



Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone

Excerpts from

PRECIOUS RESOURCES: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
Participatory Research Study with Adolescents and Youth in Sierra Leone
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Mission Statement

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children works to ensure that refugee and displaced women, children and adolescents are given protection, encouraged to participate, and have access to humanitarian assistance. Through a vigorous and comprehensive program of advocacy, supported by extensive research and technical expertise, the Women's Commission serves as an expert resource and works with governments, United Nations agencies, international and local nongovernmental organizations, and donors to improve the lives of displaced women and children. The Women's Commission is an affiliate of the International Rescue Committee.

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Note to readers

The following pages appeared as chapter sections in the Women's Commission's 2002 report *Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone*. Both address achievements and gaps related to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children and youth in Sierra Leone, with an emphasis on problems faced by girls, women and youth formerly with fighting forces seeking to reintegrate into society.

For the full text of *Precious Resources*, please visit www.womenscommission.org and select "reports."

THE DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) PROGRAM

“They lied to us that they would give us everything we wanted if we handed in our weapons. They promised us skills training, allowance and jobs, but nothing happened.”

— Adolescent boy, Waterloo Interim Care Center,
Freetown, October 2001

“If I knew that this was what life would turn out to be, I would have stayed in the bush.”

— Formally demobilized adolescent girl,
Peacock Farm, Freetown, October 2001

The DDR program in Sierra Leone is touted as one of the most successful demobilization efforts in history — it accomplished its principal goals of disarming and demobilizing thousands of ex-combatants on all sides of the conflict, including children (see Demobilization statistics chart). It quickly increased security in Sierra Leone, an essential prerequisite for peace. In the face of limited resources, a fluctuating security situation and destroyed infrastructure, UNICEF, Child Protection Agencies (CPAs) and the government of Sierra Leone provided demobilization services, including reunification, to approximately 6,900 children and adolescents. These are just first steps, however, toward significantly raising the bar of success in such efforts. Interviews with more than 300 adolescents, youth, women and men formerly associated with fighting groups in Sierra Leone reveal very serious gaps in the program and provide strong lessons learned.¹

The DDR made a distinction between “ex-combatants” and those recruited to serve for other purposes, which made it especially hard for girls and women leaving armed groups to find reintegration support. Some who were eligible for formal demobilization were unable to access the program, and still others who did formally demobilize found the support they received to be grossly incomplete. Overall, while the two “Ds” in DDR have been completed,

young people say that the “R” — the reintegration essential to uniting these components to construct recovery, reconciliation and a new beginning — remains distinctly lacking.

These and other gaps described below are contributing to deep feelings of injustice, neglect, anger and desperation among those formerly involved with fighting groups, as described more in the Psychosocial section. Many feel more stressed in post-conflict Sierra Leone than during the war as part of the fighting forces. Many youths formerly with the RUF especially, feel extremely angry and call the DDR programs “totally inadequate.” They believe they have been “lied to” and threaten a return to fighting as the result of “promises not being kept.”

In addition to undermining the peace process, the gaps in the DDR program are also contributing to further protection problems. Many children, adolescents and women left behind by the DDR face a range of new, serious problems, including: an inability to provide for the children they bore while in captivity with armed groups; the experience of strong negative stigmatization within their communities and families; migrations to urban areas in search of work; becoming homeless “street kids;” using drugs and committing crimes; and becoming involved in commercial sex work.

Some CPAs also describe frustration and concern over the limitations of the DDR. They identify strong needs to address additional child and adolescent protection problems, while continuing to support those they have already begun to serve.

MAJOR GAPS IN THE DDR

- The initial “cash for weapons” approach to DDR rendered many young people and women ineligible for formal demobilization.

Between the May 1999 ceasefire, the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999 and the official start of the third phase of the DDR program in November 1999, many young people took the opportunity to quickly get away from their commanders. Some of those who “spontaneously demobilized and reintegrated” in this way later had trouble accessing the formal demobilization process,

The DDR: Goals and Functions

ORIGINS AND PURPOSE

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Sierra Leone has taken place in roughly three phases, each interrupted by a resurgence of violence, between 1998 and 2002. The first phase began in 1998 when ECOMOG ousted the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) military regime and the government of Sierra Leone gained control. While rebels surrendering to ECOMOG were demobilized, efforts were curtailed by another wave of violence beginning in January 1999. The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 1999 heralded a second, more elaborate phase of the DDR that began in October 1999 and focused on the collection and destruction of surrendered weapons and the demobilization of ex-combatants prior to reintegration into civilian life. After another resurgence of violence, a third phase began in May 2001 and was concluded in January 2002, prompting a formal declaration of the war's end. Approximately 72,490 former combatants were demobilized, including 6,845 children. The closing date for the Multi-donor Trust Fund administered by the World Bank, which covers ongoing reintegration costs, is February 28, 2003.

PARTNERS

The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR)² governs the DDR, overseeing the work of the government of Sierra Leone, UN and RUF members. Under Article XVI of the Lomé Peace Agreement, UNAMSIL (then UNOMSIL) and ECOMOG serve as a neutral peace keeping force responsible for disarming all combatants. UNAMSIL also monitors the process and provides security. Special provisions for children in the DDR were seen as necessary, and there are thus two streams of the DDR, one for persons under 18, another for adults 18 years and older. Article XXX of the Lomé Peace Agreement, on child combatants, calls on the international community, UNICEF and others to pay particular attention to the issue of child soldiers and address their special needs. UNICEF thus continues its work with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), the NCDDR and the Child Protection Network (CPN) to "support programs for the demobilization, care, protection and reintegration of children associated with the fighting forces."³ The MSWGCA coordinates policy and monitors all actors in this area, and Child Protection Agencies (CPAs)

involved in the CPN deliver services directly to the young people, with technical assistance, logistical support, funds and training from UNICEF.

PROCESS AND PROVISIONS

During the most recent phase of the DDR, individuals and groups presented themselves to UNAMSIL disarmament posts and surrendered their weapons and military clothing. Each was provided with an identification card. This card later served as proof of eligibility for services provided under the DDR.

Children and adolescents were provided immediate care in Interim Care Centers (ICCs),⁴ which met their food, clothing, shelter, water, medical care, recreation and counseling needs. Family members were traced and prepared for the return of their children, and reunifications followed. Local child protection committees assisted in this process. Where families were untraceable, alternative care, such as foster care, was arranged. Widespread advocacy and sensitization was undertaken to support this work, as were a variety of psychosocial activities with families, communities and children.

Education and skills training were also offered to the young people in the ICCs and upon return home. The young people were assisted in returning to formal education, and those between 15 and 17 had the option of formal education or vocational training. They were also offered monthly allowances to cover educational and other reinsertion expenses, and some will also have educational assistance opportunities in future years. Two key educational and livelihood support programs initiated were the Community Education Investment Program (CEIP) and the Training and Employment Program (TEP). Through CEIP, materials are provided to schools in exchange for accepting former child soldiers and waiving their enrollment and tuition fees. TEP is designed to assist those who complete skills training in finding jobs and to distribute start-up tool kits.

Demobilization for adults was more "fast-track," where 300,000 leones (approximately US\$143) reinsertion allowances ("Transitional Safety Allowances") were distributed rapidly, and adults could choose to return home or go elsewhere immediately and seek services. Skills training accompanied by monthly stipends was also offered to adults through NCDDR, and smaller numbers also entered formal education.

When DDR Works Well

At St. Edward's Secondary School, former combatants between the ages of 18 and 21 who have gone through the DDR program have been accepted to and are attending school. The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) has facilitated their acceptance by covering their fees and providing them a monthly allowance. Most importantly, a caring Sierra Leonean guidance counselor gives them support. She affectionately calls them "my boys." The principal of the school embraces them as his own, showing them tenderness and understanding. Students model themselves after the teachers and principal. As a result, the former combatants feel accepted and do not want to return to the bush. Although some are stigmatized in their communities, they believe they can cope because the school provides a sanctuary. They are hopeful beyond their bullet wounds, trauma and illnesses. They express optimism about the future and praise the school authorities.⁵

especially girls and women.

When the process began, individuals were required to turn in a weapon to UNAMSIL authorities in order to "disarm." Many of those who left for home spontaneously did so without a weapon and thus could not meet this requirement. Many commanders also collected weapons from captives to be later parceled out by them as patrimony to chosen recipients — mainly males. The one-person, one-weapon approach was later changed, and group disarmament was instituted. This involved commanders providing UNAMSIL and NCDDR lists of former combatants to be disarmed. Groups would then disarm together, and weapons would be turned in jointly.

Many women and girls were excluded from formal demobilization as others rushed in for assistance. Had those who spontaneously returned home arrived with weapons, they would have raised suspicions among those who received them. But arriving without them created further barriers to receiving care. Desperate for help, some of these young people left home again to try and get weapons in order to comply. One adolescent girl in Peacock Farm said, "...three of my friends have gone back to Kono...they said they are going to get weapons and disarm."⁶ Others felt they could not go back and

approach commanders for help or to be placed on demobilization lists by them. Instead, they waited for other opportunities that never materialized.

In the end, the total number of children, adolescents and adults formally demobilized was over 150 percent of the number originally anticipated, yet, the number of females among them remained extremely low (about 7.5 percent of the total, see chart, "Demobilization Figures"). Without additional support, girls and women who provided services to fighting forces will continue to be stigmatized and debilitated in their recovery, and their contributions to reconstruction and rehabilitation will be further diminished.

Thus, even if these girls were to be addressed through programs for separated children as described below, few were able to access the services. Although no specific initiative was announced by the time of the research project, UNICEF protection officers said they were looking at those who were separated, demobilized and reunified, who were not combatants, and were following up on care and protection for sexually abused and demobilized.⁷ Young people and CPAs welcome accelerated attention. Caritas-Makeni, responsible for coordinating assistance to demobilizing children in the north, started a street and working children's program in 2002. Caritas-Makeni's Maurice Ellie said the project was started because "most children were left out during disarmament and demobilization. As a result, most have been left out of reintegration efforts, and many are on the streets with no parental care."²⁴³ By April 2002, the project was working with 161 children, including nearly 40 girls who were part of the RUF, orphans or without familial support.

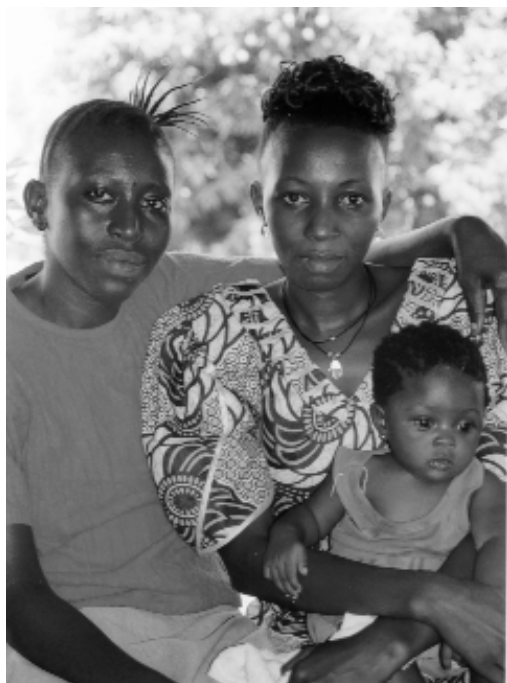
- **DDR was largely gender-blind and did not take into sufficient consideration the varied roles women and girls played among fighting forces and thus did not adequately provide for their specific DDR-related concerns and rights.⁹**

Many girls and women who were formerly with fighting forces say that DDR services neither recognized nor took into consideration the many non-combatant roles they played. Yet these "marriages" are nothing more than a forcible provision of services to the armed elements. Many said that the Sierra Leone government and the international community have given a secondary status to those recruited to serve fighting forces, mainly females, focusing instead on "ex-combatants" — those who took direct part in

the hostilities.¹⁰ Few women and girls volunteered to fight in the war, but a large number were abducted, forced into combat and subjected to gang rape, repeated rape, sexual slavery and other violence by their captors;¹¹ they were also used as cooks, porters and other forms of military support. In Sierra Leone, this slavery is euphemistically called “jungle marriage,” “bush marriage” or “AK-47 marriage.”¹²

At first, it was impossible for an individual to demobilize through the DDR without surrendering a weapon, and later, commanders were asked to name and attest to an individual being a combatant in their fighting force. As discussed further in the next section, these approaches barred many females from formal demobilization who had spontaneously demobilized or were discriminated against by their commanders, or “bush husbands.” DDR planners failed to adequately anticipate the number of females expected to demobilize and instead viewed them largely as “dependents” of the male demobilizing soldiers. Thus, little was done to fully account for them.

Despite their distinct experiences within the fighting forces, no comprehensive programs existed to help girls and women make considered decisions about their “AK-47 marriages.” Apart from a handful of micro-credit schemes targeted at women serving with the fighting forces, no comprehensive approach or



Despite serving with the fighting forces during the war, many girls and women have been left out of DDR services because they were considered non-combatants.

programs existed to support them. They were offered little additional protection should they opt out of, or manage to escape, these circumstances.

The following box illustrates the huge discrepancy between male and female combatants and those serving the fighting forces:

DEMOBILIZATION FIGURES ¹³	
(Numbers of combatants demobilized between 1998 and February 18, 2002)	
Child and adolescent boys	6,316
Child and adolescent girls	529 = 7.7 percent of children
Adult males	60,769
Adult women	4,876 = 7.4 percent of adults
Total demobilized	72,490

DIFFERENCES IN THE DEMOBILIZATION OF CHILDREN

The approach to demobilizing children held more opportunities for girls and boys who were not formally demobilized as combatants than adult women. In its lead role facilitating DDR for children under 18 years old, UNICEF went beyond the “combatant” delineation and planned to serve both “an estimated 5,400 child ex-combatants and 5,000 camp followers from the fighting forces.”¹⁴ In this way, girls, a significant portion of this latter population, were recognized more explicitly than adult women who were not formally demobilized. This meant that children and adolescents who were not formally demobilized as ex-combatants but had otherwise served with the fighting forces would be identified as separated children and could ostensibly find help making the transition back to civilian life through this holistic approach to child protection.¹⁵ A UNICEF program specifically assisting girl survivors of sexual violence was also included in this work.

Where such services were well provided, the transition back into community life was greatly eased, but a high number fell through the cracks, and their journeys home have been extremely difficult.¹⁶ One adolescent girl living in Peacock Farm, said: “I was abducted and [spent] nine months with the rebels. When I came back they have been inviting us to meetings, but they just talk and don’t do anything for us.

We have suffered, and they have not helped us...they skip us when it comes to benefit.”¹⁷ According to UNICEF, only a small percentage of the predicted caseload of “camp followers” and others associated with the fighting forces had been assisted by the end of 2001.

*UNICEF reported that by December 2001, basic services were provided to 2,312 separated children in four demobilization centers and 14 ICCs, including 312 girls. Of these, approximately 1,500 were demobilized child soldiers, and the remaining were a combination of “camp followers” and unaccompanied children (including separated children among returnees from Guinea).*¹⁸

Without a consistent, explicit focus on the rights of girls and women, NCDDR tacitly condoned, or at best dismissed, the violence girls and women suffered and contributed to their trauma and diminished self-esteem. It made their reintegration, often with small children to care for, even more difficult, as many were shunned as “rebels.”¹⁹ Since rape is often a taboo subject in Sierra Leone, failure to confront the issue perpetuates a culture of silence that exacerbates an already difficult recovery from these crimes. Advocacy and community sensitization work focused on preparing families and communities for their return and creating sympathy for them rather than stigmatization has only scratched the surface of what is needed.

Women and girls who served in fighting forces need additional support in confronting both the trauma of their experiences and the prejudice now foisted upon them. Without this support, their ability to participate fully in the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of Sierra Leone, as well as their own recovery, has been greatly diminished despite an explicit call in the Lomé Peace Agreement to prioritize their involvement.²⁰ Beyond what government, United Nations and other organizations can do, communities must be directly involved in these issues, like those related to gender-based violence. As society has endured dramatic assaults and changes, community attitudes must change with them and will ultimately hold the answers to successful reintegration.

• **Reintegration programs for children and adolescents are under-funded and incomplete.**

More than 72,000 people went through disarmament and demobilization — more than twice the original 33,000 anticipated.²¹ As the numbers swelled, however, donor contributions did not swell with them. Disarmament and demobilization were emphasized and proceeded at a rapid pace, with adults reintegrated on a “fast track,” and children reunified as quickly as possible. As this rapid movement was prioritized, community-based reintegration programs and other local support structures have not been able to keep pace with demand. UNICEF and CPAs worked valiantly to reunify young people with family and get programs running to support them, but the work is far from complete. Many young people are feeling greatly let down and often very angry about the process.

The northern town of Makeni was the RUF headquarters in the latter years of the war. While the DDR representative in Makeni told the Makeni adolescent research team that reintegration benefits have been the same across Sierra Leone, DDR service providers and young recipients interviewed there said that cutbacks have become common. DDR service providers told researchers that the programs had been reduced from six months to three months and that they had not received the funds required to run the programs. As a result, materials needed for the courses were unavailable. One young mother lamented angrily, “First the programs were nine months, then six months, now three months. Tailoring in three months! I have three kids. It’s one week and all we’re living on is mangos. When we get up in the morning, we don’t have anything. We only want schooling. Now, we don’t have anything.”²²

A representative of a local NGO in Makeni told researchers the following story: In the fall of 2001, NCDDR “gave us the go ahead to register a lot of ex-combatants who were roaming the town with no food. [The ex-combatants] were angry with the government about this. So, we started to register them and work on numeracy, civic education, counseling and trauma healing. But NCDDR didn’t supply us the equipment we needed to do tie dye, tailoring, hair-dressing and metalwork, so we started on our own without materials.” He continued, “In other areas, reintegration activity lasts for six months, but here they say three months and 60,000 leones for each ex-combatant (US\$29.33) at the end of each month.” At the time of the research, the NGO had not been paid

and reported that the NCDDR said it would only pay for three of the five months worked.²³

Former combatants enrolled in skills training or in formal education also complained that monthly stipends promised them had not been paid for several months, and there were few materials to practice or learn a trade in their skills training courses. Few see any clear job prospects. One ex-combatant adolescent boy now in school in Makeni said of the DDR, “No, it is not effective because they don’t buy us material for our school and only gave us 300,000 leones (US\$146.69).”²⁴ Another spoke of discouragement: “There is no quality education. Education is not just academic,” he said. “[We need] vocational training and materials to help us, but we don’t get this.”²⁵

Stories were similar in the western region. One adolescent girl in Freetown, who was with the rebels for two years, said: “When we disarmed, they promised to teach us skills to enable us to be gainfully employed. It is three years since then. I was pregnant. I had the baby here....DDR has come, agencies have come, but we haven’t seen anything. They come with new stories every day. That is why we have decided we are not coming for meetings anymore.”²⁶ Some girls facing these problems have returned to the bush, and others threaten to, although at times their commanders are no longer interested. Like so many, they feel trapped, with few choices.

Researchers also learned about abuses of the system by former combatants. “It is true that the programs are not always functioning well, but there are other issues, too,” said youth leader Ngolo Katta, of a situation he encountered in Port Loko in the north. “Some show up for their monthly stipend, but they don’t actually come to class. Then they complain about not getting the money, but they need to come to class in order to qualify to continue to receive payments.”²⁸

Researchers also found that the Community Education Investment Program (CEIP) was not yet fully functioning in all areas. (See Education section.) According to UNICEF’s child protection officer, Donald Robert Shaw, the program was up and running in 2001, with a goal of catering to 2,000 children and adolescents. Many beneficiaries were identified in that time, but some needed to wait until September 2002 to begin their studies; it is likely another 2,000 will be targeted in 2003.²⁹ At the time

An Unclear Future

Binta, 18 years old and from Makeni, was captured by the RUF in 2000:

“When they take you to the rebels, they give you a gun and train you to shoot and fire. I was trained, and I had a gun, but I was afraid to use the gun. [I especially didn’t like] the sound.

“I finally got free when Brimah [her captor] left the rebels to go to Liberia and fight. I knew I was pregnant because my period stopped. I went to my uncle’s in Freetown in June 2001. I was accepted, as he knew it was not my fault. After two months, he told me, ‘Go beg it from your parents.’ [Meaning, go back and approach your family and see if they will accept you.] My mother accepted me in Makeni. That was August 2001. My daughter was born at home with my mother in February 2002.

“Regarding the DDR, I was 17 then. I gave the weapon, which I still had. They gave me a yellow form, drinking buckets, soap and a brush and slippers. I was in the DDR camp in Makeni for three days. I got an ID card, but I was not given any money. At the time, there were plenty of people there — over 100. In January, I registered for a job. Four months have passed, I haven’t received any money, and I’m strained with my child. I am taking a weaving and dying class, which I like, but I have no job. I would like to go to school, I don’t mind about my height. My mother says, ‘Education is better than silver and gold.’ But we lack money [for education, especially]. My mother is tired and has no money. I have two brothers, five sisters and my child. My father died in the SLA in Liberia.”²⁷

of the research in Makeni, Daniel Mye-Kamara, CEIP project officer for Caritas-Makeni explained that while successful, CEIP still has a ways to go in a short time before becoming fully functional. “Of those demobilized since 1999, about 20 percent are in the first year of the program,” he said. “It’s functioning in some districts, not all...But so far, it is a great success...Schools have not had materials for many years...After UNICEF, communities will need to take further action.”³⁰ Thus, while CEIP is an extremely important mechanism for drawing former combatants back into society, it is not yet filling the gap for all of those who could be eligible.

• Reintegration programs are not in sync with the overwhelming economic and social recovery needs of

Sierra Leone and of individual families; livelihood skills acquired through DDR are often useless, hindering family reunification and community acceptance processes.

Even when functioning well, DDR programs are not enough to ensure the reintegration of former combatants in an environment of widespread devastation and poverty. Refugees and IDPs are returning home for the first time in large numbers, and their communities themselves are struggling to begin life over again. In this environment, and as infrastructure redevelopment takes significant time, communities are not fully prepared to take in those returning from fighting forces. As a result, young former combatants and others previously involved with fighting forces feel pressure to return home with something to offer. Many also simply need to be occupied, to ease the difficult transitions from positions of responsibility within the “bush hierarchy” of fighting forces to no positions in particular in civilian life. Adolescents and youth do not feel they have years to wait for assistance and a better life. They want and need to take action immediately.

Reintegration Program Data as of February 18, 2002³¹

Of the 6,845 children and adolescents formally demobilized, 1,133, or 17 percent, benefited from reintegration programs. Of the 1,133, 843 were registered for CEIP and 290 were enrolled in skills training programs.

In this context, young people and members of their communities voiced several concerns. For example, the skills training offered through DDR is often not immediately useful to the young people. Local economies are not up and running, proper tools to accomplish their tasks are not available, and in many cases, family reunification has been prioritized over completion of their studies. Some young people were in the middle of courses in ICCs when their families were identified, and they were quickly reunited. Once back home, they needed to start all over again. Young people suggested this problem could have been avoided by delaying reunification for several weeks.

The majority of young people surveyed in Sierra Leone rank lack of education opportunities as their highest concern; thus, interrupting their skills training is particularly disturbing to many of them. They then have less to show upon return home, and lose hope that they are finally on a path of renewal. In such circumstances, it is easy to remember their life while part of fighting forces, when many had better access to food and other items on demand.

Combined with the shame often cast upon them by civilian communities, many wonder whether leaving the fighting forces has actually been worth it.

- **Youth roughly between 18 and 25, who may have been forced into the fighting as children, enter the adult DDR track without sufficient support for return to their home communities, reunification with family or local integration.**

Youth between the ages of 18 and 25 are in particular crisis, especially those who were with the RUF. Most were abducted into fighting forces as children, yet ironically cannot receive the support they need because they have “aged out.” Unlike those under 18, they receive little, but desperately need assistance reunifying with family, securing housing and intensive re-education about civilian life. Without this, hundreds are displaced, even ghettoized. Their RUF association causes them to be rejected by communities who accepted or supported those from other fighting forces during the war. As refugees and IDPs return home and want their houses back from RUF members who occupy them, pressure is also on the youth to find somewhere else to go. As these and other pressures grow, they become increasingly angry about their situation and fixated on the failure of the government, other authorities and former commanders to keep promises made to them.

One former RUF youth in Freetown said: “As far as I am concerned, they have not kept their promises. They just gave me money and then they abandoned me and said you are on your own. You can do whatever you want with your money...they said they would give us the opportunity to be educated and they would teach us trade...and they would offer us medical service. But when you are sick, they don’t even want to know about you. Here, nobody cares about me. We are just sitting here doing nothing.”³²

As the former headquarters of the RUF, the Makeni region poses a particular challenge. Hundreds of youth formerly associated with the RUF who originate from other towns in Sierra Leone feel they are

unable to return home. Some also squandered the 300,000 leones (US\$149.69) they were originally given making trips to the diamond mines with their former commanders, to their home towns or other familiar sites that did not work out. Compelled back to their points of demobilization, few sources of support are available to promote their reintegration. Their situation is further worsened by skills training programs that do not produce jobs. One youth said, “The youth suffered a lot in this revolution and now we disarmed, but we are living in different homes and the owners are asking us to pay rent. But we don’t get any money. The promises are not kept, and we cannot pay the rent.”³³

Youth and civil society organizations in Makeni are aware of these gaps for the 18- to 25-year-olds and the risks they pose to stability. They are attempting to work with international organizations and local groups, including tribal councils, to pave the way for these ex-combatants to return to their towns of origin. They want to undertake community sensitization and reintegration work that would allow former combatants from Makeni who are now in other towns to return home and those currently in Makeni to return home to other towns. In the meantime, some former RUF combatants say they earn a living doing odd jobs, such as transporting goods with wheelbarrows or carrying water, while others say they have no support whatsoever and that the women among them are even forced into prostitution. Police officers also report having to step in to help resolve disputes between former fighters occupying the houses of returning IDPs and refugees.

- **Some young people remain with their commanders, unable to leave without additional support; some have become “street kids” and commercial sex workers.**

Without support, many young people formerly with fighting forces are facing new protection problems. Some are commercial sex workers and others are living on the streets. Still others are known to remain with their former rebel commanders, unable to leave without further support. Caritas-Makeni reported that many young people who did not make it through disarmament still live with commanders who never officially released them. “They don’t even think of running away,” said Maurice Ellie of Caritas-Makeni. “They tell us they won’t go ‘because they [their commanders] will kill us.’”³⁴ Many of those identified so far in the north are orig-

inally from southern and eastern Sierra Leone.

The full number of young people eligible for DDR or with related needs that were not adequately covered by the program and are experiencing new protection problems is unknown. Some CPAs, including Caritas-Makeni, are doing assessments in their areas of coverage to identify young people in need of assistance or protection as a result of having fallen through the cracks of DDR. Whether or not a “retroactive DDR” is feasible or advisable, more must be done to identify young people still in need of release from fighting forces and to address both those requiring ongoing reintegration support and those who have yet to be targeted.³⁵

MOVING BEYOND DDR AS A SECURITY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION

Thus far, DDR has been effective in providing a needed carrot to those being asked to disarm, demobilize and commit to peace. The symbolic destruction of weapons, family reunification and initial support in steps toward a new life have all been critical to paving the way to security and peace. However, gaps in the DDR, combined with the limitations of its education, livelihood and community advocacy programs, have left young people angry and disappointed. The DDR thus far, then, appears to have been more an initial critical security and psychosocial program seeking to address immediate needs than a reliable reintegration mechanism. Without additional follow-through, the discontent that is already breeding among those formerly with fighting forces will spread.

Donors and decision-makers must understand that for many young people formerly with fighting forces, the enticement to demobilize and try peace came largely through the promise of acceptance and support in reintegration — that life would be better in post-conflict Sierra Leone. If many begin to feel more marginalized, the seeds of unrest will be sown again. Thus, legitimate promises made to former combatants must be kept and those who were in service to fighting forces must receive immediate attention. The Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone states, “The successful reintegration of former child combatants and other children separated from their families requires a long-term approach and commitment,” with particular attention “given to children bypassed by the formal disarmament process.”³⁶ However, as stated

above, support to the wider community must also keep pace to bridge differences between the groups and prevent future disaffection due to deprivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE and EXPLOITATION

*“Physicians for Human Rights estimates that approximately 50,000 to 64,000 IDP girls and women were sexually assaulted during the war.”*³⁷

* * *

Of an estimated 4,500 children abducted in Sierra Leone following the 1999 invasion of Freetown, 60 percent were girls, the majority of whom suffered repeated acts of sexual violence.”

— Olara Otunnu, UN Special Representative for the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict

In early 2002, the release of a draft study by UNHCR and Save the Children UK (STC-UK) on the subject of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in West Africa exploded into an international scandal. The report, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone*, included accusations by children and adolescents in refugee and IDP camps of sexual exploitation and violence against them by mainly locally hired aid workers, as well as United Nations peacekeepers and other males with authority and/or resources.³⁸

The findings of adolescent researchers³⁹ support many of the claims made in the study that gender-based violence, including the sexual exploitation of young people, especially girls, is extremely widespread. Researchers also documented female genital mutilation (FGM) and early and forced marriage as key problems facing girls. (See also Health section.) They said that poverty and traditional sex discrimination combined with inadequate or non-existent humanitarian assistance and response mechanisms fuel the violence.

RAMPANT PROSTITUTION

Adolescents, youth and adults told researchers that “prostitution,” which they define as the exchange of sexual services for money, goods or other benefits, is rampant in Sierra Leone. The vast majority of the more than 600 adolescents and youth interviewed

said they could identify individuals involved in prostitution, including, in many cases, themselves.⁴⁰

Forms and Causes

Prostitution takes several forms and crosses a wide spectrum of groups and individuals, including IDPs, Liberian refugees, teenage mothers, former combatants who are unemployed and without benefits, orphans, students and the extremely poor. Although most prostitutes are females, some say that males become involved “by homosexuals.”

In general, they work in almost every possible setting, from saloons and discos to UNAMSIL bases, along roads, on beaches and boats, in private homes. Customers are mainly adult males, including UN peacekeeping troops; international workers; local men, including those working with humanitarian organizations; youths and others. Adolescent researchers talked to teenage girls who openly solicit customers in the local dance and drinking venues of Makeni. They dance provocatively before the crowd and approach individual males. These young women do not associate at all with the more “professional” prostitutes who work principally among the UN peacekeepers near their base in Makeni, viewing them as competition. As for the women working near the UNAMSIL base, one said: “We do not have a leader. Everyone is a leader. We do not have to advertise. Men know we are here, and they come, although sometimes it is slow, and sometimes they do not pay.”⁴¹

Young people cited poverty as the main cause of prostitution. One girl said, “I do it just to get money to eat and to give to my parents.”⁴² A former combatant adolescent girl in Makeni told researchers, “No one provides for us, which is why many go into prostitution. This is why I go myself.”⁴³ Other prostitutes in Makeni said, “We would be ready to stop everything if we had money to go to school, but there’s no money, nothing.”⁴⁴ One adolescent girl interviewed in Freetown said, “My friend is called Fatu. She is 16. She told me that when she is sick...unless she goes and does her prostitution for money to buy drugs, she has nobody to take care of her.”⁴⁵

Other girls and women left with no home or family to return to, travel significant distances together to service UNAMSIL troops based in different towns. For example, all the women and youth participating

in a focus group of prostitutes in Makeni were from somewhere else in Sierra Leone, including Lungi in the western region, effectively having become internally displaced again. One said: “I lost my parents in the war. We decided to group ourselves together and come here. We’re not happy now.” Another concurred: “We have no houses to go back to, no nothing. We pray to God for opportunity and better conditions.”

Almost all the former combatant girls interviewed by the Women’s Commission in Peacock Farm, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Freetown, in the fall of 2001 were involved in commercial sex work. They also cited “bad friends,” “pressure from parents” and growing desensitization to sexual exploitation and violence among the population as causes of prostitution. A police officer in Freetown believes adolescents are led to prostitution because of “broken homes and discontent minds.”⁴⁶

Ex-combatant and other girls associated with fighting forces articulated their own powerlessness and fears of becoming involved in prostitution. “I was abducted,” said one. “After disarmament they told us we would get allowances every month. But we don’t see any improvements.... I don’t want to be a prostitute. How do they expect me to live?”⁴⁷ Another said: “This country is full of so many resources, but they squander everything for themselves. They don’t care about the adolescents, now they are turning to prostitution.”⁴⁸

Consequences

The consequences of this exploitation are deep and



Young people want to move beyond marginalization to real participation in society. Here they came together to support non-violence among youth during the May 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections.

widespread. Many young people expressed profound concern that prostitution is so pervasive that it dramatically impedes their ability to have more normal relationships. One young man from Makeni said: “I approached a well-dressed woman for a regular date one day, and she coldly asked me what I would give her for it. There is no free love anymore in Sierra Leone.”⁵¹

Young people also cite low self-esteem, hopelessness and shame, disease, an inability to marry, unwanted teen pregnancy and poverty for the children of child mothers as consequences of prostitution. In Makeni, a group of young women prostitutes live constantly with isolation and rejection. They are looked down upon by other members of the community for their work, even though many girls and women are doing the same thing in other areas of the town. “We are not liked in the community.

They treat us poorly... sending stones against us, and some are calling us *kolonkos* [meaning prostitutes],” one said.⁵²

They also worry about contracting illnesses. Though skeptical about AIDS, they still express concern. “The men don’t agree to use condoms. If we have one, they will not use it.” Some problems they cite are “high blood pressure, malaria, stomach pain, appendicitis,

UNAMSIL Troops Are Principal Customers

A UNAMSIL spokesperson in Makeni stated that solicitation of prostitutes by UNAMSIL soldiers stationed there does not take place. Prostitutes, however, spoke in detail about the sexual services they have provided to the peacekeepers. “That mat you are sitting on right now,” a young woman said to researchers, “that’s what we do it on. They come from there [pointing toward the Nigerian Battalion 11 base] at night, and we sleep with them on the floor in this house. UNAMSIL also calls on us, and we go there. They give us things to eat for sex. This is why we stay here. They call us at night, and we get something to eat.... Some do ‘men to men,’ too.”⁴⁹ The young women interviewed affirmed that girls under 18 years old are involved in this prostitution. An 18-year-old prostitute said, “I started this when I was 17.”⁵⁰

gonorrhoea and pregnancy — men will not take responsibility for the baby.”⁵³

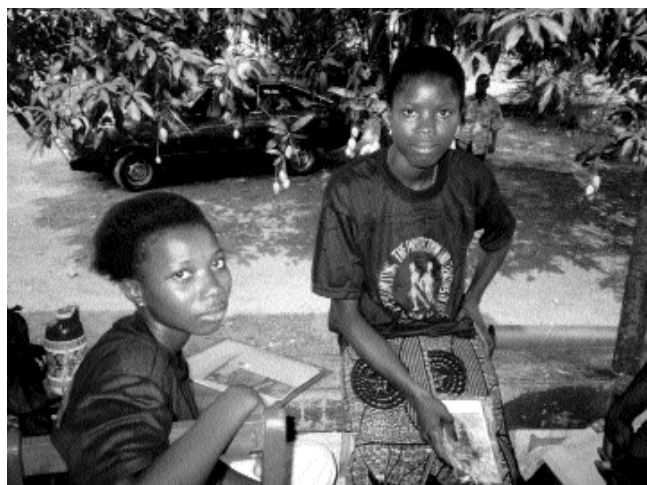
The normalcy with which prostitution is now viewed might explain why adolescents ranked it relatively low in their survey of top concerns. This stands in stark contrast to their openness in discussing the subject and indicates some breakdown in the tight cultural taboo surrounding it. Some adolescents feel this is because they have nothing left to lose; others are anxious to see it addressed; and others still want to discuss it because sexual activity in general is intriguing and on their minds as their own sexuality emerges. A UNAMSIL human rights officer pointed to the normalcy of years of wartime violence: “People got things through violence and it was the same for sexual abuse. This has led to amazing levels of tolerance [of this violence.]”⁵⁴

Addressing the Problem

In the face of numerous challenges, efforts are underway to address the problem of prostitution. Makeni Chief of Police Sisko pointed to the absence of any clear law against prostitution. One statute penalizes the “harboring of a child under 18 under a roof,” he said, and perpetrators can be arrested for “indecent exposure,” but arrests are “infrequent, apart from on the beaches of Freetown.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, the age of consent in Sierra Leone is 14.

A second challenge is monitoring the behavior of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, ensuring they work to prevent sexual violence and exploitation. In the wake of the scandal involving refugee and IDP children, a task force was established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)⁵⁶ to address prevention and monitoring. Mandated “to make recommendations that specifically aim to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel and the misuse of humanitarian assistance for sexual purposes,” the newly created Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises developed a plan of action, including new codes of conduct and core principles on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.⁵⁷ (See Appendix.) Ensuring implementation and monitoring of these commitments must be the next step.

Few NGOs are focused on working to educate and provide services to commercial sex workers or those who buy their services. Those that are, such as GOAL, Planned Parenthood, UNFPA and Marie Stopes International should be supported. Programs



Adolescent researchers, including some who are child mothers themselves, report that girls are especially concerned about unwanted pregnancy and early and forced marriage. With limited job and education opportunities, many girls also fear being forced into prostitution to support themselves.

should be expanded into rural areas, as much of the focus until now has been on the urban centers, and should be holistic, incorporating counseling, skills training and access to credit, as well as reproductive health information and services.

UNAMSIL’s Human Rights Office has made efforts to address prostitution and sexual violence. In Makeni, for example, it is working with students in schools that have formed human rights working groups and each month discuss a different set of rights. Human Rights Officers also work directly with the UN peacekeepers on the challenging task of prevention. “Children under 18 are being used for sex by peacekeepers, and you do not have too many complaints about it from families or others,” a UNAMSIL Human Rights Officer in Makeni said. “Every time a battalion is deployed, they get training on human rights from us,” she said. “We stress the issue of complying with UN standards with them. However, the code of conduct for peacekeepers requires ‘respect for women,’ and it’s not clear whether this message is effective.”⁵⁸ UNAMSIL’s Child Protection Office will also be working to bring UN agencies together on compliance with the new IASC code of conduct principles.

Organizations with specific child protection mandates, including UNICEF and UNHCR, are among those required to implement the new core principles. UNICEF has had a project for survivors of sexual violence in place for some time, and UNHCR had begun work on the issues as well, prior to the recent scandal.

International and local organizations focused on child protection must continue to work together with local community groups to raise issues about sexual violence and exploitation with young people and identify solutions. Religious and youth groups should be brought further into the fold of these discussions. Any groups carrying out work on the rehabilitation of justice and law enforcement systems must tackle these issues head on, so that all civilians have full protection from sexual exploitation under the law in line with international standards. Since the problem disproportionately affects girls, gender issues must be central to all of these initiatives.

RAPE, SEXUAL SLAVERY AND BEARING THE CHILDREN OF CAPTORS

The Ongoing Impact of Wartime Violence

Interviews with young people confirmed their experiences as witnesses and/or victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed during the war.⁵⁹ The impact of these experiences continues to affect their lives, especially those who care for the children born as a result of captivity and sexual enslavement by the RUF. Some of these young mothers participated as adolescent researchers for this study and together with other members of the research teams interviewed other survivors, who provided direct testimony about their experiences. NGOs, human rights organizations, United Nations agencies and others have also substantially documented widespread acts of sexual violence committed during the war. As noted above, Physicians for Human Rights puts the

number of female IDP who have suffered war-related sexual assaults in the Sierra Leone war at 50,000 to 64,000.⁶⁰ Factoring in younger adolescents and those who were not IDPs or who were refugees, the number would likely skyrocket.

Survivors of this violence nurse wounds that have not and will not heal and relive the memories of their trauma. While many have been accepted by their families and communities, some girls are shunned and ridiculed, and many former sexual slaves are called “rebel wives.” Many face harsh difficulties finding jobs, education, health care and marriage partners, adding to their trauma.

The impact of this violence has cut a wide swath through the lives of all adolescents and youth in Sierra Leone. Girls, especially, disclose ongoing fears of sexual violence, and many believe this violence has desensitized young people to such a degree that they see it as simply unavoidable and inevitable. Support for survivors of wartime sexual violence is therefore an ongoing need through counseling, training, health care, job services, community advocacy, protection from further violence and more. Work to prevent further violence and allay the fears of young people is also an urgent priority.

The Question of Current Sexual Violence

The extent of ongoing sexual violence, including rape, in Sierra Leone is not fully known. Interviews revealed no direct testimony of acts of sexual violence recently being committed against adolescents, but secondary sources attest to its taking place.

Chief of Police Sisko in Makeni told researchers that only one rape case had been reported to police in recent months, involving an adult woman. He stated that reporting of such cases is not common “due to stigmatization...if young girls get raped here, they will hardly get married, and so they suffer in silence. It is not like in big towns where there are different groups to help. However, the Forum for African Women Educationalists is working on this here.”⁶¹

UNHCR and STC-UK’s recent report also asserts that “reliable data on how many children are affected by sexual violence and exploitation within the Mano River states still

Boys Recall Wartime Sexual Violence

Many adolescent boys register ongoing concern about rape. Adolescent boys in Freetown even ranked concern over rape slightly higher than adolescent girls did. Many recall instances of boys being forced by rebels to rape girls or family members, sometimes including other males. Some also report cases of females raping males during the war. An example cited several times by different groups of participants involved a case of female RUF fighters luring men into an encampment in Makeni. Once cajoled inside, the females allegedly forced each man to have sex consecutively with several females. If they refused or could not keep up, they were supposedly beaten or killed. One youth says, “The RUF did it at Cemetery Road that time when they arrived in Makeni. The methods they used is to call on you like giving you food to eat, and when you go there you are going to be raped by a group of women.”⁶⁵

remains rare.”⁶² The report cites fear of stigmatization, reprisal, collusion of authorities and lack of awareness about justice and other services as some of the barriers to seeking legal and other remedies. One young person told adolescent researchers that young drug users rape girls when they are high. “They [were] not aware of what they were doing because at that time they have been drugged,”⁶³ he said. Others said that sexual violence continues for some girls and women who remain with their “bush husbands.” One ex-combatant said, “Some of our leaders take our wives at home and have sex with them. After having sex they start to talk about them and call them prostitutes.”⁶⁴

Addressing the Problem

Some survivors of wartime sexual violence described a helpful and healing response by their families and communities, feeling that they are on the road to recovery. One teen mother in Freetown said: “I am a victim. It was during the course of the war. I was really brutalized, but thank God, I am alive. I am associating myself with friends and people that really encourage me.”⁶⁵

Young people proposed many ways to deal with the impact of sexual violence and prevent further abuses. Fundamental are family and community support and acceptance for survivors. One teen parent said that community members should talk with survivors and “tell them not to be shy to say what had been their past experiences.”⁶⁷ Others said that communities need to step in and shame the perpetrators. Persons caught committing rape should be “scandaled to the nation” and “arrested by the policemen.”⁶⁸ Survivors need “treatment by doctors” to return to “your correct mood again,” some said, and others support counseling and the provision of education and job skills for survivors.⁶⁹

Child survivors of sexual violence ultimately have few protections under Sierra Leonean law. The age of consent is 14; few rape cases are reported and even fewer are tried. Legal systems are barely functioning and procedures are not “child friendly.” The UNHCR and STC-UK report states that a “child taking a rape case against an adult would be expected to appear in court and testify...in front of the assailant....”⁷⁰ In IDP or temporary settlement camp settings, few mechanisms function well to respond supportively to young people’s claims of violence with follow-up protective services.

The IASC plan of action spells out a detailed approach, with a timeline, to improve coordinated protection against sexual violence and exploitation, including using the core principles mentioned above, which include response and disciplinary procedures. (See Appendix.) The plan includes: conducting situation analyses and assessments of need, identifying key areas of risk; addressing the manner of camp governance, the delivery of humanitarian services, and the need to improve accountability to beneficiary populations; and emphasizing the provision of basic services to survivors.⁷¹ Coordinated follow-through on these activities among communities, service providers and governments that is closely linked with increased community activism on the issues is critical to improved prevention and response. The response must not only focus on former refugees and IDPs in Sierra Leone, but also on the wider population.

FORCED SECRET SOCIETY INITIATIONS — FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

As discussed in the Health section, virtually all young people, NGO representatives and others stated that FGM perpetrated against young girls is widespread in Sierra Leone as part of the initiation rites of the traditional *Bondo* secret society. (See Health section.) Because of its highly sensitive and taboo nature, adolescent researchers thought hard about how to approach the topic. Afraid to appear disloyal to their oaths of secrecy, those who are part of a secret society and wish to speak about the subject, must do so discretely. Even politicians are careful not to offend members of the society, and have supported the building of initiation centers or “bushes” in various parts of the country. Health and human rights advocates trying to reduce FGM have faced the wrath of *Bondo* secret society supporters; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, leading demonstrators against anti-FGM advocates, presented a petition to the president, threatening to, “sew up the mouths of those preaching against Bondo.” In reply, the president said he himself was “from a traditional background” and pledged his support.⁷² There is no law in Sierra Leone prohibiting FGM.⁷³

When the topic was raised, it provoked strong responses among young people. Most respondents, male and female, said that the practice is usually forced upon girls at a young age, and most agreed that it needs changing. “I was about 10,” said one adolescent girl, now 18. “They just take you and do it. It’s not by choice. It was very painful. It’s still

painful today,” she said, gesturing to the area between her legs. “I can feel sexual feelings in my breasts, but nowhere else,” she continued. “My daughter will *not* join.”⁷⁴

Another girl said, “Normally people are forced into *Bondo*. But if you are not well off, they will not force you. Society members eat three times a day. It all involves money. If you are not able to pay, you are not forced.”⁷⁵ She stated that secret society members rely on new sources of income and other contributions to improve the well-being of the group, which involves parties and other activities. This, she explained, leads to forcing new members to join. Others, however, stated that even poor girls can be subjected to the practice. In either situation, parents are pressured to spend precious resources on the activities, including the purchase of expensive ceremonial clothes, to avoid community embarrassment over an inability to pay. At times, they must even pay the women to return their daughters to them, who are effectively held for ransom, as secret society members refuse to release them before circumcision and payment.

One person interviewed indicated that initiation into the traditional society is seen by elders as a curative for what they perceive as girls’ “bad sexual behavior.” One adolescent girl told how she went to live with a boyfriend to get money for her school fees. She became pregnant twice, both times seeking an abortion, and then became a prostitute. As a result, her grandmother attempted to have her initiated into the “*Bondo* Nature Society.” She said, “[my] mother sent men to [my] grandmother so that they can take [me] to the bush, and finally they succeeded.”⁷⁶ Despite sentiments against the practice, initiation has positive effects for some girls, as it makes them acceptable in the eyes of their community and eligible for marriage, having upheld the traditions of the culture.⁷⁷ In addition, a number of the female ex-combatants sought membership in the traditional society as a form of self-protection and evidence that they were reintegrating into society.⁷⁸

Young people require additional information about the health risks related to female circumcision, and safe spaces to discuss the subject openly. These discussions must ultimately include parents and senior members of the *Bondo* society, who must be convinced to find different, safer ways to initiate young women into adulthood that do not involve the mutilation of their bodies. A legislative response banning the practice would also support its cessation. One young person said simply, “The solution is to tell our

parents to stop condoning this traditional society.”⁷⁹

MARRIAGE: EARLY, FORCED AND NEVER

Views on the ideal time for marriage vary. Many adolescents interviewed put the desired or appropriate age at 17 or 18 years of age or “after university studies.” Whatever the scenario, however, young people are in a state of flux and confusion about marriage possibilities.

Girls surveyed voiced strong concerns about being forced into marriages at a young age. On average, they are twice as concerned about it as boys. (See Survey Results section.) Most said these young marriages happen between the ages of 13 and 15 mainly due to poverty. With little economic support, girls and their parents are turning to males with more resources to care for them. Some early marriages also occur as a result of teen pregnancy. Although many fathers skirt responsibility, some pregnant girls are compelled to marry the father of the child. Other girls described traditional initiation rites leading to forced or early marriage. When girls emerge from their initiation they are presented to their community as eligible for marriage, and many are married immediately.

While some were concerned about being pushed into marriage, others worried they might never marry. Former female RUF abductees with “RUF” scarred on their bodies, rape victims, single child mothers, those with diseases, sex workers and others believe their marriage prospects are grim. Adults confirmed this view. Many boys said they might like to marry but that they need to put it off for economic reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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 communi-

ties 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.

NOTES

- 1 The section on DDR is based on research conducted by the Women's Commission Children and Adolescents Project team working with the two adolescent research teams in Freetown and Makeni, as well as that conducted by Binta Mansaray, Women's Commission Protection Partner in Sierra Leone. The adolescent research teams worked mainly in April 2002 and included interviews with 48 former child soldiers in designated "ex-combatant" focus groups — 42 in Makeni, including 31 males and 11 females; 6 in Freetown, including 4 males and 2 females. Approximately 108 (47 females and 61 males) additional young people formerly associated with fighting forces were also interviewed, as were 53 (14 females and 39 males) formerly associated with Civil Defense Forces. Ms. Mansaray's research was conducted in October 2001 in Freetown. The interviews involved at least 41 females and 14 males.
- 2 UNICEF, *Programme for Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Combatants in Sierra Leone, January - December 2001*. This high-level policy body was first appointed by the government of Sierra Leone following democratic elections in 1998 and was originally made up of key ministers and the office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative.
- 3 *Ibid*, direct citation p. 2; other information pp. 2-4.
- 4 During the interim care phase, a premium was placed on swift reunification or placement in alternative care, ideally in less than six weeks. It is important to note that while ICCs mainly served formally demobilized children and adolescents, UNICEF and the CPAs also used them to support other "separated children," including those abducted by armed forces, or "camp followers," who were not formally recognized as combatants.
- 5 Women's Commission interview, St. Edward's Secondary School, Murray Town, October 2001.
- 6 Women's Commission interview with a spontaneously demobilized and reintegrated adolescent girl formerly with the RUF, Peacock Farm, Freetown, October 2001.
- 7 Women's Commission interview, UNICEF, Freetown, April 23, 2002.
- 8 Women's Commission interview, Caritas-Makeni, Makeni, April 25, 2002.
- 9 Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."
- 10 Uniquely, UNAMSIL and the government of Sierra Leone use the term "combatants" to describe the parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone — an internal armed conflict. See: United Nations, *Thirteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, S/2002/267*, March 14, 2002. This definition creates a gray area in the treatment of those recruited to serve fighting forces but not necessarily to take direct part in hostilities. International humanitarian law has traditionally distinguished between combatants in international armed conflict and those who take a direct part in hostilities in internal, "non-international," armed conflict. Normally, actors in a civil war are referred to as "parties," "members of government forces," "insurgent force members," etc. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (ratified by Sierra Leone on May 16, 2002) does not use the term "combatant," and instead uses "members of armed forces," thereby recognizing various forms of responsibilities therein. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (not yet ratified by Sierra Leone) does not use it either, instead referring to "recruiting" and "tak[ing] direct part in hostilities." Definitions drafted for use by the International Criminal Court (ICC) include "persons in service to combatants (military or armed groups or elements): persons who - voluntarily or involuntarily — provide food, shelter or sex, or medical, religious or other, similar goods or services, to military or armed groups or elements (combatants)." See: Footnote 42 of "Finalized draft text of the Elements of Crimes," and accompanying text, *Report of The Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court*, PCNICC/2000/1/Add.2, March 13-31, 2000, June 12-30, 2000. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, uses the term "child soldiers" to include all children seeking protection under the Optional Protocol, which goes beyond those who take direct part in hostilities to include others recruited to serve these forces, for example, as porters, cooks, housekeepers, sex slaves, etc. See: Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Child Soldiers*, www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/soldiers.htm. According to *The Civilian Character of Asylum: Separating Armed Elements from Refugees* (UNHCR, Global Consultations on International Protection, EC/GC/01/5 February 13, 2001, paras. 9-10), "International law does not define fighters in an internal armed conflict because of the reluctance of States to confer a formal 'combatant' status upon those whom they consider as rebels and insurgents." UNHCR, however, defines and applies the term "armed element" for purposes of separating military elements from civilian populations.
- 11 The Women's Commission, while not ignoring the very specific nature of the justice and rehabilitation requirements of such victimization, nonetheless includes this category of children, adolescents and women affected by armed conflict under the "others recruited to serve these forces" rubric of "child soldiers." (See Endnote 224.) As such, they should be fully accounted for in demobilization and reintegration programs.
- 12 Girls and women forced to be "wives" of armed elements in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in the world often perform both combatant and other services, including as the cook, housekeeper and sex slave. Those performing the last three roles are referred to as "wives" and the owner-slave relationship into which they are sold, bartered or otherwise transferred as "marriage."
- 13 NCDDR, "Status of Reintegration Activities for Discharged Ex-combatants," February 18, 2002. Cited in unpublished research by the Women's Commission, 2002.
- 14 UNICEF, *Programme for Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Combatants in Sierra Leone, January - December 2001*, p. 5.
- 15 It also meant that the ICCs established to serve the demobilizing child soldiers could also be, and were, used to serve other separated children, such as those among returning refugees and IDPs.
- 16 Some women who spontaneously demobilized, reintegrated well, and new efforts in the East to reunify girls with their families are showing a strong willingness to have the young people come home with their children. As affirmed by the Women's Commission's research, however, this does not happen in every case and girls may continue to be stigmatized by the wider community. Further research is needed on how communities and service providers define successful reintegration and which factors contribute to achieving this success.
- 17 Women's Commission interview, Peacock Farm, Freetown, October 2001.
- 18 UNICEF, *Programme for Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Combatants in Sierra Leone, January - December 2001*, pp. 13-14. Thus, "camp followers" were only a portion of the 812 separated children served who were not formally demobilized. UNICEF also reports that its program to address sexual abuse victims supported 231 (including 223 girls) cases in 2000, along with those identified in 1999. According to the report, "support

- included counseling and medical services for 212 newly registered cases and education and skills training for 585 cases. Support for reintegration into primary and secondary schools was provided to 340 of which 244 were child mothers. Skills training and income-generating support was provided to 195. Fifty girls received training on basic business principles and bookkeeping.”
- 19 This was especially difficult for girls returning from the RUF into areas that had been terrorized by the group.
 - 20 The Lomé Peace Agreement supports the call for a strong role for women in post-conflict reconstruction. Article XXVII, paragraph 2 states, “Given that women have been particularly victimized during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.”
 - 21 This is according to the World Bank-administered Multi-Donor Trust Fund Report, progress report number 8, December 31, 2001. As of that date, a total number of 69,681 had been disarmed; 65,813 were demobilized; 62,952 discharged; and among those disarmed were 6,683 child combatants. The program anticipated that 45,000 ex-combatants, including an estimated 15,000 RUF, 15,000 CDF, 13,000 AFRC and ex-SLA and 2,000 paramilitary groups, would go through the program, with a total of 5,400 children among them all. As of December 31, 2001, 22,496 RUF (150 percent of the original estimate), 36,450 CDF (243 percent), 8,964 AFRC/ex-SLA (69 percent), 1,771 paramilitary (89 percent) and 6,683 child combatants (124 percent) participated, which is 155 percent of the original estimate.
 - 22 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 2002.
 - 23 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Rural Integrated Communities Development Organization (RICDO), Makeni, April 18, 2002. At the time of the interview, RICDO had 213 students, 173 of them former combatants.
 - 24 Makeni research team interview, St. Francis Secondary School, Makeni, April 25, 2002.
 - 25 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview with former combatant youth, Makeni, April 18, 2002.
 - 26 Women’s Commission interview with a formally demobilized adolescent girl, Peacock Farm, Freetown, October 2001.
 - 27 Women’s Commission interview, Makeni, April 25, 2002.
 - 28 Women’s Commission telephone interview, Director of the Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities, Freetown, August 2002.
 - 29 Women’s Commission interview, UNICEF, Freetown, April 23, 2002.
 - 30 Women’s Commission interview, Caritas-Makeni, Makeni, April 16, 2002.
 - 31 NCDDR, *Status of Reintegration Activities for Discharged Ex-combatants*, February 18, 2002.
 - 32 Women’s Commission interview with a formally demobilized young woman, Peacock Farm, Freetown, October 2001.
 - 33 Women’s Commission interview, Makeni, April 2002.
 - 34 Women’s Commission interview, Caritas-Makeni, Makeni, April 25, 2002.
 - 35 UNICEF also reports that donors are resistant to retroactive DDR and any focus on a “fix” might be “counterproductive” to the well-being of children and adolescents in the short and long runs. Women’s Commission interviews with UNICEF, Freetown, March and April, 2002.
 - 36 *Fifteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, United Nations Security Council, S/2002/987, September 5, 2002, para. 47. See also paragraphs 48 and 49 related to children and adolescents.
 - 37 *Report of The Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises*, Inter-agency Standing Committee, June 13, 2002, p. 1.
 - 38 Save the Children UK (STC-UK) and UNHCR, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, Report of Assessment Mission Carried Out from October 22 to November 30, 2001*, January 2002.
 - 39 The environment for such discussions was highly sensitive given the international scandal, and researchers were careful not to place young people providing testimony at any additional risk. Prior to undertaking their interviews, adolescent researchers and their adult advisers discussed carefully why they felt these issues were important to investigate and what they felt the most appropriate ways to raise the topics would be. Among other things, they never showed up in a community unannounced to conduct interviews, nor did they pressure respondents to discuss topics they were resistant to. The topics were raised as just some of many discussed. They conducted mostly same-sex interviews, and did not pose questions to focus groups that elicited direct testimony of personal experiences in front of their peers. They committed themselves to confidentiality and were prepared to make referrals to young people for additional support following interviews if necessary. They focused on solutions, not just problems, and more.
 - 40 It is important to note that “prostitution” is the term used by adolescents themselves and is therefore used in this report, despite its growing unpopularity and replacement among advocacy groups with terms as “sexually exploited” or “prostituted” youth.
 - 41 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 17, 2002.
 - 42 Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 23, 2002.
 - 43 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview with adolescent former combatant girl, Makeni, April 18, 2002.
 - 44 All citations in this paragraph: Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 17, 2002.
 - 45 Freetown research team interview, Freetown, April 2002.
 - 46 Freetown research team interviews, Freetown, April 22 and 29, 2002.
 - 47 Adolescent research team interview, Sierra Leone, April 2002.
 - 48 *Ibid.*
 - 49 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 17, 2002.
 - 50 *Ibid.*
 - 51 Women’s Commission interview, Freetown, April 19, 2002.
 - 52 Women’s Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 17, 2002.
 - 53 *Ibid.*
 - 54 Women’s Commission interview, UNAMSIL, Makeni, April 15, 2002.
 - 55 Women’s Commission interview, Makeni, April 2002.
 - 56 The IASC is comprised of both members (FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO) and standing invitees (ICRC, ICVA, IFRC, InterAction, IOM, SCHR, RSG/IDPs, UNHCHR and the World Bank).
 - 57 *Report of The Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Inter-Agency Standing Committee*, June 13, 2002, p. 1.
 - 58 Women’s Commission interview, UNAMSIL, Makeni, April 15, 2002.
 - 59 The Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions prohibit rape in both international and internal conflicts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child further protects children and adolescents from “all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” in Article 34.
 - 60 *Prevalence of War-Related Sexual Violence and Other Human Rights Abuses Among Internally Displaced Persons in Sierra Leone*, reprinted JAMA, January 23/30, 2002, Vol. 287, No. 4, p. 520.
 - 61 Women’s Commission interview, Makeni, April 2002.
 - 62 STC-UK and UNHCR, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The*

- Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone*, p. 31.
- 63 Freetown research team interview, Freetown, April 16, 2002.
- 64 Makeni research team interview, Makeni, Sierra Leone, April 17, 2002.
- 65 Women's Commission and Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 19, 2002.
- 66 Freetown research team interviews, Freetown, April 12-13, 2002.
- 67 Freetown research team interviews, Freetown, April 12-13, 2002.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 Freetown research team interview, Freetown, April 16, 2002.
- 70 STC-UK and UNHCR, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone*, p. 38.
- 71 *Report of the Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Plan of Action, June 13, 2002.
- 72 "Female Genital Mutilation Election Issue in Sierra Leone," Afrol.com News, Misanet.com.
- 73 U.S. Department of State, *1998 Human Rights Report: Sierra Leone*.
- 74 Women's Commission interview, Makeni, April 25, 2002.
- 75 Women's Commission interview, Makeni, April 18, 2002.
- 76 Freetown research team interview, Freetown, April 23, 2002.
- 77 *Female Genital Mutilation: A Human Rights Information Pack*, Amnesty International.
- 78 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, *Sierra Leone: Report on Female Genital Mutilation*, on June 1, 2001.
- 79 Makeni research team interview, Makeni, April 17, 2002.