The reintegration of child ex-combatants in Sierra Leone with particular focus on the needs of females.

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<td>AfC</td>
<td>Action for Children in Conflict</td>
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<td>CAW</td>
<td>Children Associated with War</td>
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<td>CDF</td>
<td>Civil Defence Force</td>
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<td>CSUCS</td>
<td>Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers</td>
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<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum for African Women’s Educationalists</td>
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<td>NaCSA</td>
<td>National Commission for Social Action</td>
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<td>NCDDR</td>
<td>National Commission for Demobilisation, Demilitarisation and Reintegration</td>
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<td>NCRRRR</td>
<td>National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation</td>
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<td>PHR</td>
<td>Physicians for Human Rights</td>
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<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front</td>
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<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Army</td>
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<td>UNGASS</td>
<td>UN General Assembly Special Session on Children</td>
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<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>UNAMSIL</td>
<td>United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone</td>
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This dissertation aims to discover the reintegration needs of children who were separated from their families and recruited into armed groups during the conflict in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. The research was carried out in Freetown with a group of 60 ex-child soldiers.

Professionals in the field expected to find that the reintegration needs of female and males would differ. One of the aims of this research was to discover if this was so and in what way.

There is less literature on female child soldiers and separated girls and consequently less is known about their experiences so another aim of this dissertation was to provide more information.

The research was carried out by interview. Respondents were asked how they felt about living in Freetown and how they imagined life would be back in their home villages and towns; Where they wanted to continue to live and why; How they felt about their place in the society of Sierra Leone; What their basic medical and educational needs were and what they needed in order to have a good life.

Interviews were also carried out with key informants in the government, UN and NGO’s in Freetown to find out what they felt needed to be done to successfully reintegrate these young people with particular reference to females and their children.
The research collected from the male and female respondents is then compared. This provides information on the consequences of the sexual violence during the conflict and how this affects the reintegration of females. It also shows the inequality of females in terms of educational opportunities and access to reintegration resources thus identifying areas for resources to be targeted.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people for their support. Peter Tyrer, Chief Executive of Action for Children in Conflict for offering me the chance to visit their project in Freetown. Jane Bass an AfC volunteer in Freetown for arranging interviews with young people and key informants and for her enthusiasm and commitment to the project. Aiah Kungbana, for arranging ten young men for me to interview at a moments notice, for interpreting and for looking after me in Freetown. Mike Gaouette and Sarah Uppard from Save the Children (UK) for taking me seriously and making the time to discuss the project. My friends Kathryn Harriss and David Burfoot for their valuable feedback. My boss Paul Hill for giving me extra time off to go to Sierra Leone. My uncle Garry Madlin for his love and support. Giorgia Dona for her enthusiasm and support.
Dedicated to the memory of my father

David Bennett.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to the Children’s Legal Centre the number of children recruited into armed forces over the last 40 years has increased and their ages have decreased. They estimate that 300,000 children are involved in armed forces in over 30 conflicts, the majority of whom were forced to join. Children are vulnerable to recruitment because of a lack of adults available or willing to fight and because weapons have become lighter and can now be carried by children as young as 10. They are considered to be more compliant and aggressive fighters by some commanders.

These children are physically and mentally scarred by their experiences and find it difficult to reintegrate into communities that fear and in some cases detest them. They become a danger to fragile peace deals as they have no place in society and know nothing but violence as a way of life.

At the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (UNGASS) Kofi Annan appealed to the delegates,

“The plight of child soldiers is an issue that concerns all of us, wherever we may live… For far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognised as intolerable… to call on the parties in conflicts to take responsibility for demobilising child soldiers, rehabilitating them and reintegrating them into society. . . to put parties to conflict on notice that the use of child soldiers will carry consequences…to call for the
The implementation of…the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child” (CSUCS Newsletter 2002 p1)

The Optional Protocol (OP), agreed on 21st January 2000 prohibits the use of children under 18 in armed conflict. They are not to be deployed by State parties or non-state rebel groups and to do so would be a criminal act. In reality the OP is not enough to prevent the use of child soldiers. Harvey (2000) is only too aware that,

“If victory or survival are at stake, then rebel leaders are likely to add one more grave breach to their list of war crimes rather than to honour an obligation they have under international law” (Harvey 2000 p163)

However, for insurgents hoping for international attention and solidarity it could prevent them from recruiting younger children who could be passed off as 15 but not 18 and Harvey thinks that states will find it difficult to disregard. Clara Otunnu, the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict said the OP can achieve,

“…the mobilisation of a major movement of international pressure to lean on parties in conflict that are currently abusing children as combatants.” (Otunnu in Harvey (2000) p 164)

History of the conflict in Sierra Leone

At the beginning of the 1990’s Sierra Leone had suffered many years of corrupt and brutal government. The Revolutionary United Front, (RUF) a rebel group led by Foday Sankoh began its attacks on the country from its base in Liberia. From the beginning the actions of the RUF were marked by their brutal attacks on civilians and abductions of children.

Into the conflict came the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) many of whom became disaffected, committed attacks against civilians and forcibly recruited
children. In response to attacks from the RUF and the SLA local Kamajor (Mende for hunter) militias, also known as the Civil Defence Force (CDF), were created to protect towns and villages. While some boys joined these forces willingly, some were coerced to join by local chiefs.

On January 6th 1999 the RUF forces invaded Freetown inflicting a brutal wave of terror on its residents. People in Freetown now refer to the invasion as January 6th in much the same way as Americans refer to 9/11. The rebels were eventually pushed out of Freetown by West African forces and a cease fire and eventual peace settlement was negotiated in Lome, Togo in July 1999.

The UN established a peace keeping mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) which grew to be the largest in the world. In May 2001 the RUF and CDF signed an agreement to end hostilities. Disarmament has slowly progressed across the country.

**Involvement of children in armed groups in Sierra Leone**

At any time during this conflict it is estimated that 5,000 children were involved with armed groups. They were recruited by all the armed forces taking part. The National Commission for Demobilisation, Demilitarisation and Reintegration have registered almost 7,000 children for reintegration and there are many more who have bypassed formal DDR processes, especially girls who have not been eligible for DDR or not been released from armed forces for reasons which will be explained.
Humanitarian and gender issues in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is the least developed country in the world according to the United Nations Human Development Index. One-third of children die before the age of 5, the highest infant mortality rate in the world. Life expectancy is 38, the lowest in the world. Sierra Leone also has the world's highest maternal mortality rate. 68% of adults are illiterate (PHR 2002). Women are discriminated against in all forms of law, English, Islamic and Customary. Inheritance practices discriminate against widows. Non-war related rape and violence against women, is extremely high. Girl have less access to education than boys as it is assumed they will take the role of housewives and mothers only. Thousands of women and girls have suffered rape and sexual assault as these practices were widely adopted by all fighting forces involved in the conflict.

Aims and Objectives

Much of the information collected about child soldiers concentrates on their experiences with the armed forces and most focuses on the experiences of boys and young men. After consulting Sarah Uppard co-author of “Children Not Soldiers” (SCF UK), it became clear that the reintegration of separated girls is a subject under researched. The aim of this study was therefore to look at the reintegration needs of such girls. At the same time the NGO Action for Children in Conflict (AfC) were working in Freetown with a group of separated girls and
young women who are mostly ex-combatants. AfC felt that a comparative study of male and female ex-combatants needs for reintegration would be useful to them.

Since the Abuja Accord in November 2000, Sierra Leone has had to deal with the enormous problem of reintegrating large numbers of children and young people who were either abducted by rebel and government forces or who joined the local Kamajor militias.

This study attempted to document the views of 60 children and young people in Freetown who had experienced life with armed forces and were looking forward to establishing themselves as citizens of the country. The overall aim was to collect information concerning their aspirations for the future and their immediate and long term needs for a happy and successful life. One issue of particular interest in this research was the comparison between female and male participants and how any differences impact on their reintegration experience and needs.

As this research project has been supported by AfC another aim is to help strengthen their lobbying power with the Sierra Leonean government. AfC currently works with around 50 girls and young women and their children in Freetown. AfC staff have noticed resentment among their beneficiaries who feel that government resources are being targeted at male ex-combatants in order to encourage them to leave the city.

As the government wants ex-combatants to return to their rural communities another aim of this project is to find out how the young people feel
about leaving the city, what would make them more willing to return to their communities and why they tend to stay in the city.

**Methodology**

**Selection of participants**

The total number of girls and young women interviewed was 27. The total number of boys and young men was 33. Their ages can be seen in table 1. In addition to these there was 1 boy aged 8, one woman aged 37 and one woman whose age was not recorded.

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*Table 1. Ages of participants.*
One group of female interviewees were AfC beneficiaries. Another group of came from the Forum for African Women’s Educationalists. They had been engaged in a programme working with girls and women who had suffered rape during the war. A third group of females came from an NGO called GOAL working in Freetown with commercial sex workers. Males were recruited with the help of an AfC employee Aiah Kungbana who found a group of ten males he
knew had been involved in armed forces. Another group of 20 males came from an organisation called Children Associated with War which was situated close to AfC’s offices in Freetown and with whom AfC had close contacts. All young people were invited to participate and volunteered to do so.

![Aiah Kungbana and the group of young men he organised](image)

It might have been possible to interview a group of amputees associated with CAW. After meeting them it became clear they had had a lot of media attention and felt resentful that they had been used to call attention to the conflict but had not received any help as a result. It was decided not to make any requests of them.
Key Informants

Interviews were arranged with the following staff of Government agencies, United Nations Offices and NGOs.

- Eric Jumu, Project Officer, NaCSA
- Sahid Abu-Dingie, Programme Associate for the Support to Resettlement and Reintegration Programme, NaCSA
- Prince Kamara, Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, NaCSA
- Rumiko Seya, Reintegration Assistant, DDR Co-ordination Section, United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)
- Glennis Taylor, Assistant Project Officer, Child Protection, UNICEF.
- Abu Kokofele, Programme Officer, Training Sector, Save the Children (UK) Freetown.
- Heidi Zwick Senior Social Worker, Irish NGO GOAL.

These staff members were interviewed with a set of questions (see appendix). The areas covered by these questions were;

- The problems encountered when reintegrating child ex-combatants
- Problems for girls and women in reintegration
- Needs of females for successful reintegration
- How females and males reintegration needs differ
 Issues for children born in conflict

 How ex-combatants could be encourage to return to their homes

**National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)**

**Government of Sierra Leone.**

The National Commission for Social Action was formed when the mandate for the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) expired on 23rd November 2001. NaCSA’s role is to take the work of NCRRR in relief and reconstruction through to development and effective and sustainable reintegration. NaCSA works through three programmes. The Community Based Programme, the Public Works Programme and the Micro-Finance Programme.

They provide financial support to;

- Health clinics and primary schools
- Vocational skills centres
- Water and sanitation systems
- Community centres
- Local markets
- Rural infrastructure and agriculture
- Aid in the re-establishment of local government
United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(UNOCHA)

UNOCHA co-ordinate all humanitarian work being done in Sierra Leone with internally displaced people and people in refugee camps in Liberia and they work closely with NaCSA on their reintegration and reconstruction programmes.

UNICEF

UNICEF co-ordinate all efforts by agencies to reintegrate ex-child soldiers (those under 18). They established the interim care centres (ICCs) across the country and support children there with schooling or training. They also co-ordinate repatriation and family reunification programmes and find foster homes for children who cannot be reunited with their families. UNICEF works with the ministry of education to provide schooling for demobilised children.

UNAMSIL

UNAMSIL’s DDR co-ordination section work with government agencies, NGOs and community based organisations to support the work of
reintegrating the 70,000 demobilised combatants registered for formal DDR. 70% of their work is with ex-combatants and 30% with other IDPs. They are also involved in peace building initiatives working with young people up to the age of 30. This initiative will be run using peace camps to help build the confidence and self esteem of the beneficiaries.

GOAL

GOAL is an Irish NGO funded by UNICEF which works in Freetown. They have a project for street boys under the age of 18 and a project for sexually abused girls who are mostly engaged in commercial sex work. They work with 400 girls and women from the age of 12 – 30. They offer non-formal education, advocacy, social work, counselling, family tracing and reintegration, a medical programme covering primary health care and health education and they also offer recreational opportunities organising football matches against the girls from other projects.

The Forum for African Women’s Educationalists (FAWE)

FAWE is a pan-African organisation which promotes education for girls. They set up a project after the January 6th 1999 invasion of Freetown to provide
medical services and counselling to women and girls who were raped during the conflict. They have carried out extensive community sensitisation work to encourage a more positive attitude to women who have had babies as a result of rape. They offer skills training, education, parenting skills and medical care for children.

**Save The Children (UK) Freetown.**

SCF (UK) work with ex-combatant and separated children through UNICEF coordinated reintegration projects. They feature in the ICCs across the country and carry out community sensitisation work where there is resistance to accepting these young people back. They are also concerned with providing recreational facilities to the returning young people starting with a centre in Daru which offers library facilities.

**Action for Children in Conflict (AfC).**

AfC work with conflict survivors when they settle in Britain and in their countries of origin. They use volunteers from Britain to work on projects overseas and provide employment for local people as field workers and office staff. They are hoping to expand their project in Sierra Leone from Freetown to the rural areas.
Children Associated with War (CAW)

CAW are funded by Cause Canada and have been working with separated children in Freetown offering skills training and support to young males. They supported AfC in setting up their office in Freetown. CAW are associated with the Single-Legged Amputee Sport Club of Sierra Leone which was founded in the Murray Town Amputee Camp in Freetown.

The questions

The areas of interest were established in discussion with Peter Tyrer of AfC and Sarah Uppard of Save the Children (UK). As the government of Sierra Leone wants to disperse people from urban areas the first series of questions covered where respondents wanted to live and why and what would convince them to return to their home areas.

Because girls were thought to suffer from stigma related to sexual violence the second area for questions concerned identity and how respondents felt about their position in society.

Peter reported that many of AfC’s beneficiaries in Freetown were resentful that they were not receiving services available to the male ex-
combatant population. The third area covered access to services particularly medical and educational.

Finally Peter felt it would be useful to record the aspirations of respondents and ask them what they needed in order for them to be realised. The answers of males and females would be compared to see if, as expected, there were differences.

**Interpreting**

Although some participants spoke English most spoke Krio which is a mixture of English, French and African languages. Aiah Kungbana interpreted for his group and was paid for doing so. One of the young men from CAW was paid to interpret for their group.

It was suggested by AfC staff that females would be content to have a male interpreter so no female interpreter had been arranged. When asked, the females from FAWE said they were uncomfortable with a male interpreter so a female employee of AfC provided interpretation for the FAWE and AfC groups. Heidi Zwick, manager of the project for commercial sex workers in Freetown insisted that her staff, who were all male, provide interpreting for that group.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

There are a number of areas of research relevant to this study. Research has been done on reintegration of separated children and child soldiers and war related sexual violence. There are also relevant reports from government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs.

Child Soldiers

Skinner (1999) examined continent-wide issues related to the militarisation of young people. He states that girl fighters are increasingly common and that the conflict in Sierra Leone is one of the worst for its use of child soldiers. Approximately half of RUF forces were aged 14 and Skinner states that many children join up in order to feed and clothe themselves or for educational opportunities. Skinner’s article refers to the rape of female child soldiers, abortions and childbearing. In his recommendations for reintegration, basic needs such as food and shelter along with education, economic opportunity, counselling and family reunion were mentioned. Reproductive health care for females was not mentioned.
Machel too (1996) refers to poverty and how it makes children particularly vulnerable to recruitment during conflicts. Some armed forces pay a small wage to the family. Poverty makes children vulnerable to recruitment into armed forces but also underpins their experience of reintegration.

Many children in fighting forces have committed atrocities against the civilian populations that the reintegration programmes hope will receive them after DDR. Skinner refers to the stigmatisation of child soldiers as “barbarians” (Skinner 1999 p 9) due to the violence they inflict on others. This is confirmed by Peters (2000). He sees the colonial based attitudes of the urban elite in Freetown to people from the interior rural communities as another cause. Peters article is not balanced however, he quotes three male ex-combatants and no females on their attitudes towards the future of Sierra Leone.

Peters repeats this imbalance in an article with Paul Richards (1998) published by Save the Children in “Rethinking the Trauma of War”. This article reproduces interviews with child ex-combatants which can be compared directly with interviews done for the purposes of this study. The main thrust of their argument is that many children join armed forces as a rational choice given the limited possibilities open to them for survival. Of the respondents for this study only those who joined the Civil Defence Force said they joined willingly.

One similarity between their findings and the findings of this study is the importance ex-combatant young people place on education. Peters and Richards argue that lack of educational opportunity is a major cause for young people joining armed groups. Failure to address their educational aspirations
they argue, not only caused their recruitment but also prolonged the conflict. All the respondents for Peters and Richards’ article expressed a desire for further education or training. 57 out of 60 respondents interviewed for this study did too.

Peters and Richards reproduce five interviews they recorded with young ex-combatants. Four of the five are male and the one female followed her boyfriend into combat willingly. She is not representative of the 27 young women and girls interviewed for this study who all reported being abducted by armed forces.

Peters and Richards end by arguing against “Undue focus on victim trauma” (Peters and Richards 1998 p110) referring to psycho-social programmes and for reintegration programmes that focus on educational and economic opportunity. While these are important Peters and Richards may have come to a different conclusion had they attempted to discover the views of females who had been with armed groups and who had suffered systematic rape at their hands. They may have decided that programmes that deal with the psychological and social trauma of rape and its consequences have a value beyond that which they say “merely sugars the pill” (Peters and Richards 1998 p110). Physicians for Human Rights asked women in Sierra Leone what they felt they needed to help their state of mind and found that 72% wanted mental health counselling. (PHR 2002 p45)

Mazurana and McKay (2001) lay out some of the statistics. They state that most international reports of initiatives refer only to boys. They found that
DDR programmes rarely include girls and refer to Sierra Leone where the RUF/AFRC recently released 1,213 children from its forces and although 30% of RUF’s total forces are girls only 15 girls were among the released children. This assertion is backed by Save the Children (McConnan and Uppard 2001) They agree that girls have less access to DDR programmes and the benefits that go with them. Sometimes in order to qualify for DDR programmes it is necessary to hand in a weapon. This excludes girls involved in fighting forces as wives, cooks, porters etc who do not carry weapons.

Mazuran and McKay refer to girl soldiers from Africa, South America, The Balkans and Asia and the uses girls were put to. They examine the attitudes to sexual assault which affect reintegration and the reproductive health issues for girls in military groups and after demobilisation.

A report published in May 2002 by the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) of the Sierra Leone government shows that of almost 70,000 ex-combatants who have been through formal DDR close to 7,000 of these were under the age of 18. Although the figures for child ex-combatants are not broken down into girls and boys the report does state that of all its beneficiaries 92% were male and 8% female.

Article 38.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) requires that “State Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child” and 38.2 “…take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct
part in hostilities”. IN January 2000 the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC was agreed raising the age under which children should not be recruited to 18. Save the Children (2001) estimate that approximately 15,000 to 20,000 children some as young as 6 were recruited into the armed groups in Sierra Leone. One third of those with the RUF were girls. All armed groups in the conflict recruited children although the RUF had the largest amount.

The NCDDR report presents information on its attempts to provide education for ex-combatants. At the time it was published 6,452 former fighters had been placed in schools. Accompanying this section are four photographs of such beneficiaries and the report states that they are representative of the profile of students supported by the NCDDR under the Community Education Investment Project (CEIP) . They are all male.

Article 28.1 (CRC) requires that, “State Parties recognise the right of the child to education…on the basis of equal opportunity…” According to the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Sierra Leone (CIAASL) (2002) report 55% of 6 – 12 year olds across Sierra Leone are not attending school and girls form the largest proportion of this figure.

The NCDDR report notes the particular vulnerability of child ex-combatants to manipulation and exploitation. Many of them had been lead to believe they would be taken care of by the armed groups that recruited them and they have been disappointed. NCDDR promotes two programmes for reintegration for children, one aimed at skills training for 15 – 18 year olds (the
Training and Employment Programme) and the CEIP which aims to place those under 15 into schools. The CEIP is co-ordinated by UNICEF.

A very important part of the work of the NCDDR is to provide training as their report states “the acquisition of marketable and functional skills remains one of the major aspirations of ex-combatants”. (NCDDR May 2002 p.5) The report acknowledges that there is some conflict between the aspirations of ex-combatants and the employment opportunities in post conflict Sierra Leone “given the loss of capacity combined with dearth of relevant data on the status of the labour market”. (NCDDR May 2002 p5) Although, as the report states, post conflict environments offer opportunities for work in rehabilitation and reconstruction projects funding is not always available to finance the critical elements of these projects such as materials, tools, machinery, labour and organisation. This has resulted in a situation where people have the relevant training but jobs are not forthcoming. UNAMSIL provide employment through their stopgap project for some of these trainees.

This report does not examine the particular vulnerability of women and girl ex-combatants or refer to any provision for them despite the urging of groups such as Physicians for Human Rights.

Vulnerability of girls and women

A report by the CIAASL produced by the UNOCHA in Freetown focuses on child protection in the reintegration process. The report describes the work of
the Child Protection Network an organisation of 40 members from UN agencies, NGO’s and Government ministries co-ordinated by UNICEF. Despite the involvement of many state and non-state agencies the report says that there is still very little provision for child protection. The need created by the vast numbers of separated and demobilised children is not being met by the resources and services currently available.

According to the CIAASL

“amongst children who have been affected by conflict, the most vulnerable is the girl child...Girls make up only 8% of the total number of children released and demobilised since 1999. This had dropped even more, to 3%, in the most recent phase of demobilisation.” (CIAASL 2002 p47.)

Many girls are reluctant to go home for fear of rejection and stigmatisation due to their involvement with the rebels and their history of sexual abuse. Girls who have children with the rebels feel they have no choice but to stay with their “husbands” as that is their only option for survival. CIAASL believes that their sense of having no options “shows their understanding of an underlying attitude to females that puts the girl child in a low status category in society, and ultimately places them at high risk”. (CIAASL 2002 p47)

NCRRR and UNOCHA (2001)express concern in their report on the recovery strategy in Kono, that children are bypassing the formal DDR process. They say that the process, “is clearly not adequately addressing the needs of the majority of the children associated with the fighting forces, particularly girls” (NCRRR & OCHA 2001 p23). The report notes that children are returning home on their own missing out on the official DDR process and benefits including the
Child Protection Network. It refers to the “special vulnerability of girls” (NCRRR & OCHA 2001 p24) who are being excluded from the formal DDR process. They are either being held back by armed force commanders or abandoned by armed groups when they disarm and not incorporated into the DDR process. Specific concerns are raised around vulnerability to sexual assault. In areas where there are large numbers of ex-combatants,

“the DDR process has changed little and sexual violence continues unabated. Prostitution continues to be a survival tactic, girls are all too ready to offer their services to generate paltry amounts of disposable income to support themselves and their families.” (NCRRR & OCHA 2001 p24.)

The report recommends conducting a detailed survey of girls and girl mothers and the development of specific programmes that address the needs of girls including skills training and functional literacy.

PHR asked a group of women to think of the kinds of assistance they need to improve their state of mind. This question is similar to the questions in this study asking what respondents feel they need to make a good life for themselves. In the PHR sample 84% said skills training would improve their state of mind. 78% of females interviewed for this study said they needed skills training in order to have a good life.
The use of sexual violence and its consequences.

The attitudes towards sexual violence are thoroughly examined in Menon and Bhasin (1998) in their study of partition in India. They found many cases of women encouraged or forced into suicide in order to prevent sexual violence bringing shame upon the family. Their study argues that women’s sexuality represents manhood and desecrating the women of the community is actually an attack on the men. The group Physicians for Human Rights found that sexual violence in armed conflict,

“has increasingly been recognised as a means of demoralising individuals, families and communities and is used as a weapon to disable an enemy by dissolving bonds between family and society.” (PHR 2002 p57)

The PHR report estimates that as many as 122,000 IDP females and 257,000 females, if non IDPs are included in the figures could have suffered from sexual violence in Sierra Leone during the course of the war. (PHR 2002 p59).

Rape and sexual assault are a constant threat to women and girls as are prostitution and domestic violence in conflict situations. PHR quote a government survey on AIDS is where almost 67% of women interviewed stated that they had suffered violence from a male, and 90% of women who suffered rape reported being forced by a boyfriend or husband. According to this report the first case of rape successfully prosecuted in Sierra Leone was in 1999. PHR recommend that,

“The National Commission for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration must emphasise the protection of women’s
rights as an integral part of the …(DDR) effort for ex-combatants including child soldiers”. (PHR 2002 p11)

PHR discovered that a third of the women in their sample who had been raped during the war did not report the incident to any one because of feelings of shame or fear of being stigmatised. Only 4 out of 27 females interviewed for this study reported being raped although it is believed by the staff working with them that they are all likely to have been raped as they were all either abducted or came into contact with rebels during the war. Such concerns are not uncommon in societies where basic inequalities exist between men and women and women are financially dependent on their husbands or fathers. Should they be cast out the consequences would be dreadful.

The link between sexual violence and prostitution.

The use of organised sexual violence as a weapon of war is now well documented by observers in the Former Yugoslav Republic. Richters (1998) notes the link between rape in wartime and the loss of all means of survival, home and family and notices that prostitution often follows rape. Peter Tyrer of AfC, also expressed concern for girls in the Freetown camp who have engaged in prostitution in order to survive. What men take from girls in wartime, girls are able to earn a living with after. In terms of reintegration the task is to provide girls with alternative economic opportunities.
Article 19.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the child states, “State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect…maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse…” and article 34 (b) “from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse…” and “shall take all appropriate…measures to prevent: The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices”. SCF (UK) (2001) reports that as a result of the war many children have suffered violence including rape and mutilation and a large number of girls are forced into prostitution putting them at high risk of contracting HIV. The CIAASL report stated that as a result of the war there are many street children vulnerable to forms of sexual exploitation. According to Jane Bass of AfC sexual bartering in IDP camps is a common survival strategy for their beneficiaries.

**Poverty, prostitution and their impact on reintegration.**

Machel notes that family reunification is not always possible because families themselves have been further impoverished by the conflict and cannot take responsibility for feeding, housing and clothing ex-combatants. This situation is particularly acute for girls and young women returning with the extra burden of children.
Poverty and prostitution are firmly linked in Machel’s report as she notes that desperation drives young women into prostitution. Machel stresses the importance for women who have been sexually abused or exploited, “in regaining control over their lives through small-scale income-generating activities.” (Machel 1996 p24.)

Her call to alleviate poverty and social injustice may be more important as it is these factors which underpin many conflicts and dealing with them could prevent conflicts occurring. In Sierra Leone, as the brief history shows, corruption and the resultant poverty of many of the people was certainly important in motivating the rebels.

The threat from sexually transmitted diseases.

Machel points out the huge threat posed during conflicts by sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDs. The report on sexual violence by Physicians for Human Rights, quotes a survey carried out by the Government of Sierra Leone which found that only 54% of women interviewed between the ages of 15 to 49 had heard of HIV and only 2% had been tested for it. PHR note that, “HIV/AIDS will likely be one of the greatest challenges facing the country in the post-war period”. (PHR 2002 p32).

A Save the Children publication “HIV and Conflict: A Double Emergency” (SCFUK 2002) focuses on West Africa and mentions concerns for Sierra Leone
in detail. This publication refers to the lack of reliable data on infection rates for the country but compares it to like situations in Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Uganda where more is known. Figures are used to predict the likely impact of HIV on Sierra Leone.

They note the connection between high prevalence of HIV infection rates and conflict and refer to the high rates of commercial sex work and sexual bartering which is a feature of conflict situations as one of the reasons for this. This underlines the importance of addressing the economic insecurity of girls. In Sierra Leone girls in IDP camps describe how sex is exchanged for items such as food, soap, books, plastic sheeting etc, and they have little control over whether or not condoms are used.

Lack of knowledge of the virus is particularly acute in Sierra Leone. SCF’s report found a very low level of knowledge among young people. They refer to a UNICEF study which stated that of adolescent girls aged 15 – 19 over 40% had never heard of AIDS. Of those women in Sierra Leone who had heard of HIV well over half of them did not know how to prevent infection. Where there is knowledge there is a lack of medical resources to proscribe the appropriate drugs for treatment,

“In Sierra Leone, 62 per cent of peripheral health units do not function. There is also a massive shortage of treatments for opportunistic infections and anti-retroviral drugs. Health care workers have received no training or information about AIDS.” (SCFUK 2002 p16.

The report also refers to the stigma attached to having this disease, an additional burden for those already suffering from stigma because they were child soldiers, commercial sex workers and/or women who have been raped.
SCF asserts that this is a critical stage for Sierra Leone. The government has produced no strategic response to HIV/AIDS. They have fallen behind other African countries, thirty-one of which have strategic plans for tackling HIV. International funders favour countries with developed health systems and seem reticent about working with countries affected by conflict. Unless resources are provided infection rates will escalate.

**The extent of the damage inflicted by the war. The backdrop to reintegration.**

The success of the reintegration programmes depends on the extent of destruction caused by the conflict and the resources provided to rebuild. As a large number of interviewees for this study came from the districts of Kono (18 respondents) and Bombali (13 respondents) it is useful to examine the information coming out of those areas.

According to a report on the Recovery Strategy in Kono district, published in October 2001 by the Government of Sierra Leone’s National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) in partnership with the UNOCHA, most schools and colleges in the district had been completely destroyed or significantly damaged. What educational activity was taking place was housed in temporary structures with volunteer teachers who had access to no resources. In Bombali, a similar report by NCRRR and UNOCHA published
in February 2002 on the recovery strategy in that district, stated that the war “forced the temporary closure of schools as most school buildings were either unroofed or have the roofs riddled with bullet holes, their doors and windows forcefully removed.” (NCRRR & OCHA 2002 p5)

The burning of homes in rural areas was a tactic employed comprehensively by the rebels all over Sierra Leone. According to the NCRRR & UNOCHA (2001) report Kono district along with neighbouring Kailabun district experienced the largest numbers of population displacement during the conflict. Rebel activity in these areas rich in diamonds was particularly brutal as they fought for control of the mines. In Kono 28% of houses were razed to the ground and another 45% were destroyed. In Bombali, although in general across the district the situation regarding shelter is better than in Kono, one chiefdom in the north of the district suffered over 70% of homes completely destroyed.

**Health care and food security**

Health and water/sanitation services in Kono were “severely affected…There is an acute lack of safe drinking water in the District.” (NCRRR & UNOCHA 2001 p5). Kono has only one hospital which has no surgical facilities due to damage inflicted on the operating theatre. According to the report,

“Most of the health facilities contain no medicines, no equipment and virtually no trained medical staff. Virtually
all health facilities have dysfunctional water supply and sanitation facilities.” (NCRRR & OCHA 2001 p11)

Machel's recommendations on health and nutrition seem naïve. She advises that,

“all parties to a conflict must ensure the maintenance of basic health systems and services and water supplies…Parties in conflict should refrain from destruction of food crops, water sources and agricultural infrastructures…” (Machel 1996 pp36-37)

In Sierra Leone, as in many conflicts around the globe, insurgents use the above as strategies to intimidate the civilian population. It seems unlikely that anyone would adhere to these recommendations even if they agreed with them.

Machel realises this when she refers to measures for reconciliation and underlines the need for prosecutions for crimes committed during conflicts;

“Unless those at every level of political and military command fear that they will be held accountable for crimes and subject to prosecution, there is little prospect of restraining their behaviour during armed conflicts” (Machel 1996 p53)

This begins to make more sense as it acknowledges the causes of combatant behaviour.

The report on Bombali (2002) gives statistics on child mortality and morbidity rates which are closely linked to reproductive health care issues. A study carried out in the district included 136 women who had given birth between them to a total of 829 children. Of these children 332 had died implying a child mortality rate of 40.05%. A breakdown of mortality rates showed that 50% died under the age of one. Of the entire figure of 332 child deaths the report concludes 11.14% were due to abortion/miscarriage and 10.24% were stillbirths. According to their calculations (which include abortion/miscarriage but
do not specify at what stage in the pregnancy they occurred) 22.29% of all child
deaths and 44.31% of deaths in the under-one age group are pregnancy related.
Malaria, as expected, accounts for a large proportion of under-five deaths
(27.59%) and Diarrhoeal Diseases account for 10.34%. Of the 497 surviving
children in some of the surveyed villages as many as 40% had been sick during
the two weeks prior to the survey being done.

Article 24.1 (CRC) requires that “State Parties recognise the right of the
child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities
for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health”. It is common to see
disabled children begging on the streets of Freetown. According to World Health
Organisation figures for the African region (www3.who.int/whosis/country/indicators.cfm)
Sierra Leone is at the bottom of the table with a healthy life expectancy at birth rate of 29.7 for males and 29.3 for
females. Immunisation figures declined from 75% to 32% between 1990 and
2001 and there is a very high prevalence of malaria (with only 15% of children
sleeping under nets), diarrhoea, measles and acute respiratory infections. In
1998 the public health expenditure per capita was $2.
Children in National Workshop IDP camp

The reports on both Kono and Bombali note that food security in the districts is problematic and that assistance will be required to ensure the feeding of vulnerable groups and to feed people while rehabilitating the local agriculture. The section on child protection in the report on Kono raises the issue of food shortages and community acceptance of returning ex-combatant children who require access to already insufficient food supplies and who are often traumatised and need specialist care. Again the vulnerability of returning girls to prostitution is stressed.
CHAPTER THREE

Statement of Results

What emerges from the 60 interviews carried out with children and young people in Freetown is a desperate picture of poverty, homelessness and lack of basic facilities in a country devastated by ten years of brutal civil war. However, people were getting along peacefully and most respondents felt a sense of belonging and connection to the country.

Where respondents preferred to live and why

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living preference</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remain in Freetown</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/training more available in Freetown</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to return after training/education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling to return due to lack of shelter in home area</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling to return due to lack of medical services</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be willing to return if they built schools</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Where respondents preferred to live and why

It is interesting to note that females were more willing to return to their home villages after training than males. 14 out of 27 females (52%) were willing to return after education/training whereas the figure for males was only 9 of 33
(27%). Ella Robert age 16 said, “I would like to go back but not now. I want to learn something”.

Forty seven respondents believed that they had some family still living in their home towns and villages. Three reported that their families had been killed, five did not know the whereabouts of their families and five said they had no family left in their home towns and villages. Two people said they feared returning to their villages because their family were already struggling to survive.

“The people there would not agree for me to stay there, they would not take in me and my children because we would be a burden”. Fatmata Bangura

22 people were unwilling to leave Freetown because of the lack of shelter in their home areas. Many witnessed their houses being burned down. Many of them are still concerned with survival. Kadiatu Kamara aged 17 said, “It’s easier to survive here than in Kono”. A similar number were concerned with the lack of medical facilities. Males were particularly worried about the lack of educational opportunities available in their home areas.

Despite their preference to stay in Freetown many respondents were experiencing difficulties with their accommodation. All of the males who were previously with the CDF were staying in the hotel they took from the RUF. The army had on the day of the interviews threatened to throw them out of the hotel.

Frances Fillie was staying at Grafton IDP camp but her hut was destroyed by rain. She is now staying with a friend. Emily Mbayo was also at Grafton but now she said, “I strain because they have broken down the place where I was staying at the camp”. It is common for the army to go into the camps and destroy
sections in order to force people to move out. Unfortunately they have nowhere to go and just crowd into other parts of the camp. AfC discovered their classroom at National Workshop IDP camp was inhabited after a section of the camp was burned down.

Those living at the camps struggle in very poor conditions.

“Still is the same suffering. Now I am staying at the camp me and my children we lie down on the ground.” Princess Kailie.

At the time of the interviews it was the rainy season and the huts were flooding as they were not watertight.

Conditions in National Workshop IDP camp
Eric Jumu’s programme repatriates internally displaced children and aims to reunite them with their families. They work in partnership with child welfare agencies and local community leaders. According to Mr Jumu there are large numbers of separated children across Sierra Leone. It is possible to see many of them in Freetown. Some were displaced by the war, some leave their families to alleviate the stress due to poverty or because of difficulties at home.
Many children are orphans or have been separated from their families and don’t know where they are or if they are alive.

Sahid Abu Dingie works for a NaCSA programme which assists in the resettling of internally displaced people by working with local communities to rebuild homes, provide food and safe drinking water and find means of production. The extent of the devastation caused by the war provides challenges. Over 3,000 towns and villages were destroyed along with much of the infrastructure of the country. Shelter is desperately needed in rural areas but roads are impassable and reconstruction cannot begin of the until they are rebuilt.

Some young people are hesitant about going back to their communities because they know there are no educational opportunities there. UNICEF contact their families and find out if there are relatives in better resourced areas that they can stay with until they finish school or schools are opened in their home area. NaCSA had been involved in building 8 schools but the country needs over 900 more.

One of the biggest challenges facing the government is how to convince people to leave Freetown. People stay because they believe there are more job opportunities and facilities in the city. It is true that rural areas need a great deal of reconstruction but Prince Kamara also believes that decentralisation of government and NGO’s from Freetown will help. Civil authority in many areas has broken down completely and needs to be rehabilitated.
Ms Zwick (GOAL) thinks that people are reluctant to return because of the disparity between amenities in rural and urban areas. In many villages people are living much as they did 200 years ago. There is no transport, no electricity, no water on tap and many problems caused by malnutrition.

Although skills training is very important and sought after there is a glut of trained tailors and carpenters who do not have the tools to begin work. 8 people (6 males and 2 females) interviewed for this study said they needed tools for work in order to make a good life for themselves. Some were delaying leaving Freetown until they got tools. Three women said they wanted micro-credit so they can start their own businesses. According to Ms Tucker NaCSA have a system for giving micro-credit to women’s groups which so far has had an 80% success rate.

Post conflict identity issues

A surprisingly large number of young people interviewed felt they would be accepted if they went back to their original towns and villages which indicates the success of community sensitisation. A higher proportion of males (91%) expected to be welcomed than females (52%).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations on return</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would be welcomed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome if return with skill</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would be afraid of me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people but not all would welcome me</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would welcome my children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would not welcome my children</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Expectations of welcome on return

Three females and one other male felt they would only be accepted back if they returned with a skill and be able to provide for themselves. It was important for them to return with a skill so they could discard their association with the rebels.

“Because I was captured by the rebels if I return without any skills the people there might think I am still part of the rebels but if I go back with a skill they will see I tried to educate myself and they would accept me.” Fatmata Sankoh aged 18.

Five people thought their communities would be afraid of them because of their involvement with the rebels.

“The moment I go there they would talk to me but they would not be pleased to see me because since I left the village they would think I joined the rebels to do evil things. They would fear me.” Sallay Sam age 18.

7 women felt that their children would not be welcomed by their families.

“They will feel bad about them. They would say that these children are the rebel sons so they will go with that idea.” Princess Kailie age 25

Of ten female macacos (local language for commercial sex workers) only two felt they would be discriminated against in their home town because of their
work and they came from Freetown where they were openly sex workers and couldn’t disguise their work.

“They think bad about me because they don’t like the lifestyle I took up during the war. I started during the war as a sex worker at age 14 before I was captured by the rebels” Sarah Kanu age 18.

Six macacos felt their families/communities would feel happy to see them. One didn’t know how they would react and another stated she would only be accepted if she returned with a skill.

Only three macacos felt they were discriminated against generally because people in Freetown didn’t approve of their work. These three and one other male were the only respondents out of 60 males and females who answered no to the question; Do you feel part of the Sierra Leonean Community? Ishmail Bundu aged 18 explained, "I will only feel good when I have achieved something with my education and can stand for myself". His self respect and sense of citizenship depended on being self sufficient.

28 males and 21 females, felt that people in Freetown treated them well. Three males and three females felt that people were afraid or wary of them because of their involvement in armed forces although one of these males felt that people were mostly willing to reconcile and his experience in Freetown had improved his self-esteem.

The majority of people felt they were a part of the community of Sierra Leoneans. One 16 year old male who had been abducted by the rebels said he did not feel a part of the community when he first arrived in Freetown but that he did now. Each of the four respondents who did not feel part of the community
felt that education, training or employment would help them to feel that they were.

Eric Jumu said relatives are afraid to receive their children back from armed groups because they fear they have been brutalised by their experience. The programme has a “sensitisation unit” which works with communities to ease reintegration.

Ms Taylor (UNICEF) said many children including girls are afraid of returning because they had been forced to commit atrocities in their own villages. This practice was adopted by the rebels to cause disruption to relationships between child soldiers and the local communities so they would not be able to run away from the armed group and go back to their homes. This contributes to the stigmatisation of child soldiers as “barbarians”. Sometimes the family want to receive the child back but they are afraid of the reaction of the local community.

Sahid Abu-Dingie described some of the problems they face in reintegrating child ex-combatants. Many of these children have been drugged by commanders in order to make them more compliant and need treatment for addiction. They have suffered traumatising experiences and need counselling. They suffer from low self-esteem. They want to become useful citizens but they have no skills to offer. They need recreational activities so they are not idle.
Differences in the experiences of males and females

The difference between the experiences of girls and boys abducted by rebels is defined by sexual violence. Ms Zwick, in common with her colleagues Mr Mansaray and Mr Kokofele from Save the Children has no knowledge of boys being subjected to sexual violence. Boys would suffered from amputations but for the girls, after their abduction, rape would have been their first and daily experience. In her opinion rape was used systematically as a weapon during this conflict because sex outside of marriage is a huge taboo.

Mr Jumu said that due to the patriarchal nature of society and culture girls were discriminated against and are in a “pathetic situation”. If girls give birth in the bush they may not know the identity of the father. As patrilineal heritage is important to the culture stigma is attached to the mother and the child. Communities are afraid that girls may be carrying HIV and other STDs and this adds to the stigma.

There are many single female headed households due to the war, either women have been widowed or have children as a result of rape or sexual bartering. Many children are born of liaisons between ECOMOG or UN peacekeepers or UN staff. Men father children then leave the country without making any provision for them. Abortion is an abomination in many ethnic groups in Sierra Leone and women rarely reject their children even those born of rape. In his home village in Tikonko Chiefdom, Bo District, Mr Jumu is aware of 10 children who were born to single mothers of ECOMOG or UN peacekeepers.
Because of this situation Mr Jumu feels it is especially important for their reintegration that separated girls and women have access to skills training and micro credit so that they can be self-sufficient.

Mr Abu-Dingie, in common with Mr Jumu feels that the main difference between males and females is in the stigma attached to females who have been raped or sexually abused. They carry the shame of being raped and have very low self-esteem.

Girls fear the stigma and rejection they may face if they return to their communities with children placing extra burden on the community. Some girls are worried that they will be considered tainted and unmarriageable. In some cases the family agrees to take back their daughter but not her children. In those cases UNICEF provide family mediation.

More stigma is attached to girls for carrying STD’s than boys especially because many do end up as commercial sex workers.

Ms Tucker feels that addressing the issue of sexual violence is key to the country’s recovery. The girls and young women Ms Zwick works with still suffer from sexual violence at the hands of boyfriends, customers and peacekeepers. The issue has not been taken seriously in the past by the government, police and judicial system. Even before the war the laws on rape were unsatisfactory. The only organisations addressing this issue have been NGO’s. A coalition of women’s groups and human rights groups known as the Women’s Task Force have been lobbying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to raise the issue of gender based sexual violence. They
were also active in lobbying during the selection process for the TRC to ensure the inclusion of women.

This concern for gender equality extends to parliamentary representation. 40% of the executive of any political party must be made up of women. Approximately 30% of MPs returned in the May election were women. This achievement is due to the work of the 50/50 Group, a campaigning organisation who advocate for the rights of women to participate in public life.

Vulnerability of females to prostitution

For many girls the children are the only good thing to come out of the experience. But they are forced through lack of other options to become prostitutes in order to provide for their children. A lot of girls just want to put the experience behind them and get on with their lives. They need skills training and employment in order to do this, especially if they are engaged in commercial sex work.

Save the Children is very concerned about child prostitution in Sierra Leone. Some children are forced into prostitution because of poverty caused by the war. As far as Mr Kokofele knows no boys are working as prostitutes. This was corroborated by Abu Mansaray a senior social worker for the Irish NGO GOAL on the Night Programme for Street Children. He had spent many years working with street children and commercial sex workers and he had never found
any boys to be involved in prostitution. It seems to be strictly a female phenomenon in Sierra Leone.

Before the war people in Sierra Leone were very poor. The war compounded this situation. There is not much knowledge of birth control and people have very large families. They are already stretched to their limit. Girls come home with extra children that need to be fed and although some of the parents don’t approve of the girls going into prostitution they turn a blind eye because there is no way to survive without it. Mr Kokofele stressed the importance of skills training for these returning girls to enhance their ability to fend for themselves instead of “jumping out into the street as commercial sex workers”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age now</th>
<th>Age when captured</th>
<th>Age when started CSW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
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Table 4. Commercial sex workers

As Ms Zwick (GOAL) reports, many girls were on the verges of sex work before they were abducted by rebels. Of the ten girls interviewed for this study 6 were already engaged in commercial sex work before they were captured. They come from very poor and dysfunctional families and had no
choice but to become sex workers. Ella Robert who started sex work at age 12 said, "Life was bad after my father died. Other relatives were not helping me. I was 10 when he died". Kadiatu Fofanah, another sex worker, said, "I started Macaco before I was captured. Life was not so good. Because of the war".

The commercial sex industry is very organised. The girls are controlled by pimps or "muscle men". There are two groups of sex workers in Freetown. Those who have contacts and can get to places like Aberdeen where UNAMSIL is based and where many ex-patriots gather in bars. Sex workers here can earn up to $50 (90,000 Leones) a night working with western ex-patriots and the local Lebanese men. Most of these women will have knowledge and experience of living in the west and can integrate well with western men. The girls that GOAL work with in Freetown do not have these contacts and usually make no more than 5,000 Leones ($3) a night.

AfC beneficiaries displaying their Gara Tie Dye.
NaCSA together FAWE, CAW and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) provide skills training to females who were raped. 10 of these were interviewed for this study. Seven other females interviewed were engaging in skills training with AfC.

Prince Kamara (NaCSA) the experience of sexual violence females faced in armed groups changes their personalities. Before they went to the bush most girls were shy and sexually innocent. Once they return they are sexually experienced, may have been drugged and could be sexually active in a way which clashes with the cultural norms. Because they were independent of their parents in the bush they find it difficult to adapt to being under the control of parents, teachers and community members, “they feel so big”. Many end up on the streets and engaging in prostitution.

Mr Kamara thinks that girls need special female counsellors who can tell them the “stark reality of life” and educate them about HIV and other STDs. He thinks that they need positive role models on radio and TV. One difference between them and the boys is that they will always carry the shame of their sexual assault. Boys may be proud of their exploits with the armed forces. It is possible to hear boys boasting that they burned houses or chopped off peoples limbs, but he says, you will never hear girls boasting “I was raped”. It is certainly true that the only females who admitted to being raped when interviewed for this study were commercial sex workers, girls who are very sexually precocious.
Other factors complicating reintegration

There are other complicating factors in the reintegration process for girls. If they were the wives of rebel commanders they may have been given lots of gifts from their husbands. They may have been treated with respect and had food security for the first time in their lives. Some may have fallen in love with their “husbands” and wish to stay with them. In Sierra Leone marriages are seen as the joining of two families so UNICEF try to reintegrate girls with their families and if the husband wants to pursue the girl he can approach the family. Some girls even arrive home to their families with a letter from their husband asking the family for permission to marry their daughter. One young woman interviewed for this study wondered how she would be received by her family because she had fallen in love with, and had 2 children with, the rebel who had chopped off her father’s hand. She concluded that her father would put it down to the war and be forgiving.

Girls who fought in the conflict were known as “Mammy Queens”. Some of these girls went willingly to join the rebels as they thought it was an “exciting event” and a way to feel powerful. Some were abducted and decided to conform to rebel behaviour as a way to gain power. Mammy Queens would have been expected to have sex with rebels as would the other girls but might have been more willing and may not have had such brutal experiences of rape. They were not on the sidelines in the fighting, they would have been in the midst
of the conflict and committed atrocities along with the males. Ms Zwick (GOAL) said it is still possible to see girls saluting the former Mammy Queens, acknowledging their power.

**Effects of trauma on reintegration and reconstruction**

Mr Kamara works with local communities funded by NaCSA to implement reconstruction projects. NaCSA projects should be community based and driven, however, a problem they face is the psychological effect the long war and the trauma suffered has had on people. They have become very dependent on NGO’s and UN staff. They lack the ability to organise and take responsibility for themselves.

Most children abducted by rebels experience difficulties associated with trauma. Some are prone to violent outbursts. Families often feel they are re-living their own experiences of trauma through the violent behaviour of the young people and reintegration breaks down. Save the Children has been involved in mediating in many cases where rehabilitation has not addressed the psychological affects on children.

There is a wider problem caused by this trauma which is exacerbated by the numbers of ex-combatant young people who are idle and on the streets in the communities. On 18\textsuperscript{th} July 2002 a Fula tribesman from the north of Sierra Leone was murdered by Nigerian businessmen. When his body was found in the
east of Freetown a riot erupted and the body was paraded through the streets and dumped at the Nigerian Embassy on Siaka Stevens Street. Mr Kokofele said that many of the people involved in the riot were ex-combatants who are frustrated and have bottled up their anger and violent behaviour waiting for opportunities to let it out and loot shops. The majority of children who ended up in armed forces were abducted but some older children who felt they had no prospects joined willingly as they saw it as an opportunity to loot and gain power.

Save the Children is attempting to address the social inequality behind much of the conflict by supporting reconstruction around Sierra Leone so that young people will have schools, recreational and sports facilities, libraries and employment opportunities so that they do not build up levels of frustration which undermine the efforts to build peace in the country.

**Educational history and requirements**

As can be seen in table 5 which shows the last class attended, numbers of respondents ending their education at primary level are 48% of males and 59% of females. However the disparity increases remarkably at secondary level where only 3 girls out of 27 (11%) attended any secondary school compared to 15 out of 33 boys (45%). 6 females had never attended school compared to only 1 male. 2 females did not remember the last class they attended but do remember their age. One was 18 and the other 13. It is impossible to speculate
which class the 18 year old had achieved as schooling in Sierra Leone is often interrupted due to financial insecurity and children of all ages attend each class level. It is highly unlikely that the 13 year old would have achieved secondary level. One male, currently in primary class three (and finished at the top of class two) was two when he was captured by rebels and at that point had never attended school. These 3 respondents are not included in the table.

58 respondents said that they were either already engaged in or would like further education or training. Of the 2 who did not one was a qualified sailor who only required his documents in order to be able to work and the other was a woman who wanted to set up a business as a caterer.

Women were interested in training rather than formal education. Sallay Sam aged 18 said, “I want to learn more but I want to learn something for work. Skills.” Another 18 year old, Aminata Sesay, said,

“After I have finished my course and I am self employed and an independent woman, that would make me happy.”

Although they understood the value of formal education their priorities were to find a way of making an income. Fatmata Sankoh said in order to make a good life for herself she needed to,

“learn some skills so I can work. Then I would like to go back to school to learn to read and write to make life more comfortable.”

Formal education is seen as a luxury, something to aspire to after their basic needs are met. Frances Fillie would like formal education,

“But I can’t go back to school because I have no one to help me. I will finish my course with FAWE”
All of the women who had living children and both of the men said if they had the money they would be willing to pay for their children to attend school. Lucy Coker said, “I would pay for my children’s education, I want them to learn” In order to make a good life for herself she wanted “Very good education form my children”. Education is something all of these women want for their children but do not feel is practical for themselves until they are self sufficient.

Males aspirations for careers were higher (see table 5) and many of them wanted to go back to formal education. Sahr Ngobga age 19 said, “I need education. When I get education all my dreams will come true”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last class attended</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary class 6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary class 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary class 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary class 3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary class 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary class 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary class 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never went to school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Last class attended.

Ms Taylor (UNICEF) referred to the differences in the education of girls and boys. More boys attend school than girls. At enrolment in primary school the numbers are about the same but as education progresses girls drop
out and boys continue. This was reflected in the figures for last class attended collected for this study (see table 5).

However, both boys and girls are affected by poverty and neither sex on demobilisation usually have the money for school. So UNICEF introduced the Community Education Investment Programme. The Ministry for Education agreed to waive school fees for ex-combatants and in return schools receive a free package of learning materials for each ex-combatant they accept. They can use the packages for all the children at the school. A package could contain 200 exercise books.

In order to qualify for the programme children need a demobilisation number which they get if they are formally demobilised in UNICEF co-ordinated centres. However, far more boys than girls are formally demobilised and have demobilisation numbers. According to Ms Taylor there are many girls still out in the bush being held by commanders or abandoned and afraid to come forward. Early on in the DDR process commanders discouraged girls from coming forward to register. Some did this because they had formed relationships with the girls and some kept them for their labour. At present, Mr Kokofele (SCF) said, girls were still being held by rebels. They release them on an ad hoc basis because they no longer have any means of supporting them and consider them to be a burden.

Ms Zwick (GOAL) said most girls do not go through the process of DDR which would entitle them to skills training and access to shelter,
counselling and medical services. Some girls didn’t want to be separated from their rebel “husbands” or didn’t know DDR was available for them.

Ms Taylor in comparison talked about some of the older boys who had a position of authority with the rebels and were used to being in command. It can be very difficult for them to fit back into the traditional structures of family and community life. Many of them have returned to live with the rebels.

Ms Taylor estimates that 60% of child soldiers are male and 40% female, a much higher figure than was generally held to be the case. Ms Tucker (UNOCHA) said the focus for reintegration of ex-combatants has been on adult males (90%). This reflects the figures in the report referred to earlier of the NCDDR of 92% males and 8% females.

In order to qualify for DDR programmes it was necessary to hand in a weapon. Some girls would not have had weapons but many did and commanders took them to prevent them registering. These weapons were redistributed among the boys so that more of them could register for the process which had a cash payment at the end.

In order to address this problem UNICEF introduced the Pre-discharge Orientation Programme for Girls, an outreach programme aiming to let girls know their options regarding education, health and housing.

According to Ms Tucker (UNOCHA) poverty has a huge impact on women’s education. Girls are sent out at a young age to contribute to the family income. Many are street hawkers. Although parents would like to send their daughters to school they desperately need the income the girls bring in.
Girls as young as ten are caring for younger children and managing the household while parents are working. Girls are often married at puberty and drop out of school due to pregnancy. Girls, in Mr Kokofele’s (SCF) experience are not keen on going to school. They do not see the value of it. It is easy to get boys to attend non-formal education classes but that is not the case with the girls.

Mr Abu-Dingie (NaCSA) said that girls educational needs differ according to their religious background. Muslim girls are less likely to be educated than Christian girls, as they are expected to be housewives. He said this government is assiduously trying to ensure equal opportunities for girls. The government is planning to make primary education years 1 – 3 compulsory, so that Muslim parents will have no option but to send girls to school. Girls are encouraged to attend and stay longer in school especially girls who have been raped and have children as a result. Strategies include recognising that mothers control the daily lives of the children and encouraging them to send their girls to school.

Efforts to address the inequality of girls by making primary education free from classes 1 – 3 have not made much impact. Although the education is free, uniforms, books and even chalk has to be provided by the parents. There can be 70 – 80 students in a class with one teacher. Ms Tucker, a teacher in Sierra Leone in the early 1990’s, remembers teaching a class of 95. School often takes place in the open air due to lack of shelter. Some children have to walk five miles to their nearest school. Many teachers left Sierra Leone during the war. 80% of teachers in The Gambia come from Sierra Leone. As,
according to Ms Tucker, 40% of the population of Sierra Leone is under 18, education is a huge concern to the government and the UN.

Educating commercial sex workers presents many problems. Their behaviour can be challenging and presented a marked difference to the behaviour of the girls that AfC and FAWE are working with. They are struggling with poverty in much the same way but have very little ability to focus or concentrate. They can only think on a short term basis about surviving day to day. They are not able to think about their long term future. Ms Zwick described them as being “fixated on food”.

Although many of the NGO’s and donors are moving from emergency to development work most of these girls are still in a state of emergency. They don’t know where their next meal is coming from and are thrown further into confusion by their drug addiction. GOAL therefore finds it very difficult to get them to attend non-formal education classes. They have started to tie in food distribution to the classes. Beneficiaries have to attend workshops and classes in order to get the food. Despite this, the beneficiaries express a desire for skills training and are frustrated with GOAL because they don’t offer it. Their poor attendance at non-formal education classes and generally chaotic lifestyle could mean they are not ready for formal training.
### Medical history and requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical service/problem</th>
<th>No of female respondents reporting the problem</th>
<th>No of male respondents reporting the problem</th>
<th>No of respondent who reported children with the problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood test required</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Problem</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach Pain</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gynaecological problem</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold/infection</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria/fever</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back/neck or joint pain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury incurred in conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parasites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Planning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ophthalmic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest pain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear problems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug addiction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally unwell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hernia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaemia</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convulsions</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. Medical services required by the respondents and their children.**

Ms Taylor expressed concern for the health of child ex-combatants. Children in the interim care centres have health screening but many children go home without passing through the ICCs and their medical needs are not addressed. Some girls who have suffered rape during the war have told no one
and 3 or 4 years might pass before they are able to see a doctor. UNICEF is engaged in medical outreach visiting local areas to encourage children to go to centres for screening and treatment.

Aspirations.

All the female respondents aspired to skill based employment, the highest proportion opting for tailoring. Some male respondents showed interest in careers which would require further academic study such as accounting, law, politics and religious ministry. 20 males (61%) said their first priority was to resume their education. Ibrahim Kamra aged 15 said, if the government would, “provide my basic needs to attend school I would be happy”. Komba James also aged 15, said in order to make a good life for himself, “I need to accomplish my schooling”.

Some females opted for traditionally male oriented work such as building and welding but males did not show interest in traditionally female oriented work. No males opted for tailoring even though it is common to see males employed as tailors in Freetown. No one expressed any interest in farming or animal husbandry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer/Mechanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Minister</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caterer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty Trader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gara Tie Dyer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President (politician)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. showing aspirations of respondents.

The majority of respondents had no formal experience of working prior to their involvement in armed forces but had worked as porters, cooks, soldiers and commercial sex workers during the war. Two females had experience of petty trading, two others of tailoring and one of gara tie dying. Two males had experience of mining for diamonds, one of carpentry, one of masonry and another of mechanics.

When asked what they needed to make a good life for themselves the most remarkable difference between males and females was that 20 females (74%) said they needed employment as opposed to only 10 males (30%). This could be because the female sample’s average age was older than the males’.
could also be due to the females need for immediate income to meet the needs of their children.

When asked, “what would you like the government to know about you?”, 17 males wanted the government to know they were good men or could do good for the country. A further four wanted to government to know that they had fought against the rebels in the war. 3 males and 6 females wanted the government to know they were suffering. 2 males felt that the government had forgotten about them. 2 females wanted the government to remember they were responsible for them. Sahr Ngeba aged 19 wanted the government to know about his potential. He said, “I am a future somebody for tomorrow”. Some looked forward to a time when they could tell the government how they had achieved their goals.

“When I have been educated I would like the government to know I was abducted by the rebels but since then I have educated myself so I can by myself alone.” Fatmata Sankoh aged 18.

“I am now a successful man and I would like the government to be surprised by my success although they have done nothing for me” Noah Conteh aged 18.

Some expressed their desperation and sense that the government has forgotten about them,

“I am a human being, I am in the world” Michael Sao aged 20.

“The way they treated us it has been unfair. They should appreciate what we had done for them.” Tommy Gbondo aged 18.

“to help me, but I don’t think they will. The government does know about us, but they have forgotten about us”. Mohammed Kamara aged 21.
Females did not express themselves as vehemently.

“The government is responsible for me and they should help me to stop suffering.” Marian Sesay aged 22

Some males expressed their contrition for their involvement in armed forces.

“I didn’t know the right thing I was fighting for. It was a senseless war. I was fighting because I was forced to. I didn’t know what I was fighting for”. Suleman Kamara aged 25.

“I am a good man. I am no longer as I was before”. Aiah James aged 16.

There was an extremely high turnout at the recent elections from the respondents. Of 47 respondents who were eligible (old enough) to vote in the May 2002 election 45 voted. One female did not vote because she did not get a chance to register and one other female did not vote because she was sick. 1 male and 3 females under 18 campaigned for a political party even though they could not vote.

Respondents were asked to compare their lives before being with the armed groups, during their time with armed groups and after demobilisation. 48 respondents said that life was fine or at least normal before they joined the armed groups. Ten said that life was difficult before their capture due to the war and financial difficulties. Of these 2 were males (6%) and 8 (30%) were females.

49 respondents said they were not happy while they were with the armed forces. 14 of these said they lived in fear under of being killed if they didn’t do what the commanders told them to. 14 said they were beaten, mistreated and four of these said they were continually raped. 6 said they were given drugs by
the commanders to make them more compliant. One woman said she lost a baby while with the armed forces. 2 males said they felt fine while with the rebels as they got used to the life and 6 male members of the Kamajor militia said they were treated well and felt fine.

Asked how life was now 42 respondents felt life was better than with the armed forces. 13 respondents, 8 males and 5 females felt that life had not improved significantly since demobilisation. 5 male former members of the Kamajor militia felt betrayed because promises made by the head of the militia of education and employment had not materialised.

**Issues for children born in conflict**

![Children living in the National Workshop IDP camp in Freetown](image)
In order to successfully reintegrate children born in the bush they need to “totally disarm their minds”. Mr Kamara said these children are “ideologically sensitised to thinking the gun is the be all and end all”. These children display violent behavioural problems with other children. Mr Kamara thinks they need to be integrated with children who have not been influenced by armed forces so that they can learn different ways of behaving.

Communities need help in order to accept these children. They have difficulty accepting “rebel babies” and though sensitisation work has improved the situation some parents do not consider these children their legitimate grandchildren.

Initially there was some problem reintegrating the children born while with armed forces. Some people were abusive to these children and did not want them in their communities. But things have improved due to sensitisation work and the stigma is attached more to their mothers than to the children, but Ms Taylor thinks that could be because the children are very small now. As they grow up it could become more of a problem.
CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and discussion

Sexual violence and its consequences for separated and abducted females is probably the issue of greatest concern to those working for their reintegration. It is what made their experience of being with armed forces and the process of their reintegration different from that of the males. They are more acutely affected by the poverty suffered by most child ex-combatants because they not only have themselves to care for but they have children. These children were often the result of sexual violence and they need to be fed, clothed, educated and treated when they are sick which is often.

All this the young women must do without the support of their families in a society which is set up to favour males in all areas of life but crucially in employment, education and sexual freedom. Furthermore the organisation set up to reintegrate them, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration makes no reference to their specific needs in their report. They admit that of all the ex-combatants benefiting from their various programmes, only 8% were female when it is now known that in the RUF, the largest recruiter of children in the conflict, one in three children used, were girls.

Although the females in this study were more willing to return to their home villages after skills training only 52% of females expected to be welcomed
compared to 91% of males. This is due to the stigma attached to their sexual history and the added burden to their families of their children.

Prostitution and sexual bartering have become a survival strategy for many girls and young women compounding the problems they already face with more unsupported pregnancies, children and reproductive health problems including STDs. The culture attaches great stigma to the loss of virginity outside of marriage and prostitution is deeply abhorrent to most people. Females involved in prostitution suffer from feelings of shame and know they are subject to the double stigma related to sexual activity outside marriage and selling of sex. This stigma only applies to females although, of course males, are just as involved. It is important to note that the only female respondents in this study who did not feel part of the society of Sierra Leone were commercial sex workers

The only way out of the trap of prostitution is through skills training which will lead to employment as females cannot rely on their communities who are already struggling to survive, to provide for them. Financial independence may save these women from further sexual violence from husbands and customers. This may be something they already know because when asked what they needed to make a good life for themselves none of the females interviewed for this study said “a husband”.

The high prevalence of prostitution and sexual violence, coupled with the lack of knowledge of HIV puts the people at huge risk of contracting the virus and HIV and AIDS could cause devastation throughout the country. Empowering women so that they are independent of men as husbands and customers of
prostitution, will provide them and their children some protection. Vigorous prosecution of and education about those who commit sexual violence should be part of the reconstruction of the country much as it is now being employed in South Africa.

The government of Sierra Leone understands it must address the inequality of females in the country. The results of this small study show that the females have had less access to education and consequently do not aspire to be lawyers, politicians, accountants or ministers or imagine they could assume positions of power, influence and greater financial security. However the situation for the majority of people in Sierra Leone is that there is a desperate shortage of housing, educational and medical facilities and employment and without addressing all of these issues as well, the situation for women will not improve. All the citizens of the country need to feel their problems are being addressed or there is likely to be strong resistance to projects that are seen to favour females.

Attention also needs to be paid to the children born as a result of this conflict. They face many obstacles in their development. They are usually cared for by a single mother and may have less access to health care, education, shelter, and food than children born in normal circumstances in large extended families and surrounded by close nit communities. They are vulnerable to stigma both because their fathers were mostly rebels and because they have no fathers in patrilineal communities where the father is of more importance in defining the child’s identity than the mother. Most of them are small now and not capable of
causing disruption in the community and sensitisation work is being carried out to deal with the stigma attached to them. But as they grow older, if their behaviour becomes anti-social it is possible that the stigmas will re-emerge. They could become a future underclass.

Another issue raised by this long and protracted conflict is the legal position of people over the age of 18 who were abducted as children and came of age while with armed forces or in the aftermath of the war. Services designed to reintegrate adult combatants may not be appropriate for their needs. Services made available by international concern and funding to reintegrate child ex-combatants, that they are not eligible for, could be more suited to them. These are adults who would have been separated from their families as children. Girls who left as children and came back as mothers. Young adults who would have had no family support through adolescence and lost the chance of attending school. These young adults were very common among the respondents for this study and if, as international efforts to rehabilitate child soldiers results in more projects targeted at under 18’s, there is a concern that this vulnerable group may miss out.
CONCLUSION

The research shows that the experience of this group of male and female child combatants has marked differences. Prior to their capture females have had access to education. During their time with armed groups females have suffered from sexual assault carried out in a systematic and brutal strategy to subdue and terrorise the population.

Biology dictates that females produce children and in most cultures around the world it is females that take care of children. This no different in Sierra Leone. As a result of rape many girls and young women were caring for children while with armed groups and after demobilisation. This puts a financial, physical and emotional strain on females that males are free of. Many feel they have no choice but to engage in prostitution in order to survive.

The patriarchal nature of the culture places stigma on females who have sex outside of marriage but not on males. Females suffer from the stigma of having children outside of traditional rites and customs and from association with commercial sex work. Females in this study were less sure of a welcome from their families than males and it is likely this is one of the causes.

The aspirations of females in this study are lower than those of the males. Their see less value in formal education as it does not provide an income as quickly as skills training and their need for immediate money to provide for their children is great. They aspire to education for their children but not for themselves.
Almost all the respondents in this study felt that opportunities existed in Freetown that were not available in their home areas. The extent of devastation caused to the country by the war means that a great deal of reconstruction needs to be done in order to change that perception.

Peace has finally come to Sierra Leone much to the relief of the population who are striving to ensure it stays. However, poverty is a huge problem and there are many young people who have been traumatised by their experiences and are eager to move on and rebuild their lives. They are being held back by a lack of resources and are becoming embittered. How long peace will survive under these conditions is a question of grave concern to the author of this study.
REFERENCES.

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Issues 3 and 4 March and June 2002) Child Soldiers Newsletter CSUCS London


World Health Organisation Report Sierra Leone  www3.who.int/whosis/country/indicators.cfm?country=SLE&language=english
APPENDICES

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Name:

Sex: M F

Place of Residence:

Name of village/Chiefdom:

No of interview:

1. What do you think of life in Freetown now? What do you like about it? What do you not like about it?

2. What do you think it would be like in your home village now?

3. Where would you most like to live now and why?

4. Do you have any family in your home village?

5. Would you be willing to return to your home village?

6. If not why are you not willing to return there?

7. If not what would make you willing to return there?

8. If you were to return to your home village how do you think the people there would feel about you and behave towards you?

9. How would they feel about and behave towards your children?

10. How do you think people feel about you and behave towards you and your children in Freetown?

11. Do you feel part of the Sierra Leonean community?
12. If not why do you not feel part of the community?

13. What would need to happen for you to feel part of the community?

14. At what stage did you stop your education?

15. Would you like more education?

16. What would you be willing to give up in order for your children to have access to education?

17. What kind of medical services do you need?

18. What kind of medical services do your children need?

19. Is there a job you would like to have?

20. What jobs have you done in the past either paid or unpaid, before you were with the armed forces, while you were with them and after?

21. What was life like before you were involved in the armed forces?

22. What was it like while you were with the armed forces?

23. What is it like now?

24. What do you need to make a good life for yourself?

25. What do your children need in order to have a good life?

26. What would make you happy?

27. What would make your children happy?

28. What would you like the government to know about you?

29. What should the government do for you?

30. How could you participate in government processes?

Thank you.