

CONFLICT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

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Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Contexts Programme

This report summarizes findings from a situation analysis undertaken as part of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, funded by the Government of the Netherlands. The purpose of the research was to examine the role of education in consolidating peace in Sierra Leone and provide a robust, comprehensive and systematic situation analysis as a basis for country-specific education programming.

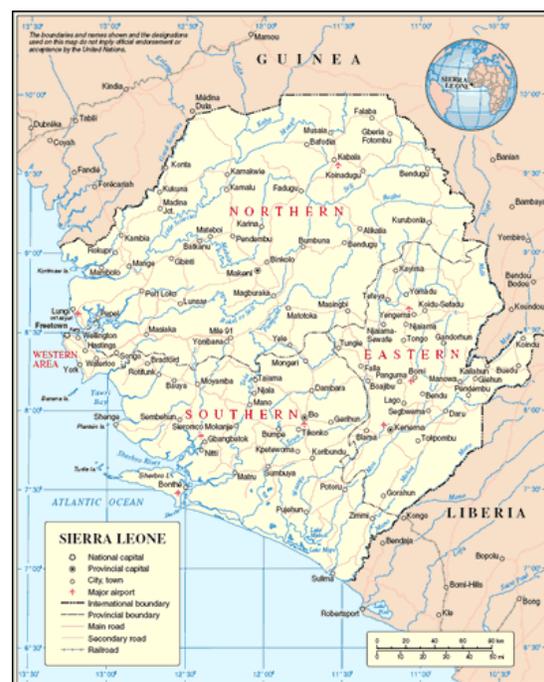
The PBEA programme, 2012-2016, seeks to build peaceful societies by strengthening the role of education in peacebuilding and integrating peacebuilding within the education system.

Methodology

The situation analysis began with a mapping of conflict analyses and other key peacebuilding documents. Subsequently, workshops were held with stakeholders in the capital city of Freetown and in Bo, Kono, Port Loko and Pujehun to capture geographical variations in experience and perception of conflict dynamics as well as to identify peacebuilding recommendations. Information was also gathered from consultations with conflict, peace and security specialists, and focus group discussions with children and youth across the country.

Context

Sierra Leone's transition from colonial rule to independence did not significantly alter its pattern of uneven development, which was based on rural resource extraction channelled through urban centres of administration and trade. Equitable and sustainable economic development and democratic governance were precluded by the autocratic rule of President Siaka Stevens and his All People's Congress, coupled with corruption that undermined both public office and private enterprise. Young people were organized into paramilitaries and hired to enforce a lucrative informal economy and regulate, through intimidation, any social, political or economic threats.



Resistance to the regime was tied to the rise in student radicalism, which attracted support from Libya and resulted in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) being able to establish a military presence in the mining hinterlands and border regions of Sierra Leone. A large portion of the RUF's 'recruits' were adolescents and children who were forcibly abducted and trained in 'bush camps' or in village primary schools that had been commandeered by the rebels.

Stevens' successor as President, Joseph Saidu Momoh, was ejected from power by a coup that established the National Provisional Ruling Council junta. As the war progressed, atrocities and violence against civilians became more commonplace and were perpetrated by both rebels and government soldiers. This led to the emergence of the Civil Defence Force, established to protect villages from the outrages of the RUF. When the National Provisional Ruling Council relinquished power due to, among other factors, ongoing pressure from women's civil society groups, the newly elected President, Tejan Kabbah, assisted in modernizing the Civil Defence Force with more support and resources. Diplomatic pressure and sanctions brought the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council/RUF junta to the negotiating table, and the Conakry Peace Plan was signed in late 1997.

Underlying causes and dynamics of conflict

Since the war officially ended, in January 2002, there have been two national elections without any large-scale violence. However, many of the conflict dynamics that spurred the civil war are still present in Sierra Leone. The following underlying causes and dynamics of conflict were identified in prior analyses – and in national and regional workshops – as key factors that could impact long-term prospects for sustainable peace and social cohesion. Participants in all workshops and consultations drew attention to the many ways in which education underpinned these conflict dynamics.

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

- **Cross-border vulnerabilities:** The porous borders, and the influence of outside forces and conflicts in neighbouring countries, especially Liberia, has historically been a major conflict driver in Sierra Leone.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Weak governance:** Patrimonial and corrupt government systems in which power and access to resources depend on personal connections contribute to an overall perception of injustice. A lack of transparency in government decision-making further impairs trust and confidence between the State and its citizens. Children and youth cited the confusing system of tertiary education scholarships for girls as an example where the education system lacks transparency and is not properly communicated to potential recipients. Widespread illiteracy disempowers women and men from various forms of economic, social and political inclusion.
- **Tribal and regional sectarianism:** Marginalization in rural areas and between regions creates tensions and weakens the development of national unity. The curriculum prior to the conflict failed to contribute to social cohesion and did not allow for patriotic attachment or the celebration of tribal diversity.

- **Inequitable distribution of social services:** Massive regional disparities in social services, particularly education, created an imbalance of power in Sierra Leonean society. The elitist and exclusive nature of education, rooted in the colonial system, combined with the uneven provision of resources and services that favoured Freetown and the western part of the country, have been a key factor in driving conflict. Continued inequality in access to and quality of education for poor people, as well as a curriculum that does not reflect the country's needs, is a source of resentment. Increasing concerns include the lack of access to services for children and young people with disabilities, and the growth of private schooling that marginalizes those that cannot afford to pay.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Poverty and inequitable economic development:** Lack of systematic vocational and skills training, and a mismatch between the education system and local economic needs have resulted in large numbers of dropouts and left many young people unemployed. This is exacerbated by large populations of ex-combatants, many without jobs or education, who fall prey to divisive political groups. Many young people in the conflict analysis workshops called for diversified educational opportunities that could prepare them to become engineers, to develop skills in diamond cutting and polishing, and to be able to attend local tertiary institutions.

SOCIAL ISSUES

- **Youth alienation:** The inability to meet the educational needs and aspirations of young people, including involving them meaningfully in political processes and decision making and preparing them for employment, results in the feeling that they have no stake in the system. Alienated and uneducated youth are potentially drawn to violence, constituting an ongoing threat to security. Through consultations, young people explicitly linked their transition to adulthood, independence, self-esteem and peaceful citizenship to opportunities for education.
- **Poor quality and relevance of education:** An overly academic curriculum, centrally driven and with insufficient regional flexibility, is a source of frustration. The absence of civic, peace, human rights education and political literacy underpins exclusion and prevents individuals and communities from taking ownership of their environment and exercising peaceful citizenship.
- **Social norms related to violence:** Sierra Leonean society is permeated by a culture of violence, including high rates of gender-based violence. Despite new laws and the Code of Conduct for Teachers, violence also permeates the school system, and corporal punishment remains commonplace. The prevalence of violence on sports days and an emerging gang culture within secondary schools and higher education are also a concern.
- **Marginalization of women and girls:** Women are marginalized by structural injustices that deny them access to education, land ownership, credit and marketable skills. As a result, many women are illiterate and resort to petty trading activities with low earnings potential. Gender inequities in access to education exclude girls from developing the skills and values to challenge exclusion and discrimination in civic, social and economic domains.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- **Exploitation of natural resources:** Natural resources in the country are exploited and leveraged for private gain and, historically, to support conflict. Lack of local, skilled technicians and mining experts leaves little room for economic development at the local level. Participants in the workshops called for education that empowers them to enter into consultations with extractive companies and government representatives about the impact of resource extraction and the potential benefits to local communities.

The role of education in peacebuilding

Prior to the conflict, the poor quality of education service provision had a key role in fostering individual grievances and undermining state-society relations. The collapse of the education system at the onset of the war resulted in school closures, absent or unpaid teachers and widespread strikes. As teachers expressed their feelings of being neglected and abused by the Government, young people also felt excluded and angry, increasing their likelihood to be mobilized into violent action or recruited into armed groups. Limited access to education led to high rates of illiteracy and fewer opportunities for developing values conducive to peace, which further contributed to social disintegration.

Since the end of the war, Sierra Leone has made substantial progress towards improving the education system. The Education Act (2004) declared free basic education for all and helped achieve gender parity in primary schooling. The Government, in partnership with the United Nations and others, decentralized basic education to local councils and school committees and invested in rebuilding infrastructure to increase access. There is also a new focus on distance learning to accelerate education for out-of-school youth and to increase the number of qualified teachers.

Contributions to the development of child-friendly schooling include the Child Rights Act, 2007, which abolished corporal punishment in school, and the establishment of the Code of Conduct for Teachers and Other Education Personnel in Sierra Leone, in 2009. The creation of the National Youth Commission and skills training programmes have supported relevant education for young people who are seeking economic opportunities. The country also developed an education sector white paper, which outlines a vision for addressing inequities and quality issues, and, in 2013, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology released the national Education Sector Plan for 2014–2018. These steps are enormously important in the movement towards consolidating peace and improving education quality and service delivery across the country.

Nonetheless, corruption in the education system and inequitable access to quality, relevant education remain threats to peace in Sierra Leone. There are still areas where students cannot access free education, and fee subsidies or scholarships do not arrive in time for enrolment, causing financial hardship in families. More private schools are opening, causing renewed resentment from those who can only afford public education, which is seen as substandard. Some teachers are still not on payroll, and there is an overall lack of transparency in the school system, creating the impression that the old, exclusionary system is still predominant.

Peacebuilding entry points in education and learning

Political and policy responses

- **Support curriculum reform:** Develop a curriculum that contributes to peace consolidation, improves the relationship between government and society, and addresses the social, economic and political drivers of conflict. A reformed curriculum should encompass life skills (behavioural and psychosocial education) and employability skills, as well as citizenship and peace education, including awareness of land rights and use, corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability. Employability components should aim to build locally relevant skills and enterprise development that engages the private sector and communities in planning and delivery. Curriculum reform should also promote gender equality and celebrate the cultural and ethnic diversity of Sierra Leone, especially through the arts.
- **Strengthen education programmes for teachers:** Provide training to support teachers to implement the curriculum, and develop pedagogic strategies to engage children and young people in peacebuilding education.
- **Develop stronger cross-sector partnerships:** Consult with government ministries and engage partners across sectors. These partnerships should involve the security sector, corporations, the private sector and community development agencies, as well as Sierra Leone's Human Rights Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Youth Commission. Expand opportunities for dialogue among parliamentarians and elders, youth, and local communities.

Structural reforms

- **Improve equity of service delivery:** Ensure equitable distribution of schools, particularly for higher education, a better distribution of trained teachers, and improved distribution of scholarships to promote equitable education service delivery.
- **Strengthen localized planning:** Empower community school committees to make changes to the curricula that will ensure it is relevant to the community's needs, especially regarding development of employability skills.

Individual and interpersonal changes

- **Provide educational programmes that aim to reach mothers and young children:** These programmes should provide learning opportunities for young mothers that combine literacy, life skills and marketable skills training with parenting education. In addition, it is important to invest in early childhood education that will help young children develop the values, attitudes and behaviours that are conducive to peace.
- **Provide educational opportunities for out-of-school youth:** Provide targeted and flexible education programmes for out-of-school youth focusing on literacy, numeracy, life skills, work-related learning, agricultural skills, and technical and vocational education.
- **Reduce violence in schools:** Enforce the Code of Conduct for Teachers and Other Education Personnel. Provide teachers with training in non-violent behaviour management and conflict-resolution strategies. Integrate gender-responsive pedagogic strategies in teachers' training programmes and classrooms.