

XI. ADOLESCENT RESEARCHERS LEAD THE STUDY: METHODOLOGY AND LESSONS LEARNED



During the three-day training, adolescent researchers worked with adult research advisers to develop interviewing and communication skills.

Adolescents were the principal researchers and leaders of this study, with youth and other adults supporting and facilitating their activities. This section provides detail on how the study worked, including:

- How adolescent researchers, adult research advisers and youth coordination groups were identified
- The content of their training
- How they developed their methodology
- How they carried out their research
- Lessons learned about process and participation

The approach to the work in Sierra Leone was similar to that conducted with adolescents by the Women's Commission in Kosovo (2000) and northern Uganda (2001), and interesting patterns in outcomes have begun to emerge. Thus, some of the language used to describe the process is from earlier reports with information specific to Sierra Leone inserted, as are important lessons learned that warrant reprinting for a new audience. Lessons learned that are especially distinct to the Sierra Leone experience or had not been covered in previous reports are also given emphasis here.³²⁰ A final report comparing the findings from each site, plus a fourth site, will outline more precisely patterns that emerged in the research process and overall lessons learned.

THE RESEARCH TEAMS

Fifty-one Sierra Leonean adolescents living in Freetown and Makeni, Sierra Leone, participated as “adolescent researchers” in this study. They were the principal researchers, in collaboration with the Women's Commission. They designed and shaped their methodology, organized and conducted the research, and analyzed and reported their findings. They will go on to conduct advocacy based on these findings with the Women's Commission, adult advisers and youth coordination groups involved in facilitating their work, and other interested groups and individuals.

The young people worked on two separate teams, one in Freetown, known as the Freetown team, and one in Makeni, known as the Makeni team, with 27 and 24 adolescent researchers respectively. Seventeen adults serving as “research advisers” assisted them in their responsibilities — eight on the Freetown team and nine on the Makeni team.

A total of seven local NGOs coordinated the work of the two teams — four in Freetown and three in Makeni. Each of these two groupings formed a “youth coordination group” (YCG). Thus, one YCG assisted adolescents and adults carry out the work in Freetown, and another facilitated those in Makeni. These entities acted as sub-grantees of the Women's Commission and administered the research project funds. Six of the seven organizations were youth-run NGOs.

The Women's Commission and the IRC offices in Freetown and Caritas-Makeni in Freetown and Makeni provided invaluable support to the project, each offering insight into conceptual approaches and issues to be addressed. The local Women's Commission office assisted especially with the organization of the research teams, and the IRC played an important role in providing financial accounting support. Caritas-Makeni was a strong collaborative partner in the north, assisting with the organization of research teams and follow-up advocacy.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The objective of the teams' work was to identify and investigate key issues facing adolescents in their communities and to identify solutions for these concerns. The results of their work will be used for advocacy purposes, to bring international, national and local attention to adolescent and youth concerns in Sierra Leone and the surrounding region. Their recommendations will inform decisions made about programs

and policies implemented in Sierra Leone, including strengthening current efforts and implementing new pilot projects for young people that *involve* young people. It is also hoped that the process will inspire young people and provide them with ideas about ways they can take action on their own behalf, with or without help from adults. (See below for more on what adolescent researchers identified as their reasons for undertaking this work.)

Central to the approach of this study is a belief in adolescents' right to participate in the decisions that concern them.³²¹

Adolescent participation in this study and adult support for this participation took several principal forms:

- **Adolescents were:** lead researchers, advocates and research participants, who were interviewed by the research teams.
- **Adults were:** advisers to the adolescent researchers, research coordinators, advocates, supporters and research participants, who were interviewed by the research teams.

FREETOWN RESEARCH TEAM

**27 Adolescent Researchers
8 Adult Research Advisers**

Coordinated by Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA); Forum for African Women Educationalists-Freetown (FAWE); Independent Youth Forum (IYF); Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organization (SLYEO)

Regions Covered

Freetown (city); **Mountain Region** (Regent, Leicester, Gloucester); **Western Rural** (York, Tombo); **Western Urban** (Waterloo, Grafton, Hastings)

MAKENI RESEARCH TEAM

**24 Adolescent Researchers
9 Adult Research Advisers**

Coordinated by Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR); Civil Society Movement (CSM) and Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG)

Regions Covered

Makeni town and surrounding villages

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH LOCATIONS AND PARTNERS

FINDING THE YOUTH COORDINATORS

Having received positive responses from adolescents, local and international NGOs, UN agencies and others working in Sierra Leone about potential interest in, and the feasibility of, conducting the study, representatives of the Women's Commission traveled to Sierra Leone in March 2002 to identify partners and locations to carry out the work. The local Women's Commission office also helped identify a number of Freetown-based youth organizations and many adolescents who expressed interest in becoming involved. In turn, direction from these youth groups and additional guidance from Caritas-Makeni led to local groups being identified in Makeni, Bombali Seborá Chiefdom.

In both regions, given the very large number of youth organizations functioning in Sierra Leone, the young people decided to ask umbrella youth organizations to represent them as the YCG for each area. They held discussions and decided that the Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA), Independent Youth Forum (IYF) and the Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organization (SLYEO) should work together as the YCG in Freetown. The Forum for African Women Educationalists-Freetown Branch (FAWE) was also included in this YCG to expand the direct participation of women and girls in the coordination function, since most youth organizations are led by males. In Makeni, the YCG comprised the Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG), the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR) and the Civil Society Movement Sierra Leone (CSM-SL). (See International, National and Local Responses section for more information about these and other local groups.)

The original concept of a YCG involves a single youth organization facilitating the work of one research team. In the case of Sierra Leone, these YCGs had a double challenge: carrying out the work *and* doing it as part of a coalition, with the inputs of many groups to balance. This, however, was deemed the best way forward by the young people themselves. With great savvy, the groups also made the decision from the outset to, as much as possible, use the project to strengthen youth advocacy networks throughout Sierra Leone and carry the outcomes to other parts of Sierra Leone.

CHOOSING THE LOCATIONS

With resources enough to concentrate on two sites only, Freetown and Makeni were chosen for several key reasons. The issues presented by the sheer number of people traveling through and living in and around the capital in a range of circumstances — in camps, villages, urban settings, as returning refugees, as IDPs, etc. — presented compelling reasons for focusing on Freetown. In addition, having local groups involved in this area in close proximity to major governmental, UN and other decision-makers would facilitate follow-up advocacy work. Furthermore, local umbrella groups based in Freetown could provide national representation for adolescents and youth in other parts of Sierra Leone and could potentially carry out follow-up work with young people in other areas.

After much debate, Makeni was chosen as the second site. At the time, the north had received little attention compared with other parts of the country and was just opening up to larger numbers of NGO and other actors, while the east of Sierra Leone especially was drawing significant attention. The northern region had IDP and returning refugee issues to be addressed and faced particular challenges making the very recent transition from being the headquarters of the RUF. Freetown-based youth organizations also felt that involving and supporting youth groups in the north was particularly needed given the unique upheaval experienced under the RUF's control.

CHOOSING ADOLESCENT RESEARCHERS AND ADULT ADVISERS

After detailed discussions, the Women's Commission left the new Youth Coordination Group partners in March with basic guidelines and mutually agreed upon criteria for selecting adolescent researchers and adult research advisers according to terms of reference (TOR) for each function. The YCGs had a month to organize themselves and the teams in order to begin research in April.

Diversity was a key criterion for choosing adolescent researchers. While no one person can fully represent an entire group, attention was paid to ensure the representation of a wide range of experiences and perspectives of young people. This gave researchers good opportunities to learn from one another and their adult advisers, so that their ideas for eventual outreach would be comprehensive.

In both areas, YCGs used youth and women's group

networks to identify and choose adolescent researchers. YCGs provided these groups and other key community people, such as headmasters, with the adolescent researcher TOR. Nominations were received and narrowed down by the YCGs and other young people, according to the criteria.

Ultimately, adolescent researchers were of both sexes, aged from 14 to 22 years. They included: child mothers; those formerly with the RUF; those formerly with the CDF; internally displaced; former refugees; former commercial sex workers; adolescents living in or out of camps and in town or in villages; those orphaned by war; students and out-of-school youth; working youth; adolescents with disabilities; a young tribal chief; and youth activists (e.g., part of a youth organization).

A strong effort was made to limit the number of experienced youth activists on the team while reaching out to more marginalized young people. Thus, some adolescents on the team were also representing their youth groups and would be able to bring their experiences back to the group, and others were learning about being part of a group activity for the first time.

Adult advisers were chosen in much the same way. They included both males and females with a commitment to and/or experience working with young people. They were respected members of the community, including parents and teachers.

In both cases, an effort was made to identify participants from neighborhoods where the teams intended to carry out research. While the teams did not limit themselves to conducting research in areas where team members resided, in some places this facilitated logistics and increased the potential for follow-up discussion in these areas.

DESIGNING, ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH

Each team participated in a three-day training, where Women's Commission researchers and local professionals guided them through a process of identifying their purpose as a team, learning about research methodologies and developing and practicing their methodology.

The Women's Commission provided a framework for the researchers, suggesting a few general questions to guide their work: "What are the main prob-

lems of adolescents in Sierra Leone, and what are some solutions?" and "Who are 'adolescents' and 'youth' in Sierra Leone today?"

First, the teams worked together to decide for themselves why these questions would be of interest to them and to develop statements of purpose. Then they spent a day-and-a-half identifying and developing detailed questions about related topics for discussion with their peers. (See Methodological Materials in the Appendix for sample questions developed.)

The Makeni team's statement of purpose was: "We are conducting this research in order to find out more about adolescents' problems and identify solutions and recommendations for subsequent implementation, so that future generations will not face such problems."³²² And the Freetown team asserted, "We are undertaking research as a team to investigate the problems facing adolescents and young people in Sierra Leone, identifying solutions and advocating to the policymakers and the community for the betterment of young people."³²³

In the second half of the training, the teams learned about, shaped and practiced different research methods. Following a suggestion made by the Women's Commission, the teams chose to undertake a combination of focus group discussions, individual case studies and a survey of top adolescent concerns, which they designed and tested themselves. (See Survey Results section and Appendix for Methodological Materials.)³²⁴ They practiced leading discussions and taking detailed notes, incorporating interviewing ethics agreed upon in the training. As the final activity of the training, researchers devised a detailed research plan, deciding whom they wanted to speak to, where and how they would organize themselves. (See Who Was Interviewed?) They also designed team T-shirts, which they would wear while researching. After the training, the teams conducted their research for roughly three weeks, followed by a week of analysis and two weeks of drafting a short team report.

Focus groups and surveys were carried out by smaller groups of the larger research team and included two to four adolescent researchers, accompanied by one adult research adviser. The adolescent researchers in these small groups took the lead explaining the project to participants, posing questions, generating dialogue, taking notes and administering the survey. Following the sessions, the adolescents wrote up summaries of the overall findings of

the sessions. Adults acted as guides, helped the young people to organize themselves and endeavored to intervene only when needed. Adolescent researchers acted individually to invite research participants to be interviewed separately for case studies. These interviews at times lasted several hours, following which the adolescent researchers wrote written reports of their case studies.

Each focus group/survey session aimed to involve no more than eight to ten people to provide ample opportunities for individuals to speak. Sessions were conducted in the language of choice of the participants, mainly *Krio* in Freetown and *Temne* or *Krio* in Makeni.³²⁵ Although the length of the sessions varied, in general the groups spent an hour and a half talking in the focus groups and then half an hour filling out the concerns surveys. Attendance at the sessions was voluntary for participants, and they were informed that their testimony might be used in printed reports, but that their identities would be kept confidential for their protection. Photographs and video were taken and published only with the verbal agreement of the research participants.

EXPERIENCE, MOTIVES AND IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

THE ADOLESCENT RESEARCHERS

The experience was undoubtedly the most interesting and meaningful to the adolescent members of the research teams, who met hundreds of research participants and learned about a wide range of concerns firsthand. The research team members worked together for many weeks, were excited to get out into their communities and engage with others and felt a huge sense of accomplishment. As with the two previous Women's Commission studies, the more the adolescents worked at it, the more enthusiastic, creative and dedicated they became to doing a good job.

Overall, the researchers on both teams enjoyed getting to know one other and the adolescents they interviewed. They confronted their fears of leading discussions and speaking in front of others and met new challenges with growing confidence and excitement. They also worked through disagreements about the process and supported one another's progress. With no promises that their efforts would produce desired outcomes, the process instead showed the young people the potential value of



Adolescent researchers from both teams submitted their own design for the research team T-shirts and voted for the winner. Here, an adolescent researcher displays the winning design for the Makeni research team.

research and advocacy, of hope and of confidence in themselves and others.³²⁶ All of these skills and experiences are useful to other areas of their lives.

Given their excitement for the project and the skills and confidence they developed, the adolescent researchers are likely to undertake more activities, individually, in groups and or with adults. In effect, they form energetic, knowledgeable nuclei for further youth-led community-based action. Also, the NGOs that coordinated the research all possess enormous experience and determination to build on the results of the study. They are already taking action to further engage the young researchers in follow-up endeavors according to the young people's motivations. These organizations have the capacity to receive and manage funding from donors to carry out projects with young people, which some have done for years, and stand ready and eager to take on more endeavors.

RESEARCH TEAM PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRES

Unlike in the Kosovo and northern Uganda studies, the Sierra Leonean adolescent researchers were asked to fill out a written questionnaire prior to beginning their work. The exercise was mainly intended to gauge how much past research experience the young people had had; how they felt about youth participation and any experiences they had of it; and what concerns and expectations, if any, they had about the

project. In the future, as follow-up reporting and advocacy progress, the team members will be asked to fill out additional questionnaires to understand what impact participation in the project and follow-up work has had on their lives over time and their opinions about the outcomes.

The researchers were asked six questions, including how they found out about the research; if they had ever conducted research before; if they believe the views of young people are taken seriously by adults, including by politicians, and why or why not; if they ever voice their opinions about young people's problems and if so, how and to whom; and what fears and hopes they have about undertaking the study. (See Appendix for sample Research Team Participant Questionnaire.)

Young People Feel Marginalized From Government

Forty adolescent researchers and six adult research advisers filled out questionnaires. The adolescents' responses revealed:

- a low level of research experience
- strong beliefs that the views of young people are not taken seriously by adults, especially within government
- strong experience expressing their views to a variety of audiences
- few fears about undertaking the study
- high hopes of doing a good, effective job

These young people feel they speak out and are eager to do more to shape their communities, but that few listen to them. Reflecting the responses that they would hear later in interviews with their peers, despite the legacy of youth activism in Sierra Leone and their experiences of responsibility in a variety of roles in the conflict, the researchers felt they and their concerns are marginalized from those who have the power to affect their lives.

Young people said things like:

"They [adults and other leaders] feel the views of young people are meaningless and [that the young people] have no idea about government and higher institutions."

"Adolescents are considered to be inferior in society."

"The authorities...do not think of the young ones."

"They [think] young men have no education about government."

"They feel that adolescents have no better things to say in the community. People think their opinions are useless."

"For us in Sierra Leone, elders or leaders do not consider us better people because of our age or sex."

"The government [doesn't take us seriously] because of greed and selfishness."

"They do not recognize the rights of adolescents in Sierra Leone."

"Adults, politicians come to young people and [we] tell them something, and [they are] not able to do anything at the end of the day."³²⁷

They also said, over and over:

"The government needs to pay attention to young people's needs and demands."

"The government should support and pay attention to young people's views."

"Young people have opinions that are good and useful to the government."

"The youth should have a say."

"I would like the Women's Commission, UNICEF and other children's associations to pay attention to young people."

Young People Speak Out

About three-quarters of the adolescent researchers said they voice their opinions about the problems of young people. They do this in a variety of ways, mainly through conversation with a wide mix of listeners: parents, friends, teachers, NGO workers, elders, other youth and religious leaders. They also said they speak out in other ways: creatively, through art and drama presentations, through media work and organized groups (youth, religious and others).

While the majority listed that they had not had research experience before, some had. It involved work within their youth groups and with other NGOs and government-sponsored projects. One had done research on primary health care issues for one day. Another had done research related to child tracing and reunification and the identification of orphans with Child Protection Sierra Leone in 2001 (this person was part of Peace Pals Network, too). A

third had worked on a research project related to the TRC and the Special Court in Freetown. A fourth said she did regular research as part of her youth organization's work on creating reconciliation with the rebels. She asked individuals their views about the reconciliation process.

Few Fears About the Research

All but three adolescent researchers registered having "No!" fears about undertaking the research, and great happiness about being part of the group. One wrote, "I have no fears of the research because anywhere I go, I will go there with peace." Of those who did register concerns, one worried about being able to coordinate research activities with her school schedule, especially if long distance travel was to be required.³²⁸ Another was concerned about this being the first time he undertook research and wondered whether it would be successful; he did not want to be disappointed. A third was concerned that the study be properly managed, that compensation be distributed fairly and that rating the researchers be done fairly.³²⁹ (Note that researchers were not rated as part of the process.)

Through the research, many hoped to learn more and continue to speak out more effectively and make changes in Sierra Leone. They said:

"I most hope to accomplish development and [better] decision-making in this country."

"I hope I will have more wisdom and ideas from the research program."

"To be successful."

"To be a good questioner [discussion leader] in the research."

"To gain knowledge that will help me in the future...and be able to...solve young people's problems."

"To learn more about adolescent problems and even about myself."

"I hope to accomplish more knowledge and to do more personal research and to also teach others in my country and beyond."

"To see the research be properly done, learn more about the problems faced by our youth and meet the needs of the deprived youth."

"I hope to accomplish the promotion of young peo-

ple's rights and capacities."

"I hope to produce the necessary document that is needed from me by the Women's Commission...and to receive a reward in the form of compensation for the work when done."

"To learn more about researching."

"To find ways to solve the problems of adolescents."

"I hope to accomplish this research so that I will be able to pass on this message to teach our fellow brothers, as we are the future leaders of tomorrow."

"Through this research, I want to be able to know exactly what passed during this war and the problems facing young people."

"To disseminate the information in relation to the research."

"To increase funding for adolescent programs."

ADOLESCENT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The hundreds of adolescents who participated in the research³³⁰ had a very different participatory experience in the research process than their peer researchers. The collective impact of their participation is potentially large, but its immediate impact on their individual lives is small.

As respondents, they had opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions for roughly one to five hours through the survey, group discussions and individual interviews. They also received a commitment that their views would be included among the findings of the study. Beyond this, the researchers basically came and went, and the participants will receive no other feedback until the teams return with reports of their findings some months later. They may hear radio shows and participate in future community discussions that focus on the issues they raised. Together, their contributions form a useful, powerful voice representing the experiences of thousands that can be used by decision-makers to target programming and policies for young people. However, unless these young people become animated and supported to act as a result of this work within their local communities, their individual participation will remain limited.

For broader adolescent participation to occur and for additional support to come to young people already engaged in meaningful activities for youth, strong efforts are needed to spread the words and

ideas of these participants and generate concrete interventions that involve and impact many more young people. The same holds true for the adults involved in work with young people, and a challenge remains for all — locally and internationally — to keep young people’s active input and leadership at the center, not at the periphery, of efforts on their behalf. When merely consulted, young people must continue to be informed of the outcomes of their efforts as much as possible and be engaged more substantively.

ADULTS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

Adults in Sierra Leone adapted very quickly to their role as guides and facilitators in the service of the young people’s leadership. Their role was to keep the young people generally on track and help them to organize themselves. They mostly intervened in their conversations and decision-making only when necessary or requested. Their support was especially important in the following areas:

- ensuring that the logistics of the teams’ movement operated smoothly, including double checking that all equipment and materials needed were prepared by the YCGs;
- greeting other adult members of the community upon arrival to conduct the focus group sites and intervening with these adults if they sought to encroach on the proceedings;
- providing helpful suggestions about how to phrase questions and pursue relevant follow-up questions;
- helping the young people administer the written concerns survey;
- assisting and supervising the researchers’ production of reporting paperwork for each research session, including research summaries, etc.
- instilling confidence in the young people.

The six adult research advisers who filled out research team participant questionnaires, all from Makeni, gave similar responses to the young people. They, too, believe government officials and other adults give little credence to the views of young people. They were eager to participate in the research, learn new things and support the resolution of

young people’s concerns. Two of the six expressed concerns about being able to cope with the research schedule; the others stated no fears or concerns about being involved.

Two of these six adults had also had previous research experience. One did research work on infant mortality with UNICEF in Makeni in May 1997. The other did research on foster children with Plan International in 1983.

Adult research participants were very animated in their responses overall and generally approved of the activity. As described in other sections, many of them considered themselves to be youth, too, in a variety of ways, and thus could relate to the topics as issues of real concern.

YOUTH COORDINATION

The two YCG entities did a remarkable job bringing young people together and implementing the project in both areas. Each faced distinct challenges in their different environments. The Freetown team faced a potentially vast territory of neighborhoods and circumstances to cover, with big city transportation costs and logistics to contend with. Makeni was challenged by limited infrastructure, including the near complete absence of vehicles, no electricity, no telephones and a potentially vast rural territory to cover. In both situations, the youth coordinators creatively used resources to make the most of project budget and time limitations. The Freetown team, however, ultimately faced more constraints due to choices made about coverage.

The Freetown team would have benefited from a more specific division of the research team members into the four different areas of coverage chosen by the group — Mountain Region, Freetown (city), Western Rural and Western Urban. Had six researchers (three boys, three girls) living near one another in each of these areas been chosen to work together intensively in their region, limited resources might have been gone further and other logistics might have been facilitated. Instead, researchers came from all around the regions and regularly had to travel large distances to complete the work, creating great communications challenges and major cost and time pressures. The positive tradeoff was the ability of young people to travel around to many different communities, perhaps more than in the other scenario. However, the drawbacks were a substantial

resource crunch and cumbersome communication and scheduling.

Despite these factors, the coordinators, adult advisers and adolescent researchers showed enormous enthusiasm in sticking to their vision of covering as much as possible in the way that they did, which showed tremendous personal dedication to the overall objectives of the activity. Given the expense of travel to a central point, the YCG collaborating organizations also worked hard to choose common meeting points and times at their various offices where researchers would gather to plan, report and regroup as necessary.

The Makeni team managed to arrange use of one or two vehicles regularly amid the slim pickings available, and provided generally smooth transportation to focus group sites throughout the region. The three coordinating organizations also shared office space with a common meeting area, which provided researchers with an easy and youth-friendly access point. Although some had long distances to travel, most researchers were able to walk to this meeting point, dedicating time to get there and back home, even if it was a long distance. The existence of a bicycle association run by youth in the center of the town also facilitated relatively inexpensive transportation for the team members. In this scenario and despite the absence of telephone communications, the young people were able to spend a great deal of time with one another, the coordinators and the adult advisers in the office, regularly reviewing their work and carefully producing their reports.

The coalition approach to the YCGs worked extremely well in each site, mainly due to the dedication and commitment of the leaders of the groups. They shared a common vision and treated one another with respect and made democratic decisions among themselves and the adolescents about management of the project. A handful of individuals shouldered enormous burdens when responsibilities for implementing the many project tasks could likely have been delegated to additional members of their and other groups, particularly to the female members. Nonetheless, both groups did a superb job helping the young people organize their visits, have the equipment they needed, analyze and report on their findings, liaise with community officials and the Women's Commission, manage project finances and much more. Their dedication stretched well beyond the timeline of the project and has invested their groups in following up on the work through

joint advocacy efforts and related project development. Both the Freetown and Makeni teams coordinated with one another throughout the project to effectively build one team moving forward.

MORE LESSONS LEARNED

ABOUT LANGUAGE

At the outset of the study, the issue of language barriers between communities, the Women's Commission and other actors in the project appeared fairly straightforward. Many Sierra Leoneans speak English and many speak *Krio*, providing common threads of communication within and across cultures. However, as the research moved forward, the issue of language and communication became much more complicated.

What is the usual, extremely challenging process when cultures collide of finding common ground in words, facial expressions, modes and ceremonies of communication had multiple layers of difficulty for the young researchers when conducting research. Although the young people were free to communicate in whatever language they chose, their own language skills had limitations that greatly affected their work.

In Sierra Leone, young people do not learn how to read and write English or local languages until they are in school, and learning to read and write in the local language starts after English. However, the devastation caused by the war was so vast that the educational system was destroyed, and learning has been greatly delayed or lost. The researchers were left juggling their linguistic talents.

While taking notes word for word was already an alien practice for most of the young researchers, they were forced to do so in English during their focus groups because they did not know how to write well in their own native languages. They were effectively interviewing people verbally in one language and attempting to simultaneously translate their responses into the written form of another, in which they also possessed limited skills. This process took enormous courage for the young people, who ran the risk of feeling extremely incompetent or despondent about their abilities. Instead, they used it as an opportunity to improve their skills and worked extremely hard to find ways to get beyond these barriers.

The teams ultimately relied a great deal on tape recorders when conducting interviews, much more so than researchers in Kosovo or Uganda did during previous studies. The Sierra Leonean researchers at times had trouble with the peevish technology, plagued by weak batteries and poor quality cassette tapes, and they spent hours reviewing the tapes and transcribing. They also spent extra time carefully interviewing people for case studies, taking down their stories slowly as they made the linguistic transition. The interviewees were similarly patient with the process.

Each training had translation provided so that both English and *Krio* could be understood, but related documents were all provided in English. They were not translated into other languages because the young people felt their ability to read English was likely as good as their ability to read *Krio* or *Temne*, if not better. As also described in the Survey Results section, the surveys were similarly not translated out of English because researchers felt the communities would not likely read them any better than the English version. Thus, verbal translation of the survey to each respondent was frequently required and ultimately very effective in conducting the exercise.

The language issues the teams faced also highlight an overall set of barriers young people face in having their messages heard by adults who have the power to affect their lives. If they face stereotypes of being uneducated and incompetent to provide valuable opinions, not being able to successfully express themselves in writing or verbally is a great impediment to stepping forward to do so. Papers, policies and pronouncements from any source are ultimately very challenging for young people to understand without good communication skills, leaving them at a great disadvantage, as well as impeding constructive societal change.

These communication barriers can be addressed through good, thorough translation by people who are able to remain objective and who understand different cultural approaches to language and meaning. They can also be addressed through the use of non-written or visual means, such as radio or creative expression. But ultimately, children's and adolescents' right to quality education must be ensured to minimize the disadvantages that come with limited language and communication skills.

ABOUT "ADOLESCENTS?"

While the Women's Commission does not approach any of the adolescents studies it conducts with a preconceived notion of what "adolescence" is in communities in conflict, coming to a common working understanding was difficult at first when setting up the project. While the Women's Commission was generally aiming to engage young people between the ages of 10 and 20 to be researchers, we remained open to different needs and definitions of who adolescents are when assembling the research teams. In Sierra Leone, trying to focus youth groups on actual teenagers as the main adolescents in question was difficult.

As described in the Adolescence and Youth section, the teenagers were not immediately identified as youth or as children and were somewhat lost in between. Thus, we ultimately had to reject propositions of "adolescent researcher" teams as comprised mainly of young adults in their mid-twenties. There was no particular objection to this stipulation by the youth organizers, just not an immediate understanding of the interest in the younger ones. Subsequently, the actual ages of the adolescent researchers have also been difficult to pinpoint. Many have changed by several years over the course of the study as ages were asked and provided by the young people for a variety of purposes.

It is not clear if the young people were concerned that to be a certain age would not permit their participation in the project. If so, this would fit neatly into the culture of concern over categorizing vulnerability that is sweeping Sierra Leone. Regardless, the "older adolescents" might have been chosen to participate on the teams because they are, in fact, in the same situation as somewhat younger adolescents would be in other countries, given their loss of education and other services for their development. In the end, the teams surveyed a wide range of age groups, as detailed in the Survey Results section.

XII. INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL RESPONSES TO ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH CONCERNS

The civil war in Sierra Leone has taken thousands of lives, mostly in the adolescent and youth age groups. Many young people were split into factions during the conflict and others took on adult responsibilities without proper support. It is urgent that the government develop the political will to give this group the attention it needs and deserves by implementing and monitoring adolescent- and youth-specific policy. The international community must also design, implement and fund holistic projects with the active involvement of adolescents and youth to enable them to acquire the skills necessary to lead useful and meaningful lives.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: UNFULFILLED PROMISES

The Lomé Peace Agreement recognizes “the imperative that the children of Sierra Leone, especially those affected by armed conflict, in view of their vulnerability, are entitled to special care and the protection of their inherent right to life, survival and development, in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.”³³¹

Yet, according to many young people, this imperative and many other policy commitments remain largely unheeded. In different ways, they told researchers again and again that youth have been marginalized since independence in 1961, and yet “90 percent of the campaigners before elections are [were] youth,” helping to get politicians elected, including through voter intimidation and violence. They say that young people continue to let themselves be “used” by politicians because it gives them something to do; without education, some assert that “youth don’t have a mind of their own.” Despite their work in getting votes for politicians, once parliament is in session, young people say that “politicians forget about the youth.” Young people want to be partners in society-building, not instruments of violence. Given this legacy of manipulation, one youth leader asked, “How are the politicians going to prepare the youth of today to be the leaders of tomorrow?”³³²

This question, widespread among young people, has been woefully unanswered by the government. Despite the massive rights violations young people suffered during the war and the central role they played in the conflict, the government has been slow to enact policies that articulate child, adolescent and youth rights and respond to their desire to play a productive and active role in rebuilding their society.

The 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement was the first peace accord to recognize the effects of war on young people and include in its provisions specific directives on their protection and assistance. Article XXX articulates the government’s responsibility to pay “particular attention to the issue of child soldiers,” including addressing their special needs during DDR processes. Article XXXI, focused on education and health, provides that the “government shall provide free compulsory education for the first nine years of schooling (basic education) and shall endeavor to provide free schooling for a further three years. The government shall also endeavor to provide affordable primary health care throughout the country.” These provisions led some young people to believe that their voices would be important in post-conflict Sierra Leone. One person said that: “The formation of the Lomé Peace Agreement shows that the youth are considered important by the elders.”³³³

Sierra Leone is also party to several key international human rights and refugee conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.³³⁴ A number of national bodies have also been established to deal with war-affected children. They include a Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA), a National Commission for War-Affected Children, a Ministry for Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and a Ministry of Youth and Sport (formerly the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). There is also a well-established Child Protection Network, which is led by UNICEF with the strong participation of local and international NGOs and focuses on the protection of specific groups of war-affected children and adolescents.

Despite stated commitments to prioritizing children's and adolescents' concerns and the existence of a number of governmental and humanitarian entities to address them, there is a vacuum of action in establishing national policies, passing legislation and implementing programs for adolescents. The ministries are weak, understaffed and suffering from brain-drain, the objectives of the National Commission are unclear and the National Council for Children is basically defunct. There is also competition among them for limited resources, which intensifies compartmentalization of child and adolescent issues and creates a dangerous scenario where children and adolescents are falling through the cracks of bureaucracy and politics. Girls are particularly affected. Despite the programs and policies developed for former child combatants, for example, the government has not yet developed a comprehensive plan of action to assist "bush wives" and RUF followers who were not formally demobilized. Few of the rights to protection and assistance articulated in these conventions have been legislated into national policy and implemented on the ground. Without targeted support, the potential of young people to contribute to further unrest is high. UNICEF and NGOs are shouldering much of the child protection effort, and there is a real danger that when they scale down their operations and leave, many services will collapse. Therefore, they must work to build ministerial and local NGO capacity to take on long-term responsibility. (See Protection section.)

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN AND THE NEED FOR A STRONG FOCAL POINT ON CHILDREN

In 1999, Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, proposed the establishment of a time-bound national mechanism to focus on war-affected children and ensure their welfare in national priority-setting, policy-making and resource-allocation while government ministries were not functioning well enough to do so. In April 2000, the government of Sierra Leone agreed to establish a National Commission for War-Affected Children,³³⁵ which was not formally launched until September 2001. Intended to focus on children up to the age of 18, the commission will also take into consideration the concerns and needs of youth under the age of 25, as many of them were children under 18 during the war.³³⁶ The commission will report directly to the

parliament and president and be independent from the MSWGCA. Neither the executive director, who is a political appointee, nor the 12 commissioners, have real child protection or assistance experience, and United Nations officials fear that the commission "will need a lot of hand-holding."³³⁷

The delay of over two years in establishing the commission has meant that it was not able to play a role in DDR and the reintegration of children after the Lomé Agreement, as many had envisioned.³³⁸ Moreover, the goals of the commission remain unclear: its purpose has ranged from ensuring that the concerns of children are legislated nationally, funded, internationally known, focused on the DDR process, or even operational, in terms of programming for war-affected children.³³⁹ Moreover, the commission threatens to create a duplicate structure competing for funds and influence with government ministries. Another concern is its use of the term "war-affected" in its name three years after the Lomé Agreement. First, all children in Sierra Leone are war-affected; second, it compartmentalizes children and adolescents into categories which in turn worries those young people who feel they do not fit into one category or another but who still need support; and third, it diverts attention from the desperate need for an approach that promotes unity and reflects a transition to peace rather than continuing to dwell on the war. In these ways, the commission may have outlived its purpose before it has even begun.

At the same time, many adolescents stressed that the government needs to do a better job ensuring their rights and called for a stronger policy and a clearer focal point for coordinated action. While there is a draft bill on children's rights, it has not yet been adopted by the government, and one UNICEF official called it a "total disaster."³⁴⁰ The attorney general of Sierra Leone maintains that when it is adopted, a new commission will be needed to monitor compliance with the bill. If such a Child Rights Commission is established, two national commissions on children would exist simultaneously. United Nations officials suggested that after three years, the Commission for War-Affected Children could be brought under the purview of the ministry and take on the role of monitoring compliance of the Child Rights Bill, rather than creating a new commission for monitoring now. Should a child rights bill pass, the government will need to determine a clear monitoring entity that is well-resourced and does not duplicate efforts.³⁴¹

A NEW MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORT

A significant change took place after the May 2002 elections: the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) broke up into two entities: the Ministry of Youth and Sport (MYS) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). Before this, youth leaders said that youth concerns were eclipsed by MEYS's focus on education. Youth leader Ngolo Katta declared that, with this movement of youth issues into its own ministry, "a wind of change is underway."³⁴² Youth groups have since been invited to meetings with Dennis Bright, the Minister for Youth and Sport, and there are new opportunities to move forward policies and programs for youth at the national level. One such policy is the National Youth Policy, first drafted in 1995 and revised in 2001, for which adolescents and youth resoundingly expressed their support. The draft defines youth as "any person between the ages of 15 and 35."³⁴³ The draft is now in parliament for approval, and as of the printing of this report it had not yet been approved. It is urgent that this document be approved immediately.

"I don't care about politics. Politicians are liars. They make promises for jobs and education to youth but then they forget about us. They are only in politics for their pockets, to enrich themselves and their family. My job is my politics. I care for my mother, the government doesn't."

— Samai, age 20, Freetown

The vacuum of action at the national level in passing legislation on the rights of children, adolescents and youth has resulted in widespread disillusionment about the government and politics among young people. Young people repeatedly expressed their desire for a role in national decision-making and society-building, but said that they feel marginalized by politicians. Without such policies on youth and children's rights, including clear ways for young people to participate in their implementation, feelings of marginalization where young people felt they "were not able to affect government policies," and could "not take place in any decision making process," will continue.³⁴⁴ It is essential that the commission

and ministries work with young people in a participatory and constructive way, involving them in decision-making and program implementation, offering them internships and more. The National Commission should also lend its voice in support of a War Victims Fund for additional support to children and adolescents as planned in the Lomé Agreement. Young people said clearly that political patronage must not "support bogus youth-serving institutions" or "corruption."³⁴⁵

A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

In April 2002, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)³⁴⁶ Protection Unit began its work advising its 15 member states on how to implement the Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children in West Africa (April 2000)³⁴⁷ and harmonize child protection policies within West Africa. The special adviser for child protection, who is backed up by two child protection officers, should also take up the provisions of the declaration that commit member states to "involve young people as participants and advocates in the movement for the protection of war-affected children, including developing children-to-children networks within West Africa" and develop specific programs to provide information, education and communication materials on child rights.³⁴⁸

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

There is an enormous number of youth groups and associations throughout Sierra Leone, concentrated especially in Freetown. Researchers found a strong desire among young people to organize in informal or formal youth groups and associations. Youth leaders point to Sierra Leone's strong tradition of youth organizing, in particular since the late 1970s, when the All People's Congress (APC) began to rule Sierra Leone as a one-party system (see Glossary). Within this system, youth were effectively mobilized and organized into organizations and structures that were controlled by the government. Youth believe that these young people were used and manipulated by politicians and that their work on behalf of the APC, including inciting violence, earned them only empty promises. At the same time, young people — mainly students — began to organize themselves in protest against the totalitarian political system, forming very structured and well-organized groups. Youth leaders explain that such systems were good "soil for grow-



A large number of youth groups offer activities to young people but need more capacity building and material support. Here, adolescents came together through Bone Sufferer youth group in Freetown to clean their surroundings.

ing” youth structures. They realized that, as elders and politicians neglected them, there is power in numbers and that by coming together, they would have a better chance to have their voices heard.

The desire and motivation to participate in youth activities remains strong among young people in Sierra Leone today. In fact, youth leaders assert that 1,000 youth associations exist. Although there is overlap between various types of groups, depending on their activities, purpose, structure, funding and membership, most youth groups can be categorized in the following ways (see Appendix for chart):

YOUTH GROUPS FOCUSED ON ONE ISSUE OR LOCATION/COMMUNITY

These groups makes up the vast majority of youth organizations in Sierra Leone. Issue-oriented groups bring together young people concerned with a common problem and work together to overcome it. An example is the Sickle Cell Victims Association in Freetown, whose mission is to help children and young people suffering from this illness, or the Peace Pals Education Network, which advocates for better education focused on peace. Location-oriented youth groups bring together young people from one community to work for a common purpose, such as to generate income by farming, cleaning, bicycle renting, and the like, or to organize sport or cultural activities. In general, the impact of the location-focused groups does not go beyond the borders of their neighborhood or community, and the main benefici-

aries are members of that organization, for example, by earning money or enjoying a sport or cultural event. The vast majority of these groups are underfunded and get by through membership donations.

YOUTH GROUPS CREATED BY AN INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE OR SUPPORTED BY AN INTERNATIONAL DONOR

These youth groups comprise the smallest and most privileged category of youth associations in Sierra Leone. While issue-oriented like some in the above category, they are distinct because they were created by an international initiative, such as a conference, and/or supported by an international donor. As a result, these groups, such as Talking Drum Studio, the Independent Youth Forum, the Arts Beat Center of Peace Links and Children as Peace Builders, are well structured, funded and equipped. Members are often well-educated young people who help make these groups more professional and successful than others. Members also have more opportunities to travel abroad to broaden their knowledge and represent young people from their country in national, regional and international forums.

YOUTH UMBRELLA GROUPS

Youth umbrella groups are coordinated by strong and devoted young activists who work to provide youth organizations with technical expertise or help them obtain funding. These groups have often grown out of a local initiative to bring smaller groups together to have a stronger voice. The Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) and the Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG) are examples of youth umbrella groups. Although they are not as well funded as groups created by an international initiative, these groups are very professional and because they represent a large number of young people and have well-developed structures, their ability to attract donors is greater than issue-oriented and community-based groups.

Most youth groups are extremely active and say that they need more funding to carry out their work, as well as training in human and financial resource mobilization. Other challenges include lack of mobility due to expensive and insecure travel. They want to work more with international NGOs, government ministries and UN agencies and receive capacity building from them, but assert that these groups infrequently respond to their proposals or ideas.

Youth Groups that Constituted the Coordinating Groups of this Participatory Research Project

- *The Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)* works toward the empowerment of youth through effective coordination of youth activities. The center enhances the capacity of youth groups through out the country, 400 of which are CCYA members, and promotes and protects the rights of youth.
- *Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organization (SLYEO)* works to increase the capacity of young people and their opportunities for self-development, thus making them responsible for their own development. Established in 1995, SLYEO has developed a youth and community network and advocates for youth participation in national development, as well as national structures that respond to youth needs.
- *Independent Youth Forum (IYF)* is dedicated to promoting youth unity and effective participation in Sierra Leone. Toward that end, IYF coordinates over 200 member youth organizations and builds the capacity of youth leaders and organizations through education and leadership training.
- *Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR)* conducts public education and training on various issues affecting youth, including human rights, civic education, the TRC and domestic violence. They also record human rights abuses and perform counseling.
- *The Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG)* was created by bringing three separate youth groups together in 1995, and now has 36 member groups. Among other things, MUYOG organizes education for children and town cleaning, and wants to focus on leadership training, micro-credit, civic education for young people and facilitating reintegration of adolescents and youth.
- *Civil Society Movement Sierra Leone (CSM-SL)* is a national umbrella organization that coordinates activities among members. CSM-SL undertakes awareness-raising activities and events, as well as training workshops on issues such as human rights, education and development.

NGO PROGRAMMING FOR ADOLESCENTS

There are dozens of international and national NGOs working in Sierra Leone, many focusing on children and youth, and a few programming for adolescents. Again, the focus is largely on either children or youth. The need for youth programming is specified in the 2002 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Sierra Leone, which recognizes that the underlying tensions in the Mano River region are fuelled by “unemployed and mostly illiterate youth who are vulnerable to recruitment by state and non-state actors in the region, who turn them into some of the most brutal perpetrators of violent acts.”³⁴⁹ In particular, one UNICEF official remarked that since UNICEF, the primary agency for children, focuses on younger children, “youth depend on NGOs.”³⁵⁰

Still, there is much room for improvement in programming. Even when a program does target young people, the tendency is to work *for* them rather than *with* them. Programs need to be more participatory. Actively involving adolescents and youth in the development of programs and policies that affect them

will ensure that young people take ownership of their development and will increase the effectiveness of the programs. This may decrease the likelihood of adolescents and youth returning to violence to destroy their own positive future. NGOs working with adolescents agreed that programs tend to neglect adolescents in rural areas as well as girls, especially child mothers and heads of households. NGOs also agreed



While there are some good programs for adolescents, more need to include child mothers, adolescent heads of household and rural adolescents.

that a major gap affecting their programs for young people is lack of funding. While researchers were not able to evaluate programs, the following are some highlights of local and international NGO programs that focus on or include adolescents in their programming for children and/or youth:

- In order to reverse years of marginalization and exploitation and support young people's empowerment, **World Vision Sierra Leone's (WVSL) Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace (YRTEP)** program targets youth. Developed with Management Systems International, YRTEP is a nationwide, non-formal education initiative for ex-combatant and non-combatant youth, aged 15-35, including resettled refugees and those displaced by the war.³⁵¹ YRTEP focuses simultaneously on reintegration of war-torn communities and remedial education for youth bypassed by schooling for nearly 10 years. Young people are trained in reintegration orientation and counseling, life-skills training, vocational counseling, agriculture skills development, civic education and functional literacy. They then teach what they have learned, in the form of five modules, to other youth.

Since March 2000, almost 50,000 war-affected youth and ex-combatants in over 2,000 sites have participated in YRTEP. The program includes a second track called Education for Nation-Building, a nationwide non-formal education initiative for public and private sector leaders. The program's success in bringing together divided communities has led to its extension beyond the planned two years and an expansion into newly opened areas. Youth involved in YRTEP told researchers that the program develops real reconciliation and leadership skills but said that they need more help in using their new skills for further livelihood development. WVSL and YRTEP's funder, OTI/USAID, have responded to this criticism with a **Skills Training and Employment Promotion (STEP)** program that focuses on skills development, employment, cooperation, dialogue and psychosocial support.³⁵²

- While the Sierra Leone government was in exile in Guinea, **Conciliation Resources** and **UNICEF-Sierra Leone** formulated a **Youth in Crisis (YIC)** project to better address the needs and concerns of youth. **ActionAid** began work on the project in 1998. It was one of the first projects to see youth in a positive light, not only focusing on their destructive power.³⁵³ YIC undertook participatory research with young people in the Western Area, Bo and Kenema to inves-

tigate how they defined their problems and solutions. The recommendations formed the basis of ActionAid programs enabling youth to acquire education and skills to realize their potential, attain meaningful livelihood and contribute positively to society. The programs, implemented between 1999 and 2002, focused on skills and on-the-job training, recreation, private enterprise, income-generation and youth sensitization and mobilization on key youth issues, including peace-building and health. ActionAid is now following up on this project, researching the impact of policies and programs for adolescents in West Africa in order to enhance youth involvement in development processes. In addition, ActionAid was involved in the **Never Again Campaign**, which was led by ex-combatants to ease the reintegration of former child soldiers into society through dialogue focused on sharing experiences and reconciliation.³⁵⁴

- Building upon its involvement in the Youth in Crisis Project, **Conciliation Resources' (CR) Springboard: Youth in Progress** project focuses on community "social animation," reconciliation and rehabilitation. Its aim is to strengthen youth clubs and provide support for recreational activities and life skills for 14- to 25-year-olds in the southern, eastern and western regions. CR also supports community-based peacemaking initiatives that involve young people. At the regional level, CR has begun working with national and international collaborative networks, including youth groups, to promote and consolidate peace constituencies in the Mano River area, covering Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.³⁵⁵

- The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** has many education initiatives that benefit adolescents, from the **Rapid Response Education Program (RREP)** to the **CEIP** program. Most recently, NRC has developed a **YouPac** for 14- to 18-year-olds, who have had no, or very little, schooling. The YouPac will provide these adolescents with a ten-month program of literacy, numeracy and life-skills to help them become functionally literate and increase their self-reliance and chances of employment. NRC will cooperate with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), ActionAid and young people in its adaptation on the ground. NRC is also training primary and lower secondary school teachers, building and rehabilitating schools and assisting returnees and IDPs, including child soldiers, adolescents and war-wounded, through rehabilitation projects.³⁵⁶

- **Christian Children's Fund (CCF)** supports youth clubs involved in agriculture and livestock produc-

tion and is implementing the **Skills Training and Employment Generation (STEG)** project, which is a follow-up to WVSL's YTREP program, to increase the social reintegration of ex-combatants and war-affected youth through community-based strategies of skills development, employment and psychosocial support. CCF's project, **Sealing the Past and Facing the Future**, offers traditional cleansing rituals to survivors of gender-based violence, many of whom are adolescents, as well as STI treatment, skills training and loans for income-generating activities. In addition, CCF's other programs for children benefit adolescents through non-formal primary education, educational materials and teacher training. CCF has child centers and child well-being committees in 19 project communities in the northern and eastern provinces of Sierra Leone and provides psychosocial interventions for children and adolescents affected by ongoing violence.³⁵⁷

- The **Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)** provides multi-faceted education support to vulnerable girls and young women, including sponsorships, non-formal education and life skills, counseling for victims of gender-based violence and skills training for employment. FAWE also influences policy to address the challenges facing girls.

- **Caritas-Makeni** supports emergency and development projects in agriculture, micro finance, HIV/AIDS, peace building and human rights, child protection, reconstruction and resettlement and community capacity building in Sierra Leone. With a strong focus in child protection and children's rights, it served as the key implementing agency for the DDR in the northern region and providing care to many young people left out of the formal demobilization process.

- The **International Rescue Committee's (IRC)** several children-related programs account for 75 percent of the NGO's US\$7 million budget in Sierra Leone.³⁵⁸ The psychosocial support program ensures that the psychological and educational needs and rights of children and adolescents living in displacement centers are met through broad-based healing, formal and informal education and recreational activities. Their education program provides formal schooling, textbooks and other instructional materials. The IRC also provides shelter, health and psychosocial care for children and adolescents being disarmed and demobilized and reunites families from Sierra Leone who were separated during the war, including identifying foster families for children who are orphaned. IRC

provides reproductive and sexual education classes, which include topics such as contraception and STIs. Furthermore, their gender-based violence aid and prevention program provides support to survivors of sexual violence through counseling, facilitating medical care and advocating for legal action if needed.³⁵⁹

- The **American Refugee Committee (ARC)** is strengthening HIV/AIDS prevention and has launched an HIV/AIDS education program to increase knowledge about the disease and about ways to prevent transmission. ARC is targeting adolescents, as well as commercial sex workers, in Port Loko and the surrounding Maforki Chiefdom in this work. Adolescents are involved through health clubs, peer education and games, and ARC has developed a curriculum for adolescents in and out of school. Apart from providing condoms, ARC encourages people to seek treatment for STIs as a way to reduce transmission of HIV. In addition, ARC's **Regional Reproductive Health Initiative** is strengthening the capacity of its West Africa programs to deliver reproductive health services to adolescents for HIV/AIDS prevention through educating host governments and local partners about reproductive health needs and increasing access to services, information and family planning supplies.³⁶⁰

- **Marie Stopes International's (MSI)** health center in Freetown supports sexual and reproductive health outreach to adolescents, as well as trained youth educators who undertake information, education and communication activities in schools and colleges, IDP camps and through links with other NGOs who work with young people. It is expanding these services to Port Loko, and like the health center in Freetown, will include services for STI treatment, postnatal and antenatal care. In partnership with other NGOs and the government, MSI is also developing its capacity to fully integrate and provide medical and psychosocial responses to women and young girls who have suffered sexual violence, including those abducted during the conflict.³⁶¹

- Adolescents are actively involved in the reproductive health-focused work of **Planned Parenthood Association of Sierra Leone (PPASL)** through peer counselor training and skills training. Currently, PPASL is conducting training workshops on peer education, HIV/AIDS and life skills for 250 adolescents from 15 communities and 10 schools in the Western Area. The adolescents then sensitize peers in their respective communities and refer them to PPASL's three **Youth Information Centers** in

Freetown. In these centers, young people can gather, play games and learn about reproductive health information. Each center also has a Youth Health Center where young people can obtain, in a confidential and adolescent-friendly manner, reproductive health information, STI testing, free pregnancy tests and referrals for free HIV/AIDS testing.³⁶²

- **Childreach/Plan International's RapidED** program allows children and adolescents to acquire basic learning skills by completing primary and informal education, helps them cope with the fear and trauma caused by violence and displacement and emphasizes peaceful conflict resolution.³⁶³

- **Cause Canada's (CC) Rehabilitation and Reintegration for War Amputees and Children Impacted by the War** project in Greater Freetown/Waterloo, Kenema and Bombali districts offers psychological counseling and vocational training for children and adolescents, particularly former combatants, orphans and those physically or psychologically handicapped. CC also sensitizes children to the need for reintegration, and offers counseling and vocational training, including carpentry, tailoring, weaving, soap-making and welding. These skills assist in the economic recovery of their communities and help smooth the reintegration process as they become contributing members of their villages.³⁶⁴

- **Search for Common Ground's (SCG) media** program supports **Talking Drum Studio (TDS)**, a multimedia radio programming studio whose programs include *Golden Kids News*, which engages children as producers, reporters and actors who identify issues for and about children and advocate on their behalf, and *Atunda Ayenda* (Lost and Found), a drama series that facilitates a discussion on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process through a story about two ex-combatants who are best friends. SCG also partners with local groups to host the annual **Bo Peace Carnival**, where secondary school troupes and youth groups perform plays around issues concerning adolescents and youth.³⁶⁵

- **GOAL's** community-based **Street Children's project** in Freetown provides food, formal and non-formal education, skills training, health care and recreational activities for over 400 street children, ranging in age from 10 to 17. GOAL is also in its second year of working with sexually abused women and girls. It provides health care, counseling and non-formal education to over 200 commercial sex workers, half of whom are aged under 18 and many of whom

were with the fighting forces during the conflict. GOAL has incorporated health education, including HIV/AIDS prevention, into these programs; its mobile health unit visits the commercial sex workers weekly and distributes condoms and reproductive health information.³⁶⁶

- In the Northern and Western regions, **War Child** works with adolescents aged 12 to 15 in creative workshops that provide a safe and empowering space. The workshops aim to speed up the reintegration of war-affected children, such as former child combatants and child mothers.³⁶⁷

- The local NGO **Women in Crisis** has set up two drop-in shelters where women and girls who were sexually abused during the conflict or are commercial sex workers can learn basic life skills such as reading and mathematics, earn a living sewing and making crafts and have a place to talk about their problems and pray together. They also learn how to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and receive treatment and care for STIs and other support.³⁶⁸

In addition to these NGOs, many others work with children and adolescents through and are part of the Child Protection Network, including Family Homes Movement, COOPI, Caritas-Kenema, Christian Brothers, Save the Children (UK), Don Bosco, Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Mission, Adventist Development and Relief Agency and Leonet.

INTERNATIONAL DONORS

Seventy percent of Sierra Leone's national budget comes from international aid.³⁶⁹ While donors reassured the government of Sierra Leone and humanitarian agencies of their continued commitment to relief and recovery early in 2002, United Nations agencies are facing a shortfall of funding.³⁷⁰ All programs are facing difficulties in raising funds; however, programs that are explicitly for child protection appear to receive funds more quickly than other programs that are nonetheless essential to adolescents, including more participatory empowerment and health programs. The most recent United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) for Sierra Leone illustrates this, as child protection programs are funded at the expense of adolescent health and education needs. For instance, UNICEF's request in the 2001 CAP for US\$2.85 million to support its Child Protection and Child Rights sector has been

fully funded for US\$3.37 million. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of funding UNICEF has received for its Youth Participation and Empowerment project, requested in the same CAP, which will improve knowledge, attitudes and practices of young people between the ages of 12 and 25 with respect to reproductive health, peace, human rights and economic survival. As of November 23, 2001, this project had zero funded out of the requested US\$368,000. In addition, the Breaking the Silence on HIV/AIDS project, which aims to increase the ability of 1.7 million adolescents to prevent HIV/AIDS through peer education, mass media and testing and counseling facilities, had received only 39 percent of its requested US\$580,000.³⁷¹

The United States government was the largest single donor to the UN Consolidated Appeal for Sierra Leone in 2001, providing approximately 54 percent of the total contributed. However, USAID and the U.S. embassy both feel that since September 11, 2001, their impact in Sierra Leone has been compromised due to the redirection of funding to Afghanistan.³⁷² The next largest humanitarian donor, the United Kingdom, which ranks first in development assistance to Sierra Leone, provided 10 percent of the total contributed and the European Union's humanitarian arm, ECHO, provided approximately 9 percent (not including contributions to UNHCR and ICRC). Other major donors providing humanitarian assistance include Sweden, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and Germany.³⁷³ Below are highlights of international funding to programs and policies that include adolescents. This list is not exhaustive.

- **The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Guinea-Sierra Leone**, which assumed responsibilities for the **Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)**-funded programs in March 2002, is funding the Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Program (YRTEP). OTI conceived the project and approached Management Systems International (MSI) and World Vision Sierra Leone (WVSL) about the project, which focuses on reintegrating war-affected youth into society, supporting the reconciliation process, and rebuilding the physical infrastructure damaged during Sierra Leone's conflict. OTI/USAID has also funded the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) and WVSL to follow up on the gains of this program by implementing, respectively, Skills Training and Employment Generation (STEG) and Skills Training and

Employment Promotion (STEP). Both NGOs received US\$950,000 over two years for this follow-up. USAID also contributed US\$1.9 million to the World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund for payments to ex-combatants who have disarmed. In addition, OTI/USAID is supporting the communications program of Search for Common Ground Productions (Talking Drum Studio) on demobilization, reconciliation and reintegration, and media and distance learning in support of OTI's non-formal education program. OTI also supported election education activity by Talking Drum Studio to promote youth participation in elections.³⁷⁴

- Within USAID, the **Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF)** is supporting the Reintegration of War-Affected Children program in Sierra Leone. This funds the IRC for \$1,590,571 (2000 to 2003) to facilitate the reintegration of war-affected children and youth within the Interim Care Centers (ICC), IDP centers and their communities in Bo District and the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. DCOF also gave UNICEF US\$1.5 million (1999 to 2001) for reuniting and reintegrating unaccompanied children with their families and communities; developing long-term arrangements for unaccompanied children who cannot be reunified with their families and communities; ensuring that unaccompanied and other vulnerable children have access to basic education, primary health care and safe water; strengthening the capacity of the Child Protection Network; and producing a compendium of best practices on interim care, reunification and reintegration of war-affected children.³⁷⁵

- **The U.S. State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM)** supports the American Refugee Committee's and UNICEF's adolescent and youth reproductive health programs in Sierra Leone and recently approved US\$1 million for UNHCR's work to provide greater protection from sexual exploitation to refugees in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. BPRM also supports education for Sierra Leone refugees, including the IRC's programs in Guinea.³⁷⁶

- In 2001, the **European Commission (EC)** earmarked 15.5 million euros (US\$14.25 million) to meet the needs of refugees, IDPs and host communities in Sierra Leone and Guinea; 11 million of which were marked for Sierra Leone. The EC also gave some 2 million euros to support children and women affected by the war and amputees.³⁷⁷

- The **British Department for International Development (DFID)** co-funds Conciliation Resources' 'Youth in Progress Project' in Kenema, as well as Community Reintegration Projects in Port Loko, Kambia and Makeni. While DFID does not have specific programs dealing with adolescents, it attempts to mainstream issues relating to youth throughout its security (including support to the police, security sector reform and the reintegration of ex-combatants), governance, budgetary support and humanitarian relief programs.³⁷⁸

- In late 1999, the **Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)** gave 4.5 million Canadian dollars (US\$2.8 million) for humanitarian aid and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers back into society. It also gave 500,000 Canadian dollars (US\$315,000) to Cause Canada in assistance to help war-affected children and adolescents reintegrate into their communities. In 2000, the Canadian government committed 250,000 Canadian dollars (US\$157,000) to support the establishment of the Commission for War-Affected Children. Canada is also funding, along with Norway, the ECOWAS Child Protection Unit, and has a special envoy to Sierra Leone.³⁷⁹

- In 2001, the **Japanese government** gave nearly US\$200,000 to the World Bank-administered **Multi-Donor Trust Fund**, including US\$31,837 for skills training for former child soldiers, disadvantaged youth and sexually abused girls and women; US\$11,982 for training in self-help skills for abducted girls; US\$13,920 for girls and women who were abused by the rebels to receive training for self-sufficiency; and US\$5,635 for rebuilding primary schools for returning refugee children.³⁸⁰

- In order to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, the **World Bank's (WB) Sierra Leone HIV/AIDS Response Project (SHARP)** will help the government organize a response to the disease. The project components include capacity building and policy and program coordination, multi-sector responses to HIV/AIDS prevention and care; health sector responses to HIV/AIDS, STI and other opportunistic infection management; and community and civil society initiatives and the private sector. Emphasis will be placed on prevention among youth and ex-combatants. Costing over US\$14 million over four years, over 50 percent of SHARP resources will be allocated for community-based initiatives for HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Launched in 2001, SHARP hopes to be operational by June 2002. In

addition, the World Bank funded US\$250,000 of the **Youth in Crisis Project**; is supporting the **National Commission for War-Affected Children**, through the Debt Initiative for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC); and has designated 25 percent of an estimated US\$42 million each to primary education and health projects as part of a national poverty reduction and development project.³⁸¹

- The **Refugee Education Trust** has provided US\$24,000 for six months of vocational training workshops for roughly 1,650 adolescent refugees, returnees and IDPs between the ages of 14 and 18 in Bo, Pujehun and Kenema districts through its funding to the NGO Enfants Réfugiés du Monde.³⁸²

- **Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)** promotes good governance, basic freedoms and citizens' empowerment, in part by supporting local youth groups like the CCYA and the IYF.

- **Commonwealth Youth Program (CYP)**, gives Youth Service Awards between 1,000- 3,000 British pounds (US\$1,556 - 4,670) to projects for self-, community or national development to enable young people to contribute to the development of their society, including in Sierra Leone. The CYP also provides micro-credit for youth economic development projects through the Youth Ministries. It also sponsored the 2001 Africa Regional Forum that brought together young women and men to discuss HIV/AIDS, strengthen youth capacity in fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa and increase communication among the National Youth Representatives of the Youth Forum.

- **Village AiD Project UK (VA)**, a British-based NGO that enables African rural communities to drive positive and sustainable changes in their life. VA has provided support to local youth NGOs in Sierra Leone, through, for example, the help of the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund to enabled the SLYEO to establish a program to combat youth marginalization in 50 communities in the Northern region.

- The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** is working with children, adolescents and youth in the areas of health and nutrition programs; improving access to clean water and sanitation; education, particularly for those who have been out of the traditional school system; and psychosocial programs for children who have been traumatized, abused and neglected. UNICEF also leads the **Child Protection Network**, which focuses on the protection of specific

groups of war-affected children and adolescents, including former child soldiers, and has funded the activities of the NGOs that participate in the network, such as the IRC. UNICEF helped establish the **Youth in Crisis Project** in 1998 and has been supporting PPASL's Youth Centers and peer education on HIV/AIDS, though its 2001 country strategy eliminated its Youth Development Program, shifting its focus away from youth overall to youth within the HIV/AIDS division, in which the target ages are 10-25. In addition, UNICEF's **Meeting the Participation and Rights of Adolescents** project, which aims to empower adolescents through skills training and awareness raising, is vastly underfunded.³⁸³

- The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** is focusing on adolescents through its work with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) on a school-based Population/Family Life Education project, which will introduce sexual reproductive health information into the upper primary and lower secondary school curriculum. However, the project has been stalled and is unlikely to be piloted within the next year. UNFPA is also piloting a program that gives 250 commercial sex workers, some as young as 11, access to reproductive health education and services health in the Western Area. In addition, UNFPA has given funding and technical guidance to the Women in Crisis Movement Center since 2001.³⁸⁴

- In facilitating the return of Sierra Leonean refugees and IDPs to their places of origin, the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** provides assistance through NGOs focused on the rehabilitation of schools, health care, family tracing and reunification of separated children, income-generating activities and programs to support survivors of gender-based violence. It also provides protection and care to Liberian refugees within Sierra Leone. However, UNHCR's severe funding crisis in 2002 forced it to decrease its protection operations, leaving gaps in refugee protection and care.³⁸⁵

- The **United Nations Foundation** donated US\$1.1 million to UNICEF to demobilize child soldiers in Sierra Leone, particularly for interim care facilities, family tracing and reunification.³⁸⁶

- The **United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone's (UNAMSIL)** Civil Affairs Division has identified areas that need urgent humanitarian aid, raises funds for specific organizations, helps in the simultaneous disarmament of rival fighting groups and identifies projects to help sexually abused women and girls

and ex-combatants.³⁸⁷ UNAMSIL's Trust Fund has contributed grants to child protection projects, including US\$45,000 to three community-based organizations in Bo to train war-affected women and girls along with ex-fighters, in crafts and to build a culvert. UNAMSIL has also given funds to the IRC for farm training for ex-child combatants and to Caritas-Makeni for skills training.³⁸⁸ UNAMSIL contingents also work to rebuild schools and other structures that benefit children and adolescents in the communities in which they work. In addition, a new child protection adviser (CPA) will begin in September 2002, aided by another CPA, and Radio UNAMSIL has decreed that 50 percent of the program time (not total time) will be devoted to children and youth.³⁸⁹

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In November 2001, a 14-year-old former child soldier, Alhaji Babah Sawane, addressed the United Nations Security Council as it considered the issue of children and armed conflict. This was the first time that a child was invited to address the Council, and it underscored the importance of involving children and adolescents in decisions that directly affect them. Alhaji appealed to the Council to increase funding for reintegration process, warning of the potential dangers of leaving thousands of young men with little to do. "I ask this body on behalf of all the children of Sierra Leone to do all they can to bring our sad story to an end," said Alhaji. Not long afterwards, on July 12, 2002, President Alhaji Ahmed Tejen Kabbah formally opened Sierra Leone's parliament in Freetown and promised to improve the population's welfare through improvements in food security and agriculture, provincial power supply, safe water supply, health care, education, decentralization and the general rehabilitation of roads.³⁹⁰

These promises must be followed through, and young people must have a stake in them. While the war was declared officially over on January 18, 2002, much more needs to be done for and with young people to remedy the conditions that encouraged young men and women to take up arms against the government.

“It is clear that despite a tenuous peace, the so-called solutions to these problems are bound to explode if special consideration is not given to the welfare of adolescents and young people, a very crucial human resource. Sierra Leone stands central among countries whose socio-economic and political structures have been battered.”

— Freetown research team report, 2002

Notwithstanding their deep concerns, adolescents and youth also expressed cautious optimism about the future of their country and a strong determination to have a role in making it a better place. For this to happen, programs and policies must actively involve adolescents and youth in the reconstruction of their country, and the government must be more responsive to their ideas and needs. These actions will allow young people to take ownership of their development and will increase the effectiveness of reconstruction and recovery efforts, while decreasing the likelihood that adolescents and youth will violently destroy what they have stake in.

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of the following recommendations were generated by Sierra Leonean adolescents and require a range of actors to respond, including the government of Sierra Leone (GOSL); donor governments; UNAMSIL and other UN actors; international and local NGOs; and local communities, including young people.

EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOOD

- The GOSL, World Bank and donors must ensure that current efforts to increase the minimum baseline standard for education do not focus solely on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of formal primary school structures. Formal secondary schools, skills training, accelerated and distance learning courses and other forms of education must be supported to ensure that adolescents’ right to education is fulfilled. Life skills should be incorporated into all of these efforts. Education in a variety of forms for all young people must be seen as essential to peace, stability and reconstruction.
- In addition to support for school reconstruction, donors and NGOs should provide students with school supplies, uniforms and transportation. Without these necessities, young people cannot attend school. Young people in rural areas in par-

ticular need schools in their communities and/or transportation to schools nearby.

- The GOSL, donors and program implementers must end the gender gap in education access and ensure that all education efforts emphasize and support the full and equal inclusion of girls, especially adolescent heads of household, child mothers, separated girls (without family or other caregivers), commercial sex workers, married girls, former child soldiers who were unable to formally demobilize and others. The GOSL should confront barriers to girls’ education and implement policies and incentives where necessary to increase their access and promote girls’ education through public awareness campaigns. Support to the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) should be increased to promote additional community-based action for girls’ education.
- UNICEF should assist communities in forming more teacher, parent and student associations that can act quickly to resolve local education issues when government structures lag behind.
- The GOSL should continue to collaborate on and support initiatives undertaken by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and other NGOs to address the massive teacher shortage. Refugee

teachers should be helped in confirming their certifications and every effort should be made to ensure that eligible teachers can take certification exams in a timely manner. The GOSL and its district education partners should utilize the teacher survey created by the IRC to match returning refugee teachers with schools in need of teaching staff.

- As part of increased support for reintegration, donors and UNICEF should extend the Community Education Investment Program (CEIP) to all areas of Sierra Leone and expand the eligibility for inclusion under the program.
- The GOSL should undertake a countrywide analysis with key development and local youth organizations to identify critical skills needed for development and reconstruction; donors should fund skills and on-the-job training programs linked to these needs; and implementers should employ adolescents and youth to undertake the tasks.
- Donors should support and expand programs that incorporate formal education, skills training and income-generation into holistic reintegration efforts for adolescents and youth, like the Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace (YRTEP), Skills Training and Employment Generation (STEG) and Skills Training and Employment Promotion (STEP). Such programs should be linked to skills training with access to credit, investment, tools, technical advice and support. They should involve young people in both rural and urban areas and should respond to the specific situation of adolescent commercial sex workers, heads of household, beggars, street children and drug users.
- The GOSL, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, should facilitate the construction and renovation of health centers, especially in rural areas. More medical personnel should be recruited and trained to work with adolescents and their specific health problems, and medicines should be made more widely available.
- Adolescents and youth should be trained as community health volunteers to support medical staff.
- Health providers should ensure adolescents are accessing care and should establish adolescent-friendly services that are confidential, low-cost and include reproductive health services. Programs should make sure to reach in- and out-of-school young people, survivors of gender-based violence and commercial sex workers. The community and civil society initiatives component of Sierra Leone's HIV/AIDS Response Project (SHARP) should ensure that programs and protocols are developed for young people.
- Education and health professionals working in Sierra Leone should develop reproductive health education programs for non-formal learning and vocational training, targeting young people who are not in school, particularly rural youth and girls.
- Donors should fund a reputable youth-focused organization to develop a nationwide magazine for adolescents and youth addressing health and relationship issues to provide an alternative to sources of disinformation currently available to young people. Such a publication could be modeled after Straight Talk, read by young people in Uganda. Peer education programs for rural and illiterate youth should also be supported, using, for example, a picture-based youth-friendly approach for illiterate youth.

HEALTH

- The Ministry of Health and Sanitation should work in collaboration with NGOs and UN agencies to break down myths about health issues and health services through broader public education campaigns, providing basic information, including services offered by schools, clinics, hospitals and others, including costs. Among other means, UNAMSIL radio should be used to convey this information during broadcasts geared toward adolescents and youth, and any adolescent-friendly health projects should be identified.
- The GOSL, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, should facilitate the improvement of water and sanitation in the communities. More latrines should be constructed and safe water sources established in urban and rural areas.
- Donors should support the GOSL and NGOs in providing increased assistance to disabled and war-wounded adolescents, especially those who suffered permanent disabilities such as the amputation of limbs. A national program for construc-

tion and provision of prostheses should be funded, together with a system of rehabilitation services specifically tailored for these beneficiaries.

- The GOSL and NGOs should work with communities to implement comprehensive programs addressing girls' and women's health, human rights, education, economic and social issues. Among other topics, girls and women should be given information about reproductive health care and the health risks and human rights abuses related to female genital mutilation.
- The GOSL, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, donors, youth and other community groups should undertake intensive advocacy and public awareness efforts to increase knowledge about the dangers of STIs, especially HIV/AIDS, and how to prevent their spread. The GOSL should also develop protocols and programs to implement the youth-specific elements of the national AIDS policy in a way that includes the active participation of young people.
- The results of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's national Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey on HIV/AIDS conducted in Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone government's Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Adolescent Survey Report, both completed this year, should be released widely, and the findings should form the basis of advocacy and programming.

PROTECTION

- Affirming the strong work and role of UNICEF and the Child Protection Network, the GOSL should undertake an aggressive campaign with a wide range of governmental, United Nations, NGO and community actors, including local child protection committees, to promote an increased emphasis on child and adolescent rights and protection within all humanitarian assistance and reconstruction interventions.
- ECOWAS's Special Adviser for Child Protection should ensure that member states involve young people as participants and advocates in the movement for the protection of children and adolescents. The adviser should develop specific programs to provide information, education and com-

munication materials on child rights.

- Donors should support the capacity building of civil servants and other governmental staff at all levels, increasing their practical knowledge of child and adolescent rights and protection and basic skills in carrying out their work.
- Recognizing that almost all young people are vulnerable in some way, work must be balanced to address the recovery of *all* young people, without stigmatizing or excluding any group and minimizing competition among them, while maximizing the protection and care of all.
- The GOSL must strengthen national legal frameworks to protect the rights of children and adolescents and should immediately pass the proposed National Youth Policy, enact a Child Rights law and eliminate gender discrimination under the law. The GOSL and others working on judicial and legislative reform should make a priority improvements on protection from sexual violence and exploitation and forced marriage under Sierra Leone law. They must also work to ensure women's right to own property.
- The GOSL should ensure equal access to education, livelihood opportunities and property ownership for girls to help prevent sexual exploitation.
- The GOSL must implement strategies to end the widespread sexual exploitation of children in Sierra Leone. Laws should be enacted to criminalize the purchase of sexual favors from children in exchange for money or benefits, to ban forced marriages and to establish an age of consent that discourages early marriage. Enforcement of such legislation should be accompanied by broad-based awareness raising campaigns and protection and services, including legal assistance and counseling, to be made available to girls and women who choose to pursue cases before the law. These efforts should be guided by research conducted by Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance regarding the legal status of women in Sierra Leone.
- The GOSL should avoid a confusing, costly and ineffective duplication of structures and either support the evolution of the National Commission for War-Affected Children as a body responsible for monitoring the fulfillment of children's and adolescents' rights in Sierra Leone or create a

National Commission on Children for this purpose when the War-Affected Children's Commission's mandate is completed. To this end, the National Commission for War-Affected Children should make its objectives clear, ensuring that it works with government ministries and UNAMSIL Child Protection Advisers in a constructive and complementary way, minimizing confusion among competing structures working on behalf of children and adolescents.

- In the case of refugees, UNHCR, and in the case of IDPs, UNOCHA and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), should ensure that refugee and IDP returns to their home communities are fully voluntary, that communities and individuals are informed of their options for assisted returns and that returns are carried out safely, with protection and assistance en route according to international standards. Additional transportation should be provided to returnees facing longer journeys.
- The GOSL and donors must ensure that returnees, including adolescents and youth, have immediate access to community-based reconstruction and rehabilitation support programs. Seeds, tools, additional food stocks and plastic sheeting should be provided as standard start-up assistance.
- Donors must supply UNHCR and the GOSL with sufficient resources to carry out repatriation and resettlement work and should closely monitor its implementation, with attention to local coordination, governmental capacity and child protection issues.
- Separated children within returning refugee or IDP communities and within the general population must continue to be identified and assisted with family tracing programs and access to protection and assistance, including foster care, education and livelihood opportunities.
- The GOSL and local community actors should increase efforts to educate adolescents and youth about the objectives and functions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Discussions about the function of the TRC through mobile outreach teams should take place among local groups, tribal councils, religious leaders, adolescents, youth and others representing all sides of the conflict. These mobile outreach teams

must take care to listen and respond to young people's concerns about the TRC. Should children and adolescents agree to participate, their identities as witnesses should be secured and their stigmatization minimized by ensuring community support for them following their testimony.

- The Special Court for Sierra Leone should not try young people who committed crimes as children as part of the fighting forces in Sierra Leone. Instead, it should focus on prosecuting adults for crimes committed against children, adolescents and other civilians during the conflict, including gender-based violence.
- The GOSL and the international community should establish and support a Special Fund for War Victims as stipulated in Article XXIX of the Lomé Peace Agreement. Organizers should seek direct input from community groups, including adolescents, on what rehabilitation activities the Fund should prioritize, given the generalized level of victimization felt by the population of Sierra Leone.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- The GOSL and all its ministries should ensure that girls and women benefit to the same extent as boys and men from rehabilitation and reconstruction programs and that they are directly included in such planning, as mandated by the Lomé Peace Agreement. Donors should monitor the gender balance in planning and implementation of recovery efforts.
- The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) and child protection agencies (CPAs) should undertake a gender analysis of the needs of girls and women, especially those involved in the conflict and in commercial sex work. The analysis should address their reproductive health needs, the risks of forced marriage, sexual slavery, female genital mutilation and other gender-based violence. It should incorporate the results into post-conflict reconstruction priorities and the design and implementation of post-conflict programs. NCDDR, NaCSA, UNICEF and other key actors must work together to secure additional funding for this work.

- The GOSL, UN agencies, NGOs and communities should ensure that the trauma of gender-based violence is dealt with in a culturally and gender-sensitive manner, offering girls and women medical treatment and reproductive health care, psychosocial support, economic opportunities, community advocacy and protection from further violence.
- The GOSL, international organizations and civil society actors should work to sensitize communities about children's and women's rights, and to protect women and girls from discrimination and violence. In particular, safe spaces must be created for young people, health officials, communities and others to discuss the practice of female genital mutilation as practiced in Sierra Leone. Parents and members of the women's secret societies must be included in these discussions and convinced to find different, safer ways to initiate young girls into adulthood.
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) organizations, their partners and other groups should continue to implement core code of conduct principles and a plan of action on prevention of and protection from sexual violence and exploitation in humanitarian crises and post-conflict reconstruction. Coordinated follow-up on implementation and monitoring of these efforts that is closely linked with increased community activism on the issues is critical to improved prevention and response.

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR)

- Donors must increase support for the reintegration of former child and youth soldiers and other young people beyond the completion of DDR programs currently supported by the World Bank-administered Multi-Donor Trust Fund that ends in February 2003. Holistic protection and assistance programs should be supported that build young people's capacities, address multiple needs and vulnerabilities and reduce competition over resources among former child soldiers and other young people. Special attention should be paid to girls and young women who spontaneously demobilized and did not receive support under the DDR program. Addressing the rights of girls and young women formerly with fighting forces who did not

formally demobilize should be a priority.

- The GOSL, UNAMSIL and the World Bank should solicit an independent assessment of the DDR, including a detailed gender analysis and recommendations for follow-up in the reintegration phase. This should be achieved with the direct input of children and adolescents. It should include recommendations for gender awareness and child protection concerns for future demobilization processes in the region and elsewhere.
- Donor support should be directed to youth groups and networks for collaborative work focused on increasing community acceptance of former child and youth soldiers, with a special emphasis on girls. Young people who were successfully reintegrated should be directly involved in these efforts.
- NCDDR, NaCSA, UNICEF, CPAs and other stakeholders should involve children, adolescents, youth and women directly in peace building and reconciliation efforts. They should be supported to lead community sensitization initiatives and program assessments, planning and monitoring in these areas.
- NCDDR, NaCSA, UNICEF and CPAs should assist youth and other community groups in addressing the reintegration concerns of many demobilized 18- to 25-year-old youth who were abducted into fighting forces as children but who are not receiving the support they need because they have "aged out" of programs targeting children under 18. These youth require increased support for family reunification, relocation and intensive re-education about civilian life. As much as possible, child-focused organizations should also expand existing programs to address youth rights.
- Donors, NCDDR and UNICEF should improve the quality and continuity of training and educational opportunities for ex-combatants. They should integrate them into family reunification activities so that young people reintegrating into their communities are not forced to quit these programs mid-stream.
- Keep the promises made to reintegrating children, adolescents and adults and the organizations serving them by ensuring resources are fully available and that stipends are paid on time.

- Donors should encourage and support child protection agencies providing reintegration services to those formerly with fighting forces, ensuring that local authorities and local organizations manage more funds to build their capacity, autonomy and effectiveness.

PSYCHOSOCIAL

- The GOSL, the international community and local organizations should expand psychosocial interventions that address the trauma stemming from direct involvement with fighting forces, including gender-based violence, and from other types of victimization. These interventions should focus on ensuring young people's coping strategies are constructive and limiting their reliance on activities that may be injurious and limiting over time.
- Decision-makers must recognize education, livelihood, health care and participation opportunities as essential to young people's psychosocial recovery and should ensure that programs are carried out in a holistic manner, accounting for the multiple pressures and needs facing young people.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sport should work with groups supporting recreation in schools to expand organized recreation and team-building activities to community-based centers, including through youth groups, allowing a wider range of young people to participate in these activities and expanding opportunities for community-initiated events.
- The GOSL, including NaCSA, NGOs and civil society organizations should identify and train key community members, such as teachers and other educational leaders, community elders, religious leaders, local health care workers, and adolescents and youth, as point people who can consistently respond to the psychosocial needs of reintegrating children and adolescents. This could be undertaken through local child protection committees.
- Donor governments, decision-makers and policy-makers must support trust-building efforts between the GOSL, adolescents and youth. They should ensure that all promises made to young people in the Lomé Peace Agreement and other post-war interventions are carried out to their

fullest extent with young people's direct involvement. Community discussions should be held throughout Sierra Leone about the roles of government, community, international, adolescent and other actors to air concerns and pave a path to mutual understanding.

ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- The GOSL, including politicians and key ministries, must take immediate steps to incorporate young people's needs and rights into their daily work. This should include making adolescent- and youth-serving ministries more responsive to young people's voices through consultation and by enacting legislation to protect their rights. Policies and programs should be developed, implemented and monitored in a more participatory way, working with rather than for young people. While ministerial staff at the local level are stretched, better collaboration will result in a wider and deeper impact of interventions, as young people invigorate local responses.
- The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the National Commission for War-Affected Children should find creative and constructive ways to involve young people and their organizations, by offering them internships, for example, as well as programming and monitoring partnerships. Consultations with young people by the new Ministry of Youth and Sport should continue and be replicated by other ministries in a process of trust building and open collaboration.
- Donors should fund youth organizations directly, and international NGOs, government ministries and UN agencies should work with them on programming and capacity building. Priority should be given to holistic programs for adolescents that address the range of education, livelihood, psychosocial, participation, health and protection rights.
- Youth organizations should promote the active participation and leadership of female members. They also should continue to facilitate constructive collaboration between youth throughout

Sierra Leone and internationally, offering alternatives to war and suggesting solutions to problems facing adolescents and youth.