

Part 1

Rebuilding Democracy, Peace and Security



Paramount chiefs at May 2001 consultation

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Introduction

Since 1991, Sierra Leone has been in the firm grip of an armed civil conflict characterised by savagery and brutality of the most primitive and inhuman kind. In spite of a huge concentration of effort on the peace process in Sierra Leone by the international community, which complements the domestic effort of the government and civil society, resolution of the conflict has been notoriously elusive. As the conflict enters a second decade, with a relieving lull in hostilities and hope for peace and resolution of the crisis, it is imperative to examine how the political structures, practices and values that held us together collapsed and generated the conflict, and how these can be reconstructed to provide a foundation for rebuilding sustainable democracy and peace in post-conflict Sierra Leone. It is equally important that this rebuilding process be undertaken within the context of partnership between men and women as the gateway to the creation of peace and democratic culture.

My contribution to this difficult task is presented here in four parts: the first part presents the democracy and peace that have been destroyed and have to be rebuilt; the second is devoted to the rebuilding process, the third examines gender relations in decision-making, and the final part is on the central role women can play in the process of rebuilding peace and democracy.

Pre-war Democracy and Peace in Sierra Leone

This section of the paper is divided into two: the first part examines democracy as practised during the colonial administration, especially how it prepared Sierra Leoneans, if at all, to practise the Westminster model of democracy, and the second part presents democratic practices in post-independence Sierra Leone before the war. Peace and stability during these two administrative periods are also discussed.

Democracy during the colonial administration

Colonial administration was far from being democratic. The policy of Indirect Rule was meant to rule the colonies without interfering much with the traditional power structure of African society, whose practises were at variance with western democratic principles.

Three basic features of colonial rule accentuated its undemocratic character:

- ◆ The police and the army used force to maintain law and order. In fact the colonial state was essentially a military administrative unit. Thus the political culture bequeathed by colonialism contained the notion that authoritarianism was an appropriate mode of rule.
- ◆ The administration undertook activities that it deemed appropriate without widespread consultations. Transparency and accountability to the people were never part of it.
- ◆ Preparation for independence was rather hasty and incomplete. The process lasted for roughly 15 years, from 1946 to 1961, not long enough to teach the people democratic ideas and practice.

Neither were the administrative structures designed to cultivate democratic culture. Members of the Protectorate Assembly, established in 1946, for example, were mainly representatives of formal administrative organs of government and not directly elected by the people. The Assembly could not initiate major policy issues but merely endorsed them.

Elections of Protectorate members into the Legislative Council were done indirectly and Chiefs mostly represented the Protectorate people. In the Colony, there were property qualifications for elections. So here too, the franchise was limited. There was some attempt at opening up the franchise in the 1957 elections, but real adult suffrage was achieved only in the 1962 elections, one year after independence.

Thus the mass of citizens were not prepared for participatory democracy during the colonial period, including the period of decolonisation. Multi-party democracy, democratic institutions, principles, ideals and practice of democracy were all alien to the majority of the citizens at the time of independence in 1961.

Post-independence Era

Like many people, I have uncritically written in some documents that Sierra Leone inherited, at independence, a democratic system of government with effectively functioning democratic institutions modelled on those of Britain, with no reference to the inadequacies of these institutions. The second post-independence general elections, held in 1967, clearly unveiled these weaknesses, including their vulnerability emanating from the lack of proper understanding of, and faith in, their function by both politicians and citizens. The army stepped in because of what it described as a 'stalemate' in the elections, rather than resorting to judicial or other constitutional processes to solve the impasse. From then on the picture of democracy in Sierra Leone has been all doom and gloom. For

the best part of the post-independence period and especially after 1967, the country has been governed by a single-party political structure interspersed with military rule.

Both in principle and practice, single-party and military rule are anathema to democracy—they are absolutely incompatible with it. The democratic rights of the citizens, particularly the right to choose their leaders in conformity with democratic standards and freedom of speech and expression, were relegated to privileges rarely enjoyed by the citizens. Local governments, especially the District Councils that provided the environment for citizen participation in governance, were abandoned in favour of an overcentralised system. Municipal and town councils have been run by management committees, not elected by the people, but appointed by the government of the day. Functional relationships among the three arms of government underpinned by checks and balances, were compromised, just as the rule of law and equality before the law were generally compromised.

Thus the country was ill-prepared for sustainable democracy, and both the single-party and military regimes that have ruled the country for most of the post-colonial period aggravated an already serious situation, leading to the collapse of the weak democratic institutions inherited at independence. The crisis of democracy the country is going through has hence emanated from the woeful failure of successive post-independence governments to build on this weak foundation by strengthening democratic institutions and delivering sound citizenship education for democracy.

One of the sad consequences of the introduction of dictatorship and authoritarianism on peace and democracy after independence was the widespread use of violence in politics. Citizens whose views different from those of the regimes were coerced into compliance. Lives and property were at the mercy of political thuggery, especially at elections. It is widely believed that the seeds of the unprecedented violence and abuse of rights the country has experienced in this war were sown during this period.

Moreover, the voice of women was a mere whisper throughout this long period of political decision-making and practice. A few, just a few, enjoyed appointive and elective political positions, but women were generally on the thin fringe of the system and decision-making processes.

Peace before the war?

Generally, the country enjoyed considerable peace during the colonial administration, either because of its threatening 'sledge-hammer' administrative approach or because the natives found comfort in the indirect rule system. But the House Tax War of 1898 and the countrywide disturbances of 1955-56, among others, indicate that it was not altogether an unbroken peace.

From the 1967 general elections to 1991 when the rebel war started, there was no openly organised armed challenge to the authority of the state, apart from the brief spell of the Ndogbowusui insurrection in the Pujehun District in the aftermath of the 1982 general elections. However, the persistent violence that characterised political activities deprived many people of genuine participation in the political process. The period was also marred by sporadic student protests and labour unrest, all of which were brutally suppressed. From the point of view of many people, what prevailed then was an uneasy calm, a volcano waiting to erupt.

Rebuilding Democracy and Peace

Rebuilding democracy and peace presupposes that these two concepts once existed in Sierra Leone, but have been destroyed. While the generality of this statement can hardly be questioned, it has been argued above that democracy was both weak and rudimentary, and that what obtained was more of political stability anchored in a zero choice political climate than peace. Our task, then, is much more of building than rebuilding, which is why I have used the two words interchangeably in this paper.

But what are we building for and how do we do this construction work? Using the two words together, democracy and peace, strongly suggests a close link between the two: with democracy we can have peace; with peace we can exercise our democratic rights and responsibilities. An extended interpretation is that peace was shattered because democracy was shattered.

If this interdependence of democracy and peace in our particular context is accepted, then the rebuilding process must be firmly based on the foundation and building blocks of human rights. Democracy is a rights-based ideal. I cannot imagine any argument against the view that peace is considerably enhanced in an environment where the rights of the citizens are protected and promoted; neither do I expect an opposition to the view that democracy is better practised in an environment of peace.

And what are the objectives of this rebuilding process, we may ask?

Cultivation of common values

Sierra Leone has a population of less than 5 million, shared among at least sixteen ethnic groups, each with its own language and cultural practices. Democracy does not call for dissolution of ethnic diversities, but careful cultivation of common or shared values and identity. In Sierra Leone, where political activities and groupings are perceived in terms of ethnic patronage, this is the greatest challenge to democracy. For example, the following comment on the formation of political alliances appeared in the *Standard Times* tabloid on 14 May 2001:

‘UNPP sources said with UNPP Temne support and the GRAO Limba based combined, they would form a strong force to challenge the mainly Mende dominated SLPP.’

Building a sustainable democracy in Sierra Leone thus requires creating an environment where the state has the loyalty of this ethno-nationalism, real or imagined, now enjoyed by the ethnic groups. In this environment, citizens should feel secure and not threatened by other groups. In other words, the sense of belonging and security the citizen is offered from their ethnic group should be provided by the democratic system of the state. Equal opportunities—economic, social, political and judicial—should be enjoyed by citizens without regard to ethnic affinity. Through this, shared democratic values, aspirations and a common national identity are carved out of ethnic and cultural diversity.

The relationship between shared values and aspirations and peace is not difficult to delineate. Shared values and aspirations mean those who hold them have a common goal and stake in the process of nation-building. They serve as a bond of peace, minimising conflict or providing mechanisms for containing conflict. Who wants his/her stake destroyed in conflict?

Democratic institutions

Democracy cannot work without institutions to uphold and promote its ideals. I stated earlier that the three traditional democratic institutions compromised their values and functions during the single-party political era, and the legislature in particular was abandoned during the period of the military dictatorships. Stories of the judiciary compromising its responsibilities, and the legislature merely rubber-stamping the wishes of the executive were not uncommon.

The most important single factor in rebuilding democratic institutions is taking measures that can revive the confidence of the people in these institutions. The judiciary should not only be independent, but should be seen to be independent, commanding the respect of the people, recognising no sacred cows including the state, and expeditiously carrying out its responsibilities to the people. The judiciary should itself, as the major human rights machinery of the state, be conscious of its responsibility to intervene promptly even in the most distasteful of legal conflicts. Democracy will work when people feel safe and confident to take constitutional and other matters on democratic principles to the courts, especially those involving the government.

Democracy needs a legislature that understands the principles of democracy and is prepared to sacrifice for it. Viable opposition providing constructive checks and balances on the ruling party is an imperative in a functioning democracy.

Civil society has emerged in Sierra Leone as an institution that can play a crucial role in rebuilding democracy and peace. Its uncompromising resistance to military rule as demonstrated by its agitation for return to constitutional rule in 1996, the civil disobedience against the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) junta in 1997 and the demonstration against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in May 2000 leads indisputable credence to this. Civil society's role in the peace process is equally impressive. However, for a more effective contribution to the restoration process, there is need to create awareness of the functions of civil society in a democracy and to be more visible outside the capital, Freetown, in addition to its strengthening and development.

Education for democracy

Democracy is learned. It is not genetically transmitted or bequeathed by parents to offspring. And like all cultural values and practices, it is acquired through processes of socialisation, formal as well as informal. It is a part of civic culture which, when acquired, enables citizens to live in harmony with others and behave as informed, responsible citizens, discharging their civic duties and obligations.

Education for democracy creates a culture in which the citizens understand and zealously protect the ideals and practices of democracy, irrespective of party and other political interests. The citizens must understand the functions of democratic institutions and the functional relationships that exist among these institutions. Perhaps more significantly, the political education programme should cultivate in the citizens confidence in the institutions as the 'shrines of democracy'. And to sustain democracy, the citizens should perceive it as their permanent preference of government over all other forms of government. In it they place their hopes and expectations for justice, freedom, affluence, deliverance from the afflictions of bad governance, opportunity for participation in governance, enjoyment of their rights and of course peace. Education for democracy should recognise these expectations and hopes. It should emphasise patriotism, de-emphasise ethnopoltics, encourage healthy political competition, tolerance and the role of the security forces, especially the military, in a democracy.

While the entire citizenry should be the target of this democratic rebuilding education, particular emphasis should be placed on the young population, especially those in educational institutions, to 'catch them young' so that they grow up into adults imbued with democratic values and the desire to protect those values. It must be emphasised that building democracy is a process and, like all cultural processes, it takes time to produce results.

Education for political parties is critical in rebuilding democracy. The administrative structures, functions and membership should reflect the democratic tenets and practices

to which the country aspires. Party officers should be elected in consonance with democratic standards against the background of gender equality, which should be enshrined in the party constitution, and with full recognition of ethnic diversity. Education for political parties centred on these factors will enable them to operate according to democratic principles, which they can then apply when they are in power.

There is yet another special group for education for building democracy: chiefs and cultural leaders. The indirect rule system of British colonialism and the preservation of chieftaincy institutions in various forms with their authoritarian administrative structures present a tremendous obstacle to true democracy. This, coupled with the practice of the aged male taking decisions on behalf of the rest of the community, denies the citizens the right to participate in decision-making that affects them.

Moreover, chiefs are not directly voted for by the people, and only men vote at chieftaincy elections. The problem is that the voting right is tied to payment of local tax, and women are excluded because they do not pay local tax (the exception is women councillors). It also means that young citizens at school, 18 years of age and above, constitutionally qualified to vote at general elections, have no voting right for chieftaincy elections.

The rebuilding process of democracy must very carefully consider this anomaly. There is need for reform so that the people learn and practise democracy at their local level.

Gender Equality in Political and Public Decision-making

This part of the paper discusses the current situation of gender equality in political and public decision-making as the basis of recommendations for promoting and sustaining gender equality in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

The current situation

We have seen that the authoritarian nature of traditional African administrative structure excludes women and young people from the mainstream of decision-making. The chiefs and the 'grey hairs' have the 'authority' to take decisions on behalf of women and the community at large. We have also seen that the franchise at the chiefdom level favours men, limiting the participation of women in decision-making, including the right to choose their leaders. To understand rights, exercise rights and promote rights, rights should be exercised by those entitled to them, not by others on their behalf.

Outside of this rural sphere of life, the situation is minimally different. Here is how *For Di People* newspaper of Thursday, 17 May 2001 satirised the paucity of women in parliament:

'There are Ten men for every One woman in Parliament ... Yes, that's a FACT! There are only seven ladies in Parliament while there are 73 male MPs!'

The executive arm of government does not present any better picture at all, for in 2001 there were only three women ministers in government, two of them of cabinet rank.

In the public decision-making structures, the situation is even more dismal. For example, no woman is a managing director or chair of a board of directors in the many parastatals in the country.

There are many reasons for this small presence of women in these structures:

- ◆ The leadership culture of the country does not favour women to occupy decision-making positions. The Northern Province in particular excludes women from occupying the position of Paramount Chief. In fact, it is only the Proportional Representation (PR) system that seems to have created the opportunity for women from the north to serve as members of parliament.
- ◆ The political violence referred to has served to exclude women from the challenges of contesting elections, especially during the era of the single party system.
- ◆ The apparently low self-esteem of women that makes politics a 'man's game', voluntarily excludes them from the mainstream of political decision-making structures.
- ◆ The low number of educated women, arising from prioritising education for males, limits women's chances to occupy decision-making positions.
- ◆ Subtle discrimination in the workplace that hampers the upward mobility of women to decision-making positions, and the absence of gender policy in political and public decision-making structures.

These obstacles were among factors identified by a study conducted by this writer and three women academics and professionals, for the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO) in 1997, that militate against women holding major decision-making positions in the country.

This situation obtains not because of the absence of legal provisions for equal opportunities. In fact the Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991) provides for equal opportunities for men and women. In addition, Sierra Leone is a signatory to international human rights instruments that guarantee equal rights, specifically the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women that guarantees:

Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections—to vote and to stand for election—on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service.

Unfortunately, these international human rights norms that entitle every person irrespective of sex, to vote, hold office, perform public functions and engage in decision-making at all levels, are yet to be achieved in Sierra Leone.

The Centrality of Women in Rebuilding Peace and Democracy

This part of the paper proposes that women have a central role to play in rebuilding peace and democracy, given their experience of the conflict.

But first, what does the conflict mean to women?

- ◆ sexual violence of the most horrific kind, sometimes inflicted on them in front of their children, male siblings, and husbands;
- ◆ rape and gang rape;
- ◆ torture;
- ◆ loss of friends and family members;
- ◆ insecurity and vulnerability;
- ◆ displacement and homelessness;
- ◆ extreme poverty and dependence;
- ◆ loneliness;
- ◆ the burden of single parenthood and other responsibilities;
- ◆ reconstruction;
- ◆ distasteful activities including begging and prostitution for survival;
- ◆ indignity and humiliation.

These profound and indelible experiences of women and their perceived non-violent nature in our culture demands that they be given, or they seize, a central role in rebuilding peace. This is an even more compelling proposal in the light of the fact that women constitute just over half of the country's population. Their experiences and perceptions of the war and democracy are very different from those of men. They have

different social values gathered from their 'invisible role' in society. As 'outsiders' contributing from the 'fringe and beneath' of society, their contribution to the reconstruction process in post-conflict Sierra Leone will be refreshingly invaluable.

Here are some strategies that can promote this proposal:

Understanding the causes of the conflict

Since women have different social values, experiences and perceptions of democracy and the conflict, it is absolutely essential that these differences are thoroughly identified, understood and appreciated by men and women so that the reconstruction exercise is not carried out to the disadvantage of any one group. Nothing that militates against democracy and peace at all levels of society should be glossed over in this identification process: limited suffrage for women, violence (both domestic and public), obnoxious cultural and legal provisions and practices that affect women, discrimination in the workplace, etc., should all be carefully considered.

Democratic structures and processes

These, especially the electoral system and political parties, have fundamental roles to play in ensuring effective partnership in rebuilding democracy and peace. Sierra Leone has tested two electoral systems, constituency-based elections that have majoritarianism as the basis of victory at elections—otherwise known as the winner-takes-all or first-past-the-post—and a system of proportional representation (PR) that favours multi-group representation in political decision-making. Whichever of the two systems that is selected for elections in post-conflict Sierra Leone should be the one that has greater room for partnership between men and women.

The PR system presents itself as more suitable for this purpose, since lists for party candidates can be selected on the basis of 'all even numbers for women, all odd numbers for men.' If the first-past-the-post system is selected, then affirmative action that allocates an agreed number of seats to women is imperative. This is particularly significant for those parts of the country whose culture and tradition seem to exclude women from important decision-making structures.

Going beyond gender consideration for elective positions, is the suggestion to consider very seriously affirmative action in the appointment of heads/chairs and members of parastatals and commissions.

Decentralisation

Local government structures with increased authority and power should be designed to operate on the basis of partnership. In particular, the proposed structures should be

reformed to accommodate the visible and decisive presence of women, either through affirmative action as suggested earlier, or a PR system that makes participation of women a certainty. This will give women their entitlement to participating in the democratic decision-making machinery at the local as well as regional levels.

Resolve of women

No recommendation for forging partnership for democracy and peace rebuilding can be meaningfully achieved without the resolve of the women themselves to effectively occupy their space in the process. They need to take off the cloak of low self-esteem, image or perception and muster confidence to outgrow their erroneous second-rate citizen status. This will take time, the support of women organisations and a lot of education of all categories of the citizenry.

Popularising the rights of women

It has been stated that both the destruction of democracy and peace were rights-based abuses. This is particularly true of the war, both in terms of cause and character. Therefore the rebuilding process should consider popularising the rights of women as enshrined in the constitution and international rights instruments. My view is that this will take time. But educating the young at school, designing an appropriate gender-based curriculum, instructional materials and teaching methodology, will help considerably. And so will a rights-based approach to development, aid and social reintegration.

Capacity-building

It is one thing to legislate gender equality, even distribute appointive positions with a gender focus, but quite another to yield the desired result. Women in particular should be trained in 'performance skills' such as communication skills, public relations and confidence building. Men should also be 'taught' to understand and appreciate that their role and that of women in national reconstruction are complementary.

Families and communities

Families and communities are critical in building democracy and peace because they are the units that shape socialisation processes and attitudes. It is in the families and communities that recognition and practice of gender equality can start, complexes can be defeated, stereotypes about educated women and women in politics can be dismissed through education, and changes in voter attitude coloured by prejudices against women can be tackled. They are the nuclei of culture of rights and peaceful coexistence. In the centre of it all should be women, in complementarity with the men, not behind them.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that democracy has never been firmly established in Sierra Leone, and that peace before the outbreak of the war was a smouldering tinder box waiting to erupt into flames. It has argued further that women, in spite of their tremendous contribution to development, and the fact they constitute over half of the population, have been on the periphery of political and public decision-making, despite the fact that they have sacrificed for democracy and peace far beyond their level of participation in decision-making. For example, the first real civil society organisation to agitate for the end of the war was the Women's Movement for Peace. An Eastern Province-based women's group has the credit of being one of the first groups to attempt a meeting with the RUF, although the result was a humiliation that they can hardly forget. Women were also in the forefront of the agitation for return to constitutional rule in 1996.

In view of this impressive record, a genuine partnership between men and women in the struggle to build democracy and peace is bound to be a highly productive strategy. This partnership must have a sense of equality and of the indispensability of each person's contribution. It has no place for the traditional notion of the weaker sex associated with women, but certainly a huge place for brains, skills, determination and vision—all of which women possess no less.

Gender Equality in Political and Public Decision-making 1.2

Elizabeth Lavallie

Member of Parliament and Acting Speaker of Parliament

I shall address this topic from three angles:

- ◆ Women's role, as I see it
- ◆ What can women do to be involved?
- ◆ What can the government do towards achieving gender equality?

Introduction

Sierra Leone has a history of political misrule under various preceding governments. Social injustice was the order of the day, leading to deteriorating social and economic conditions. Mismanagement of scarce resources was predominant. Unemployment was at its highest. The youths being the greater percentage of unemployed became easy prey for corrupt politicians who recruited them and gave them drugs to act as thugs in political campaigns.

Key among the consequences of these social, economic and political injustices were the advent of the Ndogbowosui conflict in southern Sierra Leone in the 1980s and the rebel war in 1991. Sierra Leone has since then moved from a one-party dictatorship, through two military governments, to a democratically elected government in 1996. Women played a leading role in the democratic process, acting as advocates for change through sensitisation campaigns, rallies, protest marches and pressure groups. Particular mention should be made of the contribution of women to the success of the Bintumani 1 and 2 conferences. All sectors of the population suffered severe psychological, physical and social dislocation on account of the war. There were rapes, physical assaults, looting, killing, maiming and damage to property acquired over generations. This had a telling effect on the economy. The value of the *leone* decreased considerably, reaching its lowest in 1998 when the rate of exchange was Le3000 to US\$1. Poverty was on the increase and this impacted negatively on the entire population, especially women and children. When one considers that women had become heads of households overnight, serious problems of catering for the family needs were posed.

The present government has been grappling with the many problems brought on by the war and has registered a number of successes, particularly by signing the Lomé Peace

Agreement with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in July 1997. Even though the peace is yet to be consolidated, the ongoing programme of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants is to be regarded as a sure means of advancing the peace process if carried to its logical conclusion. The efforts of the international community to help the people of Sierra Leone get back on their feet is to be lauded.

Women's Role, as I see it

Western democracy puts emphasis on the basic principles of universal human rights, including the equality of men and women—this they contend is the foundation of democracy. The stability of any democracy depends on the degree of participation by its citizens, which comprise both men and women. For this reason it is a cause for concern in Sierra Leone that only a few women have been included in political and public decision making, including peace negotiations, taking into account that women make up to 51.3 per cent of the population of this country. Table 1.1 in Annex A shows that women are grossly underrepresented in political and public decision-making institutions and can be easily classed as the marginalised majority.

Since the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement, Sierra Leone has gone through a very slow and painful process of rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement. The indications are that the economy could pick up rapidly with much more improvement in security. Efforts are being made to create awareness about the need to make the peace work. The National Commission for Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Resettlement (NCRRR) is currently involved in restoring damaged structures as well as providing for the socioeconomic needs of the population especially those in rural communities. NGOs have made a lot of input in this venture.

Even though there are still legal impediments to women's advancement there is ample evidence that their participation in spheres of life has increased considerably. When one considers the magnitude of atrocities wreaked on women and children during the war, women are to be commended for their resilience. The small number of women and at times the non-inclusion of women in peace negotiations is cried down by women. Sierra Leone has gone through four major peace negotiations and one peace plan as a way forward to peace: the Abidjan peace agreement of 30 November 1996; the ECOWAS peace plan of 23 October 1997 (Conakry); the Lomé Peace Accord of 7 July 1999, and the Abuja Agreement of 10 November 2000 and May 2001.

At the Abidjan peace agreement women were not represented. For the ECOWAS peace plan one woman was involved at national level. Improvements were made during the Lomé Peace Accord: two women representatives were involved. Although the women were not chief negotiators, they made immense contributions during the discussions.

Article 28 of the Lomé Peace Agreement relating to post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction states that:

Given that women have been particularly victimised during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.

Embedded in the peace accord is the formation of commissions that consolidate good governance:

- ◆ Commission for the Consolidation of Peace;
- ◆ Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development;
- ◆ Council of Religious Leaders.

In all these commissions there is no involvement of women: there is therefore still room for gender sensitivity. It is expected that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be more gender-sensitive.

Although female representation has been minimal in the country's peace missions, yet women have been involved in an advocacy role in seeking an alternative to war and violence. At the organisational level, women are involved in planning and implementing peace programmes thereby inculcating and nurturing a culture of peace and peace-building. There are various women's organisations involved in peace: e.g., Mano River Women's Peace Network, Women's Movement for Peace, WILPF SL, Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Women's Forum, MCSL FORWASAL, Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP).

While Article 28 of the Lomé Peace Accord proposes or promises greater opportunities and wider access to women and women's groups to the structures of power and the processes of social change, it is another thing to deliver on those promises evidenced by the lack of involvement of women in the commissions established by the agreement. Serious conflict can never be resolved without the participation of the parties involved. As women are involved in all deep-rooted social conflicts, they must be involved in the processes of resolution, as well as in social decision-making.

Gender inequality was identified in all power and decision-making structures and processes by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Since that declaration six years ago, very little progress has been made by governments towards gender equality. Instead, our sub-region continues to be male-dominated.

The Beijing Platform for Action states:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for a transparent and accountable government ... and sustainable development in all areas of life Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account.

During the military rule of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government, when it became clear that the military government had no intention of holding elections and handing over to a democratically elected government, women were prompted into action by 'WOMEN' (Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation) and were instrumental in the fight for democracy. They were both key advocates and a pressure group. More importantly, they were at the heart of the political campaign, wearing ashobies, preparing sumptuous meals. However, when the time came for a proportional representation election the inequality was evident. Women were relegated to the back seat. In my party, for instance, only 5 women were on the list of 68 representatives. The men made the decisions. When Foday Sankoh's hidden agenda was exposed, it was again the women who took the lead to tell him 'Not again! Enough is enough!'

The need to include women in the planning and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction cannot be overemphasised. In conflict zones throughout the world, it is evident that not only are women in need of specific attention and care but for reconciliation and reconstruction processes to take root, the involvement of women is crucial. Women have increasingly become providers for their families as well as decision-makers. There is therefore the need to develop mechanisms that will involve women in social, political and economic reconstruction in post-conflict situations.

It is important that there must be gender equality at all levels in post-conflict reconstruction. Many women have been made widows and, particularly in Africa, death is culturally a tragedy and widowhood a curse. Women can be disinherited and turned out in the street. It is therefore the responsibility of government to protect the widow from harassment and ostracism. One sure way to protect the widow is for her to have her voice heard in post-conflict reconstruction from the village level upwards.

The most important area where women can make an impact in influencing equality is in politics—local or national. However, until recently women have shied away from politics because they have been led to believe that politics is a dirty and violent game

that must be left to the men to play. As a result of this negative attitude only about 24 women have been involved in politics as members of parliament or as ministers since independence (40 years ago). The first women politicians included: Constance Cummings-John, Paramount Chiefs Madam Ella Koblo-Gulama and the late Madam Honoria Bailor-Caulker, the late Florence Dillsworth, Dr June Holst-Ronese, Agnes Taylor-Lewis, Agnes Labour, Matilda Conteh, Amy Kallon and Christiana Thorpe. Today, there are only eight women in parliament and two women cabinet ministers.

What can Women do to be Involved?

There are evident obstacles that inhibit Sierra Leonean women from taking part in democratic elections and participation in political and public decision-making. These include: violent elections and corruption, tradition, lack of knowledge about the system, the negative attitude of some men, and socio-cultural barriers.

Women need to be encouraged and trained to become politicians. Women need to recognise that the blame must not be put on men entirely. Perhaps we as women have allowed ourselves to be marginalised and relegated to the back seat because we have no confidence in ourselves or other women folk.

Political participation and inclusion in the political structures

Now that the war has ended and peace is imminent, there is an increased demand for psycho-social rehabilitation as well as political and peace education at all levels, but more so in the war-affected areas. This demand cannot be ignored but it is also disheartening to note that the existing facilities and efforts cannot cope with the wide range of demands. In this regard it will be desirable if the Women's Forum could collaborate with the appropriate agencies and institutions to establish support centres at strategic locations to provide much needed assistance in the following areas:

- ◆ more involvement in political affairs;
- ◆ women politicians to sensitise women about political involvement;
- ◆ increase women's decision-making power at all levels;
- ◆ upgrade literacy status especially among women;
- ◆ sharpen women's political skills;
- ◆ train women for leadership/assertiveness;
- ◆ mobilise and sensitise grassroots;

- ◆ remove negative cultural barriers;
- ◆ push for affirmative action/quota system (number of parliamentarians/ministers/others);
- ◆ stipulate leadership positions per constituency;
- ◆ increase political education;
- ◆ female aspirants to political office should be given moral and financial support;
- ◆ push for affirmative action in political parties, i.e., political parties allocating a percentage of safe seats to female candidates.

Much has been done by the 50/50 Group to sensitise women for political office, and with the support of the British Council and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) training in building the capacity of women in politics is being carried out by this group. The Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP), with the support of UNFPA, has been advocating for women's participation at all levels of decision-making.

Democracy and good governance

However much women's organisations and institutions advocate for gender equality in political and public decision-making, there must also exist the political will of the government to initiate and implement policies and programmes that are gender-sensitive to bridge the gap of inequality evident in Sierra Leone.

Some of the actions government may take as a way forward include:

- ◆ educate for attitudinal change, i.e., moral values;
- ◆ step up voter education for women;
- ◆ disseminate information about civic rights and responsibilities;
- ◆ increase women's participation in constitutional matters (input into the constitution);
- ◆ enhance knowledge of democratic principles;
- ◆ create greater understanding of current issues;
- ◆ accelerate development of literacy projects and legal rights education.

The role of government in achieving gender equality

- ◆ take critical action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions;

- ◆ develop career advancement programmes for women of all ages that include career planning, training and retraining;
- ◆ develop communications strategies to promote public debate on the new roles of men and women in society and the family;
- ◆ strengthen the national women's machinery and other governmental bodies integrating gender perspectives into legislation, public policies, programmes and projects, and generating better research and data on how public issues affect women;
- ◆ ensure that before any policy decisions are taken, an analysis of their impact on women and men is carried out.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has initiated two policy documents:

- ◆ National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming;
- ◆ National Policy on the Advancement of Women.

These should be reference books for all women and men. For these policies to be implemented, however, adequate budgetary allocation must be made to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. The effective application of these policies will go a long way towards gender equality.

Conclusion

The participation of women in all aspects of conflict resolution, social transformation, and decision-making bodies, requires institutionalised structural change. The roles for women, their inclusion and their legitimacy, need to be fully integrated into the legal, political and economic systems of society. Women must also share responsibility for institutionalising the changes into social structures and processes.

Much improvement has been made towards gender inclusion by appointing women to decision-making positions. For example women have been appointed as judges, board members of parastatals (including chairpersons) and in other administrative establishments. Most recently a woman was elected to the ECOWAS Parliament and as Acting Speaker of Parliament. Much more needs to be done, though, to bring about gender equality in political and public decision-making.

To achieve equality therefore:

- ◆ Governments must make it a policy.

- ◆ Men must be sensitised to accept women leaders.
- ◆ Women themselves must be sensitised to make good use of their potentials and build confidence in themselves to meet the challenges of equal participation. Only then can we truly bring about gender equality in political and public decision-making.

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Introduction

A surprising amount has been written about gender equality in recent years if the many thousands of Web pages are an indication of interest in this subject. If one expands the debate into the similar area of Equal Opportunities there is even more to discover. In Britain, the pressure for progressing the issues of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities has been championed principally by women and members of the ethnic minorities, but also as a direct result of external pressure from legislation, for example the Human Rights Act. This consultation is an excellent example of the need to expose problems and shortcomings and seek to deliver solutions that are appropriate to a country on the threshold of post-conflict reconstruction. For it is as well to square up to these issues now as we move towards a resolution of the current security situation and start to lift our eyes towards the horizon and the goal of reconstruction.

There are clearly roles for both women and men in the security sector and in peace building, and these two areas will form the theme of the paper. It is also important to acknowledge the differences between men and women—as well as the similarities—and take note of the lessons of history in developing a way forward.

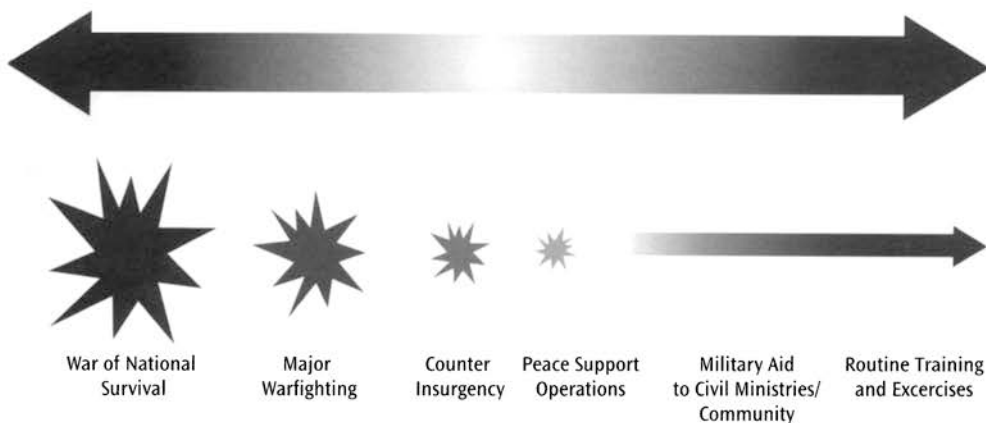
Gender Equality in Security

Security tasks in any country involve a range of agencies, either working together or separately. Typically, the agencies involved are the armed forces, police, prisons, fire service, private security companies, for example in the mining areas, and the intelligence services. In this part of the paper remarks will be limited to gender equality and the role of women in the armed forces.

It is important to have a view of a typical military security spectrum and the impact it can have both upon a country or nation, and more specifically on the roles of men and women. At the extremes of the spectrum are War and Peace, but there are shadings and nuances in between, as shown in Figure 1.1.

* *The views expressed in this paper are personal and do not in any way form the official view of the United Kingdom Government or the Armed Forces, nor should they be taken as such.*

Figure 1.1: The Security Spectrum

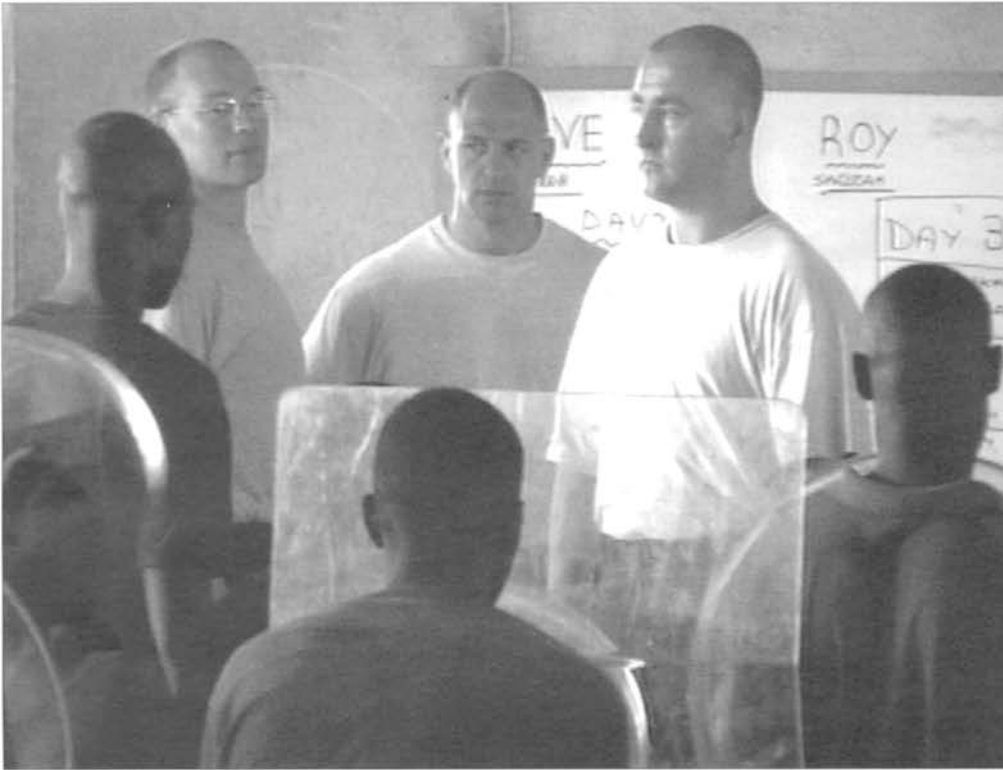


One might be tempted to think that the involvement of women across this spectrum would be heavily loaded to the right end and that the left end of high intensity warfighting would be where masculinity predominates with women excluded. This has not been borne out in history.

Women in the Military

Despite some present day squeamishness at the prospect of women being killed in combat, which has been used as one of the reasons for excluding women from front-line units, in reality there has always been such a role for women when the situation faced by a country or nation has become critical. War fighting has never really been solely a male preserve, and in any case the many civilian casualties caused by conflict throughout history have included men and women, old and young alike. History can also provide us with plenty of examples of the way women have been employed in the armed forces and in the support of the national war effort. Paradoxically, many more women serve in wartime in varying and dangerous capacities, than serve in the armed forces in quiet peaceful times when there is no real need to serve, except by choice, and when there are plenty of other avenues of employment. They do so from the perspective of patriotism and national need, rather than any overt requirement for gender equality.

Interestingly, it seems that only when the very being of a state is in doubt do women really come to the fore and gender is simply not an issue—it is actually unimportant by any stretch of the imagination.



British troops train Sierra Leone security forces

In the Second World War, it is noteworthy that in the defence of Russia women played a prominent role. They were frequently assigned to all-female units and fought bravely in Stalingrad and Odessa.

The experiences in the US and UK at the same time were rather different. In the US, a huge country that was not geographically threatened, many women were employed in the armed forces, but strictly in administrative roles with no hint of a combat role. Nevertheless, over 150,000 women served in the Women's Army Corps (the WAC).

In the UK, women performed broadly similar tasks to those in the United States, although there was more of a backs-to-the-wall feeling in the UK, which, for a time, was threatened with invasion by Germany and led women to take on more dangerous and patriotic roles.

Gender Equality in Modern Armed Forces

Over the last 50 years attitudes have changed. Women now serve in an increasingly wide range of mainstream military jobs, which include those that give them a combat role. In the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and United States Air Force (USAF), women combat pilots are more in evidence, as well as in the transport aircraft fleet. The British Royal Navy has mixed crews on surface ships and the first women are about to serve on nuclear submarines, where they will be in close confinement with men for several weeks at a time. Despite these advances in gender equality, there remains resistance to women serving in combat roles in most of the world's armies, which excludes them from the infantry, armour and artillery. It is ironic then that a few women serve in the Royal Engineers, who in a combat situation in their armoured bridgelayers could find themselves forward of the infantry and armour for certain military operations.

The extent to which women can serve in the world's armed forces is variable, even within NATO. In some countries women are virtually excluded (Germany and Spain). In others virtually all positions are open to women, including combat roles, as in Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, and more recently the US and the UK. However, women are still excluded from the infantry and armour in the US, while in the UK, resistance to women in the infantry remains. Interestingly, Israel still conscripts women into the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), but also excludes them from combat situations. The reason harks back to the Six Day War (1967) and Yom Kippur War (1973) when the IDF discovered that despite—in those days—enlightened gender-neutral training, female casualties caused whole units to cease operations while they were recovered. In essence, units lost their combat effectiveness and cohesion and all the unit personnel were put at increased risk as a result.

The impact on combat effectiveness forms the central issue over gender equality in the armed forces. Great strides have been made, admittedly under some resistance by 'military men'. Sadly over the last 50 years there has been plenty of combat experience to study and learn from. Commanders are taught to apply 'military judgement' to difficult situations and choices, and there is a perception that women in combat units could be detrimental to combat effectiveness, which is the key measure of the capability of one force to overcome another and survive.

Eventually it is likely that all jobs will be open to women and true equality of opportunity will apply. In practice women will self select and few may wish to carry a heavy machine gun running at speed to attack a position as part of an infantry section. Those that do accept will have to adapt to the situation they find. In true gender equality, there should be no separate toilet and washing facilities; it would be costly and inefficient to build separate facilities to accommodate women—this is particularly the case and most graphically illustrated in submarines where no special provisions are being made.

With regard to Sierra Leone the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) is completely gender-free, and in this respect is ahead of the UK, although the percentage of women serving in the RSLAF and the UK armed forces is similar, about 7 per cent. The RSLAF personnel database does not include any reference to gender; military personnel are identified solely by their service number. Women are admitted to all parts of the armed forces, including infantry battalions where there are typically 50-70 women in a unit of 600. However, it is not yet clear whether they operate within sections or carry out administrative tasks, as the new armed forces do not have any operational experience. Nevertheless, the current approach and the obvious integration of women into the RSLAF means that there is real scope for men and women working together in meeting the country's security challenges over the coming months and years.

Peace-building

There can be some confusion between peacekeeping and peace-building. At the November 1999 joint United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA) conference in Singapore entitled 'The Nexus between Peacekeeping and Peace-Building', delegates debated the differences between the two terms.

Throughout the conference, participants grappled with the question of definitions. Defining peacekeeping and peace-building with some precision and identifying 'where' the nexus between the two occurred, or even what it consisted of, led to many debates. In general, for many, peacekeeping essentially referred to those security responsibilities carried out by military personnel, and civilian police, including enforcement, along with the more passive and traditional roles. Peace-building seemed more elusive. It could be used in the political sense, i.e., reconciliation, electoral assistance, institution building, human rights monitoring and the establishment of a credible judiciary. But it could also include a predominantly social and economic manifestation—i.e., the reconstruction of schools, clinics and hospitals, water filtration plants, as well as longer-term self-sustaining economic activities. Participants agreed that both the degree and intensity of peacekeeping and peace-building, as well as their range and scope, could change from operation to operation. These distinctions and separations, however, even if conceptually useful, became difficult at the operational level, where the realities of the field influence all decisions. Yet participants agreed that some discipline and analysis was necessary to keep the distinctions between these different, but complementary, mandates clear. This is necessary not least because the very nature of military culture and its purpose are often in contrast to, and sometimes contradictory with, the objectives of development.

It was stated that, often, peacekeeping issues were at the fore of the mission and given more prominence than peace-building matters. One participant noted that, 'Peace-



Coordinating security forces and peacekeeping troops

building and development need more respect.’ As opposed to a dedicated secretariat for peacekeeping, the management of peace-building is currently divided between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), as well as many other UN programmes and agencies, not to mention bilateral assistance and aid from NGOs. Inevitably, the actual capacities of and the coordination issues between all of these organisations affect the success of peace-building efforts.

Where then does peacekeeping stop and peace-building begin? When does peace-building end and development activities begin? What is the nature of the overlap, and what mutual reinforcement can be achieved? In struggling with these fundamental questions and reflecting on the case studies, participants felt that many of these concepts need not be sequential but could exist concurrently, rather than chronologically, depending on the contexts. In all the cases reviewed, however, the peacekeeping forces could have played a key role in supporting peace-building initiatives. In its simplest form it was agreed that, where adequate security was not established, peace-building efforts invariably suffered.

The nature of today’s peacekeeping and the necessity for broader missions has thus led to at least two new sets of problems. First, careful articulation of the exact scope of operations is needed in order to accomplish the desired objective, without leaving too large a gap between the peacekeeping mission and peace-building phase. Second, the problem of

coordination among efforts carried out by various segments of the UN system and the many intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations operating in the same fields and working for similar purposes must be understood and addressed from the outset.

Participants recognised that though each peacekeeping case was unique, they shared many similarities and therefore it was reassuring that the conceptual plans for the missions in Kosovo and East Timor seemed to have benefited from lessons learned from past cases. Participants felt that this was a good sign for the UN: the thoughtful and realistic conceptualisation of a mission is vital even if it alone is not a sufficient guarantor of success.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) defines assistance provided to countries lacking modern economies in stable periods as 'development assistance'. It is generally oriented towards long-term economic growth and towards correcting the conditions that lead to conflict.

Peace-building is similar, but generally refers to restoration of normal conditions permitting development following a conflict. However, what constitutes normal conditions, and in whose terms are they defined? Often they are defined in western terms based on western experiences and an aspiration to improve towards conditions which sit comfortably with the observer. There is of course a range of factors to be taken into account when defining normal conditions. These include:

- ◆ From which datum are normal conditions measured?
- ◆ What were the conditions that prevailed at the time?
- ◆ How long is the period of reconstruction to be?

War and conflict cause people to lead abnormal lives with varying degrees of deprivation and usually accompanied by abnormal or dysfunctional behaviour. The duration of the period of conflict can have a profound effect on the degree of reconstruction and rebuilding of institutions required within the affected country as well as on the psyche of the people and their ability to move back to normal conditions.

The answer to the question of duration of the reconstruction phase bears a direct relationship to the duration and intensity of the conflict and the variance from the previously articulated 'normal' conditions, as the country switches from conflict to peace. It seems to me that getting the basics right is the most important first step. Invariably this means food, water, shelter and medical assistance in a secure environment, and these factors should apply in any post-conflict situation anywhere in the world. Subsequent steps are more difficult to judge though, because they depend on

the ability of the people to motivate themselves to restore the normal conditions of their daily lives, on the government to give a strong lead in coordinating a national reconstruction plan which takes into account the needs of the people and harnesses the energies of the people, and on the international donor community to offer such human, material and financial assistance as they are able to provide until such time as the country is back on its feet and generating sufficient national income to reduce its dependence on other countries.

Peace-building is certainly not a male domain—everyone should have the opportunity to play his or her part. The many talents of men and women should be brought to bear. It would be surprising to believe that an all male or all female solution was more effective than a solution arrived at together.

Peace-building: the Sierra Leone Dimension

Turning to the current situation in Sierra Leone one is struck by the magnitude of the task. The process to restore the country to a peaceful, democratic and prosperous country will require heroic effort.

So the essence of the problem is how do people know what to build?

The natural and latent talents of the population need harnessing. The burden of work will inevitably fall to those about to leave school and those in their twenties and thirties, for they represent the most precious natural resource in the country. The value of national service in the broadest sense should be instilled into young people, for the task they face is of heroic proportions. And here the role of women is crucial, particularly as they represent 50 per cent of the population. It is of note that the role of women (and men) in work has declined dramatically in the 15 years to 1994, fuelling widespread unemployment, discontent and a drift to a dependency culture. The rise in unemployment was exacerbated by the invasion of Freetown in January 1999, as it resulted in the destruction of many public buildings, public and commercial businesses and private dwellings.

This downward spiral needs to be broken in order to lay the foundations for success, and the remedies proposed should try to engage the whole population in a major nation above self effort. Developing the role of women in national reconstruction, working alongside men, but bringing their different talents and perspectives to bear, will be a major challenge, particularly as women are behind men in their access to education.



International Military Advisory Training Team (IMATT)

Conclusion

From a military perspective, gender equality in security is being steadily implemented around the world. There remain particular difficulties and anxieties when the debate turns to the role of women in combat situations. The vital ground is that nothing should be allowed to compromise the ability of commanders to maximise combat effectiveness in a warfighting scenario, where good military judgement is required for a force to prevail.

However, in practice all roles within the military will eventually be open to women, but women themselves will probably self-select the areas where they can make the best contribution. For this reason it is likely that few women will elect to fight in the trenches alongside men. Gender equality already exists in the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and this should be taken as a positive sign when considering the maintenance of security in Sierra Leone over the next few months and years.

In peace-building gender equality is essential to make the best use of the natural talents of men and women. There is simply no benefit in preserving single-sex bastions, which impede the rapid progress required in a country like Sierra Leone to emerge from a period of turmoil. Successful peace-building will require the harnessing and mobilising of the entire nation to involve itself at every level in projects to restore not just a sense of normality, which might itself be illusory, but real and lasting normality for which an achievable vision, sound leadership, much planning, sheer hard work and wise investment will be required.



Destroyed Law Courts, Freetown
