



War, intervention and development

What sparked civil unrest in Sierra Leone?

Ngulu Kpakai, for RUF

One of the root causes of the war in Sierra Leone was corruption. Two, there was, let me say, nepotism also within the society, so the war came as a result of those ills of society and which still manifests itself today.

Gibril Foday-Musa, student activist

At that time my feelings about armed struggle was positive I actually believed and I would say I still believe that by then we needed an armed struggle, because we had come up with various demonstrations, and we had been shot at an like Che Guevara ever said: the next time he was going to demonstrate he needed his own Kalashnikov. So the next time we were going to oppose the government we needed our own guns.”

Screen caption:

Some rebels received military and ideological preparation in Libya

Gibril Foday-Musa, student activist

Initially we made sure we had study groups, because as Thomas Sankara ever said: a soldier without a political education is a potential criminal. So we actually thought we had to study ourselves and discipline our selves because at the end of the day people were going to misdirect their guns. If you train a man in the way to fire, shoot a gun you have to give him the necessary political and ideological education for him to know how to use the gun.

Screen caption:

Some trainees were unimpressed with the newly formed Revolutionary United Front.

Gibril Foday-Musa, student activist

My feelings then about the RUF was bad I was not very impressed with them I was disgusted about the way things were going, I was disgusted about the fact that people were not going through study groups before joining the movement and my disgust or my displeasure actually came through by the way they actually pursued the entire war or revolution.

Narrator

Gibril Musa returned to Sierra Leone to pursue a career as a journalist while others in the group organised for revolution and formed the RUF which invaded Sierra Leone in 1991 backed by Charles Taylor and Liberian fighters.

One of those was Ngululu Kpakai who now works with Gaskin Amara and other ex-combatants in a community based agricultural development NGO. They have no doubts that there was a cause worth fighting for.

Ngululu Kpakai – former RUF

Voluntarily I joined the Revolutionary United Front because I admired the aspirations or the intentions of the organisation. That is they came to wipe out the rotten system. And at that point in time everybody was yearning for something that would wipe out the rotten system. Some of us had been student activists even before the way so we decided for opt to join the RUF so that we could change the situation. It was the only way that the politicians would listen to the call of the people.

Gaskin Amara, former RUF

Some of us being marginalised for so long heard the messages, over two thirds of the country were yearning for war where in people were saying because of the rotten system, because of the marginalisation, because of the oppression, if we don't go into fight I think conditions will not be improved. People were saying this in mosques reciting special *fatia* for that going to the churches praying for a change, and suddenly it was just like that in 1991 we heard of war, and we were captured alive because we were very close to the border. By the time we heard of it the people had already gone ahead so there was no way out and we decided to stay with them having heard about their ideology, which we thought was good for the nation."

Rashid Sandi – former RUF

When these guys came with the ideology that they came purposely to liberate people to fight against all these things corruption this and that people started embracing them, though I mean there was that fear because when you see somebody with a weapon more especially with arms you must be panic a bit. But on the other hand people were a bit happy because they thought things would be changed for the better.

Screen caption:

In 1992 the Sierra Leone army staged a coup and deposed the government.

Julius Maada Bio, NPRC coup member 1992

The RUF originally wanted to over throw the APC government – that was the reason they took up arms, but my belief was instead of starting to kill people from the East in order to capture the seat of government in the west, it was better to start in the west and do a two or three hour operation and get rid of them.

The main motivation was to try and get rid of the government that had caused so much misery for the country; we really didn't know in fact what we were going to do after but at least we were much more based on removing the APC which we think had been there for over 23 years and we just wanted to see their backs.

Screen caption:

The army thought that their coup would end the RUF rebellion. They were wrong. The one problem was the large number of Liberians amongst the RUF.

Rashid Sandi – former RUF

But you see the problem here is that you can't take a foreign man to fight a liberation war believe me you will never succeed if Rashid is a sierra Leonean I know the problem of my people and when dealing with my people I will know what to do, But if you take Rashid to fight a liberation war in Guinea I don't know the problem of the Guineans so I will behave exactly in the way I feel like. That was the main thing here.

Screen caption:

In the mid 1990s the chaos deepened when local militias, the Civil Defence forces, entered the fray.

Foday Sajuma

Initially when we started this operation everybody over 90% plus was in our favour. But as time went on the situation became so complex that you can hardly tell who was really the genuine person that was now fighting in the interests of the nation.

Rashid Sandi – former RUF

The image of the RUF was already tarnished mostly when the RUF came together with the AFRC most of these guys too during the war they were just recruited from the street, they became part of the national army they were not disciplined, most of them were street guys so I mean, so it's like, we were all headed towards the same direction.