

Part 7

Gender Issues in Education, Training and Employment



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Background

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is the arm of government charged with the responsibility of providing education for the people of Sierra Leone.

The 6-3-3-4 system of education was introduced in 1993 together with a Basic Education reform, which is intended, *inter alia*, to ensure the provision of basic education for the majority of the population and to enhance the participation of women and girls in education.

Aims and Objectives of Education

The aim of education in Sierra Leone is the integral development of the individual for the building of:

- ◆ a cohesive, healthy and strong nation with a sustainable and dynamic economy;
- ◆ a free, just and peace-loving society;
- ◆ a democratic and harmonious society;
- ◆ a moral and disciplined society.

The major objectives of education in Sierra Leone include:

- ◆ the development of a broad-based education;
- ◆ increased access to basic education;
- ◆ improving the quality and relevance of education;
- ◆ expansion and upgrading of technical/vocational education;
- ◆ promoting equity in education;
- ◆ developing relevant attitudes, skills and values in children.

Programmes

To achieve the aims and objectives of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, the following structure has been put in place:

Pre-primary education: It consists of the schooling a child usually receives between the ages of 3 and 6. The main objective of this level is to prepare children for primary education.

Primary education: It consists of full-time formal schooling, which children receive for 6 years from ages 6 to 12. It constitutes the first part of the 9-year cycle of formal basic education.

Secondary Education: Under the 6-3-3-4 system, secondary education consists of 3 years Junior Secondary School (JSS), after 6 years of primary education followed by another 3 years of Senior Secondary School (SSS). The JSS is the final part of basic education at the formal level while the SSS completes the Secondary School Course.

Technical/Vocational Education: This is education provided by government-approved educational institutions aimed at developing self-reliance in individuals by providing them with tech/voc training especially in areas of the agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors.

Tertiary/Higher Education: This is provided by the University of Sierra Leone with its constituent colleges, institutes, teachers' colleges, tech/voc institutions, polytechnics and professional schools, e.g., National School of Nursing.

Impact of Conflict

Many children suffered extreme violence as soldiers but even those who remained civilians were also subjected to horrific experiences. Children were tortured as a way of punishing their parents. In the process many lost their lives.

Once recruited the boys had to undergo various degrees of indoctrination, often bordering on the brutal. They were forced to witness or take part in the torture and execution of their own relatives.

Women and girls in particular suffered the added trauma of sexual abuse and rape. Even women and girls who were not raped were coerced into giving sexual favours for food, shelter and physical protection for themselves or their children.

Impact on Women

The effects of the ten-year war on the Sierra Leonean population are far reaching and tremendous. As is usual in any war situation, women, children and the aged are the most vulnerable. In the Sierra Leone situation women played various roles.

In most cases the impact was negative. They were, and still are, being used as spies, sex slaves, combatants and labourers. Women have had to cope with the effects of unplanned pregnancies resulting from being raped and, in some cases, gang raped.

Since medical facilities behind rebel lines are often lacking, maternal death is reported to have been very high.

In many cases men/husbands die in war, so that the society now has a widow population. These unfortunate women often are saddled with many children. The women now become the breadwinners for their families: this can be a very heavy economic burden on their shoulders.

Women suffer a lot of molestation at the hands of unscrupulous men during times of conflict. This can lead to loss of confidence and self-esteem. Women affected by the war are traumatised because they have witnessed torture being inflicted on their persons, family members and close friends. They may have a very negative attitude to society and in some cases even have phobia for men. The children that they produce as a result of being gang raped may not enjoy the loving relationship that normally exists between mother and child, as such children remind them of their horrible experience at the hands of gangs who raped them.

Girls

During this war there have been serious violations of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

According to this Convention, a child is entitled to:

- ◆ social security;
- ◆ a better education and standard of living;
- ◆ protection against abduction and participation in armed conflict;
- ◆ protection against sexual exploitation, torture, harmful labour, drug abuse.

This war has robbed many Sierra Leone children of these rights and has instead exposed them to abduction, conscription into the fighting forces, rudely disrupting their educational pursuits. It has made the girls become sex slaves, early mothers, and prostitutes, some of them thus becoming victims of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Because the girl is separated from her family she becomes unloved, uncared for and defenceless. In most cases she is unkempt and malnourished. She does not have any accepted moral standards. This girl cannot grow well to become a responsible, independent and reliable adult. In many instances, she dies during pregnancy because of lack of medical facilities.

Boys

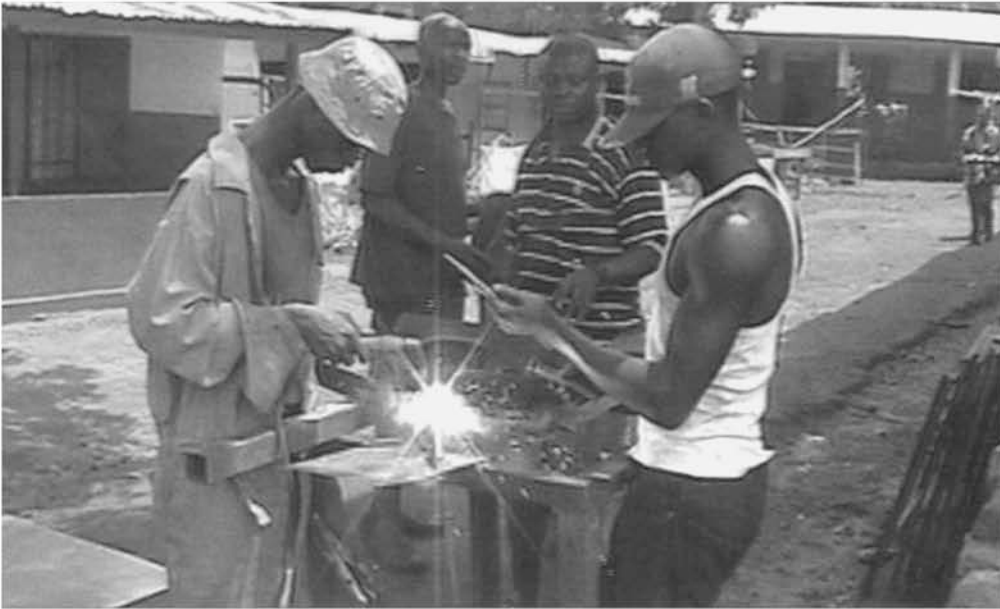
The boy during the war has also had his rights also seriously violated. He is, among other ills, forced physically to participate in the war. He becomes a combatant. He is removed from decent society because he is abducted and forced to join the fighting forces. He witnesses killing take place and sometimes takes part in the killing himself. He is introduced to adult life at a very tender age—even forced to sleep with women much older than himself. Therefore he is morally empty. His social values have been turned upside down. Because he is forcefully removed from parental care, he grows up feeling he is a man. He is hard-hearted, hates society and does not show love for anything or anyone. This war has therefore produced a generation of boys who are destructive and not prepared to take up adult responsibilities. Having been introduced to hard drugs at a young age, he becomes hooked and therefore cannot think rationally under normal circumstances.

Men

The men play the most active part during conflicts. They enter into conflicts either willingly or are conscripted. They inflict torture and sometimes are very seriously tortured themselves. They join in killing people and they too get killed.

When uprooted from their normal habitat they can become callous, brutal and inhuman, particularly to women and girls. They do not have any family values. They are emotionally and sometimes mentally disturbed.

Therefore, the war has left Sierra Leone with a high percentage of men who have lost their sense of living in a decent society, men who no longer believe in working to gain a decent living but must loot, burn down houses and even kill people to get their living. Men who not have respect for themselves and other people.



Young men engaged in construction project

Effects of the War

The war has adversely affected the country as a whole, and the education sector in particular has been the hardest hit, with about 80 per cent of educational infrastructure countrywide destroyed and teaching/learning materials and equipment vandalised.

The war has resulted in the massive displacement of people. Communities, families and social institutions have had to migrate to the relatively safer areas of the country, mostly found in the Western area and in some of the regional headquarter towns. This has resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Others had to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees.

As migration to safe areas increased, the pressure on education facilities in these areas mounted to the effect that schooling has had to be done in double shifts and in makeshift structures, e.g., Camp Schools.

In spite of these problems, government is very conscious of the fact that no country can develop faster than its educational system. Government has thus, under the constraining effect of the rebel war, embarked on a series of educational policy reforms and systems improvements—initiatives aimed at reducing further decline in the education sector.

The following are among initiatives aimed at improving access:

- ◆ In 1999/2000 government introduced free primary education in classes 1–3 whereby the fees for all students were paid for by government and books and teaching/learning materials also provided for the students. This free education is to be extended to classes 4–6 in the 2001/02 year.
- ◆ The Rapid Response Education Programme (RREP): a new initiative purposely geared towards facilitating the re-entry to the formal school system of school-age children between 10 and 13 years who have lost formal schooling as a result of the rebel war. The programme lasts for 5 months, and enables children who go through it to re-enter the formal school system.
- ◆ The Complimentary Rapid Education for Primary School (CREPS) is aimed at inducing the re-entry of over-aged children into primary school. The 6 years primary school syllabus has been condensed to 3 years, so that children in the CREPS programme are expected to complete the syllabus in 3 years. It is being piloted at the Lungi Area and will shortly be introduced to other areas in the country.

In addition, there are various Non-Formal Primary Education programmes aimed at children without access to formal primary schools because of distance or age. Such programmes are community based and focus on literacy, numeracy and simple vocational skills.

Adult Literacy Centres cater for 18–40 year-old learners, whilst a number of institutions provide skills training for youth as a means of empowering them economically.

With its own resources and with the assistance of partners, government has embarked on numerous rehabilitation and reconstruction of schools projects in accessible areas of the country.

Authorities of schools in inaccessible areas of the country have been encouraged to relocate their institutions in safe areas where they are now operating.

Workshops for guidance counsellors are being held by the Ministry, and schools are encouraged to improve their guidance counselling services.

Constraints

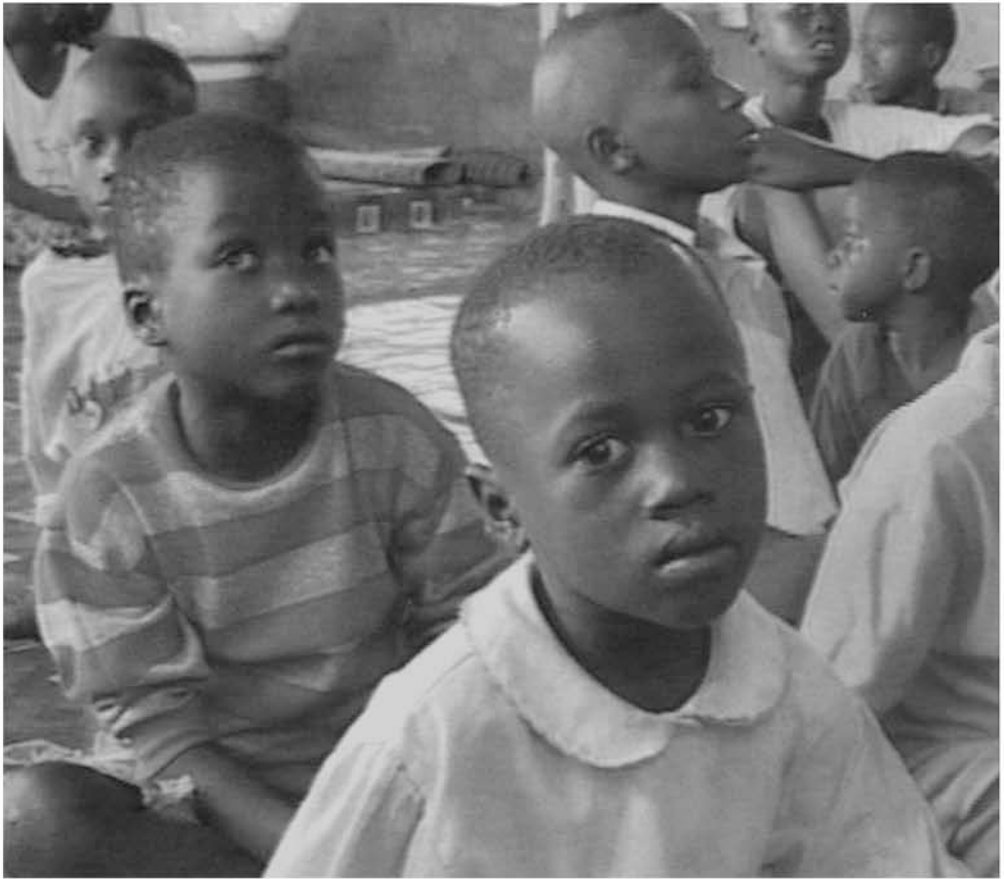
Because of the scale of the destruction caused by war on the educational infrastructure, a great deal of resources are needed to undertake reconstruction and rehabilitation. Money is therefore a major constraint. The funds needed to provide the necessary infrastructure are not available. Hence we continue to have problems of accommodation in the schools. Another major constraint is that of mobility. The war saw most of the Ministry's fleet of vehicles commandeered. This has greatly restricted the movement of personnel for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation.

Security continues to be a problem: many children for security reasons cannot go back to their places of origin. Overcrowding in the schools therefore continues.

Partners

We are very grateful to our friends, both local and international, who are helping us to cope with and find solutions to the problems that have resulted out of this conflict.

The list is not exhaustive, but mention should be made of major partners like UNICEF, UNDP, COOPI, FAWE, PLAN INTERNATIONAL, WFP, UNHCR, NCRRR. These organisations, among many, have been helping to win back the lost souls. They are doing everything to rehabilitate, reunite, trace lost relatives, detraumatise, reintegrate into society, and teach young people to fend for one's living in a decent way.



80 per cent of the schools were destroyed in the war
