



War, intervention and development

The future of the marginalised in Sierra Leone.

Screen caption:

In Sierra Leone half the population is under 15. Many are unemployed and many unhappy.

Voxpop 1 – male

Things are not really good but I think as a Sierra Leonean there is hope for us, as youth. Because in as much as there are ways for us, provisions are being made for us to learn, I think there is much provision for us, for instance considering my course, being a nurse pursuing the nursing field, the government do pay us in spite of being students. They do give us stipends and the government do so many things for us, so that shows that there is hope for we the youth in this nation.

Voxpop 2 – male (*subtitles*)

I joined the military in 1992; I was a vigilante (CDF). But after the battle of Freetown, they took us to Wilberforce camp to disarm us. Since then they haven't done anything for us, they don't give us work, they haven't done anything since then. So we're just wandering about the city, we don't have anything to do. I've no work, no business to do.

Voxpop 1 - female

It's difficult, really difficult. Some people have qualifications, but if you don't know somebody at the place where you're applying for work, it's very difficult to get a job.

Voxpop 3 – male (*subtitles*)

We find our selves in a difficult position, no work to do, even if you try street trading, the police chase you, and seize your goods. So what do they expect us to do? Do they want us to steal? If you steal they'll take you to prison, so you'll waste your life there. So I don't know what they expect us to do, because we're in a difficult position.

Voxpop 2 –female (*subtitles*)

Trade is bad, things are tough, rice is dear, palm oil is dear, and there's no money."

Voxpop 3 – female (*subtitles*)

I sell African things so that my children and I can survive. My husband was killed in the war, I have nobody else to help me, so I'm just trying to do something for myself and the children.

Steady Bongo - Musician

The war is over and we say we are free, but how can we be free in poverty. We are not free because most youth are without jobs, you understand, and this is one of the reasons that most youth took up arms against the people to go to the bush.

Diamonds vox 1 (*subtitles*)

For a small diamond like this, sometimes I get two pounds, sometimes a pound, sometimes 40p, sometimes in a whole month I make nothing at all, even in two months nothing."

Narrator

Informal diamond mining is not a get rich quick business. But the last resort for the rural youth left unskilled and illiterate by the years of war. The pittance they get from the diamond brokers for a week or more of back breaking labour will only buy enough rice for a few days.

Diamonds vox 2 (*subtitles*)

There's no one to help us. Look at us - the youth, there is no work to do, except for mining. Rather than go out and steal, it's better to occupy yourself with mining so you don't get any problems with the authorities.

Diamonds vox 3 (*subtitles*)

I have problems, firstly I'm not educated, secondly I'm unskilled, and three I'm very poor. We've got nothing.

Diamonds vox 4 (*subtitles*)

People come here to earn a crust, because there's no work for uneducated people in Sierra Leone. If you haven't been to school this is the only kind of work you can do, rather than be idle.

Narrator

Many of the youth who resort to diamond mining were non-combatants during the war, they are uneducated and unskilled – with no prospect of employment, and they see chancing their luck here as the only alternative to turning to crime for survival.

In many ways those that didn't fight during the war are worse off than the ex-combatants, around fifty thousand of whom have been through skills training schemes as part of the Demobilisation Disarmament and Reintegration process, which was officially wound up in 2004.

While some of these trainees have gone on to get jobs in commercial industries, like this carpentry workshop in Freetown, the skills training programme has been criticised for being too short and superficial to enable ex-combatants to compete properly in the limited jobs market.

Daniel Tucker Bike Renters Association

Today, most of the youth have been through some skills training since the war. But that's also a problem, because most of the training was only for 3-4 months, which is not enough. So most of them are no match for the competition in the jobs market.

If you train as a tailor for just 2-3 months, how can you compete with somebody with ten years experience? He's going to be better than you.

Narrator

Frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities, ex-combatants in Bo the second city of Sierra Leone have created jobs for themselves, as motorcycle taxi riders. Organised as the Bike Renters Association.

Daniel Tucker (*subtitles*)

The country right now is handicapped by unemployment. So instead of sitting and waiting for the government to provide jobs for us, we've said no, we have to help ourselves. So we've come together creating work for ourselves and develop our country.

Bikes Vox 1 (*subtitles*)

I started doing this job because I have no mum and dad. And when I think back I destroyed so many towns and cities. So I thank the chairman of the Bike riders association, who took me off the streets, when I had no mum or dad and nobody to take care of me. He brought me to the bike renters and gave me a job as a rider.

But still the situation is poor, it's only because of the bike renters that five hundred youths now have jobs, but the situation in Sierra Leone is still lacking."

Bikes Vox 2

During the war I was a fighter, I was a Karamajor, (CDF) I was about to enter university, but things were difficult with my parents, so I decided to embark on it. Then there was no job in the country, so that's why I decided to be a rider.

Daniel Tucker (*subtitles*)

The youth have been marginalised for a long time, so now we need to do things for our selves. We can't sit back and wait for these old people – the government – to do something for us they have misled us before. They only come round because they want us to vote for them.

Narrator

While the youth emerging from war still feel marginalised and misled by the system, what are the prospects for the 2 million children growing-up in a country shattered by war? Providing basic education for them is one of the biggest challenges to sustainable peace.

Nearly half the population of Sierra Leone is under 15 years old, if their needs are not addressed what is to stop them rising up as the previous generation did before them?

Augustine Jamiru, Head Teacher, RC Primary School Kailhun

The situation for teachers in this country I would say is horrible, is unsatisfactory. And that is why, because teachers want in the first place, payment is very slow, and we don't get our salaries on time. Maybe a month ends and maybe a week or two before another salary is paid, so teachers are not happy. They are disgruntled that is why a good number of them have even left and joined some NGOs. Teachers are not happy, salaries are not forthcoming.

Davidson Kuyateh, Secretary General SLTU

There is this commitment to free education at least basic education all over the world. There is this commitment to quality education, and we limit the numbers of teachers we recruit, even when the access to schools increases. So we think that there is a problem there. These goals will not be achieved, because there are larger numbers of children in the school, very few teachers, limited training, no incentives as a result of partnership with World Bank policies. The World Bank restricts us especially when you talk about teachers, because they discuss with governments and determine limits to which you can recruit, they even go to the extent of determining what salaries are paid. The greater portion of our budget is donor driven; we cannot determine in our own way our priorities and put strategies that will be able to achieve our objectives. Everything is worked out by formula and formulas and formulas, and formulas, which at the end of the day do not to a great extent, reflect the situation on the ground.

School children singing

Narrator

So far things are looking bleak for the majority of the population, and the people are starting to express their frustration. If the international community and the government of Sierra Leone ignore this, will history repeat itself?

Steady Bongo Musician

There's a proverb that says; "a hungry man is an angry man." I'm afraid because we don't want such to repeat in this country again, you see, and that definitely if they don't do something, some people will say, what was the reason for we say we have peace, we have peace, let me go back and fight for my rights.

Gibril Foday, Musa, former student rebel

During the war you really found out that they were a ready made army standing by – so they were so vulnerable, they were so easily used by all the fighting factions, because they had a ready made army – they didn't need to go and look for them, because they were neglected, they were already there, the guys were idle.

Zainab Bangura

The population below 30 is over 60% of the country. The people who are running this country are in their seventies. They have run out of ideas. They haven't had ideas 30 years ago. How are they going to have new ideas? They don't access the internet. They are completely cut off from the rest of the world, and so I believe that they are so disconnected from the country and its problems that they will not find answers.

Steady Bongo

Some of the politicians just say ok, these are small boys, but it's better for them to take in the reality, because every big man came from small man – ha ha ha (sic), big things came from small things. So they have to know that.

Gibril Foday Musa

If the problems of youth are not addressed then we will be going back to where we were coming from.