to be done to improve access to health care for average Sierra Leoneans throughout the country, and to ensure that the particular health needs of women are effectively addressed.

Before the War

Government spending on health care in 1977 was approximately 7 percent of the national budget, and declined even further during the conflict.³²¹ Health conditions in general were dire, and the high infant mortality rate at this time, which has continued, suggests that access to health care was insufficient, and that health conditions were not adequate. According to a study on infant morbidity and mortality from 1992,

the combination of poverty among the vast majority of the population, inadequate health service, poor nutritional status, and endemicity of some common childhood diseases continued to keep the infant mortality of Sierra Leone as one of the highest in West Africa. The recent economic difficulties arising out of lack of demand for the primary commodities Sierra Leone exports, increased oil import prices, hyper-inflation, and

some Provincial Headquarters, as well as local clinics and health care centres in other parts of the country. Private health care providers include for-profit hospitals and clinics and clinics run by NGOs and missions. Most public and private clinics and hospitals have a fee-for-service approach, and many charge a consultation fee, although fees at public centres are usually less than at private ones. Other resources, including food, water and medication, are additional expenditures for the patient. According to a pre-war study of the effectiveness of user fees in the health care system in Sierra Leone, “[b]ecause government health facilities had been mostly out of drugs since the early 1980s and health workers’ salaries were paid only irregularly, people had little choice but to buy drugs from the private market, to visit private doctors or mission hospitals (the latter having increased charges in an environment of declining external aid) or to make unofficial payments to government hospital staff for consultation, and buy drugs, dressings, and even generator fuel.” This study noted that the key challenges to accessing health care were cost and distance. Stephen J. Fabricant, Clifford W. Kamara and Anne Mills, “Why the Poor Pay More: Household Curative Expenditures in Rural Sierra Leone,” *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 14 (1999): 183. In the post-war period, little has changed, and Dr. Augustine Park notes that health care in Sierra Leone is still very much an entrepreneurial enterprise, with little access for those who cannot pay. “Interview with Dr. Augustine Park”, September 24, 2007.

³²¹ Margaret G.W. Hardiman and J.O. Midgley, “Planning and the Health of Mothers and Children in the Rural Areas of Sierra Leone,” *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 27, no. 2 (1981): 86.

rising interest rates on loans have all made the situation worse, leaving less and less resources available for health expenditures.³²²

Evidently, even before the war, access to health care was not widely available. Costs were prohibitive for many. The distances to health centres were also a great challenge, particularly for those living in rural areas. According to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone during this period, “[h]ealth care was...not available to many. For example, maternal mortality was high, and it is still high. Because a lot of people, because of the knowledge, because of poverty, they [could not] access health care facilities.”³²³ Many Sierra Leoneans also turned to traditional healers, who are still very much in business today.³²⁴ This was evident in the responses from the individual participants in Sierra Leone. When asked about their access to formal medical care before the conflict, seven participants indicated that they either could not have gone to the doctor, or that they did not go because they were not sick during that time. Over half the participants indicated in their responses that whether they could get access to health care depended on whether they could pay. Some had employment at the time so they could afford health care, but others did not. Cost was the most common response among those who explained why they could not access health care before the war. Even those who could access health care mentioned the cost associated with the formal system. A participant who had grown up in a rural community stated that when he was in the Provinces he did not go to the doctor but instead used local herbs because of the cost of formal medical care.³²⁵ While formal health care institutions existed prior to the conflict,

³²² Ruhul Amin, Robert B. Hill et al., “Immunization Coverage, Infant Morbidity and Infant Mortality in Freetown, Sierra Leone,” *Social Science Medicine*, 35, no. 7 (1992): 851.

³²³ “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

³²⁴ “Interview with Kerry Smith”, (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

³²⁵ “Interview No. 2”, November 14, 2007.

access was dependent on economic status and also on location; it depended on how close the provincial headquarters or Freetown were.³²⁶

Distance to health centres is a particular problem in accessing health care related to maternity. In a study of the health care of mothers and children in rural Sierra Leone conducted in 1977, the respondents cited distance and expense as the two main factors preventing them from accessing government health care services. The study surveyed 260 households in one of each of the districts in Sierra Leone and an urban area and found that “[o]f the 62.7% of the sample households who had not used government treatment facilities for the last illness experienced the majority of them reported that it was because of the distance they would have had to travel, although an appreciable minority of about one-third gave expense as the reason, and a few said they had no confidence in the effectiveness of the treatment, or thought that the service was poor.”³²⁷ It is evident that rural communities face particular challenges in accessing health care.

Women in particular suffer from a lack of access because they tend to have even less access to resources. Further, maternal mortality can depend very heavily on access to health care services, and the costs of such services have been prohibitive. A survey conducted in 1989-1990 in Bombali District in Sierra Leone found that “[t]he general

³²⁶ Speaking to the situation before the war, TEDEWOSIL stated, “women live very far from the medical centres, 15, 20 miles, and women do not have the access to funds the way they are supposed to so that they get the attention for medical care. And a lot of these places in the rural districts do not have...the kind of setting for the medical care exam or they are just building a small building but there will not be the basic logistics that are supposed to be in there for medical care. So...sometimes they have to bring their patient down to other big towns, move them either perhaps down to Freetown, which is not easy.” “Interview No. 8”, (TEDEWOSIL), November 22, 2007.

³²⁷ Hardiman and Midgley, 85. These findings are similarly expressed in a study evaluating a national action plan for primary health care established in 1984, which states that in the Gbendembu Ngowahun Chiefdom in Bombali District a clear barrier to accessing maternal health care is the cost of medication, as well as problems with transportation, for the families or for TBAs or others assisting with maternal care. Further, there were serious problems with the inadequacy of funds to support health care provision, including sufficient compensation for TBAs and other health care personnel, who had to seek funds from other sources to complement their health care work. See Richard Konteh, “Saving Mother’s Lives: Things can go Wrong,” *World Health Forum*, 19 (1998): 137-138.

impression was that the women that suffered maternal deaths in the chiefdom died because of poverty. Their socioeconomic status was generally low... . These people could not afford the cost of drugs, operations, transportation and post-operation care. Some could not even afford to send their wives to antenatal and postnatal clinics or to meet the cost of delivery in hospitals.”³²⁸ In two areas of the study where most deliveries were performed at home, the reasons given were “because the quality of the facilities and services provided at (the) centres were inadequate. The prices were unreasonable; the nurses were inefficient and unfriendly; and the women lacked the financial resources to pay the bills charged at the health centres.”³²⁹ Many of the births were attended by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), although the level of training, and the equipment used varied greatly.³³⁰ In a country in which “childbirth is traditionally considered to be ‘women’s business’”³³¹ not having direct access to funds to pay for maternal health care, or being unable to rely on family funds, meant that many women were unable to access such care, and this has been a continued problem in the conflict and post-conflict periods.

During the War

³²⁸ Richard Konteh, “Socio-Economic and Other Variables Affecting Maternal Mortality in Sierra Leone,” *Community Development Journal*, 32, no. 1 (January, 1997): 51.

³²⁹ Konteh, “Socio-Economic and other variables affecting maternal mortality in Sierra Leone,” 54.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58. An indepth analysis of the TBA training program and the role that this approach to maternal health care plays in Sierra Leone will not be provided here, as although an understanding of how the lack of provision for maternal health care is important for understanding access to health care for women in the pre-war, war and post-war periods, further analysis of the effectiveness of the program and the historic use of TBAs in providing maternal health care is beyond the scope of this study. For more on TBAs and maternal health, see Nancy C. Edwards, “Traditional Birth Attendants in Sierra Leone: Key Providers of Maternal and Child Health Care in West Africa,” *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 9, no. 3 (1987): 335-347 and Jane Ross, “Upgrading Traditional Midwifery in Sierra Leone: An Overview with Special Reference to Koinadugu District,” *Midwifery*, 4, no. 2 (1988): 58-69. For more on Maternal and Child Health Aides (MCH), which are responsible for supervising TBAs, see T.K. Kargbo, “Rural Maternity Care in Sierra Leone,” *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 38 (1992): 29-31.

³³¹ Edwards, 337.

A report on maternal health published in 1996 indicated that “[i]n Sierra Leone the centrally organized national health service reaches only about 35 percent of the population. Among the poor in urban areas, and in most rural areas, the majority of health care comes from self-treatment or the traditional sector.”³³² Access to health care for men and women during and after the war is difficult to quantify due to a lack of data. According to the above report, “[o]nly an estimated 34 percent of all births in the country, and far fewer in rural areas, are supervised by people with any medical training, even a few weeks of training. . . . The national maternal mortality rate is only an estimate of 7 deaths in childbirth per 1,000 births.”³³³ However, the 2005 *Human Development Report* puts the maternal mortality ratio of Sierra Leone in 2000 at 2000 deaths per 100,000 live births.³³⁴ This is a higher rate than that suggested by the Sierra Leone government, and also higher than that proposed in 1996. In 2000, it was estimated that only 42 percent of births were attended to by skilled health staff.³³⁵

According to a study on obstetric services in 1997,

[o]bstructed labor, hemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe abortion and eclampsia are among the major causes of maternal deaths. With timely medical treatment, many of these deaths can be prevented. However, the poor quality of services and poor economic conditions often cause delays in seeking, reaching or receiving life-saving treatment. In Sierra Leone, deteriorating political and economic conditions over the past decade have led to reduced government and individual expenditures on health. As a result, health

³³² Amara Jambai and Carol MacCormack, “Maternal Health, War, and Religious Tradition: Authoritative Knowledge in Pujehun District, Sierra Leone,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (June, 1996): 273.

³³³ Jambai and MacCormack, 273.

³³⁴ *Human Development Report 2005*, 253; note that data refers to the year 2000.

³³⁵ The World Bank, 23. Many of those who assist in childbirth, particularly in the rural areas are TBAs, as outlined previously. Many have not received formal training, although there have been some attempts to do this. Recognizing the concerns with inadequate training and equipment, many TBAs also have a great deal of experience and are widely respected in their communities, which is an important element in gaining the trust of their patients. Thus noting only “skilled” staff may be inaccurate in terms of who is assisting in births and may not fully recognize the importance of local knowledge.

services, including emergency obstetric services necessary to prevent maternal deaths, are inadequate.³³⁶

Thus, although the situation was already quite difficult, the perilous security environment and the lack of access to financial means during the conflict exacerbated the severity of the ability of women to access medical services, particularly for maternity.

In terms of women's access to health care to deal with the sexual violence they experienced during the conflict, Human Rights Watch suggests, "the health needs of women and girls have not received as much attention or funding as required to adequately address the scale of the problem... . The reproductive health infrastructure, which was poor before 1991, virtually collapsed during the war."³³⁷ A common longer term effect of sexual violence is the increase in sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. In a 1997 study, "[o]f 16,000 people tested (for HIV/AIDS) in Sierra Leone, 492 (3%) tested positive for HIV, and 154 had AIDS (1%)."³³⁸ It is estimated that "by the end of 2001 there were 170,000 persons aged between fifteen and forty-nine living with HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone."³³⁹ As of 2003, the total number of adults over the age of 15 with HIV/AIDS was estimated at 40,000 in Sierra Leone, 24,000 of whom were women. As of 2005, 26,000 women of a total 43,000 people over 15 years of age were living with HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone.³⁴⁰ It is noted in other studies that HIV/AIDS levels in Sierra

³³⁶ P. Fofana, O. Samai, A. Kebbie, and P. Sengeh, "Promoting the Use of Obstetric Services Through Community Loan Funds, Bo, Sierra Leone," *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 59, Suppl. 2 (1997): 225.

³³⁷ Human Rights Watch, 51.

³³⁸ Judith C. Lahai-Momoh and Michael W. Ross, "HIV/AIDS Prevention-Related Social Skills and Knowledge among Adolescents in Sierra Leone, West Africa," *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 1, no. 1 (March, 1997): 38.

³³⁹ Figures as cited in Human Rights Watch, 51. According to Etchart and Baksh, over sixty percent of soldiers tested HIV positive at the end of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Etchart and Baksh, 27.

³⁴⁰ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2006): 505-507.

Leone may have been overestimated during the conflict.³⁴¹ Nonetheless, the number of individuals living with HIV/AIDS has increased in the post-war period compared to the situation prior to the conflict.

Despite the attempts of the government, NGOs and the international community to deal with the results of the conflict, sexual and gender-based violence have not been fully addressed, and access to health care remains limited. Government expenditure on health care was only 7.9 percent of their total spending in 2003, compared with 6.9 percent in 1996, and declining to a low of 2.9 percent in 1999. Health expenditure makes up only 1.7 percent of the GDP, compared with 2.5 percent in other sub-Saharan African countries in 2002.³⁴² It is clear that during and after the conflict, health services were not sufficient to adequately address the health care needs of men and women in Sierra Leone.

During the conflict, as was the case with other aspects of infrastructure in Sierra Leone, health care infrastructure seriously deteriorated. An official with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs suggests that during the war medical facilities were unavailable and because many people were displaced, it was nearly impossible to access health care.³⁴³ This sentiment was similarly expressed by individual participants. According to their testimonies, it was difficult to get a doctor because most had little financial means to pay for medical care when it was available, and most of the

³⁴¹ "At the beginning of Sierra Leone's civil war, HIV prevalence was low in the general population; for example, 0.8% among urban antenatal women and 0.4% among army recruits in 1990. However, higher prevalence was found in some groups, e.g. 6.7% in Freetown blood donors in 1987-89, and 4.7% in sexually transmitted disease (STD) patients in 1990. During the war, UNAIDS estimated 7.0% adult HIV prevalence in 2001, which was a significant over-estimate. Within months after the war ended in early 2002, a national serosurvey assisted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found only 0.9% HIV prevalence in youth and adults aged 12-49 years, which was a weighted average of 0.6% HIV prevalence in rural areas and 2.1% in Freetown." David Gisselquist. "Impact of Long-Term Civil Disorders and Wars on the Trajectory of HIV Epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 1, no. 2 (August, 2004): 118.

³⁴² The World Bank, 31-32.

³⁴³ "Interview No. 6", (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs), November 21, 2007.

doctors in the rural areas either left for Freetown or left Sierra Leone entirely. According to a man who had been in the provinces at that time, “During the war it was hard to get a doctor if you were caught behind rebel lines. If you had to see a doctor you had to walk to those areas considered a safe haven.”³⁴⁴ Thus, access to health care in rural areas was compounded by rebel occupation and systematic dislocation of rural populations throughout the conflict period.³⁴⁵ Access to health care in the provinces was affected by the flight of the general population from the areas affected by the conflict, including those responsible for providing health care, compounding the previous challenges of cost and distance by the destruction and dislocation of the conflict itself.³⁴⁶

While access to health care in rural areas was exceptionally poor, it was not adequately provided in any part of the country in general. Overall, twenty of the participants indicated that they either could not see a doctor at this time because of finances or because there were no doctors. Or they indicated that in general formal health care was not available during the conflict. One woman who had experienced severe brutality during the conflict, including the amputation of her right arm stated that it took her a very long time to access medical help after she had been attacked, and she suffered infection of her wounds because of the delay.³⁴⁷ Those involved with the fighting forces did not access health care any better than the civilian population. “[C]ertainly during the war, access to health care was dismal for the young people who were with the fighting forces. I mean they often had very serious injuries and wounds that were not attended

³⁴⁴ “Interview No. 25”, December 6, 2007.

³⁴⁵ In reference to access to health care, Dugal stated that “the divide between Freetown and the rest has always been there, and during the war this was very evident because people in Freetown didn’t really actually pay attention to the war until 1999 when it was invaded.” “Interview with Zoe Dugal”, October 21, 2007.

³⁴⁶ “Interview with Kerry Smith”, (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

³⁴⁷ “Interview No. 14”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

to.”³⁴⁸ Those who were victimized as part of their experience with the rebel forces also faced serious health problems, many of which remain inadequately addressed today.

[F]or civilians, there were some services. Those with the rebels were not allowed to access [these services]. They relied on traditional healers, taking herbs etc. There were some services created, for example in Freetown, but not much provision elsewhere. There was a flight of people who had amputations, people who had sexual injuries, and there was a move to find them health care, the international community tried to provide that, but it was mostly in Freetown. There was a reduction in health care provision during the conflict because of the conflict itself.³⁴⁹

Access to health care for civilian men and women, particularly those in the rural areas, was extremely poor, and was limited for those with the rebel or military forces. Further, women’s health needs during the conflict were fundamentally overlooked, despite attempts to address the specific health issues they faced.

During the conflict, local NGOs and women’s organizations provided assistance when possible. According to Solomon, “The Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) paid for rape victims to receive medical attention, the Sierra Leone Chapter of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) set up a number of counselling units to assist rape victims, [and] the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW) supplied non-food items to young displaced mothers.”³⁵⁰ The lack of ability of the government to fulfil these needs has continued into the post-conflict period.

Some international NGOs during the conflict provided emergency health care services, but many individuals still had difficulty accessing these services. Participants noted the existence of Medecins sans frontières (MSF), the Red Cross, Mercy Ships and a few other faith-based NGOs that provided health care services during the conflict, as well

³⁴⁸ “Academic Interview in Canada”, October 23, 2007.

³⁴⁹ “Interview with Kerry Smith (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

³⁵⁰ Christiana Solomon, “The Mano River Union Sub-region: The Role of Women in Building Peace,” in eds. Baksh et al., 176.

as the general existence of pharmacies, traditional healers and others selling medication who also provided health care in their view. Some civil society organizations (such as FAWE) provided counselling to child ex-combatants and to victims of sexual violence.³⁵¹ However, the ability of these organizations and individuals to provide adequate health care depended on their own mandate and resources, and this provision is clearly not long-term in nature. MSF was the most commonly noted NGO providing health care during and in the immediate post-conflict period, and it is evident that they were fulfilling an essential emergency medical service. However, like other NGOs which provide emergency relief and assistance, this is not a long-term or systematic solution.³⁵² This speaks to a serious problem in the post-conflict period, in which the barriers to health care that existed prior to the war have not abated, and few new resources have emerged to address the serious gap in access to health care services.

After the War

The level of health care being provided by the government and private institutions to the general population leaves much to be desired. According to an official with the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone,

[t]here have been a lot of hospitals built all over the country [since the end of the war]. But they don't have the required medical personnel. They do transfer personnel from urban areas to rural areas. But many do not go,

³⁵¹ Although FAWE was originally formed to promote women's education, during the war they "developed supportive programming for GBV (gender-based violence) victims...because they perceived that GBV victims were especially vulnerable to exclusion from education as a result of their social stigmatizations and related isolation, medical problems, and lack of financial resources." Jeanne Ward, "Internally Displaced in Sierra Leone," *If Not Now, When? Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced and Post-Conflict Settings: A Global Overview*, The Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, (April 2002); Available at: www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ifnotnow.pdf, 38.

³⁵² Park suggests that today in Sierra Leone health care is an entrepreneurial enterprise, it is very expensive and there is little access for those who are unable to pay. While NGOs have programs in the rural provinces, they are small and not coordinated with other NGOs, and these programs end when the funding runs out. Thus, the work of NGOs, is non-systematic. "Interview with Dr. Augustine Park", September 24, 2007.

but even when they do the costs in medical facilities are so high, especially in rural areas. Even in urban areas there are certain fields in health that leave much to be desired. For example, we only have one psychiatrist. There are times when even dental facilities are difficult to access. So medical facilities, there is still much to be done to make sure that they are affordable, accessible and adequate.³⁵³

This lack of sufficient health care services was also noted by individual participants.

Although sixteen participants stated that now after the conflict they are able to see a doctor if they are ill, many also stated that that ability depended on their level of income.

Cost was still the primary concern in determining whether or not health care services were accessible. One man from Freetown stated that, “[i]t’s very expensive, things are going backwards. There are no strategies, or plans or policies to upgrade these health sectors.”³⁵⁴ While a few participants mentioned that there are more health facilities now, most spoke of government services, which are still costly in their opinion. A woman who had experienced amputation in the conflict stated that although she had been promised free health care for her and her children, this had not materialized, along with a variety of other provisions. Because she cannot work, access to health care is extremely challenging today.³⁵⁵ Even for those who are supposed to be particularly looked after by the government, there is difficulty in accessing services.³⁵⁶ A man from Freetown indicated that in the provinces there are few qualified medical practitioners, and that living outside of urban areas was a serious barrier to getting adequate health care.³⁵⁷

³⁵³ “Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

³⁵⁴ “Interview No. 34”, December 12, 2007.

³⁵⁵ “Interview No. 14”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.

³⁵⁶ The TRC recommended that certain groups receive special attention and reparations. These groups include amputees and other war wounded, victims of sexual violence, children and war widows.

³⁵⁷ “Interview No. 26”, December 6, 2007.

Further, the existence of informal medical care to supplement expensive and inaccessible government services is problematic, and has not been adequately addressed.³⁵⁸

Government health care services are not only costly, they are often inadequate in terms of infrastructure, equipment and resources. According to a representative of LAWCLA,

[u]p till now, it's like health care facilities in the country have not improved that much. If you go to Connaught hospital, the main hospital in Freetown, there is not even water supply, most of the patients have to ask relatives to get water for them. And there is an intermittent supply of electricity. Even drugs are not available most times for the patient. And the salaries and conditions of doctors and nurses is not that attractive, so a lot of doctors are demotivated, and even the...medical students who become doctors, after graduation, most of them leave Sierra Leone for somewhere better in first world countries. So there is not much improvement.³⁵⁹

This lack of infrastructure, even in Freetown, is compounded by the cost of accessing formal health care, which particularly affects women in their attempt to access health care to deal with their particular health care issues.³⁶⁰

According to a study of health care in Sierra Leone in 2005, the percent of the GDP of the country spent on health increased from 2.6 percent in 1996 to 4.3 percent in 2000. In terms of the amount that individuals spend on health care compared with that of the government, “[g]eneral government expenditure on health constituted 60% of the total expenditure on health; the remaining 40% came from private households and out-of-

³⁵⁸ Another man indicated that a problem was not having proper medication and the existence of informal medical providers, “[y]ou must have, not only to have the building, you need to have the equipment, need to have the medicines, the right kinds of medicines... . If someone wants to go talk to street hockers, you buy, you are risking your life, you go by them, they have their medicines, you might end up being sick.” “Interview No. 24”, December 4, 2007.

³⁵⁹ “Interview No. 18”, (LAWCLA), November 27, 2007.

³⁶⁰ The Women’s Forum of Sierra Leone states, “some of the obstacles to receiving health care is the financial aspect of it, because...the drugs are quite expensive. In terms of seeking for private medical professionals, that is expensive also. So the main obstacle is financial...because most women cannot afford it. And the government hospitals, when you go there, you have to buy your own drugs, it is not free of cost, so that's a big obstacle.” “Interview No. 10”, (Women’s Forum Sierra Leone), November 27, 2007.

pocket spending.”³⁶¹ It is clear that individuals bear a significant portion of spending on health care services, which is problematic given the extremely low incomes of most of the population. While finances are an obstacle for both men and women, women are particularly affected because of their particular health care needs, including maternity related health care needs. KAWDA expressed that, “sometimes women die... .A girl that is in my organization from the eastern part of Freetown died...because she has no money... .So as a result of that she has a delay in labour and she lost her life and the baby's life. So still there are problems.”³⁶² Because of the lack of access to finances, women face particular challenges in accessing maternity related health care services.

The general health issues that affect women and the specific issues that became prominent as a result of their experience in the conflict, are not well-addressed in the post-conflict period, despite attempts by the international community to provide services. “I think that there's not enough attention to reproductive health issues, in terms of the post-war context. That, given the context of sexual violence that occurred during the conflict and the high risk of sexually transmitted diseases, there's simply not enough resources for girls to access, should they choose to. And again, many choose not to as a result of stigma and fear.”³⁶³ Considering the experience of women and girls in the conflict, more services geared towards meeting their needs is extremely important in the

³⁶¹ Ade Renner, Joses M Kirigia, Eyob A Zere et al., “Technical Efficiency of Peripheral Health Units in Pujehun District of Sierra Leone: a DEA Application,” *BMC Health Services Research*, (2005); Available at: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/5/77>. However, the Human Development Report indicates that government expenditure on health was 1.9 percent of the GDP in 2004, which suggests a significant decline, or a larger GDP. *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human solidarity in a divided world*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2007): Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf, 297.

³⁶² “Interview No. 11”, (KAWDA), November 23, 2007.

³⁶³ “Academic Interview in Canada”, October 23, 2007.

post-conflict period. While access is a problem for most people in Sierra Leone, the particular health care needs of women are not effectively addressed. According to Dugal,

there's a lot of problems that women have, that are not addressed. And a lot of them are from the war because a lot of women were raped. And so a lot of these sexual abuses and diseases are not treated... . And so it's not that they have less access to health care it's more just that there are some problems specific to women that are not being addressed.³⁶⁴

Women's specific health care needs relate generally to maternity, which was raised by most participants when asked about women's health issues. But there are also other health care issues that women face as a result of their experience of sexual violence, and also because of what KAWDA calls "harmful traditional practices". When asked about women's health care issues, KAWDA responded that,

[s]ome of the specific medical issues are these fistula, vaginal fistula and...most of the ones that we find out under our organization are caused by FGM. Because some of [the women] are badly cut and when they want to give birth they have these bladder problems. And we know that when a girl goes through FGM very early...they cannot give birth by themselves... .[W]hen a woman is not able to give birth...they are supposed to do CS [caesarean section] on that woman so that they can assist her... .The doctors are supposed to assist the woman to take the baby, to make sure that the babies don't die and the mothers don't die. But sometimes they leave these women to be in long labour and in the end they lose their lives and they lose their baby's life.³⁶⁵

These practices add another layer of difficulty to improving women's health needs, as do the simple lack of services and resources geared towards women's health, which increases the impact of the general difficulties in accessing health care.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ "Interview with Zoe Dugal", October 21, 2007.

³⁶⁵ "Interview No. 11", (KAWDA), November 23, 2007.

³⁶⁶ Female Genital Mutilation or FGM (also known as Female Genital Cutting or FGC), is a topic that has received a great deal of attention in studies on women's health and particularly in Sierra Leone, as it is extremely prevalent. FGM is carried out by women's secret societies as part of initiation rites into adulthood. Discussion of this practice came up in interviews with NGOs and other organizations during the field research, but was not pursued by the interviewer as it was not the subject of the thesis. See, for example, Martha C. Nussbaum, "Judging Other Cultures: The Case of Genital Mutilation," in *Sex and Social Equality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

While there have been some attempts to address women's health issues by local and international organizations as well as by private services, this is not widespread, and a great deal more needs to be done to address women's health needs in a manner that is accessible to all. According to an official with the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, when it comes to issues of breast cancer or other health issues that require specialized services, the resources to address these concerns are simply not available. Further, women's decision-making in terms of their health is limited.

There is still much more to be done, because when a woman is pregnant she finds that her participation in decision making is not a critical factor, her health care status, and even how they are treated in these vulnerable times... [W]omen do have health care issues in terms of knowing their reproductive rights, providing age-appropriate information to girls. Also [we] have infant mortality which is quite high in Sierra Leone. And that may also have to do with women's health and their access to education... . And because of stigmatization, because of poverty, because of illiteracy there are major areas of concern in women's health.³⁶⁷

One of the greatest reasons for this lack of services for women has to do with the capacity of the government to ensure that women's health needs are met. It is clear that there is a great deal to be done to improve access to adequate and affordable health care, particularly in terms of women's specific health care needs.

Access to health care in Sierra Leone has been poor since before the conflict, and has not significantly improved. There is an urban/rural, class and gender divide in terms of accessing health care, with cost being one of the greatest barriers. The serious lack of infrastructure and resources for health care in Sierra Leone means that when individuals can access services, these are not often adequate in terms of facilities and medication. The provision of health care by the international community and particularly NGOs in the immediate post-war period met an urgent need the government was unable to meet. This

³⁶⁷ "Interview No. 17", (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.

was a result of the serious political and economic deterioration it faced before and during the conflict, considering the sheer number of those requiring urgent health care services. A representative of the 50/50 Group stated that after the war the provision of health care has improved because of the work of the international community in raising awareness about health care issues. "There has been a lot of awareness, because after the conflict, the awareness on the health and education all came in... . [T]he NGOs and international institutions focused on that, health and education."³⁶⁸ The international community were also primarily responsible for providing key services in the post-conflict period, as those available were limited or had serious infrastructural problems. According to a report by Médecins Sans Frontières on psychiatric services published after the conflict, "[i]n Sierra Leone even the most basic psychiatric services were absent. With one psychiatrist in the country and one institution that was hardly staffed MSF doctors provided basic psychiatric treatment in the MSF-run primary health care settings in addition to the basic technical support that was given to the institution."³⁶⁹ Thus, international organizations supplemented the dismal services available in the post-war period. However, the provision of psychiatric care in the longer-term has not significantly improved. Shortly after the conflict ended there was,

[b]etter health care provision but only because of international community involvement, trying to set up infrastructure, it takes time to rebuild. Immediately post-conflict, sexual assault clinics were trying to work with demobilized women and others, working in hospitals... . What happens when that funding leaves? Because of the conflict and the introduction of basic emergency healthcare response, there is an understanding that there needs to continue to be a provision... .There is an awareness that in order

³⁶⁸ "Interview No. 9", (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.

³⁶⁹ Kaz De Jong and Rolf J. Kleber, "Emergency Conflict-related Psychosocial Interventions in Sierra Leone and Uganda: Lessons from Médecins Sans Frontières," *Journal of Health Psychology*, 12, no. 3 (2007): 490.

to provide health care, you need to provide minimum services. But at this stage, people are pulling out their emergency resources in Sierra Leone.³⁷⁰

While the international community has tried to meet a post-war need for health care, this has not been systematized, and as the emergency post-war period comes to an end, organizations are beginning to pull out their services to meet other post-war needs in other parts of the world. During the fall of 2007, when this research was conducted, a representative from the International Committee of the Red Cross indicated that they would be pulling out their services from Sierra Leone as the post-war period has come to an end. While there should be a clear transition from the services provided by the international community to those provided by the government, it is clear that the government is currently unable to take on this service provision in a holistic way, simply by looking at the current level of health care provided by the government.³⁷¹

Although NGOs and international and local organizations have been providing health care during and following the conflict, this is not a systematic or long-term approach to providing health care. As the post-conflict emergency period comes to an end these groups begin to leave the country. The government is evidently unable to take on the remainder of health care provision that other sources are supporting, even at this stage in the post-war process. A significant portion of health care is still provided by institutions other than the government.³⁷² Also, government facilities are still poor,

³⁷⁰ "Interview with Kerry Smith", (Amnesty International UK), November 8, 2007.

³⁷¹ This is clear in terms of the monetary amount of health care services provided by the government and that provided by other sources. "The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) provides about 50% of health care services. The remainder is provided by the private sector (private-for-profit institutions and traditional healers) and national (e.g. Christian Health Association of Sierra Leone) and international (e.g. German Leprosy Rehabilitation Association and *Medecins Sans Frontieres*) NGOs." Renner et al.

³⁷² In comparison to the pre-war period, a 1983 study suggested that "at least 75 percent of all health facilities are managed by the Sierra Leone Government," which suggests that the control of the Sierra Leone government over provision of health care services has declined since the period before the

despite attempts to address the lack of health care services, and this is of particular concern in the rural areas. Women's particular health needs, especially relating to maternity and also needs that have arisen as a result of the serious violence they experienced during the conflict, which has continued in the aftermath, have not been adequately addressed. This area will be a huge challenge for the Sierra Leone government and international and local organizations to address in the near future, and it requires a great deal of attention because of the impact it has on people's ability to survive and move forward in the post-conflict period.

Access to health care was poor prior to the conflict, it declined during the war, and has not improved in the post-war period. In Sierra Leone, this indicates that the hypothesis of the literature that access to health care declines for women and girls during the war and does not improve in the post-war period as compared to the pre-war period (H3A) has been upheld. This is particularly because of the dramatic increase in gender-based violence during the war, which continues, albeit to a lesser degree, in the aftermath. There was an increase in attention to health care and women's health issues in the immediate emergency post-war period, but this has not been sustained. The international community has begun to pull out its resources in this area, without adequate government capacity to provide sufficient health care services. In the immediate post-war period there was space to begin dealing with the sexual violence and trauma experienced by women and girls, but this was not sufficiently done, and the longer-term health needs of men and women, and women-specific needs, are not being met. This is a clear area for

war. As cited in Mohamed Bailey, "Individual and Environmental Influence on Infant and Child Mortality in Rural Sierra Leone: A Multivariate Analysis," *Journal of Population Studies*, no. 12 (June, 1988): 176.

improvement in the general standard of living of Sierra Leoneans and in particular in improving gender equality by addressing women's specific health care needs.

Women Suffer Twice – Recommendations and Conclusion

Five years after the end of its brutal eleven-year civil war, Sierra Leone is still last on the Human Development Index.³⁷³ Sierra Leone continues to suffer from serious economic and political infrastructure inadequacies, which has impacted its ability to recover in the post-conflict period. This is in spite of the massive amounts of aid and assistance from the international community and donor states.³⁷⁴ Yet there is great hope among the many Sierra Leoneans I met for something better; for the development of the nation, improved basic amenities, access to jobs and regular income, and a way to sustain their families. While the conflict has left the country with a destroyed economy, dilapidated infrastructure and weak governance structures, there has been some small improvement in certain areas. The Sierra Leone of today is not the same as it was five years ago, although a great deal of improvement is still necessary.

The conflict has brought forth new and heightened problems, including the health issues of amputees and those affected by sexual violence. Men and women, boys and girls all faced severe atrocities, and in many cases were made to carry them out. Violence was carried out in gender-specific ways, with men and boys targeted as possible combatants, or abducted into the fighting forces for combat. Women and girls were targeted for sexual violence, and those who were part of the fighting forces took on similar tasks to boys and men, as well as other gender-specific tasks. Gender inequalities

³⁷³ *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 232. Note, this is the HDI value for 2005.

³⁷⁴ According to statistics from the Human Development Report, Official Development Assistance received by the Government of Sierra Leone was 9.1 percent of the GHP in 1990, compared with 28.8 percent in 2005. An extremely large amount of donor money has been providing ongoing support to reconstruction programs and ongoing development, demonstrating the extent of the destruction of the conflict and the difficulties rebuilding in the aftermath. *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 293.

in Sierra Leone were exacerbated during the civil war and have been prolonged into the post-conflict period.

This thesis has provided a preliminary investigation of gender equality in Sierra Leone, to examine whether there has been significant change through the pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict periods and what factors have influenced this situation.³⁷⁵ The literature on gender and conflict outlines some of the main areas in which gender equality may improve through conflict, but argues that these improvements are not often sustained in the aftermath. It does not clearly explain why some positive changes are sustained and others are not, and which factors enable or inhibit improvement in gender equality in the post-conflict period. This thesis research finds that where there have been some improvements in gender equality into the aftermath, this has been through a collaboration of local and international organizations and the larger international community, with the agreement and to some degree participation of the government. This is seen in the areas of access to education, political representation and legal change. Where there has been little change or even decline, this is a result of lack of ability on the part of the government and even misguided or ad hoc approaches of the international community. The work of the international community and local organizations in the immediate post-war period has a significant impact on whether positive changes are sustained.

In the aftermath, while some women have benefited from new political and economic opportunities, this has not translated into significantly wider opportunities for gender equality. In the area of political representation, there are many challenges to

³⁷⁵ While it is unclear if the changes will be sustained in the longer term post-conflict period, currently some areas of gender equality have improved slightly. However, this is only for some women. Better data and longer-term study may allow for a more concrete analysis, but at this point it is evident that post-conflict gender equality is nuanced, in that there are improvements in some areas and not in others.

increasing the formal involvement of women, including the willingness of Sierra Leoneans to vote for women and for parties to put forward female candidates. Yet, the work of local organizations and the international community has begun to make real progress in setting the agenda for change. Women's informal involvement before, during and after the war has been significant, and these important roles are beginning to receive recognition through more formal positions. The literature on gender and conflict accurately reflects that the work of the international community and civil society organizations can positively influence an increase in gender equality in this area.

In terms of access to legal change, a number of initiatives are now ongoing to ensure the implementation of the Gender Acts. Much of the lobbying for changes in legislation and the ongoing work towards implementation has come from local women's organizations with the support of the international community. The improved legal status of women and girls in Sierra Leone following the conflict and resulting from the work of these organizations is consistent with the literature and is a clear example of positive change in the aftermath.

Access to primary education has improved in the post-war period, as well as access to secondary education in some regions. This has resulted primarily from government policies to improve access to education, with the support of the international community and local organizations focused on education for women and girls. The literature on gender and conflict suggests that access to education may increase for women and girls during war. This was not the case in Sierra Leone. Yet, although there are still serious barriers to improving access to education, the educational environment in

the post-war period is much improved compared to the destruction of the conflict, and even compared to the situation before the war for women and girls.

A less positive situation in the post-war period is access to economic opportunities. The immediate post-war period in Sierra Leone offered some new opportunities for training and employment, but the lack of a long-term approach to creating employment has meant that there is little formal employment in the post-war period. Further, the gender-biased approach of the DDR process has meant that access to formal work for women and girls is severely lacking. This indicator suggests that where the approach taken is ad hoc and gender-biased, improvements in gender equality, and even overall improvement in the situation, will not be sustainable into the aftermath.

Finally, access to health care in Sierra Leone has not substantially improved, and women and girls' access to services for their specific health care needs leaves much to be desired. There has been some service provision by local and international NGOs and other private services, but these are not systematic in approach, and cost and distance to health facilities remain serious obstacles. As NGOs have begun to remove their services with the end of the immediate post-war 'emergency' period, providing adequate health care is a serious challenge, and has a great effect on gender equality for women and girls. The suggestion by the literature on gender and conflict that health care declines during war and is not significantly improved afterwards has certainly been the case in Sierra Leone, and this requires immediate attention.

The experiences of men and women in the conflict and post-conflict periods in Sierra Leone and the analysis of the indicators of gender equality provide a clear understanding of some changes that need to occur to enable improvement. Although

what happens in war is important, what happens in the immediate post-war period is essential to determining whether opportunities through conflict are sustained into the aftermath. The opportunity for improved gender equality in the aftermath of conflict does not simply arise because of the disruption of social cohesion inherent in war, but primarily due to the spaces that are made available for reflection as a result of the disruption. In Sierra Leone, the war itself did not necessarily create long-term change, but it did open up spaces through which the articulation of the need to address and improve gender equality was made possible.

In the post-war period, the recognition that the violence carried out during the conflict was a result of systemic inequalities in Sierra Leone has been extremely important for creating change. This recognition has enabled work for changing discriminatory legislation and promoting programs such as educational opportunities for women and girls. The ability for women's organizations and civil society to rally around the TRC Report's recognition of these historic inequalities has provided a means for lobbying for change in the aftermath. One of the positive developments from the conflict was the galvanizing effect it has had on women's organizations. Yet, the lack of implementation of the TRC Report's recommendations is a huge barrier to moving forward. This is primarily the role of the government, but civil society organizations and the international community have also been implicated in this work.

Whether or not positive changes are sustained in the aftermath depends largely on support from the international community and the work of civil society. The inability of a fragile state to take on its full role in the immediate post-war period means that other actors have been primarily responsible for pushing forward the gender equality agenda.

The role of the international community is significant in creating and facilitating changes in gender equality in the post-conflict period. If gender is not properly mainstreamed into international programs and policies, the effect can be hugely detrimental. Gender mainstreaming of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation processes is essential for improving gender equality in a sustainable manner.³⁷⁶

Leaving gender issues off the table until there is 'peace' effectively hinders the full possibility of improving the situation of women through the opportunities created by the conflict. After this stage, it may be too late to regain the momentum of the immediate post-war period. Post-conflict reconstruction often involves taking stock of who did what, took on what role during the war, and how this can be reconciled in the post-conflict period. While this is particularly relevant to those responsible for the atrocities carried out in war, it is also relevant to other societal changes that may occur, such as the impact of war on women's and men's roles. This immediate post-war period is itself a critical period, so any opportunities must be addressed in the peacebuilding and reconstruction processes. Otherwise, the forces of "normalization" may prevent real positive change.

Post-conflict reconstruction processes must fully ensure that the capacity of the government to function effectively is developed before emergency services pull out. The international community must recognize that post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding programs and policies have an impact on the long-term peace and

³⁷⁶ "Gender mainstreaming" is "seen as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs in all areas and levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences as integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." As cited in Bouta et al., 5.

development of a nation. When key sectors of the society are left out, or stereotypical gender roles are reinforced, positive opportunities that may have existed, or that would have been created through such programs, are lost. This short period of time is essential for consolidating opportunities. If this is not done, recreating such opportunities is much more difficult later on.

A second essential understanding is the need to improve the long-term sustainable growth of Sierra Leone. This requires developing economic opportunities and improved educational and health care facilities in the interim period. This will significantly improve the standard of living of Sierra Leoneans, and with a gender mainstreamed approach, equality for women and girls will improve. Access to health care and education is fundamental to ensuring rehabilitation of survivors of the conflict and the long-term development of the country. Health care must also make provisions for women-specific needs and economic opportunities must be available for those acquiring the adequate education to fill positions. Beyond the greater structural political and legal changes needed, the individual citizens need to continue in their everyday lives, providing for themselves and their families and accessing necessary services, in order for real change to be consolidated.

The relationships between the factors related to war and the indicators of gender equality elaborated through the case study of Sierra Leone have provided for some policy recommendations and set the basis for further study. While the effect of conflict on gender equality is mixed, some important understandings of which factors were most relevant to sustaining positive changes in Sierra Leone have been made evident. This research indicates that what happens in the immediate post-conflict period is essential in

determining whether opportunities made available through conflict and the factors related to conflict are sustained in the aftermath. This may not always be the case, and the question of causality is not fully answered, but the research has added to the literature on gender and conflict, seeking to develop some ways for moving forward and adapting approaches to further research and policy making.

Conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction must go hand in hand with the transition to development, and both require a gender mainstreamed approach. Without this, any of the opportunities for improved gender equality created through conflict, despite its overall devastation and destruction, are lost. In Sierra Leone, this means that women suffer twice, once during the war, and again when opportunities for improved equality are neglected and unequal gender norms are reinforced in the aftermath.

Appendix A

Sierra Leone Individual Questions

Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your ethnic background? What is your religious background?
3. How long have you lived in Freetown? Did you move here from another area? Where?
4. Are you married? Have you been married previously?
5. Do you have any children?
6. Have you ever been to school or learned to read? Have you received training for a job? Was this before, during, or after the war? Did you have to stop the training or school for any reason? Are you able to receive training or school now if you wanted or needed it?
7. Did you have a job before the war? What did you do? Did you have other activities, such as household work or agricultural work? Were you able to continue working during the war? What do you do now? Have you had to change jobs since the end of the war? Do you want to go back to your previous job? What is preventing you from doing that?
8. Were you able to see a Doctor when you needed to before the war? What about during the war? What about now? Was there a time when you needed to see a doctor and could not? Did anyone else provide help? If there has been a problem, why do you think it was?
9. Did you vote in the 2007 election? What about in 2002, 1996? Why or why not? Would you vote for a female candidate? Why or why not? Do you think that having more women in government will make a difference in the decisions or programs of the government? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that the political and legal decisions made by the government have made a difference in your access to education, health care, or employment? Is this better for women or for men? How so?
11. What was your experience during the war? What was the experience of your children, family, and community? Did you experience any violence? Did you have to leave your home? How did you survive? What are some of the problems you faced during the war?
12. What was your experience after the war? What was the experience of your children, family, and community? Have you experienced violence after the end of the war? Have you been able to go back home? Do you want to? What are the greatest barriers you face today? How are you surviving now?
13. The parliament just passed some laws related to inheritance of property, marriage and divorce and to violence against women. Are you familiar with these laws? Do you think they will have an impact on society? What kind of impact do you think they will have? What or who do you think helped these laws get passed? If you are familiar with the laws, are you glad they were passed? Is there something else you think should be changed in the legal system to make life better for you?

14. Do you think the international organizations here are helping? What about the local organizations? Who do you think is most responsible for helping Sierra Leone rebuild after the war?
15. Do you think things were better before the war, during the war, or now? In what ways? Do you feel that you are able to control your life now, or was this more possible before or during the war?
16. Do you think things are worse, the same or better for women in general after the war? Are things worse, the same or better for women in general now than they were before the war? Was there anything positive for women during the war? If things are worse, the same or better, how are they this way, and what has made them this way? If they are not better, why not? Has anything prevented things from being better for women in Sierra Leone? What has made things worse if they are worse for women in Sierra Leone?
17. Where do you think Sierra Leone is headed in the future? Where do you hope it is headed in the future?
18. Do you think people have healed from the war? Did the TRC or SCSL help with this? What else do you think is needed for people to heal?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
20. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B

Academic, Expert and Organization Questions

1. What was the focus of your research/work/organization in Sierra Leone?
2. When were you in Sierra Leone?
3. In your opinion and based on your research, how available were educational opportunities (including skills training) before, during and after the conflict? Is this different for men and women?
4. In your opinion and based on your research, how available were employment opportunities before, during and after the war? Is this different for men and women? What kinds of activities do these groups primarily take on? Have people been able to continue the work they did before the war? Are there obstacles to returning to this work or to finding new work after the war?
5. Is access to health care better, worse or the same for the pre-war, war, and post-war periods? Who provides medical/health care? What are some obstacles to receiving health care, if there are any?
6. Can you comment on the results of the 2007 elections? Has voter turnout improved since 1996, 2002? Are you optimistic about these election results, or were you for previous elections. In your opinion, is there increased willingness to vote for female candidates? Would having more women in government make a difference in the decisions or programs of the government?
7. Have political and legal decisions made by the government made a difference in people's access to education, health care, or employment? Is this better for women or for men?
8. In your opinion, how did the experiences of men and women differ during the war? How was this different for people of different backgrounds, places of origin and age? What are some of the main problems men and women faced during the war?
9. In the post-war period, have things changed significantly for the lives of men and women of various backgrounds? What are some of the greatest barriers they face today?
10. The parliament just passed some laws related to inheritance of property, marriage and divorce and to violence against women. Are you familiar with these laws? Do you think these laws will be effectively implemented and have an actual impact on society? What or who do you think helped these laws get passed? What other major legal or political changes do you think need to be changed to improve the situation of Sierra Leonean men and women?
11. Do you think the international organizations and local organizations in Sierra Leone are actually helping? Who do you think is most responsible for helping Sierra Leone rebuild after the war?
12. Do you think things were better, worse or effectively the same before the war, during the war, or now for men and women in Sierra Leone? In what ways? Do you think people are able to be in control their lives now, compared with before or during the war?

13. Was there anything positive for women during the war? Has anything prevented things from being better in the aftermath for women in Sierra Leone?
14. What changes do you think Sierra Leone needs now? Where do you hope the country is headed?
15. Do you think people have healed from the war? Did the TRC or SCSL help with this? What else do you think is needed for people to heal?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
17. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

Local and International Organizations Interviewed in Sierra Leone

Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Sierra Leone
Thorough Empowerment and Development of Women in Sierra Leone (TEDEWOSIL)
The 50/50 Group
Katanya Women's Development Association (KAWDA)
Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA)
Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)
Women's Forum (Sierra Leone)
Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
Amnesty International (Sierra Leone Section)

Appendix D:

Interviews Cited

- “Interview No. 2”, November 14, 2007.
“Interview No. 3”, November 15, 2007.
“Interview No. 4”, November 17, 2007.
“Interview No. 5”, (FAWE), November 20, 2007.
“Interview No. 6”, (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs), November 21, 2007.
“Interview No. 7”, November 21, 2007.
“Interview No. 8”, TEDEWOSIL, November 22, 2007.
“Interview No. 9”, (The 50/50 Group), November 22, 2007.
“Interview No. 11” (KAWDA), November 23, 2007.
“Interview No. 12”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.
“Interview No. 13”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.
“Interview No. 14”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.
“Interview No. 15”, (Makeni), November 24, 2007.
“Interview No. 17”, (Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone), November 26, 2007.
“Interview No. 18”, (LAWCLA), November 27, 2007.
“Interview No. 19”, (MARWOPNET), November 27, 2007.
“Interview No. 20”, (Women’s Forum Sierra Leone), November 27, 2007.
“Interview No. 21”, (Campaign for Good Governance), November 28, 2007.
“Interview No. 22”, November 28, 2007.
“Interview No. 24”, December 4, 2007.
“Interview No. 25”, December 6, 2007.
“Interview No. 26”, December 6, 2007.
“Interview No. 30”, (Port Loko), December 8, 2007
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“Interview No. 35”, (Amnesty International Sierra Leone), December 14, 2007.
“Interview No. 37”, (UNIOSIL), December 18, 2007.
- “Interview with Dr. Augustine Park”, September 24, 2007.
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