

CHAPTER 1

DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

Protracted conflict in the Mano River Basin has resulted, unsurprisingly, in large numbers of displaced people both within their own countries and in refugee camps (both formal and informal) in neighbouring ones. Displacement takes various forms: those who flee fighting or the destruction of their homes in war zones; those who are trafficked by relatives or brokers to serve as labourers, sex slaves, prostitutes, or mercenaries; those who choose to pursue opportunities to fight as mercenaries; and those who relocate to urban areas seeking employment, freedom, and distance from oppressive rural patrimonial systems of marriage and land tenure. All four of these groups (which sometimes overlap) have a significant effect on the impact and spread of war from one country to another. After peace agreements have been signed and disarmament completed, as is the case in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the plight of those whose homes have been destroyed, who have no livelihoods after years of living in camps, or who have no desire to leave urban areas, places a huge burden on the reconstruction process. Peace in one country often equates rather simply to the availability of the fighters there to join other, better paid, more active militias somewhere else.

Roving warriors: Politics

West Africa, partly because of its mineral wealth, has been the object of foreign intervention for decades. Liberia started as an American “colony”, the only independent state in the region while other areas were wholly under European domination. It was founded in 1822 as a haven for freed slaves from the United States, and then dominated by the new “Americo-Liberian” oligarchic class of former slaves and their “True Whig” party. They were joined by “Congos,” slaves from other parts of Africa on ships intercepted on the high seas and brought to Liberia to be freed. The history of the American settlers and their elite descendants, and the oppression they inflicted on native Liberians, is still cited today as a root of societal division. With the independence of Ghana in 1957, Liberia’s unique status as a beacon of hope and a model for both Africans and African-Americans faded dramatically. Liberia’s President

Tubman used his country's last remnants of glamour to become a founder of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the chairmanship of which Samuel Doe later used as a pulpit from which to criticise Libya in exchange for American support during the Cold War.

In the 1980s, Samuel Doe as President of Liberia became a master manipulator of American Cold War fears. Under American President Ronald Reagan, fear and loathing of Libya was at an all-time high (in the post-9/11 world, the US has reconciled with Libya, but a wariness remains with regard to Liberia in particular). Doe offered a West African regional voice to denounce Gadaffi publicly, particularly in OAU forums. He re-established diplomatic relations with Israel, and by the middle of that decade, Liberia was "home to a major CIA station, a satellite-tracking station and a Voice of America transmitter, apart from the US economic interests represented by Firestone and other investors."¹² Libya under Gadaffi bought an estimated billion dollars' worth of arms per year from the Soviet Union, a move that both bolstered the Soviet economy and made the American skittish about the balance of power in Africa and the Middle East.¹³ This made Reagan more than willing to bargain with Doe: his support for America and Israel in exchange for US financial and diplomatic support for Doe's regime. In turn, Côte d'Ivoire's Houphouët-Boigny and Burkina Faso's Thomas Sankara shared an aversion to Doe that drove them towards Libya. Young people all over West Africa, including in their two countries, were joining radical student movements in response to the lack of jobs stemming from the economic crisis and governments' inability to provide stability and education. With the blessing of the leaders of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, many of these youth went to training camps run by Gadaffi's World Revolutionary Headquarters in Libya,¹⁴ whence Sierra Leone's RUF emerged as a threatening force at the end of the decade.

The legacy of American involvement in Liberia remains today, with a diplomatic presence (the negotiation of Charles Taylor's release to Nigeria) as well as a corporate one dating back to the Firestone Agreement of 1926. More recently, there has been significant American investment in telecommunications companies. As in other parts of Africa, Cold War politics and superpower support, combined with global circumstances that contributed to an economic crisis in the 1980s, created a fertile ground for neighbourly power plays. The alliance-building and scheming of that earlier decade has continued, albeit with different actors, to the point where Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Burkina Faso have all funded and harboured each other's rebels at some point. A recent Human Rights Watch report concisely put this into perspective:

The Ivorian and Burkina Faso governments...from at least 1989, provided backing for the NPFL; the NPFL... from 1991, backed and provided combatants and logistical support for the RUF's insurgency against Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leonean government... from 1991, used combatants from ULIMO to fight the RUF and in turn provided them logistical backing to attack the NPFL; the Guinean government... from at least 2000, backed the LURD; the Liberian government during 2002-2003 provided troops to support an insurgency against the Ivorian government; and the Ivorian government armed and trained Liberians to assist in their military campaign against Ivorian rebels, who were also backed by Burkina Faso.¹⁵

Of course, it is not only Cold War politics or traditional state-level manoeuvring that has affected the balance of power or the movement of fighters in the sub-region. Guinea's Forest Region provides a different kind of case study, one where tribal affiliations as well as high-level support have resulted in large numbers of displaced people, a haven for combatants from Liberia who have not disarmed, and sometimes lethal tension between several different groups inhabiting the same under-resourced piece of ground. Tensions between the local Guerze ethnic group and incomers from the Konianke sub-group of the Mandingo people (who are widely vilified as "outsiders" and political troublemakers by other ethnic groups) are longstanding. Konianke traders from northern Guinea have developed a strong presence in the Forest Region since France established its colonial administration there during the late 19th century. During the late 1990s, however, trouble began with an influx of Konianke from Liberia associated with the ULIMO rebel movement and its successor, LURD, which fought against former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

The Guinean government backed ULIMO and the LURD against Charles Taylor. During the early 1990s, ULIMO offered cash to young Guineans of all persuasions to fight in Liberia; many accepted the offer. The recruitment of young Guineans to fight in Liberia resumed in 2000 after a two-year lull in the conflict, when LURD took up arms against Taylor from rear bases in Guinea. After a peace agreement in 2003, residents in Nzerekore in the Forest Region said the town was packed with hundreds of idle Liberian gunmen and Guineans who had not given up their arms, and tensions began to simmer. While the Konianke in the Forest Region tended to support their rebel kin in Liberia, and for many years were encouraged by Guinean authorities to do so, many of the Guerze sympathised with Taylor, who belongs to their own ethnic group. One employee of an international aid agency said that: "As a Guinean from the Forest Region, it was terrible to see the recruitment operations taking

place in the main stadium of Nzerekore to fight against Taylor, a man from our own tribe.”¹⁶ Guinean President Lansana Conté considered Taylor an adversary, which is why he was LURD’s main backer. Residents in the Forest Region said that so long as the civil war in Liberia lasted, the rebel movement’s fighters moved freely in and out of Nzerekore with no interference from the government security forces.

When the Liberian conflict ended in August 2003 with the departure of Taylor to Nigeria (an American-brokered deal that allows Taylor to continue living in Calabar with most of the creature comforts he enjoyed as a dictator), the Guinean army tried to clamp down on the activities of LURD fighters in Guinea. However, both Konianke and Guerze youths remained armed, and they were not the only ones. In 2000 and 2001, Taylor-instigated attacks and incursions into Guinea prompted Conté to throw together anywhere between 9 and 11,000 volunteers to form the Young Volunteers Militia that pushed the attackers back. Aid workers said that once the emergency was over and the militias were disbanded, many of these combatants kept their guns. With an estimated 7,000 of these volunteers who have not yet been either disarmed or reintegrated,¹⁷ there are frequent reports of them setting up clandestine road blocks in Nzerekore at night to extort money from passing motorists.¹⁸

Religious differences between the Konianke and Guerze have also played a significant role in heightening tensions between the two communities. The Konianke are predominantly Muslim, whereas the Guerze, who by some accounts “consider themselves to be the rightful masters of the Forest Region,”¹⁹ are mainly Christian and animist. One local of Nzerekore said:

The Konianke took the land, started to trade and tried to impose their own religion, culture and language on the Forest Region, causing enormous frustrations among the local ethnic groups. In many villages, Guerze tribesmen refuse to allow Konianke people to spend the night. They are highly suspicious of them and of Mandingo people in general. There is no respect at all between them.²⁰

In this case, the political antipathy between the leaders of two countries, Liberia and Guinea, led to the funding and “training,” however cursory, of various armed groups against the other. The fallout from these high-level decisions took on a life of its own, with armed young men from various ethnic groups displaced both economically and geographically, and wreaking havoc through their dislocation. Religious and ethnic tensions among not only the fighters, but also ordinary citizens living in the border region in Guinea are

still considered ripe ground for illegal small arms trafficking and future conflict. Caches of weapons that were never turned in during Liberia's DDR process, which ended in November 2004, were presumed to have been trafficked to Guinea for possible future use by Taylor's sympathisers in case of his eventual return.²¹

The sovereign borders that Liberia's Tubman fought to bolster by founding the OAU begin to seem meaningless when each country is interfering so frequently in others' politics. Alliances have broken down by Anglophone and Francophone countries, by economic position, and by Cold War affiliation. The politics of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as Burkina Faso, are so intertwined that declarations of peace in one when another is at war are basically meaningless. The recruitment of fighters across borders is a symptom of the power-plays and corruption at top levels of government. One ex-fighter put it this way:

Decision-making with guns began with the government. The problem is political; a response to conflict is always to arm, to get more guns, to be ready to fight and then to send someone else to fight for you. Politicians use arms to pursue their goals. Now we have youth that are growing up in that environment, and this is what they know. They have no positive interactions. Sixty percent of the population is youth, and there are no jobs until a conflict starts. Then, even if you are promised money, they usually tell you: go and pay yourselves. This is what politics means to youth today.²²

Finally, an NGO officer in Monrovia summed up what he sees as the greatest ambition of the next generation of potential leaders:

We have a failed, lost generation that allowed themselves to be used. Now they say, "I don't need to go to school to become a minister: I just need to hold a gun." We need to stop them from seeking that short cut.²³

Roving warriors: Poverty

While the impetus for armed insurgent groups to be armed, trained, and sometimes drugged may originate from decision-making at top levels of government, the environment for recruitment must provide strong incentives for young people to fight. Youth, particularly young men, must have reasons

to leave a peaceful environment in favour of opportunities as a paid fighter, which come along with the risk of death and the likelihood of being forced or encouraged to commit human rights abuses. Factors such as unemployment, lack of education, and the failure of reintegration to make peace as financially rewarding as war all contribute to such an environment. Sierra Leone, which completed its peace agreement, DDR and reintegration processes first out of the volatile countries in the sub-region, has provided many of the fighters to Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire's conflict.

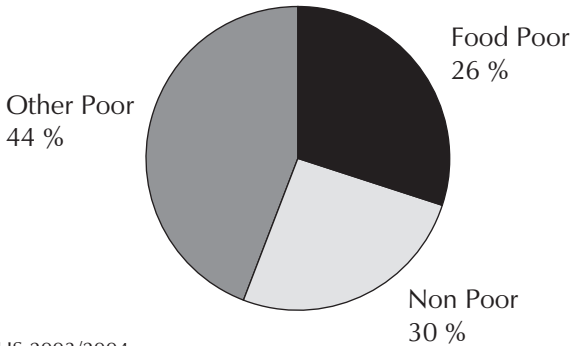
In Sierra Leone, arguably the poorest country in the world, an individual whose expenditure on food and basic needs falls below the level shown in Table 1 is considered to be poor.

Table 1: Sierra Leone Poverty Lines (in Leones)

	Annual (Le)	Monthly (Le)	Daily (Le)
Food/Core Poverty	377,045.00	31,420.42	1,033.00
Full Poverty (Food and Basic Needs)	770,678.00	64,223.17	2,111.45

Source: SLIHS, 2003/04

According to this definition, Figure 1 shows that about 26 percent of the population in Sierra Leone, or 1,248,000 people, are "food poor". This means they cannot afford even the most basic necessity, food, to the exclusion of all other necessities or comforts. When other basic necessities are added, the percentage increases to about 70 percent. The basic needs referred to are: food, safe water and sanitation, shelter, good health, basic education, and a household's easy access, both in terms of affordability and distance, to various economic and social infrastructure such as schools, health facilities, markets and public transportation.

Figure 1: Sierra Leone National Poverty Headcount

Source: SLIHS 2003/2004

Qualitatively, the population surveyed as part of the national participatory approach to Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of 2005 defined poverty as "the lack of basic needs and services such as food, money, shelter, clothing, health facilities, schools and safe drinking water." Although both men and women also mentioned lack of money and shelter, the common perception of poverty from all socio-economic groups is the lack of food. Hunger is a primary concern for children in particular. Among respondents to the national outreach team, one boy described hunger: "When you are hungry you are tired. It is difficult to concentrate in school. You fall asleep. Your stomach hurts like you have worms. You fight. It is so hard; you cannot do anything except think of food." A woman in a different province said: "We feel the pain of poverty the way the chicken screams, manifesting the pains of laying eggs."²⁴

It is important to view the movement of people and the recruitment of mercenary fighters in terms of poverty in addition to the geo-political context of countries' interference in each others' affairs. A recent Human Rights Watch report (April 2005) said that poverty and hopelessness were sending a growing number of young veterans back to work as mercenaries in conflict hotspots across West Africa even after movement towards peace was well underway in their own countries. Based on interviews with 60 male fighters, the results are representative of 15 different armed forces active in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire since 1989 and emphasise a clear link between economic factors and conflict:

The regional warriors unanimously identified crippling poverty and hopelessness as the key factors which motivated them to risk dying in

subsequent armed conflicts. They described being deeply affected by poverty and obsessed with the struggle of daily survival, a reality not lost on the recruiters. Indeed they were born in and fight in some of the world's poorest countries. Many described their broken dreams and how, given the dire economic conditions within the region, going to war was their best option for economic survival. Each group with whom these combatants went on to fight with has, to varying degrees, committed serious human rights crimes against civilians, often on a widespread and systematic scale. The brutal armed conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire have resulted in tens of thousands of civilians being killed, raped or maimed.²⁵

Some interview responses from combatants sound the warning of hunger as a graphic and immediate reality that overrides considerations of peace and rehabilitation. One Human Rights Watch respondent said: "We thought things would be ok, but they went bad again. There was no food. It was the African way – I had to feed my parents. The commanders said there wasn't money to pay us, but that we could pay ourselves, which meant looting."²⁶ Another ex-combatant said: "My children eat once a day and at times go to bed hungry. I see the chiefs, the big men, the ministers - they send their children to study abroad, whilst we live to suffer. They even use their money to buy justice in the courts. Let them heed this warning. We are talking about this now - we want another revolution."²⁷

Sierra Leone occupies the lowest possible rank of the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI), in 177th place. Côte d'Ivoire's rank is 163, and Guinea's is 160. Liberia has not even been included in recent Human Development Indices (including the 2004 Index) because of its civil war.²⁸ Unsurprisingly given the devastation of a conflict that rivalled Sierra Leone's in brutality and length, the living conditions there may be worse than any country ranked by the UNDP. According to Liberia's Millennium Development Goals report, the GDP per capita was just USD169 in 2002,²⁹ whereas Sierra Leone's was USD520. And while 57 percent of the Sierra Leonean population lives on less than a dollar per day,³⁰ the Liberian figure is 76 percent,³¹ more than three-quarters. Is it surprising, then, that Liberian fighters were both volunteering and being recruited at enormously high rates as the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire flared up in November 2004?

While some young people find their way independently into conflict zones looking for "work", others are actively recruited. The majority of underage combatants enter the life of a mercenary through a recruiter like the one that

authorities are currently investigating: a Liberian suspected of recruiting child soldiers to fight in Côte d'Ivoire. Liberian security sources said police and UN peacekeepers arrested Adama Keita in April 2005 on suspicion he was recruiting child soldiers to fight across the border. According to IRIN news reports, he was picked up in eastern Zwedru, close to the Ivorian border, but security sources would not disclose whether he had been charged. A top Liberian intelligence officer explained that, "Both the government and UN security networks have been suspicious of this gentleman's activities around the borders with Ivory Coast and we are questioning him about his involvement in the recruitment of ex-combatants in that region to fight in Ivory Coast."³² Adama is said to be a member of the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), a former rebel faction during the civil war backed by the Ivorian government.

The Human Rights Watch Report emphasised that many children from Liberia and Sierra Leone are headed to Guinea to fight for or against the government of President Lansana Conté and to Côte d'Ivoire, where rebels occupying the north of the country have been locked in conflict with President Laurent Gbagbo, who controls the south. It is not only rebels who recruit children: pro-government forces were not above it during Sierra Leone's civil war, and Gbagbo supporters in Côte d'Ivoire are doing it now. Some mercenaries said they had contacts as high up in the Ivorian army as Colonel, although the Ivorian government has repeatedly denied these claims.³³

Displacement, poverty, and recruitment find their nexus in refugee camps. UNHCR has reported that Liberian children have been recruited from camp in Côte d'Ivoire. The UN Secretary-General's February 2005 report on children and armed conflict claimed that 20 child soldiers were recruited from the Nicla camp for Liberian refugees, close to the town of Guiglo in western Côte d'Ivoire, although the timeline of this is unclear. UNHCR seems to have indicated that the camp was militarised several years ago. Still, the recruitment of former combatants is an ongoing problem in the Côte d'Ivoire and Liberian border region. Especially with the dense forest and lack of border patrols, children, mercenaries, recruiters, and guns move easily, undetected by authorities. Two-thirds of the Liberians interviewed for the April Human Rights Watch report had been approached since April 2004 to fight for one faction or another in a fighting "mission" abroad.³⁴ According to one of the report's authors:

Most would rather not go to war but they had few skills and the recruiters preyed on this. What really came out in this report was the

complete despair about their lives. The money they earned was used for legitimate concerns - hospital bills, support for family members, micro-credit loans to a brother, perhaps.³⁵

There are different types of mercenaries; those who choose to fight because they see it as part of their identity, those who are recruited with promises of wealth, and those who might volunteer for “humanitarian” reasons to sustain their families. Displacement of families to refugee and IDP camps makes recruitment easier. It also makes conflict among refugee and host populations more likely. If the displaced people are combatants or former combatants rather than civilians, like those in the Forest Region of Guinea, the situation can lead to the terrorising and extortion of local communities by armed recruits left unemployed by peace agreements. One thing most “roving warriors” have in common is that they started young.

Youth and urban migration

“Youth” can be broadly defined as anyone between the ages of 15 and 35, and occasionally people over 35 who are not married or financially independent. Data from most sub-Saharan African countries suggest that over half of the population is under the age of 18, and continent-wide it is estimated that half the population is under the age of 15.³⁶ Child soldiers barely old enough to hold a gun are fighting in West Africa’s conflicts. Children who are abducted, coerced, and forcefully recruited into armed groups face different challenges to those who are old enough to show some agency in the decision even if they are not considered adults. The militias engaged in conflict in Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire are stacked with such adolescents who have been alienated from a traditional social system that makes land ownership and even marriage difficult or impossible without total deference to elders and “Big Men.” One NGO strategist highlighted this issue by saying that “major changes in the institutional frameworks for rural social solidarity are necessary to get youth to give up guns and return home.”³⁷ In the meantime, young people who have been fighters are far more likely to settle in urban areas where crime is the only available employment opportunity, rather than returning to a life of tradition.

In *Young Africa*, Nicolas Argenti addresses the changing definitions of youth and culture, pointing out that we should question conceptions of youth that have changed dramatically from pre-colonial times to the post-modern, globalised world. While there is a huge diversity of cultures and traditions that vary from region to region, some factors remain constant. In most rural societies, young

men and women are often still subject to the control of male elders. The definition of youth that stretches into the mid-thirties age range and beyond reflects the fact that:

Men were not classified as 'children' as a result of their biological age, but rather because they had not achieved the level of economic importance that would permit them to acquire wives, build their own compounds, and become economically viable agents. Childhood thus refers to a position in a social hierarchy more than it does to biological age... The category 'youth' is therefore a moveable feast, a category used by different interest groups to define ever-shifting groups of people.³⁸

One participant in a youth focus group in Sierra Leone defined youth as "between the ages of 15 and 35, but if you are older, even if you have nothing, you are still a youth. If you are living very well, and you have money, even if you are young, we start calling you 'pa' and you leave the group."

As several theorists have noted, the youth population can no longer be categorised as a marginal sub-group of society. However, donors and governments continue, at their own peril, to plan programmes and solicit funding without a mainstream approach to politically empowering and including youth. Young people are frequently denied agency and are seen as pawns or victims of more "legitimate" power structures:

The phenomenon of children participating in violent conflicts has generally been viewed as a by-product of clashes between real conflict stakeholders (governments and armed insurgents, for example), much in the same way as happy, healthy, educated children are seen as a collateral benefit of peaceful, functional and prosperous states.³⁹

While youth are clearly vulnerable in ways that adults are not, they continue to become empowered by access to information and resources that change their expectations based on a more global view of political, participation, consumerism, and power. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth in Sierra Leone, challenged his colleagues:

Just go and do a small study on the nicknames [of ex-combatant youth]. Then you know how connected they are. Some of them are Beckham, others are Ronaldo, others are Rambo, others are Tupac, others are Notorious B.I.G. in a very remote corner of a village. To me, this is an indicator that these people know more than you think. They

are not desperately rural and backward young people anymore.⁴⁰

This new connectedness is often portrayed as threatening; and it is. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimates that there were some 300,000 child combatants active worldwide in 2001. Information has the power to mobilise change, and when the status quo still reflects child labour, abuse, and trafficking, children will find ways to fight for their own rights, or be co-opted by external forces with promises of empowerment. Argenti summarises the two extremes of youth portrayal:

While African governments may tentatively sing the praises of youth as the 'promise of the future,' they equally often fear them as the source of today's instability. Two stereotypes have thus simultaneously emerged, one portraying youth as 'heroes,' the other as 'villains.'⁴¹

In terms of policy development, these stereotypes are reflected in a split-personality donor and government approach that tends to hype the threat of violent youth when it comes to the criminal justice system or politically repressive measures, and yet under-fund or ignore solutions that would positively empower young people to use their power for economic or social advancement. There is a general failure to recognise that the same power and ingenuity used to fight wars can and should be harnessed to prevent them. The executive director of a youth organisation in Kenema stressed that

Youth are the core of the labour force but they have no jobs. We'd like to lure youth to agriculture, since that would affect our food insecurity and make the country more productive. But, we will also need to accept the mechanising of agriculture, and figure out ways to make farming generate income. The lifestyle of rural youth has already changed and will continue changing. They are not interested in subsistence farming. We need roads to get goods to market, especially in border areas, and we need points of intervention: youth who were victims but not perpetrators were excluded from DDR. Those who were 5 years old during the war and are now 16 have never gone to school because of displacement. Whatever we can do to get youth away from the cities and gainfully engaged in building infrastructure or producing food, we should do it.⁴²

An interview with a youth worker in Kono, Sierra Leone, highlighted some of the ways in which his programme is trying to reverse negative perceptions of youth.

***Interview with Network Movement for Justice and Development
Youth Empowerment Programme Director, Kono, 28 October 2004***

Q: People are very afraid of youth here. They say youth are dangerous.

Well, that is what we are facing. A lot of stories we are told about youths, how youths are volatile. But through coalition meetings, we are conscientising [sic] them to forget about those youths from yesterday, where they were just used as a political weapons of politicians, who were giving them drugs to take and go on the offensive. The recently concluded local government elections have proved that there are responsible youth in Kono, and that what we have been thinking about them is very, very wrong. For example, most of them were elected into the council; about 70 percent of the councillors of Kono are youths. So the idea of Kono youths: you could remember another time when the rebels were in control, but the MOCKY group [Movement of Concerned Kono Youth] is a firebrand group, asking these rebels to move out of their land. For that reason, people are looking at them as a difficult force.

But they were also fighting against corruption and corrupt actions. Many NGOs were not delivering what they were supposed to do after the war, and this group will pounce on them to ask what their main objectives are. Responsible youths come up with problems from chiefdoms, and they solve them. We have had five meetings, taken youth to regional and national trainings, and they are doing well. There is a lot of fear, but not all of it is justified. The last workshop we had was on human rights; we looked at the economic, social, and cultural rights of the individual. UNAMSIL, and others, explained their rights that they never knew they had. They don't want violence, but to have their rights through lobbying.

The last time, there were some football players, recreational things because there was a scuffle between two youth groups in this town here, MOCKY and Kono Youth League. So the police had to intervene, and take everything to the police. Later, when this coalition has been formed, they decided to advocate as a coalition. When they went there as a coalition, the police listened to them. They are changing, they are transforming. Initially, if they were going to the police, they would have gone there to cause a riot. But this time, they went to negotiate, and he saw to them and gave them everything. I was asked

whether the coalition has been formed, the youth leader was there, everything was handled properly. They actually tried, somehow.

Q: There are not many drug rehabilitation programmes. How many of the youth you know or work with had problems with drugs during the war; are the problems lasting?

Most of these guys are in the mines. They take these drugs in the mines when they are digging. The more they drug, the more they work. They work to the extent of ruining themselves without even knowing. But the idea of seeing ghettos around, I have not seen such actually. When we call them on meetings, we talk to them about drug addiction; they are the future leaders of this country. If the brain is damaged, development will also get damaged. And in fact, one of the youth leaders of MOCKY, in one of their meetings, suggested that in fact these drug centres are to be destroyed and come up with recreational centres for youths so they can learn skills training for their own development. At least 90 percent of the youths hailed and welcomed this idea.

Q: In terms of work, are they being exploited? Are they working without being compensated fairly?

They are actually exploited. You can look at someone who is working in the mines for the whole day, you give that individual LE500, which I cannot even estimate it; LE500 and a cup of rice for the day. They do the entire job, and at the end of the day, they don't even know the value of the diamond. So when they take the diamonds, they give them to their bosses, who can play on them. They can just give them chicken change, which cannot last them for long. Some of them today you see them with money, after a week it is finished, while those in charge buy mansions, fabulous cars, and so forth. So they are actually being exploited.

Q: Do you think there is a lasting connection between economic/social empowerment of these youth and the sustainability of the peace in Sierra Leone?

As long as these youths are empowered economically and socially—because like I said, 90 percent of these youths took up arms. And up to this day, the government pronounced that the war was over,

but after that, it's like something that is still standing still. If anything happens, the youth will take back to arms. They are on the margins of society, grumbling with hard times, they don't have a job. The ideas of economic and social empowerment will help them. One of the most outstanding things that the youth need in this country is job opportunity. It's not there. Working in the mines is not fair employment. Lots of youth around have come from universities, they have still not got job to do, they are grumbling, so the idle brain is the devil's corner.

Anything that happens, these guys will go back to the same thing. We are now agitating for economic, social, even political emancipation for the youths. I went to Kainkordu to see a problem between the youths and the newly elected councillors. They don't want to include the youths into the ward committees. The youths themselves thought it was their duty and responsibility to be in the ward committee. The council took their stand, the youth took their stand. There was no developmental activity going on in that particular chiefdom. Yesterday there was a big forum and we started to iron out some things. The chief administrator was there, and told them about the importance of youth. And if those youth are not included in the ward committees, they will get back to where they were. Because no matter which amount of work is being done, the youth will always oppose and criticise it. But if they are involved with the ward committees, they will be pleased because they will see what is happening, and will follow what is given by the central body to their own ward instead of the councillor choosing his own committee members dancing to his own tune. They must be incorporated politically, so they become stakeholders instead of agitators. Their voices are supposed to be heard.

Q: Was DDR successful? Are there still arms?

We have armed robbery and most of these guns—they have sophisticated guns up to this time—the only source of getting them was the war. I am sure some of them did not hand over all of their guns. They have decided to become night robbers and so forth. DDR was successful a little bit, because youths were disarmed, they were also reintegrated, they received skills training. But the majority of the youth were not having the chance because if you don't disarm with a gun, it means you were not a fighter. And most of those didn't

go through the process because they were not having guns. When the time came closer, the commanders seized the guns from them. Because the more guns you give, the more money you get. And they never went through training. Some of them are now in the mines, grumbling with difficulties in life. They went to the war, it seems as if they lost everything in life, they lost the war, the battle was also lost, and we are all living and up to this time they are the same people crying now, the economics of the day.

Q: But it was their own commanders who took away that opportunity?

Yes, the commanders went through, and even gave the guns to their own family friends, members, who never fought, because DDR was a big thing with education: university level even, they were paying for them. So they saw it as an opportunity. Those who fought were robbed of that chance, and the opportunity was given to those who never fought in the war. So some people are still carrying guns, committing crimes with them. And there are some caches around, with UNAMSIL leaving, just in case. About one or two months ago there were armed robbers revolving in this district, in the night, you see they were wearing military combats, attacking in the night. Citizens complained to the police, police had security meetings. And now there is police patrol every night, walking, and it has died down. But one cannot take it for granted. In case the police stop, they will come up again. And this is a diamond area, it is prone to attack. I'm not saying it will happen again. But if it does, this will be the first town they attack because they will want money. They will get the youths who are still idling in the mines, labour, get the diamonds, get guns. It can happen again just as easily as it died down. And that's why we need to empower the youth in the mines who are grumbling.