



War; Intervention and Development

Academic perspective

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Conflict is something that can erupt just about anywhere, and even if people from NGO's, from business, from government, from international organisations, who are working in development might not be working in a country where civil war has broken out, it's important to be able to learn from this course in case it breaks out, and to prevent it from breaking out; conflict prevention and peace building are one and the same thing.

When people are faced with a crisis, the initial reaction most people have is don't just stand there, do something, deal with the crisis. Within this course we turn this on its head and our perspective is 'don't just do something, stand there', and what we mean by that is don't rush into a situation without properly analysing it, without properly examining the root causes, think about what it is that you're going to do. So you might be in a military, you might be working for an NGO, an international organisation or a government, like the UK government. Why are you intervening, what is your role in that intervention, and how we intervene is very important as external interveners, and there is an argument for external interveners in conflicts.

The military interventions did help stop the fighting. One of the things that we look at in this course is going beyond stopping of the fighting, what caused the war to happen in the first place. The root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone were nicely captured by one of the RUF ex-combatants that is interviewed on one of the videos. He says that he saw the root causes of the civil war stemming from corruption, deprivation, people not benefiting from the natural resources and the industry within Sierra Leone, and youth, disaffected youth, so lack of education, poverty. And this is where we go back to development and conflict, and the link between the two, is that they cannot be seen independently of each other in a country like Sierra Leone, they must be seen together, and this is what led us to using Sierra Leone as a major case study.

The roles of the different participants are challenged in the Sierra Leone videos, and are challenged throughout the whole course, so youth as an example, youth and women tend to be seen as victims in conflict, and in violent conflict, in civil wars, and there are two videos in this course that capture that and interrogate the role of women and interrogate the role of the youth. In Sierra Leone women tended to be either abducted, abducted as cooks or abducted as sex slaves, and some joined the rebel forces as well, and they were also perpetrators, and this is something that comes through in the video. They would smuggle arms, they would also fight, so the neutrality or the victim-hood of women is challenged throughout this course.

The role of young people and youth is, again, something that's challenged, there is a benefit for youth, in a sense to be combatants because they're fed, because they survive, they're not killed if they join; when they're abducted, if they resist, there's a good chance that they will be killed, so it makes sense for them to become soldiers, child soldiers. This extends to after the conflict as well – and what we do see in the video, the future of the marginalised, is that the ex-combatants are better off than their equivalents who weren't actually fighting. The ex-fighters actually receive training whilst the youth that weren't involved in the fighting do not receive training, and this is in a country where illiteracy is rife.

The course also challenges the role of the military. The traditional role of the military has been to engage in warfare. However, what we see in Sierra Leone is the role of the UK military in crossing a line that becomes much closer to peace-building than just peace-making and peace-keeping, and this is an interesting transition, and something that we thought we would bring out in the course, and Sierra Leone does it very well.