

CONCLUSION: THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PEACE

Differing Views of Success

To determine whether peace is sustainable (or even desirable), a definition is required. The general United Nations (UN) use of the term “peace” adopted by UN missions tends to be limited, meaning largely “the absence of war” or sometimes “the absence of the weapons of war.” For civil society, peace begins to take on other characteristics. The Network on Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL) re-defined its vision in 2004 as “An enlightened society free from injustice and violent conflicts, enabling all to participate in good governance for sustainable peace, security, and development.”⁶³ During a discussion among at least 60 members representing every province, several attempts to shorten the vision statement by narrowing the definition of peace failed in an overwhelming popular vote. Urban, slum-dwelling youth insist that “peace is justice, and justice is peace,” with justice referring largely to the availability of jobs, housing, and medical care. Liberia’s peace has not yet survived an election, putting it in a highly fragile category. In Sierra Leone, popular discourse can be summarised with three views:

The Pessimist

An NGO worker in Kono:

“If they don’t start addressing this issue of mining and governance, there is going to be another war. Maybe even in the next year.”

A community worker in Kenema:

“The war is over because we don’t hear any guns, but the war is still happening on the table. People are hungry. This kind of economic insecurity does not allow for peace.”

The Pragmatist

A youth activist:

“It is possible to keep the peace. There are some strings attached. This is something that is very clear. First of all, the disarmament process went well. But then, peace does not merely mean the absence of war. Or rather, arms being gone. A host of other factors have to be put in place for peace to be sustained. We have social factors. And then there is still a kind of dissatisfaction amongst people.”

The Optimist

A Community Arms Collection trainer in Kambia:

“Let me tell you one thing. The lessons we have learned as Sierra Leoneans in terms of weapons and in terms of war, those lessons are lessons that we will never forget. I want to give anybody who says this country will not be stable in the next five years, I say NO! It's a big no. Things will keep on improving. Go around the country, leave Kambia District. Go to the bushes, go to the small towns, and see how people are improving their lives. Come back in the next five years, and you will see.

“2001, Kambia: Houses everywhere, business everywhere. In the next two to three years, this will come back. This is the trend that is happening everywhere. Go to Port Loko. Go to Makeni. Go to Kono. These were areas that were covered by rebels, under their control. You will be surprised. These areas were being occupied. Today everybody is happy. People are making huts in the bushes, doing agricultural activities, and business is coming back.”

As Carolyn Nordstrom's street philosopher put it:

Is the violence of war gone suddenly with declarations of peace? No, violence lives in the belly of the person and ruins society, unless peace is taught to the violent. And peace must be taught just like violence is, by subjecting people to it, by showing them peaceful ways to respond to life and living, to daily needs and necessities, to political and personal challenges.⁶⁴

Post-war politics, when focused exclusively on building state power and perpetuating the myth that strong state security will lead to human security, can open new markets for small arms and unbalance the delicate process of peace building. Demobilisation and reintegration in their broadest forms reduce the demand for small arms and create environments where people

can be 'subjected' to peace. In the Mano River Basin particularly, a history of repressive power structures played a role in the advent of war. Corruption of the deepest kind was widely credited with the initial welcoming of rebellion in Sierra Leone, and Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia made continuing conflict possible across the border while he looted his own country's natural resources. The rest of world, particularly the United States, is starting to recognise that Africa's "troubled regions" are a security threat. In choosing how to be a part of the solution, funding should be directed in creative ways that keep aid out of corrupt pockets and encourage a more grassroots, participatory approach to peace building.

Focus on Demand

Factors fuelling demand in the "borderlands" of Kenya, identified by an ISS research project in 2003, included the following: identity-based conflict, availability, economies on the margins, and a lack of education and development. Although Kenya's geography, culture, and security situations differ greatly from those in Sierra Leone and Liberia, many commonalities can be found in the demand drivers behind the constant influx of illegal firearms in both regions.

Identity-based conflict incorporates youth and child soldiers as well as the newer threat of Hinga Norman's followers perceiving that the Sierra Leone Special Court has an anti-Mende bias. Availability is an issue because of the extensive trading capability of countries with little security infrastructure and seemingly unlimited mineral resources. Sierra Leone and Liberia are functional and increasingly established bases in the worldwide arms trade. While the resources are plentiful in the Mano River Basin, the economy of Sierra Leone is still nearly 70 per cent donor funded. Such large economies operating on the fringes of their own interior wealth are prone to the importation of small arms. Because of these budgetary woes, police are under funded, corporations must defend their own investments in whatever ways they can, and war-traumatised communities are faced with what they perceive to be yet another kind of militia (corporate security) operating in their environment. Finally, a lack of education and development in both East and West Africa contributes to the demand for small arms. Roads linking border communities with more central markets are nearly nonexistent in both places, a situation that creates cross-border and illegal trade instead of fostering a greater national economy. Education for adults promotes literacy and civic involvement, and for children creates the next generation of leaders. The lack of education allows an environment where ethnic tensions

are easily roused among adults and young people are more likely to be conscripted than to work for peace and prosperity.

Expecting state-centred solutions alone to curb illicit arms proliferation does not work when the state in question cannot fund traditional security operations. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, where the economies have been devastated by years of civil conflict, donors play as large a role in shaping policy as the government. Borders are porous, and though they should be closed or better monitored to reduce the flow of illicit goods, that is not a short- or medium-term option. The following measures are ways that small arms proliferation can be approached from the demand side:

1. **Increase funding for education that reduces the number of illiterate and at-risk young people.** As the RADA-SL study shows, a large population of at-risk young people creates not only the risk of a large recruitment pool like the one that provided youth armies for the RUF and other factions in the Sierra Leone war; it also devalues the generation that holds the most potential for building a more peaceful society. Forced labour and sexual abuse are extremely common challenges facing children and youth in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Government funding should not be limited to “special initiatives” seen as “soft” to address these problems from a humanitarian perspective. Rather, as Minister Dennis Bright suggested, Ministries should cooperate across traditional lines to plan and fund projects that recognise the security and state-building benefits to better education, health, and food security for children.
2. **Create youth agricultural empowerment initiatives.** Food security is still a big problem in the Mano River Basin, and a majority of young people are unemployed. It would be naïve to assume that youth ex-combatants who have been travelling all over the country adopting nicknames like “Notorious B.I.G.” and “Tupac” want to return to a traditional social system where they will be subject to the whims of Big Men and will lose their autonomy and connectedness. However, the opportunity to farm in an environment where they can make money and participate in developing their own infrastructure might lure some of the unemployed away from the overcrowded slums in capital cities. Empowerment initiatives should include funding for recreation and sports facilities in rural areas. The future of peace and security (or at least the success of youth employment plans) could come down to whether ice cream and Arsenal is accessible outside of Freetown and Monrovia. By creating alternatives to trading in arms and working as fighters, a culture of peace will at least have the chance to take root.

- 3. Continue demobilisation for ex-combatants beyond cantonment sites and encourage civic and peace education for all adults as part of a reintegration process.** A four-day curriculum is simply not enough time to cover career building, trauma recovery, and “how to be a civilian” for ex-fighters. The dearth of counselling and drug rehabilitation in Sierra Leone and Liberia needs to be addressed through civil society initiatives that build the capacity and resources to reach ex-combatants in their own communities even after reintegration has begun. It is not enough to focus only on those who fought in the war or were associated with the fighting forces. Communities who will now be re-absorbing traumatised and unemployed youth and former soldiers also need to understand the processes that are in place for building peace. Truth and reconciliation and Special Courts require a lot of civic education to make them work. Adult literacy drives can be part of civic education, encouraging adults to become more active participants in their own political empowerment. ‘Ethnic’ tensions are less likely to escalate among literate people. Education for both adults and children can change cultural perceptions, create opportunities for growth and changing economies, and produce more active, informed citizens.
- 4. Share responsibility at local and national level for small arms concerns between government departments and NGOs.** The Ministry of Defence cannot hold sole responsibility for security, dialogue and joint projects. The creation of multi-sectoral task forces between ministries of defence, agriculture, youth, justice and interior can lead to creative mainstreaming of small arms reduction. Activities should include sports and recreation, economic stimulus, and infrastructure growth. An example of this would be a ministry of youth and sport working with a ministry of education to combine peace education curricula with a nationwide peace-themed sporting tournament. Many theories characterise war in the Mano River Basin as fuelled by dangerous youth. There are few initiatives focused on harnessing youth power for positive development. This is one area in which multi-sectoral planning and execution will be crucial for the next generation of peace.
- 5. Build infrastructure to connect border communities to legal markets in urban centres.** As one UN worker said near the border of Sierra Leone and Guinea, “If only one area of improvement could receive funding for an entire year, the money should go to building roads.” Near international borders, farmers and those who trade in palm wine, livestock, cigarettes, even salt and soap are often better able to sell their goods in a neighbouring country than in their own. This leads to an exodus of possible trade in the country where they live, and also

encourages a culture of illegal cross-border activity that is very easily extended to guns, ammunition, and diamonds. Investing in infrastructure makes all other things possible. Roads encourage commerce; they allow even limited security personnel to travel to border areas and conduct inspections and investigations; and they bring investment that opens up forgotten backwaters to development and participation in nation-building. Smugglers operate better in environments where their activities can be easily hidden. The more open and developed the borderlands become, the easier it will be to monitor illicit trade and encourage the kind of business that helps to build peace.

- 6. Manage private security interests with community development.** While foreign investment is a lifeline for the development of countries like Sierra Leone that are resource-rich but capital-poor, the way large corporate investments interact with local communities is very important for the future of sustainable peace. The delicate relationships between mining interests, local government, national government, and communities have to be carefully managed. With disarmament and community arms collection being advertised as the “arms free” way of the future, armed security forces patrolling with unconcealed weapons should be avoided. Government should balance the need for investment with the responsibility to represent and give voice to valid community concerns, and independent mediators should be appointed when necessary during sensitive negotiations.

Questions for Further Research

After the long and brutal civil wars that seem finally to be coming to an end in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the work of rebuilding a society from the ground up is the biggest challenge. However, this rehabilitation process also offers opportunities. The direction of future research should follow trends in the way mining companies are integrating (or not) into the communities where they operate; look at how civil society and the media evolve in relationship to government; and follow the money trail of diamonds and other mineral resources to see how much of it finds its way back into community development.

Larger questions raised by this research include:

1. How can DDR processes avoid creating new gun markets?

2. In the absence of state control, can borders be monitored at the local level through peace building and civil cooperation?
3. How do young people conceptualise and resolve conflict, and how do their ambitions and fears fit with the building of post-war national identities and economies?
4. Is there an empirical connection between the neglect of children's rights and the likelihood of civil conflict fuelled by young soldiers? If so, what specific measures make conflict less likely through early intervention?