# Between reconciliation, resignation and revenge: (re-)integration of refugees, internally displaced people and ex-combatants in Sierra Leone in a long-term perspective

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# Between reconciliation, resignation and revenge

## (Re-)integration of refugees, internally displaced people and ex-combatants in Sierra Leone in a long-term perspective

**Elke Grawert \ BICC**
**with input from Julius J. Togba**

## SUMMARY

Sierra Leone is known for the successful reintegration of a high number of returning refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), many of whom had stayed in protracted displacement situations during the eleven years of a most cruel internal war. The war was intertwined with the civil war in Liberia and ended with a peace agreement in 2002. The extremely high number of returnees in relation to the total population caused particular hardship for the 'least-developed' country. Yet, Sierra Leone managed the task of reintegration of returnees from war, returning refugees from the West African region and IDPs without major disruptions and renewed outbreaks of violence. Neither a severe armed conflict nor new waves of forced displacement have re-occurred during the past 17 years. However, the acts of violence in the context of the 2018 national election—and during the three previous post-war elections—justify the question whether the recurrent violence is related to shortcomings in the overall process of reintegration. This *Working Paper*, therefore, takes a retrospective look into the reintegration process at large. From the perspective of the communities that received returnees, not only returning refugees and IDPs but also former fighters who came back and reintegrated into civilian life. Furthermore, the perspective of people that did not reintegrate in Sierra Leone should not be overlooked in an assessment of the success of reintegration. Therefore, this *Working Paper* also incorporates the perspective of Sierra Leoneans that have stayed in Liberia and never returned. It hence addresses the following guiding questions:

- How did the reintegration of displaced people, refugees and former fighters in Sierra Leone take place, and how did the various groups returning after war manage to live together in the long run?
- What prevented people from reintegrating?

The author and her team's research in 2018 benefitted from the fact that returnees, communities and the 'non-returnees' in Liberia were able to reflect on reintegration in hindsight. Reparation and reconciliation turned out to be crucial to make reintegration feasible. Therefore, the *Working Paper* argues that reconciliation among returning people and the communities where they settle is a crucial dimension that has to be closely linked to the concept of reintegration.

The study shows that the reintegration process replicated the deep regional divide and the marginalisation of the youth that had caused the armed conflict and shaped the course of the war. The *Paper* concludes that refugees, IDPs and ex-combatants reintegrated into a disintegrated society—an environment producing grievances that fuel election-related violence. The insights from Sierra Leone should inform interventions of the international community in war-torn countries elsewhere and lead to a comprehensive reintegration process that incorporates refugees, IDPs as well as former fighters and is linked to reconciliation, reparations and development programmes.

# CONTENTS

# Acknowledgements

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*Elke Grawert*

# Main findings

## Reintegration processes should be comprehensive and equally include refugees, IDPs and former fighters.

The intertwined wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia displaced about one-third of the total population. Displacement made it easy for armed groups to forcibly recruit youth and children in particular. Crossing the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia back and forth was not only common for armed groups, but also for displaced people. Hence, the categories of IDPs, refugees and former fighters were blurred; after the war, communities had to reintegrate people that had belonged to all these groups. Special reintegration programmes according to categories do not match the reality receiving communities are facing.

## Reintegration must be accompanied by reconciliation, reparations and community development in the long run.

In Sierra Leone, reconciliation took place through ceremonies of forgiving accompanied by reparations for war victims and community development projects as a short-term measure. In hindsight, two flaws can be identified: (1) war victims including displaced people that returned were disadvantaged compared to former fighters that received individual benefits; (2) acts of revenge pose a threat to people so that some refuse to return. To overcome resentments of civilians against former fighters and prevent revenge, the process of reconciliation must continue, cover urban and rural inhabitants as well as returnees, involve independent civil society organisations and be linked with development that includes disadvantaged social groups.

## Resignation is the state of mind of refugees that are unable to reintegrate—They need African solutions such as resettlement within Africa.

Small groups of Sierra Leonean refugees that were threatened or rejected by their relatives and stigmatised in the neighbouring country for various reasons could neither integrate locally in Liberia nor return to Sierra Leone. For such groups of people in protracted displacement, the research findings suggest that there is scope to advance agreements for resettlement in a third country within Africa—at least within the ECOWAS countries.

## A comprehensive reintegration process should thwart tendencies of societal disintegration.

The reintegration of returnees and ex-combatants in rural and urban Sierra Leone appears to be successful as no renewed armed fighting has occurred. The analysis of people's assessments in hindsight reveals, however, that there is a disturbing range of factors that perpetuated the long-standing regional and political divide and enhanced the disintegration of predominantly the youth. Reintegration after the war has failed to overcome societal disintegration. Recurrent election-related violence committed by strongmen mobilising the 'lumpen youth for the dirty work' and fuelling acts of revenge is symptomatic for this.

# Introduction

Sierra Leone is known for its successful reintegration of a high number of returning refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) following eleven years of a most cruel internal war. According to an evaluation commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the repatriation of 272,000 Sierra Leonean refugees between 2002 and 2004, "(r)eturnees visited in all major areas of return unanimously expressed their satisfaction at being back home and their appreciation of the aid operation which had helped them along the way" (Sperl & De Vriese, 2005, p. 1).

The war was intertwined with the civil war in Liberia and ended with a peace agreement in 2002. More than 320,000 persons died in these wars that displaced about one-third of the population within each country and created about two million refugees scattered mostly in West Africa. Many Sierra Leoneans and Liberians faced protracted displacement as they repeatedly fled across the border between the two countries and to Guinea (Conacry), Ghana and Mali, among others.[1] Both countries successfully terminated the wars in the early 2000s without reverting to extensive violence after that.

By 2005, nearly half a million of Sierra Leoneans returned; a further 60,000 came back to Sierra Leone by 2010 (World Data Atlas, 2015).[2] Due to the mass return and a high birth rate of five births per woman, the population of Sierra Leone grew by nearly 40 per cent between 2000 and 2010 (UNICEF, 2015). Agriculture has been the main source of livelihood—mainly for subsistence—of more than 61 per cent of the nearly eight million inhabitants of Sierra Leone and 70 per cent of the five million Liberians to this date. The meagre wealth of both countries stems from exporting mineral resources (iron ore, diamonds and rutile) and raw agricultural products (timber, rubber, coffee, cocoa, fish) (CIA, 2019a; CIA, 2019b).[3] Both countries still strongly rely on international assistance. Despite the hardship caused by the extremely high number of returning people and the reintegration into least-developed countries, Sierra Leone and Liberia managed the task of reintegration of returnees—however with some disruptions and renewed outbreaks of violence during the first repatriation attempts (Sperl & De Vriese, 2005). Neither a severe armed conflict nor new waves of displacement have re-occurred during the past 17 years.[4]

Communities not only reintegrated refugees and IDPs but also former fighters within a context of peacebuilding measures, transitional justice and a reconciliation process between war perpetrators and victims. Apparently, the reintegration of the diverse groups that were displaced due to war has been sustainable—different from many other countries where lingering violent conflicts repeatedly have caused mass displacements and hence, overturned reintegration attempts.[5] It is worthwhile, therefore, to take a retrospective look at how the government of Sierra Leone and international agencies supported the process of reintegration of refugees, IDPs and returning ex-combatants. The views of community inhabitants who received the various returning groups and managed to live with them will be particularly instructive. This *Working Paper*, therefore, presents empirical findings that reveal how communities perceive the process of reintegration of refugees

1 \ According to estimates of UNHCR, about 400,000 Sierra Leoneans left during the war and became refugees mainly in the neighbouring countries. At the same time, more than half a million Liberians left their country due to war. About 67,000 Liberians fled to Sierra Leone and 200,000 Sierra Leoneans to Liberia (UNHCR, 2004a, b; Palmisano & Momodu, 2013). Estimations vary greatly, because in fact, many people moved between countries several times and returned temporarily so that they were not accurately counted.

2 \ 15,000 Sierra Leoneans opted to stay abroad and integrate locally in the neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2004b). Nearly 2,650 were resettled in northern America and western Europe until 2005 (UNHCR, 2005). Nearly 3,000 Liberians were resettled in the United States in 2003 (Patrick, 2004).

3 \ Both countries have remained among the poorest in the world measured by the Human Ddevelopment Index of the United Nations Development Programme. In 2018, Liberia was ranked 181 and Sierra Leone 184 out of 189 countries (UNCTAD, 2018).

4 \ Whereas the numbers of emigrants and immigrants were balanced until 2009, in 2010 the net emigration comprised 4.66 per 1,000 of the population and gradually decreased to 2.1 per 1,000 during the following years until 2017 (Index Mundi, 2018).

5 \ South Sudan, Afghanistan and Colombia are some of many examples for recurrent waves of return followed by renewed displacement.

IDPs as well as former fighters in hindsight.[6] It addresses the following guiding question:

\ How did the reintegration of displaced people, refugees and former fighters in Sierra Leone take place, and how did the various groups returning after war manage to live together in the long run?

To make the assessment complete, the *Working Paper* also asks:

\ What prevented people from reintegrating?

For this purpose, the perspectives of Sierra Leoneans who never returned but still stayed in Liberia in 2018 are included here.

Just before the research began, Liberia and Sierra Leone had been in the headlines of the international media who were spreading the good news that in both countries, a peaceful change of government had taken place through free and fair democratic elections. Both countries seem to have proven that they left the devastating civil wars of the 1990s far behind and moved towards consolidated democracies.[7] However, the 2018 election in Sierra Leone was accompanied by an extent of unrest, harassment, damage and violence that greatly differed from the ordinary interaction of Sierra Leoneans. This was not the first time, but violence had been associated with the three previous elections, too, and had always subsided after that. This phenomenon suggests taking the violence during elections as an indicator for possible flaws in the post-war reintegration process.

To answer the research questions, the *Working Paper* applies a concept of reintegration in the broad sense required to include refugees, IDPs and former fighters. Moreover, it links reintegration to reparations, community development and reconciliation. This is justified as all these groups returned into a society that had suffered from divisions into armed groups, perpetrators of atrocities, war victims, displaced people, refugees, beneficiaries from the war economy and many more sub-groups. The *Working Paper* provides people's perspectives on successes, shortcomings and failures of reparation and reconciliation in hindsight. An important source for this chapter is the discussion during a Stakeholder Workshop with Sierra Leonean scholars on "*How can protracted displacement come to an end? (Re-)integration and reconciliation of war-affected Sierra Leoneans and Liberians in a long-term perspective*".[8]

6 \ The *Paper* draws from qualitative social research conducted between April and July 2018 in Sierra Leone and Liberia, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as part of the research project "Protected rather than protracted. Strengthening refugees and peace".

7 \ Liberia held its third democratic election in December 2017 and George Weah (Congress for Democratic Change Party) superseded Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had been the first elected president after the end of the civil war and at rule since 2005. In Sierra Leone, the candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), Julius Maada Bio, won over the candidate of the All People's Party (APC) who had been at rule for two terms since 2007. After the SLPP had led the first democratically elected post-war government from 2002 to 2007, the APC ruled for eleven years until the SLPP took over power again in March 2018.

8 \ The author and Dr Sylvanus Spencer conducted this stakeholder workshop at the Department of History and African Studies, Fourah Bay College University, Freetown with participants from the Sierra Leonean academia and civil society on 6 July 2018.

# Conceptual approach

UNHCR equates reintegration with 'sustainable return' defining it as "the ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic, legal and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity" (UNHCR, 2004a, p. 38). Scholars have stressed the role of the state in providing returnees with equally effective protection like other citizens and the state's responsibility in guaranteeing them the same degree of security and basic rights. Moreover, if the state fails creating these equal conditions, there should be the possibility to hold the state accountable (Bradley, 2008). This *Working Paper* acknowledges this point. Hence, here the term 'reintegration' is used in a broad sense, comprising the access to livelihood options and social relations that enable returnees and receiving communities to lead a life in dignity. It also includes the fulfillment of legal and political obligations and rights by the state towards people who return after war equally as it does towards those who have stayed in the country. 'Reintegration' thus requires not only the efforts of the returnees and the members of the communities to which they return but also efforts by state authorities and the government as well as humanitarian and development agencies to create the enabling conditions that make reintegration possible.

Besides people who were displaced due to armed violence, former soldiers, recruits of various armed groups and child soldiers also reintegrate in communities, usually after a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. Studies reveal that both formerly displaced people, as well as ex-combatants, do not necessarily return to their original home areas but often reintegrate elsewhere, often in urban areas (Black, 2002; Hammond, 2004; Howard & Madzarevic, 2014; Kingma et al., 2018). From the perspective of communities, reintegration hence refers to diverse groups of people, among them refugees, IDPs, former combatants returning to their area of origin as well as others that reintegrate in these communities as newcomers stemming from the same country. The *Paper* takes the perspective of the communities as a starting point and hence uses reintegration as a term that comprises all of those groups that arrive in communities after war with the intention to stay.

A process of reconciliation is the foundation for the ability of war-affected groups to live together again and reintegrate peacefully. Hence, reconciliation does not only actively involve war perpetrators and victims in personal encounters, like in truth and reconciliation commissions. It also requires the government to shape reconstruction after war in a way that facilitates the reconciliation of people while reintegrating within various local communities. 'Reconciliation' is thus understood here as a deliberate and conscious process that involves not only the upper level of political and war leaders but also the mid-range perpetrators and their victims as well as displaced people. What is important is that a process of reconciliation can influence the decision of refugees and IDPs to return. The term applied here hence includes measures such as "timely interventions in support of human rights protection, livelihoods, educational opportunities and reconstruction [that] may play critical roles in supporting community-level reconciliation and, in turn, the sustainable (re) integration of refugees and IDPs" (Bradley, 2012, p. 5).

The following *assumptions* that stem from the relevant academic literature are guiding the subsequent analysis:

1\ The process of reintegration comprises return, reconstruction, restitution of land and / or property, basic rights and equal protection by the state for returnees as well as those who have stayed in the country during the war (Macrae, 1999; Juergensen, 2000; IDMC, 2007; Bradley, 2008).

2\ Local integration requires a range of preconditions that reach far beyond livelihood opportunities. A permanent legal status may suffice for

some groups in addition; other groups may have further social, psychological, cultural or political requirements related to the war experience. Continuous cross-border movement in the region fosters integration that may have a trans-local character (Gale, 2006; Hovil & Lomo, 2015; Carciotto, 2016).

3\ Reconciliation procedures bring victims and perpetrators together and demand confession and forgiveness. The involvement of ex-combatants plays a crucial part in reconciliation, because they killed, raped, tortured and abused civilians during war. Reconciliation is the first step towards justice but needs to be accompanied by putting perpetrators on trial (Albrecht, 2010; Bøås & Bjørkhaug, 2010; Bradley, 2012). Beyond these aspects, reconciliation should be regarded as part of the reintegration process as it may be crucial to make reintegration sustainable. Reconciliation, it is assumed, has the potential of enabling people living in the community to go beyond a mere co-existence with those who return from abroad, other parts of the country and from fighting.

4\ Reintegration in this broad sense enables a society, in the long run, to address conflicts through mediating institutions. This, in turn, enhances the rule of law.

The last assumption is derived from the previous three assumptions and requires taking a long-term or hindsight perspective on (re-)integration. It links the post-war (re-)integration process to the contemporary status of justice institutions. The role the relevant institutions play when it comes to rising violence in the context of elections will be examined as an indicator for the degree of rule of law that has been achieved compared to the lawlessness during the war.

This *Working Paper* is based on four months of field research in 2018. Two districts in eastern Sierra Leone (Kenema and Kailahun) and Freetown were the research sites, as from there, many Sierra Leoneans had been displaced during the war and returned during the 2000s. Time constraints did not allow the research team to cover more sites in the country with field research; hence, this *Working Paper* incorporates the perspective from the North through the available literature and interviews with individuals from Temne and followers of the All People's Congress (APC) living in the eastern region.

In Liberia, we conducted interviews with community members around refugee and IDP camps and the camp inhabitants themselves. These included Samukai Town, Jah Tondo Town, VOA (Voice of America) and Cemenco (Bushrod Island). We got the first access through a Sierra Leonean returnee from Liberia in Kenema, who provided us with the contact of the former chairman of one of the camps. Julius J. Togba carried out most of the interviews in Liberia.

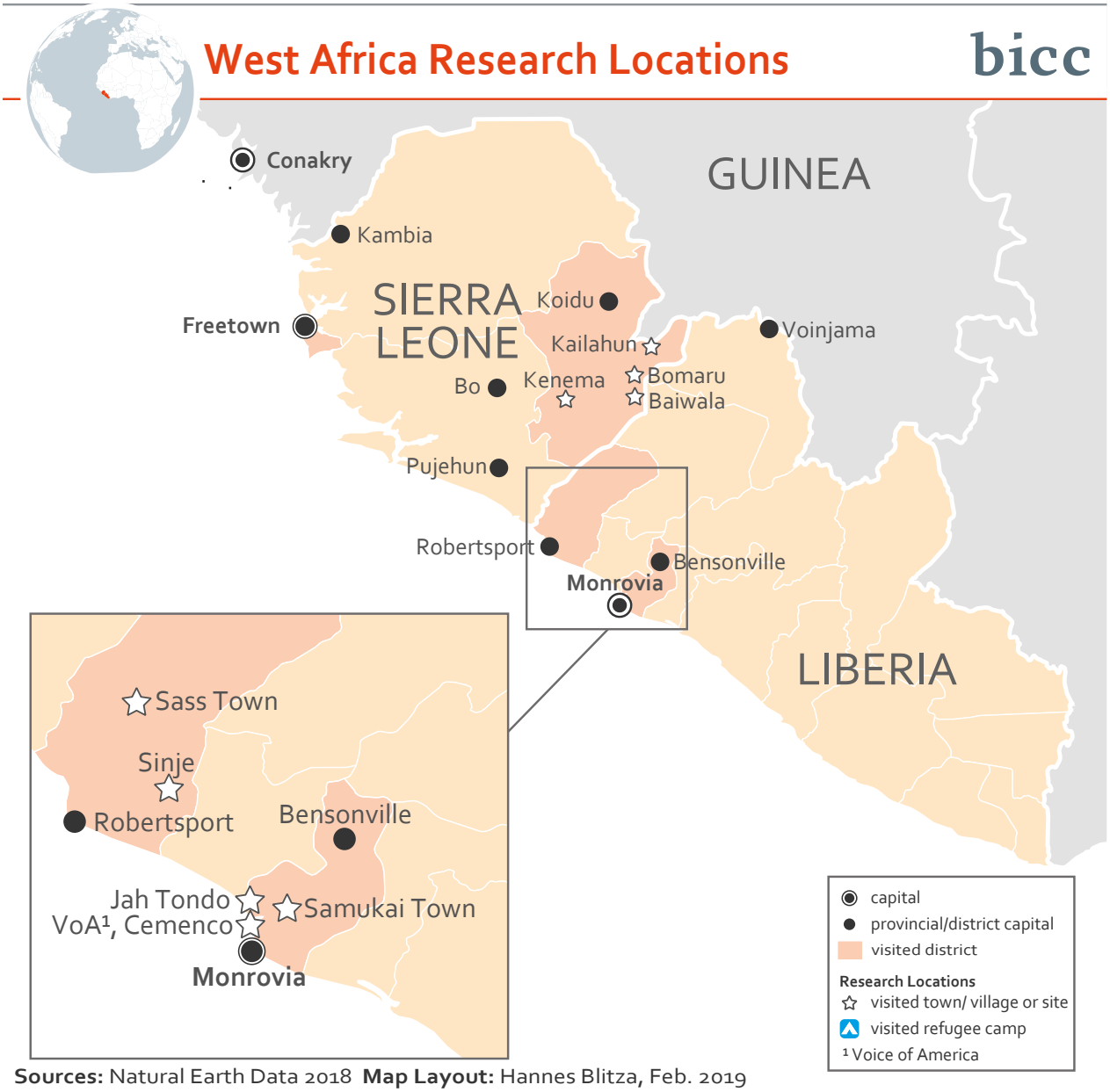
We applied thematic coding to analyse the documented interviews.[9] This method generated the key concepts guiding this *Working Paper*—(re-)integration, reconciliation, resignation and revenge. A deeper analysis of all available sources revealed potential links between the concepts which informed the structure of this study. The aspect of 'resignation' came from Sierra Leonean refugees staying on in Liberia without being integrated. 'Revenge' turned up as a recurrent theme in many interviews in Sierra Leone. The research team identified revenge as the connecting variable between (re-)integration, reconciliation and the violence in the context of elections.

Against this backdrop, it appears justified to use acts of violence in the context of elections as an indicator for incomplete (re-)integration. Beyond a better understanding of the links between the dimensions of (re-)integration, non-integration and reconciliation, the aim of the analysis is to learn from successes and failures in (re-)integration in order to improve (re-)integration processes and include clear steps towards the rule of law in other war-affected societies.

9 \ In qualitative social research, this method requires a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts and an open collection of the themes that can be identified from the data. In a second step, these themes are structured into main themes to which sub-themes are allocated, thus building a template (King, 1998; Richards, 2005). This process moves on between collecting further data, re-thinking the template

**Box 1**

***Research sites in Sierra Leone and Liberia***




**Sources:** Natural Earth Data 2018 **Map Layout:** Hannes Blitza, Feb. 2019

# Displacement, processes and the (re-)integration of returning population groups

The reintegration of returning refugees and IDPs after the war was a reintegration into a historically divided society. The roots of the division lie in the colonial history. Towards independence (in 1961) two main political parties had established regional strongholds that coincided with ethnic majorities: the Temne in the north following the All People's Congress (APC) and the Mende in the south-east and south following the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), with the SLPP forming the first elected government (1962-1967). Both the APC and the SLPP had youth wings that played a marginal political role and were constantly excluded from the real party power. The parties used the youth as 'foot soldiers', and politically ambitious members of the youth wings occasionally mobilised the 'lumpen youth' "as thugs to do the dirty work" (Abdullah, 1998, p. 207). After the APC had won the ballot in 1967, the SLPP used its connections with the military to stage a coup d´état immediately after, followed by a counter-coup that brought the APC back to power in 1968. The APC leadership turned the political system into a one-party dictatorship. The division of the society and the marginalisation of the youth became inherent in the political system during the following 23 years of APC rule.

Economic decay and the exclusion of large social groups from any redistribution by the regime were the main causes of the violent conflict that started in 1991. Scholars therefore presented the main cause of the war as a "crisis of the state and the deepening of the gains of patrimonialism" (Bangura, 1997, p. 134), "elite parasitism and repression" (Kandeh, 1999, p. 349) and "long-term exclusionary processes" (Fanthorpe, 2001, p. 363). The war started in the most marginalised area in Kailahun district in eastern Sierra Leone where the main armed group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), allied with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) headed by Charles Taylor from Liberia in its fight against the Sierra Leonean government. Only in 1999 did the Lomé Peace Accord between the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF set the stage to end the decade-long cruel "fratricidal war" (UNSC, 1999) gradually and with some setbacks.

The political divide in Sierra Leone resurfaced during the first post-war elections in 2002, when the SLPP won in a landslide victory. International observers considered the presidential and parliamentary election as democratic (TRC, 2004). Most of the voters in eastern and south-eastern Sierra Leone elected the SLPP whereas the APC regained its constituencies in northern Sierra Leone. The RUF party won not a single seat in parliament and has never re-occurred in politics ever since (for a historical overview see Annex).

Sierra Leoneans had fled from the start of the war in 1991; most of them to safer villages, small towns and regional towns in Sierra Leone or across the border to Guinea (Conakry) and Liberia but also to Mali. Sierra Leoneans fleeing to Guinea mostly came from Kailahun, Kono, Kenema and Kambia districts and concentrated in the Gueckedou and Forecariah areas. Their number was estimated at 370,000. Liberia received about 120,000 Sierra Leonean refugees (UNHCR, 2004) whose background was mostly rural; many originated from the timber and diamond-rich eastern region of Sierra Leone—Bo, Kailahun, Kenema and Pujehun districts. About 75 per cent of the refugees were women and children. Initially, they were accommodated in camps in the western region of Liberia—Cape Mount, Montserrado and Vahun districts (UNHCR, 1998). In addition, the government of Liberia provided the UNHCR with unused land (which was owned by absent Liberians) for refugee camps in the vicinity of Monrovia (interview with assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018). How the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia and international agencies assisted the process of (re-)integration of several hundred thousand refugees and IDPs and how communities perceive this process in hindsight is the focus of this chapter.

## Repatriation attempts before the end of the war

UNHCR started a first repatriation programme covering 2,000 individuals when the violence subsided in Sierra Leone after an election in 1996 that brought the SLPP to power. First groups of refugees from the neighbouring countries returned on their own at this time, too (UNHCR, 1998). A coup d'état of the united Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the RUF (the 'junta') brought these endeavours to a halt in 1997. Subsequent fighting between the junta and the *Kamajors*[10] who supported the forces of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) caused a huge new refugee movement and displaced large numbers of Sierra Leoneans again. UNHCR set up camps for IDPs and returning refugees, but bad road conditions hampered the delivery of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 1998; Sperl & De Vriese, 2005). At the request of the government, UNHCR assisted those Sierra Leoneans who returned to Freetown and housed more than 10,000 persons in a camp in Waterloo, a suburb of Freetown. Soon after, the junta conquered Waterloo, and those among the just repatriated Sierra Leoneans who could escape fled again to Liberia and Guinea (interview with a former camp chairman in Monrovia, May 2018).

Within Liberia, UNHCR transferred 16,000 Sierra Leonean refugees from Vahun to Kolahun district in order to increase the distance from the violence-affected border areas in 1998. Together with a range of partner organisations, UNHCR provided vocational training and income-generating projects in the refugee camps, focusing on women. Children benefited from recreational activities. Special assistance was offered for victims of sexual violence, and UNHCR coordinated family tracing and reunification activities with UNICEF (UNHCR, 1998).

Refugees who returned from Liberia and Guinea to the eastern region without any repatriation programme received some assistance from UNHCR, which also rehabilitated some war-affected buildings (UNHCR, 1998). In hindsight, the reintegration of vulnerable persons such as mutilated war victims, orphans and raped women proved to be very difficult in the eastern region of Sierra Leone. Many vulnerable persons were abandoned after some time, latest when assisting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) lost funding. The question of who would care for the children who were affected by the war remained open and has not been solved to this date. Donor-funded orphanages collapsed when funding came to a halt as they did not have any strategy to sustain themselves. Many children had no one who cared for them and lived in the streets selling small amounts of commodities in the market (interviews with a pastor in Kenema, April 2018 and a staff member of an NGO engaged in child protection, Kailahun, May 2018).

Ex-combatants were mixed with civilian refugees, a situation that posed a serious concern for UNHCR. In Guinea, UNHCR did not obtain access to arrested or detained refugees and asylum-seekers that were allegedly soldiers and fighters of the AFRC and RUF. In a first attempt to separate fighters from civilian refugees, UNHCR involved ECOMOG (UNHCR, 1998) despite its bad record with regard to human rights (HRW, 1993). The mixture of civilians and fighters was even exceeded in the refugee camps for Liberians in Sierra Leone and for Sierra Leoneans in Liberia, as these also became de facto shelters for IDPs of each country. Some local inhabitants pretended to be refugees to get access to assistance. Hence, these camps were areas of integration, furthering social interaction between Liberians and Sierra Leoneans, between IDPs, refugees and former fighters.

10 \ These were groups of armed men mostly from the Mende-speaking eastern region of Sierra Leone. They had emerged as fighters from Mende societies that used to hunt for the local chiefs and were ascribed mystical power. Many educated members of the Kamajors engaged in the war against the RUF after undergoing an initiation ritual to become 'bullet-proof' (Shaw, 2003).

In 2001, when the disarmament of ex-combatants had been finalised in Sierra Leone, UNHCR started a large repatriation programme from the camps in Liberia and Guinea to Sierra Leone, providing voluntarily returning refugees with transportation and initial reintegration benefits. Renewed armed clashes between forces loyal to Taylor and factions of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)[11] affected the refugee camps for Sierra Leoneans around Monrovia and endangered 30,000 persons (USCRI, 2002). The fighting was driven by fierce competition over the control of the gold- and diamond-rich northern areas of Liberia (Cue, 2002). Taylor's forces were feared for indiscriminately killing civilians, rape and torture and for burning and looting villages and refugee camps, but also the LURD combatants committed atrocities, prevented people from fleeing and forced civilians to work for them (USCRI, 2002). From the perspective of Sierra Leonean refugees in the Liberian camps, they fell 'out of the frying pan into the fire' as the armed groups recruited young men and children as fighters and committed atrocities against parents, women and men trying to hide the youth from them (interview with Sierra Leonean refugees in Monrovia, May 2018).

As the Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia were caught up in the endangered camps, UNHCR came under pressure to accelerate its repatriation programme. An international NGO stated, "(d)isplacement sites have become virtually the front lines in a Liberian war otherwise lacking front lines" (USCRI, 2002). UNHCR utilised trucks in order to quickly repatriate Sierra Leoneans from the camps near Monrovia in February 2002. Upon arrival in Blama, a way station on the road to Kenema, the capital of the eastern region, the returning refugees received a two-month supply of food, kitchen sets, blankets and other materials. From Kenema, the returnees continued the journey on their own or used transportation provided by aid agencies (Cue, 2002).

The ravage of the armed groups also displaced more than 60,000 Liberians. Many fled across the borders, increasing the number of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast to about 250,000, whereas 200,000 Liberians were internally displaced. Around 100,000 Liberian IDPs were living in camps and at risk of becoming victims of attacks. The arrival of new Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone put an enormous strain on the villages in the eastern region. The effort to reintegrate tens of thousands of repatriated Sierra Leoneans was at risk. The process was already difficult due to a shortage of housing and continued strife in several chiefdoms. Moreover, Sierra Leonean schools were lacking teachers and hence, could not enrol refugee children from Liberia (USRCI, 2002; Sperl & De Vriese, 2005).

To sum up, the early repatriation attempts of UNHCR put the returning groups at a high risk as they were repeatedly caught up in armed fighting. The effects were renewed displacements and waves of refugees. This experience suggests that a thorough context analysis and well-planned timing of repatriation are crucial to create the pre-onditions for lasting reintegration of returning refugees that provides them with perspectives to stay in safety (cf. also Sperl & De Vriese, 2005).

## Return and (re-)integration after the end of the wars

In 2002, a government was in place that finally implemented the peace agreement. The task ahead of the government, society, and the international aid agencies was tremendous. UNHCR organised another large-scale repatriation programme for 272,000 registered refugees that returned from protracted displacement to Sierra Leone between 2002 and 2004 and 170,000 refugees returning to Liberia. The real number, including the unregistered refugees, was much higher, as the borders in West Africa are open, and people move in and out of countries without being counted.

11 \ The LURD formed in 1999 to fight against the government of Charles Taylor.

In addition, more than 340,000 internally displaced Sierra Leoneans and nearly 360,000 persons displaced within Liberia reintegrated in their countries (UNHCR, 2004a, b; Sperl & De Vriese, 2005; Palmisano & Momodu, 2013). These are the 'known' numbers that UNHCR documented. Estimates of the real numbers of displaced people go up to 2.6 million displaced people within Sierra Leone (Kaldor, 2006) and one million in Liberia (Vinck et al., 2011).

UNHCR supplied the returnees with assistance packages. Each returning family received a bag of rice, a jerry can, some food, a gallon of cooking oil, SLL 25,000 (USD 12) and agricultural tools "to help them establish their new lives in communities of origin" (UNHCR, 2004). This indicates the expectation of UNHCR that the refugees would return to their communities of origin. The field research findings show that this pertains to some whereas a considerable number of refugees decided otherwise (see below).

UNHCR also carried out community-based short-term reintegration projects in cooperation with the government of Sierra Leone, donors and NGOs until 2005. The programmes included skills trainings, construction of local health clinics and wells and upgrading of schools (UNHCR, 2004). Many local inhabitants pretended to be refugees and registered in the camps to get access to aid (interview with a pastor, Kenema, April 2018). The repatriation programme to Sierra Leone ended in July 2004 (UNHCR, 2004), and in the same year, UNHCR ceased to consider the former refugee camps in Liberia as 'camps'. UNHCR and the Liberia Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), a Liberian government institution, informed the refugees about the decision taken by the Liberian government stating that assistance for persons staying in the former camps terminated in 2004. Only in exceptional cases would UNHCR still distribute tarpaulin and used clothes to individuals (interview with assistant protection officer of UNHCR in Monrovia, May 2018).

According to UNHCR, an estimated 92,000 Sierra Leonean refugees returned on their own without UNHCR assistance, and around 15,000 persons opted to stay in their host countries and integrate locally. UNHCR was prepared to provide assistance through the establishment of small-scale community-based projects in those countries where a larger number of refugees planned to integrate, such as Liberia. UNHCR kept field offices for the repatriation of around 55,000 Liberian refugees still in Sierra Leone (UNHCR, 2004).

How refugees and IDPs reflect on their experiences in hindsight is the subject of the following sections.

## Displacement experiences

Most Sierra Leoneans were displaced at least for some time during the war. In the largely agricultural areas of eastern Sierra Leone, some tried to stay near their fields and would even hide in a cave with the whole family (local chief, Kenema, May 2018). According to the mayor of Kenema City Council, "when the war started in eastern Sierra Leone, so many people left and stayed in the neighbouring countries. Many lost all their family here" (interview in April 2018).

The trauma some villagers experienced by the displacement and what it means that 'many lost all their family' is revealed in the story of a woman in her forties who was living in Baiwala (May 2018) (see Box 1).

**Box 1**

***Account of an internally displaced woman***

*Before the war broke out, I had a dream. I was running into the bush with bundles on my head. People told me not to come back. Three days later, the dream became real. I was in a village nearby with my one month-old baby to visit my sister. There we heard that war had started in Bomaru. With many others, I ran to the bush without knowing where to go. Soldiers came towards us and said, follow us to Daru [a small town in Kailahun district] if you want to survive. … The RUF came and attacked several times. People went to many different places in the district. Some ran to the river Moa and drowned when they tried to cross it. Then I heard that my husband had died. Soldiers returned us to Daru. Things became normal. We went to a small village where we could stay at my elder brother's compound. We got rice there. Then my brother left for another village. I followed him with my baby as I could not get any income. I went to my sister in the same chiefdom.*

*The RUF reached there. We went to a small place near the river Moa and stayed in the bush. My baby fell sick. I prayed and the baby recovered. We went to Kenema where we stayed with my cousin. I took my daughter to the hospital. We were taken care of by an international team.*
*At the time of the 1996 election, we saw people with different dresses—made of red cloth—and with guns. We voted. After the election, we left the hospital. The elected president Tijan Kabbah announced the end of the war and told the people to return home. I refused as I had nothing in my village and stayed in Kenema. My sister's husband came to Kenema, and he was a Kamajor now. He told us that in the villages there was war again. He did not know where my sister was with their children. Her husband went to Freetown. My sister died (the woman starts crying) when she was giving birth. All my sister's children died except for one boy. I went to Pendehun, where my grandmother lived, but could neither find her nor the boy. My grandmother was in another village. The RUF had taken her. Then my grandmother was released, and I met her in Pendembu. When the coup d'état happened [in 1997], we moved to Malema chiefdom. There my grandmother died. I went back to Kenema to my cousin. The son of her brother took me to my home village. I married again and came to Baiwala. I had four children."*

**Box 2**
***Account of a displaced woman who was caught by the RUF***

*When the war broke out, I was nine months pregnant. I gave birth and ran to the forest until I reached Tongo [a diamond mining town in Kenema province]. It took four days to get there. Still during the war, I had another pregnancy. Upon fire from rebels, my firstborn was shot in his arm. I ran away with the baby girl and left the boy. We went to a village. Then the war ended and we returned to Baiwala. Six months later, a jet threw bombs that destroyed our house. My daughter died. I ran with many others up to Kono district. My brother, who lived in Freetown, managed to come and take me there. I stayed in Waterloo. When the RUF came [conquering Waterloo in 1999], one of them caught me and took me to a village near Bo. I was forcefully married to him. After he had passed the DDR programme, he told me that each of us should go our own way. As a Mende, I left the Temne region. I walked up to the Moyamba junction [near the 'border' of the northern province] and stayed there with a friend. I worked in horticulture and sold crops and saved some money. Then I paid for transport and came back here to Baiwala where I hail from.*

This account is typical for the internal displacement of the rural population of Sierra Leone during the war. It clarifies the dependence on the relatives living in the neighbouring chiefdoms that temporarily received displaced people who were constantly on the move, with babies and small children, as mothers whose husbands were away fighting and who repeatedly lost track of their closest relatives. Other IDPs were caught by armed groups during displacement, as in the following report of a female inhabitant of Baiwala (May 2018) (see Box 2).

Beyond the loss of children and the terrible experience of a forced marriage to a member of an armed group, this account also sheds some light on the internal boundaries, in particular the ethnic and regional divide that persisted during the war. It also reveals the difficulty—at least among rural people—to be included across the dividing line which leads to the effort to finally return to the ethnic home. The examples confirm that women were perpetrators or collaborated with armed groups out of conviction, but also out of the need to survive. Women were not only discriminated against under common or customary laws in the realms of marriage, divorce, inheritance, property rights and domestic violence, but also had horrible experiences such as births as a result of rape and sexual slavery, followed by being shunned and punished for giving birth to 'rebel' children (TRC, 2004).

Besides widespread internal displacement, many Sierra Leoneans crossed the border to Liberia when the war broke out, during the war and often did this several times. One account is presented here to show under which conditions families had to struggle for survival in the centre of the cross-border war and were rescued by Liberian villagers (see Box 3).

This account confirms what has been stated in the literature about the commonalities between Sierra Leoneans and Liberians that has the potential for peaceful co-existence. The closeness of culture and language is important for this. Kandeh (1992) emphasised that the different ethnic groups in Sierra Leone are related historically and linguistically and have connections that transcend the colonial boundaries to the ethnic groups in neighbouring Liberia and Guinea. He held that the trans-ethnic connections of the Sierra Leonean ethnic groups can create an opening for a peaceful co-existence (Kandeh, 1992).

**Box 3**

***Account of a man who had fled to Liberia***

*When the war broke out, my family andI ran to Liberia through the forest. In the bush, rebels caught me and slashed my arm. My wife sought for food so that we could survive. We had no medicine except herbs. We spent several years in a village in Liberia where we stayed with the town chief who was from the Bondi tribe that speaks a similar language as ours. My wife asked him for assistance, and he gave us some land. Our children helped to clear the land. We lived there humbly as one family with the Liberians and learned to be of easy mind, even when someone offended us." .*

**Box 4**

***Account of a teacher who stayed in a refugee camp***

*An inhabitant of Kenema who had become a teacher reported that his parents were displaced from home first. Then a friend told him to leave, too. At that time, around 1994, he was 25 years old. He went by road to Dar Salam at the border to Liberia and reached Monrovia. After three months, he was registered as a refugee there. However, there were not sufficient supplies at the camp, and in 1996, the camp was attacked, and one person was killed. Many people ran away. According to the teacher, "it was not serious—just the thieves amongst the fighters" carried out the attack, and soon the refugees returned.*
*The young man received a sponsorship from UNHCR for a six month training as a teacher and then started teaching in the primary school of the camp. In 1999, he was elected chairman of the camp. He said that, according to his own experience, "Liberians are friendly, whereas for Sierra Leoneans it takes time until they open up to other people. … Those Sierra Leoneans who stay in Liberia prefer an easy way of looking after their lives. They are not well educated and seek opportunities to work in diamond mines or getting aid."*
*When another war faction took over power in Monrovia [probably the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) ], he left after six years in the camp. In 2002, he travelled by boat to Freetown with his Liberian wife and children (interview with a teacher, Kenema, April 2018).*

Although the interview partners had been displaced during the 1990s—more than 20 years before the interviews—, they vividly remembered the details. In the village, several inhabitants also talked to the author and her assistant, presumably as we were outsiders and ready to listen. However, the above accounts suffice to imagine the constant threat and fear and terrifying events that accompanied the IDPs throughout the war.

Sierra Leoneans who had fled abroad and were received at a refugee camp had different experiences. One case may suffice here to indicate how opportunities can arise from displacement, in particular for people with an urban middle class background (see Box 4).

This refugee had the opportunity of receiving education in the refugee camp. He had his first teaching experiences in the camp school and used his skills still in 2018 when we met him in Kenema. However, even this account reveals how the constant threat of being caught in an attack during the ever-reigniting armed conflicts influences the decisions of movement in and out of camps and in and out of the countries at war.

The next section highlights how displaced people managed the return after the end of the war according to their own perceptions in hindsight.

## Reintegration experiences

In eastern Sierra Leone, the war left numerous villages devastated. Most of the local interview partners had to rebuild their burnt houses using local materials such as mud and bamboo to thatch new roofs. The help of relatives was crucial for young women returning with children but without a husband. Many of them had been forced to marry a member of a non-state armed group or had become pregnant after having been raped. Unlike the parents of young women who returned alone, relatives seemed to be better able to distance themselves sufficiently from the prevailing social values so that they were able to integrate the women more easily (interviews with inhabitants of Baiwala, May 2018).

Many returned refugees and IDPs reintegrated in their home villages. Bomaru, the village where the war began (made visible by a war memorial in the centre) used to be a coffee- and cocoa-producing community. Most of the inhabitants were displaced due to the war. When they returned, the local chief organised them in groups of ten to twenty people for brushing and cultivating. They brought their harvest to the market and built their houses. The income enabled them to buy corrugated iron sheets for roofs as well as other materials (result from discussion with village assembly, Bomaru, May 2018). However, land disputes occurred in areas where investors or powerful individuals had acquired land so that returning IDPs and refugees were denied their right, or in cases where local inhabitants claimed land from less powerful people. A constitutional review committee was set up to resolve these disputes without any final result in 2018 (journalist in Kenema, April 2018).

Sierra Leoneans who returned from Liberia preferred to settle in the eastern Sierra Leonean towns close to the border with a good road connection. This enabled them to move between Sierra Leone and Liberia continuously, doing cross-border business and visiting relatives and friends living on both sides of the border (interviews with a Sierra Leonean in the Voice of America camp, Monrovia, and a group of women with Liberian and Guinean origin in Kailahun, May 2018). The help of relatives and friends in starting a business was greatly needed for those who returned. At the beginning of the return process, there were incidences where returnees were mobbed and some even killed by their own brothers (Mayor of Kenema City Council, April 2018). There was an obvious need for reconciliation (see chapter below).

The return of refugees, IDPs and fighters after war frequently does not mean return to the previous way of life or the same place of living. Marriages brought couples to a different place; family members staying in the neighbouring countries enabled returned refugees to keep not only family links, but also maintain trade connections across borders. Several refugees had learnt a trade in a refugee camp and made use of their new skills after their return to Sierra Leone, often in a different village or town than the place of origin. Development projects in Sierra Leone brought new people together in income-generating activities. Whereas many of these activities collapsed when the project ended, some beneficiaries built stable groups with their own savings and redistribution mechanisms, thus providing some kind of a social safety net to the members (interviews with local income-generating groups, Kailahun, May 2018).

Hence, the current society of Sierra Leone is made up of people with different backgrounds according to their displacement trajectories. Many have stayed in various West African countries or inside Sierra Leone and developed different political views. Those differences may have contributed to the recurrent electoral conflicts.

# Specifics of the reintegration of ex-combatants

From the perspective of the communities that had received returnees, not only returning refugees and IDPs, but also former fighters came back and reintegrated into civilian life. Looking into reintegration hence requires considering all these groups. Moreover, these categories of IDP, refugee and ex-combatant cannot be allotted unequivocally to each individual. Many adolescents and children were first displaced and became IDPs or refugees fleeing to Liberia and then were caught by the RUF or the NPLF and recruited into the armed groups. Others joined the *Kamajors* or the army after having been displaced for some time. Hence, numerous people belonged to different 'categories'—IDP, refugee in the neighbouring country, fighter, soldier, (temporary) returnee, etc.—during the war and some years after.

Some ex-combatants were even eligible for DDR programmes. After having submitted their guns, they were prepared for a return to civilian life. The soldiers of the AFRC (Martin, 2003), fighters of the RUF, CDF including the *Kamajors* (Solomon & Ginifer, 2008) and fighters that had joined a "breakaway army" called "People's Army" were eligible for the DDR programmes. The latter had a segment in the bush from where they attacked people on the road and robbed them (former *Kamajor*, Kenema, April 2018). After having participated in the programmes,[12] they returned to their home village, a town in their home region or to Freetown. The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), established according to the Lomé Peace Accord, was in charge of reintegrating these ex-combatants. A programme officer reported that NaCSA had provided the returning ex-fighters with food and non-food items and engaged some in skills trainings according to their choice (interview in Freetown, May 2018). In Kenema, for example, some ex-combatants built houses for their families (MRD chairman, Kenema, April 2018).

When the war ended, the Sierra Leonean army consisted of about 17,000 soldiers and had hardly any structures such as barracks and offices. In 2000, the British downsized the military and discharged 7,000 soldiers. They trained the remaining soldiers and established recruitment and careers based on merit, not on identity. However, military logistics, accommodation and equipment have remained poor until the time of writing. In hindsight, a colonel held that the reform could have been more successful "if the military had established farming battalions, used tractors from China and revived agriculture with cheap labour from the military" (a lieutenant colonel, Kenema, April 2018). The idea that Sierra Leone could have become self-reliant if the reconstruction and rebuilding of the state had been planned differently was shared by further intellectuals. However, these debates are beyond the scope of this *Paper*.

The reintegration of ex-combatants who had joined the RUF was the most difficult. Many of them never returned to the districts they originated from, for fear of reprisal. They joined the DDR programme to get food, money or equipment to start a business or to be trained in courses for three to six months. The Nigerian soldiers of ECOMOG initiated a motorbike taxi business in 1999/2000, which many ex-combatants took up after finishing the DDR programme. Riding motorbike taxis became the main livelihood opportunity for ex-combatants in Sierra Leone (Peters, 2007). It was a way to avoid return.

In the villages, the reintegration of former fighters sometimes worked because their labour was urgently needed. A process of reconciliation happened alongside hard work (see chapter on reconciliation below). The following example highlights how ex-combatants perceived reintegration in hindsight (see Box 5).

12 \ The first DDR programme took place in 1998; interruptions due to renewed fighting led to further programmes that finally ended in 2002. In total, 72,500 ex-combatants participated in the DDR programmes (Solomon & Ginifer, 2008).

**Box 5**

***Role of DDR programmes for former fighters returning to their home village***

*A former RUF combatant claimed that returning had been his desire. He had had a forest before the war and yearned to cultivate it "to forget about the past". When he arrived, the forest was overgrown. Villagers who had money, including the chief, paid for brushing their fields; he could get some income for doing the work. There were also "work clubs" in which he participated. He enjoys working on the farms and got the responsibility to organise all agricultural work in the village such as clearing an area with the youth or brushing a piece of land (RUF ex-combatant, Baiwala, May 2018).*

*The former fighters who returned had participated in a DDR programme before. For some of the fighters with a rural origin who returned, the skills they learned during the programme did not match the requirements of peasant life. One former RUF fighter explained: "DDR brought many skills. What you can afford, you can learn. I could not afford any of the training because of the short time—six months—while I had a family to care for. The kits we received were not sufficient. The programme did not keep what it had promised. I got a disarmament card and the right to a dwelling place with three rooms, parlour and a toilet and some dollars."*

*Another former fighter showed his card which indicated that he had received 60,000 SLL (USD 31) per month for six months. He added that the programme provided some equipment according to the skills learnt. However, although he had been trained in tailoring, he neither received a sewing machine, any other equipment necessary for the trade nor any payment in the end. Hence, he returned to farming like most displaced people after returning to their village.*

Apparently, the DDR programme was not made for peasants but rather for those former fighters who did not return to the villages but preferred to stay in towns. There, a large variety of skills was needed to specialise in fields where there was not too much competition.

Among civilians, the perception towards DDR beneficiaries has remained negative. Even today, many still consider it unfair that as war victims, people remained empty-handed whereas war perpetrators received training, equipment and money (interviews in Kenema province, April and May 2018). Numerous former fighters never returned to their home areas but preferred to stay in towns in Sierra Leone, sometimes to start a new life among people who did not know their past. The story of a former *Kamajor* who has been a secondary school teacher in Kenema since 2005 is a case in point. He stated, "DDR was about making up our mind and forget our fighting." He recalled how he became a fighter in the 1990s and why he left the armed group (see Box 6).

**Box 6**

***Reflections of a former* Kamajor**

*[During the 1980s and 1990s,] the leaders did not rightfully dispense justice, and we were not given our rights in courts. The youth was driven out of the villages. We had no democracy. Even when fuel prices doubled in Sierra Leone, nobody would move, whereas in Nigeria, key stakeholders were leading demonstrations against the high fuel price. We never participated in peaceful demonstrations. The APC was the single ruling party and won through ballot stuffing. When this happened for a long time, people wanted war. Why had we fought for independence? We had all these minerals and diamonds and could be self-reliant. But the minerals were mismanaged and the leaders cheated the population. The diamond companies exploited the minerals, and the leaders built big houses abroad. The elders have managed the resources wrongly. They had Kangaroo courts where you just paid and had no rights. All this, we fought against.*

*We started fighting as volunteers. Although we all risked our lives in fighting and were sleeping on the road, we were belittled by the commanders. We got tired with the 'yes Sir' business. I made up my mind to leave them and once I could, I left. To be disarmed you had to have at least one gun. The senior commanders took the arms from the juniors. They were just evil.*

*Hinga Norman [the leader of the* Kamajor *and Minister of Defence in 1996] was taken to the Special Court on trial. Many people did not appreciate what the* Kamajors *did. Some bad things happened, as everywhere. This led to prejudices against all* Kamajors*. The positive impact of transformation was that we got civilian employment. It is different from working with commanders. We became self-reliant. Our character has been moulded. Other people recognise you because of what you are doing. Therefore you will not want them to know what you did in the past. I did not tell anyone.*

*It is frustrating for people who were not given the opportunity [of a DDR programme with all its benefits, in particular professional training, because senior commanders took the weapons from the juniors]. We share with them and give them money. I know where they are, and we sit together, eat together and share. I say, 'let's share', and I buy food and we all eat together without discrimination. This contributed to my popularity. … We had 150 ex-combatant students in the polytechnic. I held public meetings, and they encouraged me to stand for the chair of the Teachers' Union."*

This statement reveals that a major motive of armed fighting among the *Kamajors* was resistance against the corrupt APC regime. As a traditional Mende institution, there was an element of ethnic belonging, which the SLPP Minister of Defence mobilised to make the *Kamajors* the main security force of the government under Kabbah (after the election of 1996). The statement further points to the exploitation by the senior commanders and the resentment that was looming against the lucky ones that benefitted from the DDR programme. The interview partner benefitted greatly from being trained as a teacher during the programme. He considered this as the crucial experience that changed him into a civilian able to use political ways of making an impact on society. However, he kept his past a secret, even towards his wife and children. Out of a sentiment of fairness, he tries to share with those ex-combatants who did not get such a chance.

Disintegration has been the solution for many war perpetrators and displaced people that never returned or returned to towns where they hide their past. If not physically, some of them—like the above former *Kamajor*—have disintegrated, mentally chipping experiences and acts of the past from their personality.

Several ex-combatants claimed that terrible war experiences and the following DDR programmes had enlightened them fundamentally. In Baiwala, a group of former fighters suggested that they could help in DDR programmes in other parts of Africa. They said that they understood the feelings and needs of ex-combatants very well due to their own experience and would thus be able to convince others to stop fighting (interview, May 2018). But still, suspicions, misunderstandings and differences that had occurred during the war have remained unsolved, and many people still try to conceal such feelings. Conflicts over election results as in 2018 again bring to light these differences and open old wounds that had been gradually healing after the war (interview with a pastor, Kenema, April 2018).

To sum up, the DDR programme was an important incentive for the fighters to submit their weapons and undergo a process that was meant to help them divest themselves from a militant behaviour and attitude. However, the DDR programme hardly reached those children and youth that had been working for armed groups in ancillary jobs, although many of them also had become militarised in their thinking and behaviour despite the fact that they did not carry guns. The most serious shortcoming was that the government of Sierra Leone considered the reduction of the threats from non-state armed groups as most urgent and focused on the disarmament while putting little efforts in the reintegration of former fighters. The funding agencies, too, prioritised demobilisation and disarmament and spent most of the available funds on these processes, as they could easily visualise success by numbers—unlike reintegration efforts that did not yield success data rapidly.

The outcomes of the reintegration of former fighters is discussed further below in the context of the reconciliation process.

# Local integration and non-integration of Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia

For the majority of displaced civilians, local integration in the neighbouring countries occurred due to marriage, jobs or business. Some Sierra Leoneans reported that initially, rural relatives would not accept a Liberian in the family. According to a teacher in Kenema, "people never loved my wife", who was a Liberian. His family disagreed with the marriage and wanted him to take a wife from his home village. As a result, his wife mostly stayed in Liberia, since her mother had died to manage the family's land there. She came back to Kenema from time to time. Other interview partners reported that in Kenema town, life was cheaper, and the urban relatives would accept Liberian wives. Often not only their own children stayed in Kenema to go to school, but even some relatives of the wives would send their children for education. In Kenema, living together with Liberians appeared to be normal and problems were rare (interview with Sierra Leonean husbands of Liberian wives in Kenema, April 2018).

Many Liberians were staying in areas where there used to be refugee camps in eastern Sierra Leone. These areas became part of the local communities, and newcomers could even get a plot of land if they asked for it. They were integrated and cultivated their land like the Sierra Leoneans. Some Liberians found it difficult to live in Sierra Leone, as the community was not very open, in particular, if they needed help. They returned and remained in Liberia (primary school teacher, Kenema, April 2018). For many, integration between Liberians and Sierra Leoneans started in the Guinean camps where their children received common schooling and the two groups lived closely together. For those who intermarried or decided for other reasons to locally integrate in the neighbouring country, the process of integration was mostly fruitful due to low cultural, social and language barriers. International assistance was generous and covered health care, education, vocational training and cash; some refugees remained beneficiaries until 2018—more than 16 years after the end of the war.

Many Liberians came to Kenema from Freetown, Bo or Kono and established businesses. The mayor of Kenema city council stated, "here we do not have any problem with nationality. Nobody needs a passport. We are all one people" (interview in Kenema, April 2018), alluding to the ECOWAS citizens that can freely cross borders between the member states. According to a colonel,

> *we have never had much. Sierra Leonean people accept this as normal. The average citizen will not want to disrupt tranquillity. Peace is ultimate, better than everything else. On this basis we integrate (interview with a lieutenant colonel in Kenema, April 2018).*

The scarcity of resources and services apparently did not prevent Liberians from staying in Sierra Leone and vice versa, as the conditions were similar in both countries. According to the chairman of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in Kenema, Sierra Leoneans were frequently moving between Liberia and Sierra Leone. Liberians were members of civil society organisations in Sierra Leone and participated in human rights trainings. They were elected chairpersons of NGOs like any Sierra Leonean (interview in Kenema, April 2018).

On 30 June 2012, the cessation clause was invoked for refugees from Liberia on the basis that Liberia had enjoyed many years of peace and stability after the end of the civil war (officer of NaCSA, July 2018). Officially, refugee protection was no longer needed according to Article 1C of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Article I.4 of the 1969 OAU Convention. In 2018, the refugee population of 439 individuals staying in Sierra Leone consisted of Liberians, Ivorians, Malian and Sudanese nationals who were exempted from the cessation clause. This group, of which the majority were Liberians, was disinterested in local integration. However, this remained the only viable option as there was no prospect for resettlement opportunities, and they were unwilling or unable to return to their home countries (NaCSA officer, July 2018).[13]

13 \ The United States accounted for more than 75 per cent of Liberian refugees who were resettled from West Africa, whilst Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy and France accounted for 25 per cent (NaCSA officer, July 2018).

How refugees perceive such a situation of staying in limbo is presented here by the example of 374 Sierra Leoneans in Liberia who had been in protracted displacement for close to twenty years. According to the chairman of Samukai camp, the LRRRC[14] "just keep people, raise their hope, and then leave them suspended." These individuals were left from a 'caseload' of 4,786 Sierra Leonean refugees staying in Liberia who refused to be repatriated. They were living in the former refugee camps of Samukai, VoA (Voice of America plot) and Banjoi, increasingly mixing with Liberian inhabitants (interview with former camp chairman in Monrovia, May 2018). UNHCR provided medical facilities until the status of 'camp' terminated in 2004. Since then, refugees have had to seek treatment like Liberian citizens and pay for it except in cases of life-threatening diseases. In such cases, a partner agency provided assistance on a case-by-case basis as long as refugees were not locally integrated (interview with assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018).

The solution favoured by UNHCR for this group of Sierra Leonean refugees was local integration in Liberia, for which the government of Liberia had identified five 'integration communities' in different parts of the country.[15] UNHCR and the LRRRC reached an the agreement with these communities to offer plots of land for 2,100 refugees. The Liberian government built houses for the refugees and per 100 houses for refugees, 20 houses for the community, market structures, classroom extensions, clinics and town halls to be used by the community. The refugees could also receive farmland upon request from the local chiefs. UNHCR gave priority to large families, physically impaired, single mother families and other vulnerable groups. Each family received a two-room house with bathroom and kitchen, a bag of rice, some assorted items, and USD 250. UNHCR paid for the construction of the houses and provided livelihood training and start-up packages including USD 250 "to make them self-sufficient" (assistant UNHCR protection officer) as no further assistance would be provided to them. The measure was completed in 2008 (assistant protection officer of UNHCR, May 2018). The government of Liberia offered the locally integrated refugees to stay as long as they wanted and even to bequeath the houses to their descendants; only in case of return to Sierra Leone, they should hand over the houses and plots to the government (assistant UNHCR protection officer, May 2018). Meanwhile, most of the locally integrated Sierra Leoneans have rented out or sold the houses and moved to Monrovia, which actually is against the interest of the government to keep them under control (interview with assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018).

Providing locally integrating Sierra Leoneans with land is an ambiguous endeavour, though, as land is highly contested in Liberia. In Blama C, a site close to Monrovia, 27 acres were allotted to the local integration estate and access to further land for gardening or even a grave had to be negotiated and paid for. The local pump was controlled by the Liberian inhabitants who determined when the Sierra Leoneans were allowed to fetch water. Constant fear of being displaced again was rampant among the Sierra Leoneans there (interview with former camp chairman, Monrovia, May 2018). In Samukai, the land that the government of Liberia had allocated to UNHCR for the establishment of refugee camps during the war became contested when the Liberian plot owners returned from where they had sought refuge during the war in 2007 and 2008. They put cornerstones demarcating their plots, started to build houses and displaced the refugees whom they considered

14 \ The government of Liberia set up the LRRRC in 1993 to provide "international protection for refugees and other people of concern" (LRRRC, no year) in collaboration with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

15 \ These are Blama C in Boradville near Monrovia, Sinje in Grand Cape, Tenine and Sass Town in Bomi county, and a low-cost village in Bensonville.

squatters. The displaced people had to find room between the houses of the other 'squatters' (observed during a visit of the former camp; confirmed by Liberian neighbours, May 2018). Some plot owners went to court. Several Sierra Leoneans left the former camp and built houses in the surrounding community. The houses are similar to the houses of Liberians but more congested (interview with former camp chairman, Monrovia, May 2018). In Sinje, the Liberian government had secured 75 acres of land for the local integration of Sierra Leonean families. When deeds were being prepared for the land, there were suggestions that a representative of the integrated community be signatory to the deed. The LRRRC refused this, making the legal use of the land highly questionable (interview in Sinje, May 19, 2018). In the former VOA camp, Liberian local inhabitants bought the land on which some Sierra Leoneans were still staying in tents (interview with refugees in VOA, June 2018).

The documentation of the legal integration of Sierra Leoneans through passports, national identification cards, etc. was still far from completion in 2018, putting their status in limbo. Hence, they received the approval to integrate in Liberia without any supporting document from the government attesting the approval (interviews in Monrovia and Sinje, 2018). From the perspective of UNHCR, the reason for the unfinished local integration process was the slow issuance of residence permits, travel documents or Liberian citizenship documents by the Liberian government. Some documents apparently went missing. A UNHCR representative emphasised that UNHCR was prepared to take over all costs, including those for integration tests, medical check, police clearance as well as court fees for legal procedures and had already paid for 1,718 passports (assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018).

The small number of Sierra Leoneans who refused to be repatriated or move to local integration communities feared acts of revenge, had lost the whole family or lacked any positive connection to any of the two countries due to war and experiences of violence as refugees or trauma. They strongly believed in the continuous threat by former fighters including the *Kamajors* that could even cross the border easily and harm the refugees in acts of revenge (focus group discussion with Sierra Leonean refugees and their leaders in Monrovia, May 2018). Another important reason why Sierra Leonean refugees opted for resettlement and did not want to locally integrate were the atrocities committed by the LURD in the refugee camps in 2002/2003, which still had traumatic effects on them (personal communication by former camp chairman, Samukai, May 2018).

These refugees had lost years of their life waiting. As their identification cards issued to them by UNHCR in collaboration with LRRRC had expired since 2007, they repeatedly faced security harassment and demands for payment at checkpoints while travelling from one part of the country to another (interviews in Sinje, Cape Mount County, May 2018). In 2011, and again in 2017, the LRRRC had informed each individual about the decision that their refugee status had been finally denied as Sierra Leone had successfully held democratic elections followed by a peaceful change of government so that the country had to be considered peaceful and safe. Claims that refugees still feared acts of revenge by *Kamajors* were rejected as no longer valid so many years after the war (information taken from letters refugees showed the author in Monrovia, May 2018; confirmed by LRRRC representatives in a focus group discussion in Monrovia, May 2018; confirmed by assistant UNHCR protection officer).

The LRRRC representatives explained the decision to no longer recognise the refugee status of Sierra Leoneans in Liberia against the backdrop of a shortage of funds of UNHCR, which also had led to the cancellation of assistance. This also affected about 5,000 Liberian refugees who were still scattered in different West African countries. To solve the refugee issue, the newly elected Liberian government formed an Asylum Committee consisting of representatives of the Ministries of internal affairs, justice, foreign affairs, finance and development planning in 2018 for which the LRRRC acted as secretariat and UNHCR participated as observer (focus group discussion with

five LRRRC representatives, Monrovia, May 2018). On 10 April 2018, UNHCR and the LRRRC called the remaining 376 Sierra Leonean refugees (105 family heads) again to verify their status on a case-by-case basis (focus group discussion with LRRRC representatives in Monrovia, May 2018). UNHCR representatives confirmed that all these individuals might opt for local integration or assisted repatriation, whereas resettlement was no option as no country was ready to receive any Sierra Leonean refugee (interview with assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018).

To sum up, the following categories of refugees can be distinguished with regard to legal status and options for solutions.

1\ An undocumented number of Sierra Leoneans who integrated voluntarily in Liberia; these are mostly individuals who intermarried with Liberians.

2\ Sierra Leonean refugees who opted for local integration and were relocated to Liberian communities without receiving legal documents. They fear problems when they want to travel, conclude contracts, sell and buy plots or houses, bequeath property to their descendants or vote in national elections.

3\ A number of Sierra Leonean refugees who opted for local integration upon pressure by the LRRRC and UNHCR and were promised to be naturalised as Liberian citizens but have never received any legal documents stating their status as residents. This has consequences for title deeds and inheritance cases that may lead to disputes and very likely to the loss of rights of undocumented former Sierra Leonean refugees (as in 2.).

4\ Sierra Leoneans who agreed to be locally integrated but are still staying in the former refugee camps. It is unclear whether they will be relocated and when. Some come under pressure as the Liberian owners of the former camp land that the Liberian government had allocated to UNHCR claim their property and start to build houses. A few camp inhabitants were displaced and had to move to the houses of others in the same camp, which only can be a temporary solution.

5\ Sierra Leoneans who did not agree to return or locally integrate and still are staying in the former camps (still hoping for a resettlement solution). According to them, it is unclear when and how their cases will be solved.

6\ Former Sierra Leonean ECOMOG soldiers (and their families), based in Liberia opposite the free port. Their role had been to protect the Liberians. Whereas some have been locally integrated, others refuse this solution out of fear of being pursued in Sierra Leone and in Liberia, in particular, when Charles Taylor will die and anti-Sierra Leonean and anti-ECOMOG sentiments are likely to rise again (focus group discussion with former ECOMOG soldiers in Monrovia, May 2018).

For all these groups, the LRRRC offers local integration in Liberia—provided that UNHCR will be funding the documentation and housing facilities. Whereas the LRRRC claims that the process was delayed because the government of Liberia had a shortage of funds (focus group discussion with LRRRC representatives in Monrovia, May 2018), UNHCR claimed to have paid for the 2,100 locally integrated refugees and was ready to provide the funds for the remaining caseload of 376 individuals as soon as the documentation is submitted by the LRRRC. The funds would cover all document fees related to residence permits or naturalisation as well as work permits (interview with assistant UNHCR protection officer in Monrovia, May 2018). On 23 July 2018, the President of Liberia, George M. Weah, led the official presentation of naturalisation certificates to 50 former Sierra Leonean refugees, which took place at Benton City, Monrovia (Montserrado) as part of the celebration of Independence Day (26 July 2018) activities.

The increasing movement of refugees to countries of first asylum has entailed that receiving governments have become reluctant to facilitate local integration. "Local integration carries with it a connotation of permanence as well as security problems and resource burdens" (interview with an officer of NaCSA in Freetown, July 2018). The failure to find acceptable durable solutions has resulted in increasing numbers of protracted displacement situations worldwide. To overcome these situations, the NaCSA officer suggested developing an African resettlement model within various African countries (statement by Alhaji Nurudeen, NaCSA, for the Stakeholder Workshop, July 2018).

## Interim conclusion

Coming back to *Assumption I*, the overview and perceptions provided in this chapter confirm that reconstruction, restitution of land and / or property, basic rights and equal protection by the state for returnees and IDPs were core conditions for reintegration. Moreover, the chapter showed that there is no reason to exclude former fighters and locally integrated former refugees from these demands. Civilians expressed resentments against the preferential treatment of former fighters through DDR programmes that provided them with superior starting conditions compared with war victims. This injustice requires further considerations in future DDR programmes or eventually, alternative approaches to changing people's minds and abilities from a war setting to a peaceful way of solving conflicts and civilian skills. The chapter also showed that the common ECOWAS citizenship alleviates a process of creating equal conditions for all those living in the same country, including participation in civil society activities and elections as chairpersons of NGOs.

According to *Assumption II*, besides livelihood opportunities, local integration requires a permanent legal status and for some, additional social, psychological, cultural or political requirements. Continuous cross-border movement in the region fosters translocal integration. All parts of this assumption were confirmed showing that integration needs are diverse and cannot be fulfilled by blueprints trying to cover every group equally. Even more than fifteen years after the end of the wars, people had remained in limbo, stuck in bureaucracy, waiting for a final solution about a place where they could legally stay. People in this situation were frustrated and showed signs of deep resignation. Yet, many Sierra Leoneans and Liberians were able to integrate without any external assistance, facilitated by the freedom of movement. This experience strongly suggests supporting further attempts of regional political integration in Africa.

# Reconciliation processes and outcomes

This chapter starts from the assumption that a reconciliation process enables people living in a community to go beyond a mere co-existence with those who return from abroad, other parts of the country and from fighting. It examines to which extent the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone laid the foundation to prevent acts of revenge, thus encouraging refugees and IDPs to return.

War perpetrators were extremely numerous and many could hardly be held accountable as they were adolescents and children forcibly recruited and drugged by various armed groups. A number of perpetrators of war crimes as well as members of the RUF were imprisoned after the 'Peace Task Force', a squad of armed vigilantes from various factions of Sierra Leone's security forces, had raided, arrested and detained anyone associated with the RUF they could get hold of in 2000. For the top leaders perpetrating crimes against humanity, UN Resolution 1315 put into force the Special Court of Sierra Leone through sub-section 4 (40), which dealt with thirteen large-scale war criminals. Further war perpetrators had left Sierra Leone and hid abroad. Hence, there was only a very limited prosecutorial aspect comprising only those that were considered to bear the greatest responsibility for the gross human rights violations during the war.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set up according to Article IX of the Lomé Peace Agreement of 7 July 1999 and operating in parallel to the Special Court trials, had a different approach that focused on restorative justice. The purposes of the TRC were

> *to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict in Sierra Leone … to address impunity, to respond to the needs of the victims, to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered"(TRC, 2004, Section 6.1).*[16]

## Reconciliation through the TRC and outcomes for reintegration

The TRC conducted a comprehensive reconciliation process between the remaining war perpetrators and the victims. The Commission thoroughly documented the abuses and human rights violations committed during the war and investigated the causes, context and actors involved. The aim was to restore the dignity of the victims, and to create "a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators" (TRC, 2004, Section 6.2b). The TRC considered sixteen specified criminal acts subsumed under the categories of violations perpetrated in the context of abduction and outside abduction, mistreatment violations and economic violations. Under these categories the TRC investigated killings, forced recruitment, cannibalism, forced cannibalism, forced labour, assault, physical torture and rape, arbitrary detention, looting, extortion and destruction of property (TRC, 2004).

The review of the TRC revealed that the atrocities committed during the war had not only destroyed individual lives, families and communities, people's belief systems and cultural heritages, but also demolished and desecrated traditional and community meeting spaces and institutions as people had been forced to desecrate symbols of their religion or faith. Certain groups like property owners, chiefs, traditional authorities and representatives of government institutions had been targeted on the basis of revenge, economic appropriation and because of their ethnicity (TRC, 2004). Ethnicity was an issue that all factions used as an instrument of prejudice and violence against perceived opponents or those who did not 'belong' as is shown with the documentation of the violations committed by the three main groups of perpetrators (see Box 7).

16 \ Section 6 (1) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2000, adopted by the Government of Sierra Leone on 22 February, 2000, quoted in Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2004.

**Box 7**

***Perpetrators and their target groups***

*According to the investigations of the TRC, the RUF committed the majority of violations and abuses throughout the war. The armed group pioneered the concept of forced recruitment including children. The RUF was responsible "for the widespread use of drugs by its members, which precipitated spates of crazed violence and compounded the prevailing general sense of oppression and hopelessness" (TRC, 2004, p. 74). The group directed its attacks predominantly against the Lebanese, Fullahs, Mandingos, Nigerians and Marakas (TRC, 2004). The second-most significant perpetrator was the AFRC. The fighters of the AFRC committed atrocities on a massive scale in the northern region and in Kono District. The group "demonstrated a 'specialisation' in the practice of amputations in the period from 1998 to 1999" (TRC, 2004, p. 74).*

*Among the groups that formed the Civil Defence Forces (CDF)*[1] *, an 'initiation' ceremony was practiced that entailed physical and psychological torture as well as other gross abuses of human rights. The* Kamajors *were responsible for almost all CDF violations reported after 1996. Only the* Kamajors *practiced forced cannibalism. During the latter part of the war, the CDF targeted people of northern origin that were staying in the southern and eastern regions. The* Kamajors *(belonging to the Mende) committed disproportionate levels of violations against the Temne, Koranko, Loko, Limba and Yalunka (TRC, 2004).*

*The TRC identified several characteristics and tendencies that spanned across all armed actors in the conflict. The ground forces of all the armed groups consisted of "impressionable, disgruntled young men eager for an opportunity to assert themselves, either to ensure that no harm was done to their own people, to fight against perceived injustice, or for personal and group aggrandisement" (TRC, 2004, p. 74).*

*Moreover all the militias and armed groups displayed "an astonishing factional fluidity … Overtly and covertly, gradually and suddenly, fighters switched sides or established new units on a scale unprecedented in any other conflict" (TRC, 2004, p. 75).*

1 \ The CDF was a powerful paramilitary organisation through which the Minister of Defence incorporated the *Kamajors* in the security apparatus after the SLPP had regained power through the election of 1996.

The findings of the TRC highlighted the regional, ethnic and cultural affiliations of the armed groups and identify their 'enemies'. They indicate a tendency of the various armed groups targeting people that were part of the APC networks. However, the dynamics of the movement of 'disgruntled young men' and frequent changes of sides blurred to some extent the pre-war dividing line between the Mende (eastern and south-eastern region; mostly SLPP followers) and the Temne (northern region, mostly APC followers). Against this backdrop, returnees emphasised in interviews that reconciliation was necessary to continue life in Sierra Leone, as the following exemplary statements show (see Box 8).

**Box 8**

***Returnees' views on reconciliation—perceptions in hindsight***

*"The type of atrocities that befell the country during the war by different warring factions through the cutting of human parts and the burning down of houses caused too much mayhem and therefore reconciliation was necessary. … For my return, healthcare, employment, housing and security were most important to me. For reconciliation, political power and justice were an added value to me. … Return and repatriation must be facilitated in an open field and with the involvement of all people, be it civilians, ex-fighters, government and development agencies so that those in involved in the war—perpetrators of the war as well as victims—can understand and be able to establish the reasons why and how they can return and be repatriated in their normal or original place" (lecturer, returned to his home area, Freetown, April 2018).*

*"The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) was at the forefront of the return and reintegration programme—building refugee camps, providing transportation and feeding packages to war-affected and war-wounded victims and training refugees so that they gained skills to empower themselves at the end" (chief in a suburb of Kenema, originating from a village in the same region, May 2018).*

*"Considering how brutally the war was fought I do think reconciliation is necessary or else we would have ever remained in the war of revenge. … Reconciliation was good and possible" (housewife, originating from the northern region, staying in Freetown since displacement during the war, April 2018).*

Political power and justice, an open field where all the war-affected people can understand what had happened as a basis for return, and preventing revenge are the points that formerly displaced people are making here. These points substantiate the need for reconciliation to reintegrate fully in communities after return from other places in the country or abroad. However, equally or even more important were healthcare, employment, housing, security, transportation, food and training. Hence, from the

perspective of people who were displaced during the war, food supply, social services, security and employment accompanied by a reconciliation process are the conditions required for return and reintegration. (Legitimate) political power, justice and security can be understood as aims to which a reconciliation process can contribute by putting an end to revenge.

In Sierra Leone, revenge was the main means to act upon the perceived unfair and unjust occupation of influential positions and the abuse of power of privileged individuals. Revenge occurs in at least three dimensions: As 'mob justice' that is encouraged when the judicial system is not functioning and abuses of power take place without any chance of holding the power holders accountable—in a nutshell, when the rule of law is non-existent. Second, revenge is a means to forge groups of people together against perceived enemies. Third, with revenge, followers can be mobilised even out of the self-interest of the mobiliser to engage in economic appropriation or taking over a powerful position.

In its reconciliation efforts, the TRC thus had to face the challenge of transforming attitudes informed by multi-dimensional revenge into attitudes suitable of establishing social cohesion after the war. This was aggravated by the fact that during the eleven years of war, there was a whole generation that never went to school and children and youth had survived by carrying guns. Therefore, the government of Sierra Leone established the Ministry of Youth and Sports immediately after the election of 2002 to enhance educational opportunities for the 'lost generation'. The ministry fostered numerous initiatives and programmes for the youth—stayees and returned IDPs and refugees alike—that mostly were implemented by NGOs (TRC, 2004). The National Commission for DDR also addressed mainly the youth in its effort to disarm and demobilise combatants. According to a former reintegration officer, the DDR programme included an element of counselling among some provisions meant to enable the ex-combatants to make a living:

> *Sensitisation messages and incentives—handouts that made them comfortable and training—were provided to the ex-combatants so that they could forget about the war. We even gave them psycho-social counselling, for which we employed civil society organisations. They got accommodation, health kits, food and monthly allowances to engage in training, tool kits and a reintegration package of SLL 300,000 (USD 156). This kept them busy. Many became self-employed as motorbike taxi drivers, masons, carpenters, welders, tailors, in IT and in agriculture (former project officer for reintegration of ex-combatants, Freetown, May 2018).*

However, according to an evaluation of the DDR programmes in Sierra Leone, the ex-combatants considered the encampment period as

> *too short to effect any substantial and sustained change in behaviour and attitudes, and [was], in some cases, certainly too short to break up existing command and control structures amongst the armed factions (Solomon & Ginifer, 2008, p. 12).*

Commanders continued to have power over their followers. In addition, the opportunity of learning a trade during the DDR programme was very limited. There were no funds to provide sufficient options for the youth to use the acquired skills and sustain themselves and their families. Many ex-combatants left the programme inadequately trained (TRC, 2004). Moreover, the programme hardly reached those children and youth who had been working for armed groups in ancillary jobs. According to an old pastor,

> *what was given to them instead of guns was skills training for six months. They found themselves being left out. They could no longer go to school as they were too old. Most elders in their families had died. They were 'leaders' in their communities without any foundation. When they returned from the war, they were decision-makers, although they were illiterate, had no money and could not develop a farm. They have a lot of family responsibilities. The motorbike business became a way of making quick money. But what will they be after five years, when other means of transport may replace the motorbikes? The ex-combatants are a lost generation (interview, Kenema, April 2018).*

Many fighters started a business as motorbike taxi drivers after they had participated in DDR programmes, and only a few completed school or vocational training (Peters, 2007). Together with orphans becoming petty traders and other youth dropping out of education due to displacement, former fighters, in particular child soldiers, added to the large number of youth between 14 and 35 who were lacking any sustainable livelihood perspective after the war. This group contained drug addicts and many individuals who could easily be mobilised again for doing the 'dirty work' of politicians and other jobs paid for by disgruntled potential leaders as it had been the case before the war (Abdullah, 1998).

The commitment to the process of reintegration that had to follow disarmament was low on the part of the government as well as international agencies. Therefore, the reintegration of ex-combatants succeeded or failed according to the extent, to which the receiving community had suffered from atrocities and according to the degree the ex-combatants had committed violations (Sesay & Suma, 2009). The reintegration of ex-combatant children and youth was particularly difficult as their families frequently rejected them because of their affiliations with the various armed groups. This fact reveals most clearly the importance of reconciliation for reintegration.

Based on its comprehensive historical analysis, the TRC initiated a process that was directed to the establishment of accountability, acknowledgment, truth-telling and reparations at national, community and individual levels. A sensitisation of specific groups of victims and perpetrators was meant to encourage them to partake in reconciliation activities that comprised particular reconciliation ceremonies and distinct memorial ceremonies. Reaching truth through broad-based participation would permit the nation to examine itself honestly and taking effective measures to prevent a repetition of the past (TRC, 2004). To this end, the TRC collected 9,000 statements from victims of war in Freetown and twelve provincial districts. More than 450 perpetrators exposed their deeds in public and asked for forgiveness (some only ceremonially, though). Others shirked the process posing as refugees eligible for resettlement (Kelsall, 2005). According to the mayor of Kenema City Council,

> *leaders that connived with the rebels escaped and were not tried in the Special Court or confronted by victims in the reconciliation process led by the TRC (interview in April 2018).*

Avoiding encounters of the returning Sierra Leoneans with the main war actors certainly contributed to the success of the reintegration of the displaced and refugees (interview with a pastor, Kenema, April 2019).

The combination of the Sierra Leone Special Court and the TRC was a way to bring war victims and perpetrators together to an extent that was hard to anticipate. However, analyses of observers revealed that the 'truth' was rarely told (Article 19, 2000; Kelsall, 2005). Reconciliation took the form of emotional rituals—but even critics held that these fulfilled the purpose (Kelsall, 2005). Due to institutional rivalries between the TRC and the Special Court, the TRC was not able to establish accountability for the atrocities that had been committed during the conflict as an alternative to pure criminal justice (TRC, 2004). The result of the lack of cooperation between the Special Court and the TRC was impunity for numerous mid-range commanders and perpetrators that hid incognito in Sierra Leone and abroad. The fact that the public truth and reconciliation process ran in parallel to the prosecution of top war criminals behind closed doors by the Sierra Leone Special Court has impeded the establishment of the rule of law in the country. If the rule of law were in place, citizens could bring perpetrators to justice and would no longer have to revert to mutual revenge acts incited by politicians who get away with it without a court trial (Grawert, 2019).

## Local and long-term reconciliation

In 2003, district reconciliation committees in partnership with the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone as well as local church organisations took over the process of reconciliation. The coordinator of the

Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in Kenema reflected on the requirements to achieve reconciliation and the difficulties that had to be overcome in the violence-affected society of Sierra Leone (see Box 9).

**Box 9**

***Local meaning of reconciliation***

*"Reconciliation is a very long process that starts with the perpetrators and the victims. Society has to facilitate it. There is a deadlock when the opponent is not ready to listen to you. It can only continue when he is ready to talk. From the traditional point of view, we do not have a word for 'reconciliation', because in the mentality of the Sierra Leoneans, the fabric of society will never break. It can bend. Hence—where to start with reconciliation?*

*In fact, there are a lot of broken relationships that have occurred during the war and in post-election conflicts. … One element to facilitate reconciliation is compensation. Another element is public confession, which the TRC took up during its investigation. (It consisted of) begging for mercy and apologising to certain individuals and showing that you are sorry. If you know the gravity of the wrong you have done, you should put measures in place to prevent the wrong from happening again. Otherwise it will come back. Finally, you can start a new relationship with a good feeling and harmony. There is no need to involve a court" (interview with the coordinator of the Justice and Peace Commission, Kenema, April 2018).*

According to this statement, the TRC had focused mainly on one dimension of reconciliation, namely public confession by perpetrators and apologising to the victims to restore a relationship. This approach, however, does not correspond fully with the way Sierra Leoneans used to resolve conflicts and re-establish a peaceful co-existence. Compensation appears to be an important element that may preclude future acts of revenge. NaCSA had the right approach in this direction as it focused on reparations for war victims, paying them interim cash grants of USD 100, skills training for a few hundred women who had suffered sexual violence and housing for amputees. However, the authority was not prepared to take responsibility for the long time required to care for seriously handicapped persons who would never be able to generate an income as unskilled labourers or peasants. Neither did the authority receive sufficient state funding to become independent from international donors.

NaCSA was one of those state agencies that were notoriously involved in severe corruption affairs (as reported in a newspaper headline, Freetown, in July 2018). The Coordinator of the Justice and Peace Commission emphasised that reconciliation takes a long time:

> *Such a process has not been accomplished in Sierra Leone, even more than fifteen years after the war. We have only started. Establishing community healing programmes and memorial centres where people can go and remember the dead were correct moves. There is a mass grave in Kemena. This should become a memorial centre, and the government should bring the people together there every year.*
>
> *The role of the traditional leaders is crucial. The chiefs have to invite all major stakeholders to reconciliation meetings. … We have not given up. We have to allow the process to take its own turn. We still have got a lot of latent divisions in our society (interview in Kenema, April 2018).*

A Sierra Leonean NGO, Fambul Tok, took over long-term reconciliation efforts in 2008. Its approach aimed to bridge social gaps, whereas NaCSA focused on symbolic reparations and commemorations of those who died in the war, peace monuments and trees. Fambul Tok was funded by USAID and international donors to conduct further reconciliation activities at the community level in those parts of Sierra Leone that were most affected by war atrocities. The NGO mainly organised reconciliation rituals of confession and forgiving among local inhabitants (Fambul Tok, 2019). Villagers would gather at the village centre around a fire and speak out and ask for forgiveness. When somebody forgives, this means that, according to the local tradition, the act will be forgiven (elder during village assembly in Bomaru, May 2018). In Baiwala, the inhabitants erected a roundabout after the ceremony in four sections of the village as a memorial for reconciliation. According to the local chief,

> *it was difficult at the beginning. Most perpetrators—our brothers and sisters—are her among us. Clearing and*

*brushing after the war in groups of ten helped a lot so that we learned to live together with former fighters and build a neighbourhood. By working together, we can say, "look, I have forgiven you". There was no other way to live here. We drew lots to select the first one to go and start the work, then the second. Some were not used to talk to an ex-combatant while working on his field. In any case, the owner will provide the soup, and each group member will give a cup of rice. Most of them changed their ways, but still have their military bearing. We cope with them. We are all engaged in farming now (interview in May, 2018).*

Farm work and construction in mixed groups of war victims, ex-combatants and perpetrators, fighters and civilians who returned after displacement and the ritual reconciliation ceremonies by Fambul Tok and local chiefs have contributed to re-establishing social cohesion in the villages.

Remembering the years after the war, many people who had been displaced and returned believed that the government and international agencies were too lenient with war perpetrators and offered undue preferable treatment to them compared to the victims (interviews in Freetown, Kenema and Kailahun, May and June 2018). Sixteen years after the war, reconciliation thus seems still incomplete. A process of holding perpetrators accountable in public was still important for some returnees after their displacement. Some scholars and practitioners held that the legacy of incomplete reconciliation explained to some extent the rising criminality, violent attacks and revenge acts that occurred in particular in the context of national elections.[17] Hence, reconciliation may also be required between victims and perpetrators of recent violent acts that occurred in the context of elections.

17 \ Result of discussions of academics and practitioners from NGOs during the stakeholder workshop in Freetown in July 2018; statement by the Coordinator of the Justice and Peace Commission, Fatorma A. Combey, Kenema in May 2018.

## Interim conclusion

According to *Assumption III*, reconciliation procedures bring victims and perpetrators together and demand confessing and forgiving; the involvement of ex-combatants is crucial, and reconciliation is a first step towards justice, but needs to be accompanied by putting perpetrators on trial. The study shows that reconciliation procedures only succeeded to a certain extend to bring victims and perpetrators together for ceremonies of confession and forgiveness. It can be confirmed that ex-combatants were a crucial part of reconciliation, and that it was equally important for the success of reintegration of people that returned after displacement that some ex-combatants avoided the process. As assumed, reconciliation was organised in parallel to court trials for perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes and was a first but insufficient step towards justice. Putting perpetrators on trial later may be a necessary consequence to avoid resentment among war victims in the long term.

*Assumption III* also held that reconciliation should be regarded as part of the reintegration process as it may be crucial to make reintegration sustainable and enable community inhabitants to transcend a mere co-existence with the diverse groups of returnees. The analysis corroborates that reconciliation is an indispensable part of the reintegration process in communities that incorporate victims and perpetrators and required to make reintegration of refugees and IDPs sustainable.

The assessment of Sierra Leonean scholars during the project's stakeholder workshop confirmed that to achieve sustainable reintegration within the Sierra Leonean society, the conditions that preceded the war must be changed (workshop statement by Spencer, Freetown, July 2018; similarly lieutenant colonel Kuna, Kenema, May 2018). This implies that overcoming the historical divide of the Sierra Leonean society with its deep political, regional, and ethnic biases has to be considered as a pre-condition for a sustainable reintegration of those large and diverse population groups that had been scattered inside the country and across its borders during the war.

# Conclusion and outlook: Overcoming processes of disintegration

This *Working Paper* has shed light on (re-)integration of a broad range of population groups after the end of the war in Sierra Leone: Refugees, IDPs, former fighters who returned and reintegrated into Sierra Leone as well as Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who locally integrated into the neighbouring countries. The process appeared to be successful at first sight as no armed fighting has occurred ever since. Moreover, more than half a million people have returned and stayed in rural as well as urban areas of the country and managed to make a living—even if with difficulties. Furthermore, thousands of displaced people have settled in the neighbouring countries—Sierra Leoneans in Liberia and Liberians in Sierra Leone. Cross-border movement and trade have become more important than ever to generate livelihood options. This latter finding can be an option for the few people who have resigned to their fate and stayed in limbo and can neither reintegrate in Sierra Leone nor in Liberia, to advance possibilities and agreements for resettlement in a third country within Africa—at least within the ECOWAS countries.

However, having dug deeper by collecting perceptions of different social groups in hindsight, our research reveals that (re-)integration does have a range of flaws. These were made visible through a review of the reconciliation processes after war. Reconciliation focused on ceremonial rituals of forgiveness and reparations for most vulnerable groups of war victims, among them large numbers of displaced people. Reparations did not reach all groups that had become war victims, though. Short-term counselling for traumatised displaced people and some money to re-start their lives was not sufficient to safeguard livelihood security in the long run or full reintegration of the worst-affected population groups, among them many who had been scattered all over Sierra Leone and the neighbouring countries and returned. Some groups did not return because they felt that their livelihood, and even more important, their very lives were not secure.

The study has revealed that resentment among disadvantaged social groups was tangible still in 2018 when they remembered the different treatment of displaced people, other war victims and ex-combatants. The latter had not only received counselling and payment but got privileged access to three to six months of vocational training and start-up capital enabling many to start a small business whereas large population groups many of which had returned from short and long-term displacement had very precarious incomes— a difference that became clearly visible in hindsight. For the disadvantaged groups, the hope for a sustainable livelihood had dwindled whereas more privileged and middle-class people with the appropriate networks to influential politicians had no reason to be worried about the future.

Relationships between patrons and their clients, in particular, interfered with the deep social divide between lower-class and upper-class people (with only a small middle class). The patronage relationships are split along the regional and political party divide, cutting right through Sierra Leone. Even local chiefs and religious leaders are divided by this line. Dependence on patrons for survival, livelihood options, opportunities and chances thus implied dependence on a political party—which inflates the importance of success in elections to an extent that it becomes "a kind of do or die affair" (Sylvanus Spencer during the stakeholder workshop, Freetown, July 2018). The patrons have the power to mobilise others to commit violent acts because of this existential role of elections. The research disclosed that these violent acts often are driven by sentiments of revenge stemming from the historically perpetuated rigid divide along a political, regional and ethnic line.

Here, our research has also shown that the impunity of war perpetrators has repercussions until present times, most visible in the recurrent election-related acts of violence. The statement of a publicist during the stakeholder workshop in Freetown highlights the connection as follows:

*The impunity of junior commanders of armed groups has had damaging effects on the realm of politics and democratic voting, as remnants of the cruel behaviour during war remain alive and appear to be justifiable for parts of the society (Nathaniel King during stakeholder workshop, Freetown, July 2018).*

Scholars termed the prevailing attitude "culture of impunity" (Spencer, Freetown, July 2018). This culture can also fuel electoral violence. Out of vested interests and striving to make political gains, leaders and influential well-educated individuals continue to manipulate others to commit violent acts, thus perpetuating election-related violence. These manipulators are powerful individuals and politicians—some of them former commanders and leaders during the war who got away with impunity. Consequently, they have no interest in investigations and punishment of those who pulled the strings and thus contribute to perpetuating the culture of impunity.

These findings and considerations (most of them thanks to the reflections of the scholars participating in the stakeholder workshop) have led to the following conclusions:

- Permanent engagement is required to bring about reconciliation in close connection with the reintegration of those who return after displacement, as conflicts will inevitably erupt again.
- Reconciliation has to be a process that covers urban and rural inhabitants, those who stayed put as well as displaced people and is inextricably linked with development for making rural areas accessible through infrastructure.
- Reconciliation has to be a domestically owned process and should be conducted by independent civil society organisations that also involve religious leaders. The process should link reconciliation and reintegration of displaced people and refugees and take a long-term perspective to address persisting cleavages that are a legacy of war and even pre-war times.
- This societal process should replace the highly donor-dependent government institution of NaCSA that—like many other state authorities— can easily be corrupted.
- Impunity for junior officers and commanders cannot last forever to prevent the consolidation of a culture of impunity.
- Eradicating the culture of impunity appears to be the first and foremost requirement for establishing the rule of law in Sierra Leone.

According to King,

*the rule of law and a clear division of powers that make it possible to hold politicians accountable for their action in front of an independent judiciary need to be strengthened in Sierra Leone in order to avoid this pattern of (electoral) violence to re-emerge again (King, Freetown, July 2018).*

Hence, unless the political, economic and social partition of the country is overcome, and the rule of law is established, tensions during elections are likely to trigger acts of violence and revenge again. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that in turn, establishing the rule of law to hold perpetrators accountable at all levels—including the state—will be essential to achieve the substantial and comprehensive reintegration of a society that was involved in a protracted armed conflict. Hence, the research findings go beyond *Assumption IV,* according to which the reintegration of displaced people, refugees and former fighters enables a society to address conflicts through mediating institutions in the long run, which then will have the effect of enhancing the rule of law. There must be a mutual process of establishing the rule of law and a gradual reintegration of all displaced groups including former fighters, accompanied by reconciliation, reconstruction and the development of clearly fixed and transparent steps to eradicate post-war impunity. This insight entails a re-think of international community interventions in war-torn countries and suggests that peacekeeping must be succeeded by peacebuilding combined with development efforts that are directed towards establishing and consolidating the rule of law.

As an outlook with relevance for the government of Sierra Leone and cooperating development agencies, the research findings strongly suggest that the conditions of living and future perspectives of the youth of Sierra Leone need urgent attention. Disintegration not only has the historical dimension of

division that has resurfaced repeatedly in the form of electoral violence, but Sierra Leone also has a long history of exclusion of the youth that adds a generational dimension to disintegration. Apparently, this was exacerbated when hundreds of thousands of displaced people returned after the war, among them a large number of youth who only received insufficient education and employment opportunities. Subsidies and scholarships will be needed to fully integrate the now grown-ups and their offspring in basic and advanced education, vocational training, polytechnics, colleges and universities offering subjects, skills development and qualifications that match the needs of the regional (ECOWAS) labour market. The open borders for trade, and the freedom of movement through the ECOWAS travel certificate are the ideal preconditions for the youth to be integrated in the regional trade and business market. Further preconditions have been created during protracted displacement in West Africa with many friendly and family relationships as well as business relations between citizens of Sierra Leone and the neighbouring countries. The governments of the region should deliberately build on this positive outcome of the negative experience of a decade of war.

Guiding the transition from training or studying to employment and supporting business start-ups until the graduates can sustain themselves and their young families will be crucial to integrate the vast majority of the youth as full members into society. The reason to advocate for such a strong focus on the youth is that, according to the above analysis, widespread grievances, unemployment, imposed idleness and exclusion from meaningful political and social participation have contributed significantly to the particularly cruel course of the war as well as to the recurrent electoral violence until 2018. Redressing the decade-long neglect of the youth requires the full commitment of the government and, as far as needed, assistance by international development agencies.

A serious focus on integrating the youth requires transparent procedures of holding state authorities and elected representatives accountable. The youth needs to experience that they have rights that they can claim successfully through peaceful procedures that lead to a justified decision within a short—or at least clearly fixed - time. The youth also needs to experience the normalcy of conflict in all its varieties—and that it can be resolved by non-violent means. From this perspective, setting up effective state institutions that are not politically biased and establishing the rule of law in Sierra Leone become necessary conditions for future peace.

A final aspect related to the youth is the need to avoid dependence on aid. The post-war generation that largely experienced protracted displacement was still largely donor-dependent—a structure that reached deeply into those government authorities that were responsible for social services and reintegration (predominantly NaCSA). The experience of the young generation(s) should be that self-reliance, based on the local and regional natural resources, capital, skills, relationships and infrastructure, becomes normality. This will imply developing self-confidence and creativity to find solutions for problems independently from international agencies and assistance but through much more engagement of the government, its authorities and representatives at all levels and a variety of societal organisations.

# List of interview partners

**Interviews in Freetown, 26–27 April; 28–30 May, 2 July 2018**

- Malte Kirchner, country director, GIZ Regional Office Sierra Leone, Liberia
- Dr Sylvanus Spencer, Department of History and African Studies, Fourah Bay College
- Nathaniel King, publicist, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- Dr Alex Sivalie Mbayo, College for Peace & Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay University
- Officers of NaCSA (protection and reintegration departments)
- Officer of the national electoral commission
- Chairman of Fambul Tok

**Interviews in Kenema, 29 April–1 May 2018**

- Three market vendors, one of them injured during the post-election unrest
- A group of men (SLPP supporters) sitting in the shadow of a tree
- A young man, inhabitant of Kenema
- Mayor of Kenema City Council
- A primary school teacher
- A secondary school teacher
- A lieutenant colonel
- Acting Police Inspector General
- Chairman of MRD (Movement for the Restoration of Democracy)
- Secretary of the SLPP, eastern region
- Chairman of the APC, eastern region
- A journalist
- Chairman of the motorbike taxi drivers' union
- Three ex-combatants from RUF, AFRC, Kamajor
- A pastor and coordinator of the Justice and Peace Commission
- Chairman of the National Youth Commission
- Officer of NaCSA

**Interviews in two villages, Bomaru and Baiwala, 2–6 May 2018**

- Three elders
- Bomaru village assembly
- A guesthouse attendant
- Three formerly displaced women
- Town chief
- Deputy chief
- Three ex-combatants of the RUF

**Interviews in Kailahun, 8–10 May 2018**

- Staff member of an NGO working in child protection
- A local chief
- A group of Liberians
- A group of women petty traders

**21 interviews including three focus group discussions with youth in Freetown, Bo and Pujehun by Jande Victoria Dembe between May and July 2018**

- A former camp chairman
- Focus group discussion with older Sierra Leonean refugees and their leaders
- Focus group discussion with former ECOMOG soldiers
- An older Sierra Leonean who was denied the refugee status since 2004
- An inhabitant of a former camp
- A Liberian neighbour
- Focus group discussion with former ECOMOG soldiers in a camp
- UNHCR assistant protection officer
- Focus group discussion with LRRRC representatives
- A young Liberian girl
- Older Liberian chief
- A journalist originating from Sierra Leone
- A youth spokesman originating from Sierra Leone
- UNHCR staff members
-

**30 Interviews between May and July 2018 by Julius Togba in Liberian camps in and around Monrovia**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *AFRC* | Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Sierra Leone) | *AFRC* |
| *APC* | All People's Congress (Sierra Leone) | *APC* |
| *CDF* | Civil Defence Forces (Sierra Leone) | *CDF* |
| *ECOMOG* | ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group | *ECOMOG* |
| *ECOWAS* | Economic Community of West African States | *ECOWAS* |
| *IDP* | Internally displaced person | *IDP* |
| *LRRRC* | Liberia Repatriation and Resettlement Commission | *LRRRC* |
| *LURD* | Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy | *LURD* |
| *MRD* | Movement for the Restoration of Democracy | *MRD* |
| *NaCSA* | National Commission for Social Action (Sierra Leone) | *NaCSA* |
| *NGO* | non-governmental organisation | *NGO* |
| *NPFL* | National Patriotic Front of Liberia | *NPFL* |
| *NPRC* | National Provisional Ruling Council (Sierra Leone) | *NPRC* |
| *RUF* | *Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)* | *RUF* |
| *RWC* | Refugee Welfare Committee (for Sierra Leoneans in Liberia) | *RWC* |
| *SLL* | Sierra Leone Leone (currency of Sierra Leone) | *SLL* |
| *SLPP* | Sierra Leone People's Party | *SLPP* |
| *TRC* | Truth and Reconciliation Commission | *TRC* |
| *UNHCR* | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees | *UNHCR* |
| *UNICEF* | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund | *UNICEF* |
| *UNSC* | United Nations Security Council | *UNSC* |
| *USAID* | United States Agency for International Development | *USAID* |

# ANNEX

## Annex

***Historical synopsis: Sierra Leone and Liberia***

| Year | Sierra Leone | Liberia |
|---|---|---|
| *Early history* | The Bulom are the earliest known inhabitants of the territory, with the Krim and Gola people arriving by AD 1400. The Mende and Temne settled in the 15th century, and the Fulani moved into the northern region. | *The Dei, Bassa, Kru, Gola and Kissi are some of the earliest arrivals to the region, around the 12th century. The new inhabitants brought with them skills in cotton spinning, cloth weaving, iron smelting, rice and sorghum cultivation, as well as the social and political institutions of the Mali and Songhai Empires.* |
| *15th century* | Portuguese seafarers explore the coast. Pedro de Cintra gives Sierra Leone its present name and builds a fort on the site of Freetown. Europeans trade along the coast without formally establishing themselves. | |
| *18th century* | In 1787, British abolitionists settle 400 people, formerly slaves, on a strip of land bought from a local chief. Over the following years, more settlers arrive, many of them freed slaves from Jamaica and Nova Scotia. | |
| *1807* | The British parliament declares the slave trade illegal. A British naval station is established at Freetown to intercept slavers continuing to operate; people rescued from the slave-ships are settled in Sierra Leone. | |
| *1808* | Freetown becomes a British colony | |
| *1820* | The American Colonisation Society sends its first envoy to Sierra Leone. | |
| *1821/1822* | | *The American Colonisation Society purchases land in Grand Bassa from tribal leaders for trading goods, supplies, weapons, and rum. Named after US President James Monroe, Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, is founded in 1822.* |
| | | *The American Colonisation Society spearheads the return movement of freed American blacks following the abolition of slavery. The Back to Africa movement is favoured by those who are against black integration in America. Returnees identify themselves as Americo-Liberians. They develop a culture that closely resembles that of the American south, even instituting the notion of racial superiority.* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *1820s* | | *The American Colonisation Society spearheads the return movement of freed American blacks following the abolition of slavery. The Back to Africa movement is favoured by those who are against black integration in America. Returnees identify themselves as Americo- Liberians. They develop a culture that closely resembles that of the American south, even instituting the notion of racial superiority.* |
| *1847* | | *On 26 July 1847, the settlers declare their independence from America and promulgate a Constitution that will last until 1986. The 1847 Constitution, modelled on the US American constitution, establishes the Republic of Liberia as a unitary state.* |
| *1848* | During the 19th century, the colonial rulers forge administrative links with The Gambia, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Lagos in Nigeria. | *Liberia's first elections are held. Joseph Jenkins Roberts becomes Liberia's first President. The minority Americo-Liberians dominate the new government and subjugate the inland ethnic groups. Indigenous Africans do not have the opportunity for citizenship.* |
| *1863* | A legislative council is created. | |
| *1869* | | *The True Whig Party is founded and becomes the dominant political party in Liberia.* |
| *1896* | The coastal and inland areas become a British protectorate. | |
| *1904* | | *Indigenous Africans get the right to citizenship.* |
| *1929* | | *An International Commission report finds that the Liberian officials are profiting from forced labour of the indigenous people.* |
| *1944* | | *William Tubman is elected to the first of his seven presidential terms (until 1971).* |
| *1946* | | *The right to vote and participate in elections is extended to the indigenous property owners and women.* |
| *1956/ 1957* | The progressively enlarged and representative legislative council becomes the House of Representatives. Most men are eligible to vote; women who are tax- payers or own property are also enfranchised. | *During the 1950s, bolstered by the US Lend and Lease and President William Tubman's economic liberalisation policies, Liberia reaches the world's second-highest growth rate. Liberia takes an active role in international affairs as a founding member of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity.* |
| *1958* | | *Racial discrimination is outlawed.* |
| *1961* | A new constitution comes into force, establishing a unicameral parliament and Queen Elizabeth II as sovereign. On that basis, Sierra Leone becomes independent on 27 April 1961. | |
| *1962* | Two main parties share the votes in a multiparty political system. First in office was the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) during 1962-67 under Sir Milton Margai. | |
| | **Coups d'état in Sierra Leone** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *1967/68* | The All People's Congress (APC) under Siaka Stevens wins the 1967 elections. Soon after, Stevens is arrested in a coup. Days later another army coup imposes military rule until the next year. After a further coup, Stevens is reinstated as prime minister. The independence constitution is abrogated during the series of military coups. | |
| *1971* | Sierra Leone creates a new constitution and becomes a republic with Stevens as executive president. | *William R. Tolbert is elected president.* |
| *1973-77* | The SLPP boycotts the general election of 1973. APC wins the election as well as the elections in 1977 after a campaign which sparks violence. | |
| *1978* | A new constitution establishes a one-party state, with the APC as the only recognised party. | |
| | **Rising violence in Sierra Leone and Libeia** | |
| *1979/80* | | *A rally protesting against the increase in rice prices ends in violence and loss of lives. In 1980, a coup led by Samuel K. Doe assassinates President Tolbert and overthrows the government, suspending the constitution. The coup marks the end of Americo-Liberians' political dominance.* |
| *1981-84* | Single-party elections in 1982 are once again violent. | *Doe and his cohorts form the People's Redemption Council and suspend the 1847 constitution. The new constitution increases the President's term from four to six years and removes the prohibition against military personnel being members of government. Provisions establishing two autonomous agencies to approve judicial candidates and investigate corruption are deleted. On 3 July 1984, the new constitution is approved in a referendum with 78.3 per cent of votes.* |
| *1985* | Major-General Joseph Momoh succeeds Stevens as president. | *The new constitution establishes the second Liberian Republic, and Samuel K. Doe is elected Liberia's first indigenous president. The International Community does not endorse the election, and internal actors see it as a sham designed to legitimise the Doe regime. Nevertheless, Doe's government becomes a strategic ally to the US from whom it received significant financial backing.* |
| *1986* | | *Internal resistance fuels a failed coup by a founding member of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF). In response, Doe adopts reactionary measures that set the country on the path of internal conflict.* |
| | | **Civil war in Liberia** |
| *1989* | Economic conditions deteriorate during the 1980s. Demands for constitutional reform are rising. The government sets up a constitutional review commission. | *Charles Taylor, a former member of the Doe government, launches an attack that develops into an uprising leading to the First Liberian Civil War.* |
| *1990* | | *Rebels publicly execute Doe. Infighting within the rebel movement leads to a split that prolongs the conflict to 1997 and attracts the intervention of peacekeepers of the Economic Coalition of Western African States (ECOWAS).* |

| | Civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia |
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| *1991* | The recommendation by the constitutional review commission to return to a multiparty democratic system is overwhelmingly endorsed in a referendum in August 1991. The new constitution marks a return to a multiparty system, though the country remains a republic with an executive presidency. An army coup interrupts the implementation of this constitution. The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) becomes the governing body and rules by decree. Violence from a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), that started in March escalates. Liberian rebels with whom the RUF is loosely allied make incursions into southern and eastern Sierra Leone. |
| *1992-94* | Captain Valentine Strasser takes control after a coup by junior army officers. The constitution is suspended. The war escalates. Strasser hires white South-African mercenaries, the 'Executive Outcomes', to defend Sierra Leone's diamond mines and to support the armed forces. The army also cooperates with the *Kamajors*, groups of armed men stemming mostly from the Mende-speaking eastern region of Sierra Leone. Many educated members of the *Kamajors* engage in the war against the RUF after undergoing an initiation ritual to become 'bullet-proof'. |
| *1995/96* | Despite air and ground support from Nigeria and troops provided by Guinea, by 1995 the government only controls the capital Freetown. In January 1996, Strasser is overthrown by his deputy Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. The 1991 constitution is restored, returning the country to a multiparty system with an executive presidency and a unicameral legislature. Parliamentary and presidential elections are held in February 1996. The SLPP candidate, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah wins and is sworn in as president in March 1996. In November, talks between the government and RUF leader Corporal Foday Sankoh reach an agreement to end the war. The agreement allows the RUF to register as a political party and permits it access to the media. The war has displaced two million people and caused over 10,000 deaths. RUF leader Sankoh is arrested while on a visit to Nigeria. |
| *1997* | In May 1997, a military coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma overthrows the Kabbah government. The deputy minister of defence mobilises a vast but untrained civil defence force (*Kamajors*) to oppose the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the military junta. In October, ECOWAS brokerage leads to a deal in Conakry, Guinea, in which the AFRC regime agrees with exiled president Kabbah to a six-month transition to restore the legitimate civilian government. Apart from a few skirmishes in the area of the diamond mines, the transitional period starts peacefully. |

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| *1998* | In February, renewed fighting breaks out between Nigerian-led peacekeeping troops of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and Koroma's forces in Freetown. A few days later, ECOMOG forces capture Freetown and detain many members of the military regime, though not Koroma. After nine months in exile in Conakry, President Kabbah returns to Freetown in March 1998. Parliament reconvenes with about half of its members. Within a few days, thousands of people return to their homes in Freetown. In July, the UN agrees to establish an observer mission to monitor the military and security situation in the country and to advise the government on rebuilding the police and security forces. Sankoh is returned to Freetown from detention in Lagos to face charges of treason. He is sentenced to death in October. On news of Sankoh's death sentence, RUF and AFRC rebels launch a brutal campaign in towns and villages they rapidly take over as they advance on Freetown. In the southern and eastern regions, the *Kamajor* committed disproportionate levels of violations against people of northern origin, among them Temne, Koranko, Loko, Limba and Yalunka. | |
| *1999* | In January, Nigerian troops halt the rebels' advance close to the capital. A peace agreement is signed in July, which includes a power-sharing arrangement between Kabbah and the RUF, annulment of Sankoh's death sentence and the release of those sentenced for their role in the 1997 coup. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommends the deployment of 6,000 troops to Sierra Leone to guarantee the peace agreement. UN peacekeepers proceed with disarming rebel troops and take control over a growing area of the country. | *The newly formed rebel group of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) launches an armed insurrection against Taylor's government sparking off the Second Liberian Civil War.* |
| *2000/01* | International troops are increased to 11,000 after the departure of ECOMOG. In May 2000, as the UN peacekeepers move into the diamond-producing region and begin to demobilise the rebels; the peace agreement collapses. The rebels take 500 UN troops hostage, and fighting resumes between the Sierra Leonean Army and the rebels. Power-sharing ceases. Sankoh is arrested. The hostages are released unharmed. In July, the UN resolves to ban trade in uncut diamonds from Sierra Leone until the government has established an authentication system. However, the illicit trade continues into 2001. | *The United Nations imposes a ban on exports of diamonds from Liberia to stem the flow of "blood diamonds", which helped to fund the civil war.* |
| *2002* | In the presidential and parliamentary elections in May, Kabbah and the SLPP win a landslide victory, with about 70 per cent of the votes in the presidential election and winning 83 of the 112 parliamentary seats. The RUF Party fails to secure any seat. The election observers say that the conditions enabled the will of the people to be expressed. The legislature comprises 112 directly elected candidates from 14 constituencies and 12 paramount chiefs. | |

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| *2003* | | *The armed Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MDL) supports LURD's war and launches attacks against Taylor in a battle to conquer Monrovia. In July, Taylor is accused of war crimes. ECOWAS provides peacekeepers to Liberia. Under pressure from the International Community as well as armed groups and civil society organisations within Liberia, Taylor resigns in August 2003 and goes into exile in Nigeria. International peacekeepers arrive and sign a deal with the rebels. In October, a UN Mission is established in Liberia, and an interim government is formed. The two successive civil wars have left more than 200,000 dead, displaced hundreds of thousands and shattered the country's economy and infrastructure.* |
| | **Return to peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia** | |
| *2004/05* | In June, special courts with Sierra Leonean and UN-appointed judges begin trying those accused of war crimes both on government and rebel sides of the civil war. | *The United Nations establishes a mission in Liberia, and an interim government takes control in October.* |
| *2005* | | *New elections, considered by many as the country's most credible elections, make Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Africa's first female president. She is head of the Unity Party.* |
| *2006* | | *The government sets up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate allegations of human rights crimes and causes of war crimes between 1979 and 2003.* |
| *2007* | In the parliamentary elections in August, the APC is the strongest party with 59 seats, the SLPP wins 43 seats and the People's Movement for Democratic Change 10. APC leader Ernest Bai Koroma wins the presidential election with 44 per cent of votes. In the second round, Koroma receives 54.6 per cent of votes and is sworn in as president. Commonwealth observers report that the elections have been conducted in a democratic, credible and professional way in accordance with internationally accepted standards. | *Charles Taylor's war crimes trial starts in The Hague, where he stands accused of instigating atrocities in Sierra Leone. The UN Security Council lifts its ban on Liberian diamond exports.* |
| *2009/10* | | *President Johnson Sirleaf admits to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that she mistakenly backed ex-President Charles Taylor when he launched the 14-year civil war in 1989. The commission submits its report to parliament, recommends prosecuting 200 people and listing others who should be barred from public office, including President Johnson Sirleaf. The United Nations Security Council votes to extend the mandate of UN forces in Liberia (UNMIL) into 2010 to assist in the organisation of the 2011 elections.* |
| *2011* | | *Presidential candidate Johnson Sirleaf wins her second term. Her main rival boycotts the second election round claiming fraud.* |

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| *2012* | Presidential, parliamentary and local council elections are held in November. President Koroma is re-elected with 58.7 per cent of the votes cast. His main challenger, the SLPP's candidate Julius Maada Bio, receives 37.4 per cent. In the parliamentary elections, the APC secures 67 of 112 directly elective seats and the SLPP 42. The Commonwealth observers conclude that the organisation and conduct of these elections have met international standards for free and transparent multiparty elections. | *Ex-president Charles Taylor is found guilty of war crimes for aiding and directing rebels in Sierra Leone. The International Criminal Court in The Hague sentences him to 50 years in jail. The government initiates a process to review the country's constitution. The process has to address the lack of faith many Liberians have in the government. Successive Liberian governments have been riddled with corruption. Embezzlement of public funds has resulted in citizen resentment in meeting their tax obligations and distrust of the government. There is a need to empower the citizenry, especially women groups, to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the process. The proposed amendments, once approved by the legislature will be put to a referendum vote, following a period of public review and input.* |
| *2013* | | *UNHCR completes a programme that helped more than 155,000 Liberians to return home, hailing it as evidence of the return of peace after the civil war.* |
| *2016* | | *UNMIL hand back responsibility for security to the country's army and police. The mission was first deployed in 2003.* |
| *2017* | | *George Weah (Congress for Democratic Change Party) is elected president with 61.5 per cent of second-round votes. His party wins 21 of 73 parliamentary seats.* |
| *2018* | General elections are held in Sierra Leone to elect the president, parliament and local councils. President Maada Bio (SLPP) wins the election run-off and becomes president. | |

*Sources:* HRW, 1993; The Commonwealth, 2018; Constitution.net., 2016; BBC News, 2018; Shaw, 2003.

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