CHAPTER FIVE

Youth

Introduction

1. In Sierra Leone, the youth is the lifeblood of the nation. Every Sierra Leonean between the ages of 18 and 35 years old is considered to be a youth. According to a government paper of 2003, youths constitute forty-five percent of the country's estimated 4.5 million population.[1]

2. In the conflict, youths were both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations on a massive scale. It was a dual role to which youths had become accustomed in post-independence Sierra Leone: on the one hand, they were abused; on the other hand they became the abusers. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the one-party system became increasingly tyrannical, youths formed the only viable opposition to the ruling All People's Congress (APC) because the other political parties had been co-opted and assimilated into the government.[2] When institutions and their leaders in so many sectors of society failed to speak out against the injustices of the APC regime, invariably it was the voice of youth that called for accountability. Conversely, though, youths were often the instruments of oppression, acting as vicious thugs to influence the outcomes of elections and put down anti-government demonstrations. In times of transition, Sierra Leone's youth has always struggled to find its rightful place in society.

3. Testimonies received by the Commission indicate that the majority of participants in the war were youths. Many of them were children at the time of their recruitment. Others joined voluntarily in protest against the social and political ills of the day, or in the name of defending their communities. They all lost their youth to a career of fighting and violence. Some are now exporting their combat "expertise" to neighbouring countries in conflict. The experiences and prospects of youth in Sierra Leone require careful consideration.

4. In the course of the war, youths committed brutal and malicious acts against their family members, communities and fellow Sierra Leoneans. Their experiences during the war have disrupted their lives and traumatised them. Many youths are currently drifting without direction, unable to access education or employment. Some are so disillusioned with their environment that they are desperately seeking a way out and would readily resort once more to violence.

5. Sierra Leone faces the daunting task of reclaiming a "lost generation" of youth. The "youth question" is therefore central to lasting peace and development in the country. This examination of youth participation in the war will enable the Commission to make detailed recommendations on how to respond to the

[1] See Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone National Youth Policy*, strategy paper published in July 2003, at page 5.

[2] More detail on the lack of credible opposition to the APC regime, as well as analysis of the failures of the wider society to hold the political elite to account, can be found in the chapters on Governance and the Historical Antecedents to the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report.

challenges created by misguided youth in the past and how to restore youths as productive members of their communities.

6. In his statement to the Commission, Brima Vandy, who was 30 years old at the start of the conflict in 1991, made this confession:

> "When I was in the bush… I committed many violations and abuses. I killed innocent people, took away their property by force… asked them to leave their houses for me to sleep inside… and forced their women to make love to me."[3]

7. In her testimony to a closed hearing of the Commission, a young woman in the Koinadugu District told of her experiences:

> "Upon our arrival (at their base) we were distributed to different rebels to become their wives… when we refused, they flogged us. We were raped by two or three men daily… when we fought back, they threatened to kill us. We eventually got married to them. They gave us drugs like marijuana to smoke. When the roads were free, we pleaded for them to release us to go back to our relatives… but they refused. Commander Sofila pleaded with them to release us but they threatened to kill us if we tried to escape. Commander CO Ray inscribed RUF on our bodies. They looted properties whilst we carried their ammunitions."[4]

8. Similar narratives by youths, both as victims and perpetrators, abound in the testimonies, statements and interviews gathered by the Commission. In addition, the youth question has stimulated considerable analysis and debate among academics and writers on the conflict. One Sierra Leonean historian, Ibrahim Abdullah, has described the war as the high point of a rebellious Freetown youth culture of "*rarray man dem*" that started in the 1940s.[5] Another Sierra Leonean historian, Ishmael Rashid, has detected a strong impetus for the war in the convergence that took place in the 1970s and 1980s between these *rarray man dem* and groups of radical students influenced by leftist ideologies.[6] British anthropologist Paul Richards has traced the cause of the war to a patrimonial crisis, sidelined intellectuals, violent films and a desire by youths to manage the resources of the rain forest more equitably.[7] Finally Jimmy Kandeh, a Sierra Leonean political scientist, has noted that the atrocities committed by youths during the war stemmed from the "subaltern" appropriation of what was previously the violence of the elites.[8]

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[3] Brima Vandy, TRC statement recorded at 11 Battalion Headquarters, Kambia District, March 2003.
[4] TRC confidential testimony received during closed hearings in Koinadugu District, 14 May 2003.
[5] See Abdullah I.; "*Youth Culture and Rebellion: Understanding Sierra Leone's Wasted Decade*", in *Critical Arts* journal, Volume 16, Number 2, 2002 (hereinafter "Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*"), at page 29. *Rarray man dem* are streetwise urban youths, subordinated by the system.
[6] See Rashid, I.; "Subaltern Reactions: Lumpens, Students and the Left", in Abdullah, I. and Bangura, Y. (eds.); *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, Africa Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume XXII, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997 (hereinafter "Rashid, *Subaltern Reactions*"), at page 24.
[7] See Richards, P.; *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone,* The International African Institute, Netherlands / UK, 1995.
[8] See Kandeh, J.; "Ransoming the State: Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror in Sierra Leone", in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 81, Roape Publications, 1999 (hereinafter "Kandeh, *Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror*").

9. Combining these perspectives, it is possible to build a picture of the origins of violent behaviour among youths. Members of the political elite deployed "subalterns", or *rarray man dem*, to silence their opponents during the days of the APC one-party state. Youths learned violence from their masters and developed violent reactions to the injustices and frustrations they encountered in their daily lives. As the conflict arrived, youths used brutality not to prop up the political elites, but to accumulate resources and power that had been denied to them previously, attacking the very foundations of the elites' society. The major difference between elite-orchestrated violence and subaltern violence, however, was that the latter made no distinction between public and private property. The violence of the youths was largely indiscriminate.

10. This chapter builds on these perspectives and makes use of submissions, testimonies and interviews gathered by the Commission to analyse and report on: the nature, causes and extent of the violations and abuses perpetrated and suffered by youths; the context of these violations; and the impact on of the conflict on youths. The chapter concludes by considering current interventions geared towards addressing the youth question in Sierra Leone.

Youth Categories and Violence

11. Youth in Sierra Leone can be roughly divided into two categories: mainstream and marginalised youths. These categories can be further sub-divided to take into account the geographical locations and associated characteristics of youths. Thus there are mainstream urban youths and mainstream rural youths. The same distinction can also be made for marginalised youths.

12. The defining characteristic of mainstream urban youths has always been their access to formal western-type education. They would typically be secondary school or university students, expected to take up white-collar jobs upon completion of their studies.[9] They belong to the world of the law abiding – those who play by the rules. Rural mainstream youths equally abide by long-standing traditions. They respect their elders and work on the farms.

13. In Freetown before the conflict, there was a particular category of marginalised youths, referred to above as the *rarray man dem*. They constituted a predominantly male-specific, oppositional sub-culture, prone to violence and other anti-social behaviour such as drug dealing, petty theft and riotous conduct. Mostly illiterates, they were economically insecure. They survived by moving in and out of casual jobs as domestic hands, night watchmen and labourers. They lived on the margins and were alienated from mainstream society. The violence they committed was mainly within their *potes* (enclaves or ghettos for marginalised youth) and on festive occasions when they moved around the city with their "masquerades", or processions, known as *odelay*. Their violence mainly involved *chuk* (stabbing with a knife) and was of a non-political nature.

14. The utilisation of the violence of marginalised youths for political purposes started with the 1969-1970 by-elections, when the APC rallied soldiers, the police and *rarray man dem* to intimidate members of the opposition SLPP. The *rarray man dem* were mobilised by the APC strongman S. I. Koroma,[10] who later became Vice President after the promulgation of the Republican Constitution in 1971. Koroma's cynical tactics transformed *rarray man dem* into "thugs".

[9] See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at page 21.
[10] See Rashid, *Subaltern Reactions*, at page 24.

15. In the common parlance of Sierra Leone at the time, "thugs" came to mean youths who were utilised for political violence. The word "youth" itself became a synonym for the unemployed young person who was vulnerable to manipulation. Youths were considered to be auxiliary troops for political parties. During elections, or crises, they did the dirty work for the politicians. Payment was often made in the form of drug supplies or token cash handouts. The violence offered youths an outlet for acting out their machismo, which although loathed by society was encouraged by the political elites.

16. A few leaders of the *rarray man dem* were eventually rewarded with high positions (one was made a minister, another an ambassador[11]), but most thugs were unceremoniously dumped after the completion of their violent assignments.[12] The majority of youths remained unskilled and impoverished.[13]

17. In the provinces, marginalised youths were known as "san san boys" and "*njiahungbia ngornga*". San san boys were marginalised youths eking out a living in the "sandpits" of the diamond mines. Most of them never fulfilled their dreams of becoming wealthy through diamonds. Instead, they became part of a harsh, greedy and adventurous way of life. Later they became easy prey as recruits for the purveyors of state and counter-state violence.

18. "*Njiahungbia ngornga*" is a Mende phrase meaning unruly youth.[14] This group included semi-literate youths in the provinces who loathed traditional structures and values. They saw "the rebellion as an opportunity to settle local scores and reverse the alienating rural social order in their favour."[15] Freetown youths referred to the marginalised youths of the provinces who had adopted Freetown lifestyles and world-views as *bonga rarray man dem* or *upline savis man dem*.

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[11] The *rarray man dem* who achieved high positions were: Alfred Akibo-Betts, who became a Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance; and Kemoh Fadika, who became Ambassador to Egypt.

[12] See Ngolo Katta, Director of the Centre for the Co-ordination of Youth Activities (CCYA), Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, April 2003 (hereinafter "CCYA submission to TRC"), at page 4. See also Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003. See also Victor Reider, Member of Parliament and former youth participant in a training programme in Libya, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 23 October 2003. See also Abdullah I.; "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)", in *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, Africa Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume XXII, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997 (hereinafter "Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*"), at page 49.

[13] See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003.

[14] See Muana, P. K.; "The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency", in Abdullah, I. and Bangura, Y. (eds.); *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, Africa Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume XXII, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997 (hereinafter "Muana, *The Kamajoi Militia*"), at page 80.

[15] See Muana, *The Kamajoi Militia*, at page 126.

The Increasing Marginalisation of Youths and the Convergence of Educated and Uneducated Youths

19. The country's deteriorating economic and political situation from the 1970s onwards saw an increase in the number of school dropouts. Education was no longer a right for all, but a privilege for the few. Employment and the grant of government scholarships were dependent on APC party allegiance and what Sierra Leonean youths referred to as "connectocracy", meaning personal connections to a political patron or senior public servant. Most youths could never fulfil their ambitions because they were not "connected" to the political system. Only the wealthy could provide a reasonable education for their children. The children of politicians and government officials attended private schools, often travelling overseas, while the government schools were totally neglected. The number of school dropouts increased annually as the education system deteriorated, swelling the ranks of the marginalised youths in the *potes*.

20. In the provinces, traditional political and judicial authorities served the interests of the local elites. Political marginalisation and harsh judicial penalties for the breaching of traditional norms pushed many youths to the margins of their societies. Some youths in provincial urban settings like Bo and Kono also set up *potes* akin to those of their Freetown counterparts.

21. The stagnating economy increased the numbers of even well educated youths who could not find employment. Western-type education no longer guaranteed employment. Graduates found themselves exposed to the same harsh economic realities that had long been experienced by the uneducated marginalised urban youth.

22. This convergence of the material conditions of educated (mainstream) and uneducated (marginalised) youths provided a basis for the convergence of their lifestyles and world-views. Many of the educated but unemployed youths started frequenting the *potes*. Unemployment induced in them the habits of the marginalised youth. They were frowned upon by mainstream society, but their visits to the *potes* gradually elevated their social status amongst their uneducated peers. With the increase in the number of marginalised youths came a corresponding increase in the number of *potes*. The peddling of drugs became a form of full-time employment for many youths.[16] University students also joined the drift to the potes. Student activists began establishing *potes* on their campuses and the drug culture started to gain a grudging acceptance in the society – it became a *sine qua non* for radicalism and non-conformity.[17]

23. The newcomers to the *potes* were au fait with unfolding world events and were more politically conscious than the original marginalised youths. Many had read revolutionary texts from which they had developed new political ideas. They took it upon themselves to "conscientise" their "less fortunate brothers" while in return they were themselves gradually absorbing and adopting the style and language of the "ghetto".[18]

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[16] See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at page 29.
[17] See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at pages 31 and 32.
[18] See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003.

24. This transformation was also influenced by contemporary music, particularly reggae music by Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer. The lyrics of their songs depicted realities of the day – hardship, degradation and oppression – in a style of social commentary known as "system dread".

25. The new groups emerging out of the fusion of educated youths and their uneducated peers in the *potes* were not involved in petty theft or political thuggery, at least at first. The *potes* became rallying points for alienated, unemployed youths and an arena for political discussion centred on the corrupt practices of the dominant political class and the stifling political atmosphere under one-party dictatorship.

Repression of Student Demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s and the Evolution of Revolutionary Thinking

26. Student leaders were conversant in theories of liberation and spiced up their discussions with quotes from revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey, Wallace-Johnson, Fidel Castro, Malcolm X and Steve Biko. Students and school leavers read extensively and intensively outside their fields of study in order to contribute meaningfully to philosophical debates and discussions that lasted far into the night. Another significant influence was the presence of refugees from Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia on almost all campuses. Their experiences as freedom fighters made them influential in student circles and they occupied leadership positions in some student union executives.[19]

27. Student thinking and the campus climate were ripe for protest action. Hindolo Trye was elected president of the Fourah Bay College (FBC) student union in 1976. The student motto "The Self" implied the importance of self-esteem and dignity, the awareness of the right to liberate oneself and the right of the collective self to initiate liberation.[20] The students' first direct confrontation with the APC came in 1977, when President Stevens was humiliated while delivering his speech at the annual university convocation ceremony.

28. The APC organised a counter-demonstration involving *rarray man dem* led by Kemoh Fadika. Supported by the armed Special Security Unit (SSD), these youths were brought in to flog, rape and brutalise students. The deployment of such a force foreshadowed events to come during the conflict, when youths were pitched against youths in an orgy of violence. The government's backlash led to a nationwide demonstration by students in February 1977 following the arrest of their student leader Hindolo Trye. According to one participant:

> "They sent thugs and members of the paramilitary to beat us up. They destroyed the campus, which led to a national uprising led by the students and sparked up by school children. It is what we called the "no college, no school" demonstration. It spread countrywide and became a national uprising, which lasted for several weeks.'"[21]

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[19] See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003, at page 6. See also Victor Reider, Member of Parliament and former youth participant in training in Libya, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 23 October 2003.

[20] See Currey, J.; *The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone: African Guerrillas*, 1998, at page 175. See also Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003, at page 7.

[21] See Olu Gordon, former student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer and prominent participant in PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 11 March 2003.

29. The student protests, planned and led by radical students, received popular support and forced President Stevens to make certain concessions. A general election was called three months later. Violence by APC-sponsored *rarray man dem* resulted in a massive electoral victory for the APC. The hopes of the educated youths for an opening up of the political system were dashed.

30. The 1980s saw the emergence of well-organised radical groups and study clubs on university and college campuses, including the Green Book study club (promoting Ghaddafi's ideas of revolutionary mass participation from Libya), the Pan African Union (PANAFU), which called for a popular movement,[22] and the Socialist Club. Unlike other campus clubs, PANAFU brought both categories of youth together and was concerned with educating its members about apartheid in South Africa and neo-colonialism in Africa. PANAFU operated outside the campuses and had revolutionary "cells" in central and eastern Freetown.

31. Following a student demonstration in 1984, the Fourah Bay College campus was closed down for three months and upon resumption of classes, students had to sign an agreement for re-admission into the university. This repressive act helped "contain" students and brought relative calm to campus. Then, in 1985, Alie Kabba, a keen member of several radical clubs, was returned unopposed as president of FBC student union on a platform of collective self-advancement that he referred to as "we-ism". Kabba's student union executive made no secret of its intentions to put its radical leftist ideologies into practice once in power. The student leadership was constantly at loggerheads with the university authorities, who perceived Kabba as a subversive firebrand.

32. Events reached a climax at the end of the second term in 1985 when students refused to hand in their dormitory keys. The authorities accused them of planning to bring in Libyan mercenaries to oust the APC government. The paramilitary SSD, again called in to put the students in their place, used undue force in restraining the students and beating them into submission.

33. The SSD's actions gave rise to a Freetown-wide demonstration. When the college reopened for the third semester in April 1985, forty-one students were declared ineligible to register, among them Alie Kabba. The student union protested against this decision. The campus demonstration spread to the city centre, where shops were looted and vehicles burnt down,[23] apparently by unemployed youths who used the political demonstration of the students as a chance to wreak havoc and enrich themselves. Such opportunism, to many differing degrees, would become a constant feature of the conflict in the 1990s.

34. Alie Kabba and five other students were arrested and detained for two months, while three lecturers – Cleo Hancilles, Olu Gordon and Jimmy Kandeh, the original founders of PANAFU – were summarily dismissed from the university without a proper explanation or compensation up to the present day.[24]

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[22] See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at page 32. PANAFU wanted to link people across diverse social sectors.

[23] See Rashid, *Subaltern Reactions*, at page 36.

[24] See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Olu Gordon, former student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer and prominent participant in PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 11 March 2003. See also Gibril Foday-Musa, former student of Fourah Bay College who attended a training programme in Libya in the 1980s; TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 26 September 2003.

35. Some of the expelled students eventually found their way to Ghana and gained admission into the University of Legon. From Ghana, Alie Kabba made frequent visits to Guinea and Libya and was also a regular visitor to the People's Bureau (as the Libyan embassy was called) in Accra. According to Olu Gordon:

> "The idea of the RUF actually came from the expelled students from Fourah Bay College, especially Alie Kabba. And the specific reason why it was called a "united front" was because they had attempted to draw several organisations into their plan, including the organisations belonging to the Pan African Union (PANAFU).'"[25]

36. Other witnesses, who were part of PANAFU, as well as some members of the RUF, have challenged the veracity of this testimony. Indeed, Gordon's account is not entirely accurate, since Alie Kabba's umbrella idea went by a different name altogether – the Popular Democratic Front, with the acronym PDF – and had a non-violent agenda for change at its heart. RUF members further pointed out that at the time the students were in Libya, no name had been chosen for the movement they joined. The name RUF was coined by others in Libya and had no direct connection to PANAFU, which had by that time become detached from the revolutionary project.

Divergence of Youths and the Spiral into Violent Rebellion

37. The exiled students raised the idea with PANAFU in Freetown of sending members of their revolutionary "cells" in the city to undertake training programmes in Libya. Four trainees nominated by PANAFU left for Libya during the rainy season of 1987. By the time they returned in 1988, leading members of PANAFU were no longer committed to the revolutionary project, which led to a split in the movement. One group went underground and carried on planning for new batches of trainees, recruiting mainly marginalised youths from the city.

38. PANAFU's withdrawal from the revolutionary project starved it of ideologically educated youths and turned it into what one writer has described as:

> "an individual enterprise… any man (no attempt was made to recruit women) who felt the urge to acquire insurgency training in the service of the "revolution" [could join up]… This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of lumpens."[26]

39. Alie Kabba had assumed the position of co-ordinator of the "revolution" because of his pre-existing links with Libya. Many trainees were opposed to Kabba's leadership, though. They objected to his personal refusal to undergo military training. They also accused him and his friends in Ghana of "sitting on millions of dollars" and benefiting from their recruitment for training in Libya. By the time Kabba left Ghana for Libya, most of the trainees had revolted. The bulk of them had returned to Sierra Leone by 1989 or 1990 and never assumed roles in the RUF movement, or indeed in any of the factions that fought in the conflict.[27]

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[25] See Olu Gordon, former student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer and prominent participant in PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 23 March 2003.
[26] See Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*, at page 63.
[27] See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*, at page 65.

40. Divergence of paths and purposes occurred during the time of the training in Libya. Sierra Leone's original student revolutionaries realised they had little in common with some of their countrymen who trained on the camps near Tripoli. Alie Kabba and Cleo Hancilles, the two ideological driving forces, grew wary of the direction their project had assumed and decided to opt out. Into the resultant leadership vacuum stepped Foday Sankoh, an aggrieved former soldier of the Sierra Leone Army who was an anomalous, older presence among the mostly youthful trainees. In Libya, Sankoh met Charles Taylor, the leader of the Liberian trainees on the camp. The two men forged a joint plan for insurgencies in their respective countries, starting in Liberia and moving into Sierra Leone. From that moment on, the course of the "revolution" – and with it the destiny of the sub-region's youth – changed irreversibly. Sankoh and a handful of cohorts made their way to Liberia and joined an insurgency alongside Taylor's NPFL. Among the youths involved, only Abu Kanu, a graduate of Njala University College, had reached a level of higher education comparable to the original PANAFU-led group of the mid-1980s.

41. Foday Sankoh began to assemble more fighters for his RUF rebellion in 1990. He used Charles Taylor's NPFL bases and logistics to train Sierra Leoneans from diverse backgrounds who had been caught up in the turmoil in Liberia. Some were migrant workers whom Sankoh plucked from prisons in NPFL control areas; others were marginalised urban youths and common criminals. They became known as the RUF "vanguards". In March and April 1991, the vanguards entered Sierra Leone with a troop of NPFL commandos who outnumbered them by about four to one. The Sierra Leone conflict had begun, with youths from unlikely and unsettled circumstances very much to the fore.[28]

42. After the launch of the armed rebellion, most of the youths who joined the RUF, or who were compelled to join the organisation, were marginalised rural youths. Thus different categories of youths were involved at distinct stages of the conflict history of Sierra Leone. Educated youths were involved in the formulation of ideas for revolution and regime change, instigating the training in Libya. Marginalised urban youths were involved in the bulk of the military training and the launch of the insurgency. Thereafter the bulk of the growing manpower of the RUF consisted of marginalised rural youths.

43. Youths who joined the RUF could be further distinguished according to those who joined voluntarily and those who were forced to join. Some of the youths who joined willingly were won over by the simplistic rhetoric of the movement and believed that their involvement would help to reform "the system" that had oppressed them for so long. They were fed up with the APC and wanted a change of government. According to a resident of Pujehun District:

> "We assembled at the barray and they addressed us… "We have come to make Sierra Leone a better Sierra Leone… Sierra Leoneans are suffering… education is expensive… we have come to get rid of the APC rule"… After their address, we were happy and prepared food for them… They appointed a town commander… Some of them left after they had finished eating."[29]

[28] For the Commission's comprehensive account of the pre-conflict phase and the assembly of the armed force that launched the insurgency in Sierra Leone in 1991, see the chapter on the Military and Political History of the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report.
[29] Alusine Rogers, TRC statement recorded in Kpaka Chiefdom, Pujehun District, 22 March 2003.

44. However, whether by choice or against their will, practically all the recruits soon adopted forms of behaviour that characterised marginalised youths – drug addiction and violence. Involvement in the rebellion itself became an alienating and marginalising process. RUF and NPFL atrocities in Sierra Leone soon drew contempt and opposition from the communities they were attempting to win over. Youths who had joined the insurgency became completely alienated from their own people, either due to acts in which they participated personally or due to their association with the outrages perpetrated by the movement as a whole.

45. The involvement of youth in the conflict became infinitely more complicated in April 1992, when a band of youths in the Sierra Leone Army overthrew the APC in a coup and formed a military junta known as the NPRC. In an attempt to counter the insurgents at the warfront, the NPRC engaged in mass recruitment of marginalised urban youths into the Army. By 1992, therefore, almost the entire combatant population consisted of youths, on both sides of the battle.

46. It should be recalled that by the eve of the conflict most urban youth had lost all hope. They had sunk into an abyss of unemployment and disillusionment. In this state, fighting in the war seemed a viable alternative. It presented a means through which youths could possibly break out of their despair and transform their lives. Many youth aligned themselves with one or more of the factions and swiftly achieved what they considered progress: they were able to accrue "wealth" and "status" that otherwise would have been unattainable.

47. More youths joined the war when they saw how "profitable" the experience had proved for others. Instead of enduring long periods of unemployment, they looted money and goods. Rather than possessing no stake in society, no property and no hope for the future, they became "commandos" who could acquire guns, sex, food and drugs at their will. The opportunity cost of going to war was very low. War empowered them. Inevitably, such youths began to perceive personal benefits in the continuation of conflict. Across all factions they became the most vocal constituency resisting efforts to end the war.

48. Some youths joined the armed factions in order to carry out personal vendettas. Statements from Pujehun District indicate that some of the earliest recruits into the RUF on its Southern Front were militiamen who had participated in the so-called Ndorgboryosoi rebellion against the APC government in the early 1980s, but ultimately failed.[30] The Commission also heard testimonies from various parts of the country about youths who had been ostracised from their communities in the past, only to return during war to lead fighters into attacking their people, destroying their communities and humiliating their chiefs, elders and members of their traditional authorities.[31]

[30] More detail on the Ndorgboryosoi rebellion in Pujehun District in the 1980s can be found in the chapter on the Historical Antecedents to the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report. More detail on the incorporation of former Ndorgboryosoi militiamen into the RUF in 1991 can be found in the chapter on the Military and Political History of the Conflict, also in Volume Three A of this report.

[31] See, for example, Ngolo Katta, Director of the Centre for the Co-ordination of Youth Activities (CCYA), TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 13 August 2003.

The Re-convergence of Youths

49. In the late 1970s and 1980s, there had been a convergence of the educated and the uneducated marginalised youths. This convergence initiated discourse on modes and means of resistance, or violence, that could be targeted at the perpetrator of their marginalisation – the APC government. Their discourse took place in the *potes*, against the background of a non-conflict environment.

50. In contrast, the re-convergence of youths in the 1990s took place in the course of the actual rebellion against the state. On this occasion the youths who converged were mainly uneducated and marginalised youths who had joined the RUF or the Army. Those in the Army were largely marginalised urban youths, whilst the RUF constituted mainly rural youths. It became a convergence of all the groups from the pre-conflict period described earlier in this chapter: *rarray man dem*; *upline savis man dem*; *san san boys*; and *njiahungbia ngornga*.

51. Youths in both the Army and the RUF shared common traits of marginalisation. Most were uneducated, heavy users of drugs and had been uprooted or alienated from their pre-war communities. The rebellion and counter-insurgency seemed to promise marginalised youths that they could continue to engage in their old habits while fulfilling the ambitions that were denied to them by society.

52. Towards this end youths were encouraged by the leadership of the various military and political factions. The elites were profiteering from war in different ways from the youths, but they had a similar interest in its perpetuation. Youths in turn utilised violence not only to please their masters, but also to fulfil their yearnings for material acquisitions. In other words, the youths appropriated elite-sanctioned violence for subaltern ends.

53. Thus the eventual re-convergence of marginalised youths in the midst of the brutality that characterised the conflict was perhaps inevitable. Some commentators believe that the neologism “sobel” captures this convergence, because soldiers behaved like rebels, and vice versa.[32] The reality is subtly different, however, since the union of the RUF with the AFRC regime that seized power in May 1997 came about through a decision of their respective leaderships, rather then any organic merger of the two combatant cadres on the ground. Only upon their convergence did the two factions really appreciate that they were practically identical in their composition.

54. The leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) came from subaltern social types (*rarray man dem*) who had become accustomed to deploying violence on behalf of the civilian political elites. In seizing power in their coup of 1997, these soldiers and civilians were carrying out violence towards their own ends and in doing so they made no distinction between public and private targets.[33]

55. When the AFRC regime was joined by the RUF, itself composed mainly of marginalised rural youths, many ordinary people suspected that it reflected years of collaboration between the two factions at the battlefront. It was very common to hear Sierra Leoneans saying that they knew that the RUF and the Army were secret lovers and that they were now publicly celebrating the marriage. It was not so much a question of formalising an existing relationship, though, as of wondering why the two of them had failed to get together earlier.

[32] See, for example, Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*.
[33] See Kandeh, *Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror*.

Community Self-Defence and the Utilisation of Youths

56. In the mid to late 1990s, civilian communities largely lost faith in the national army and sponsored their own youths to become members of the Civil Defence Forces, a militia network dominated by Kamajors from the south and east. For many youths, joining the Kamajors was a way to earn respectability and honour. Others simply heeded the call of their elders to be initiated:

> "The chiefdom elders called upon the youths of all the surrounding villages and explained to us that since the situation was getting out of hand, they want some of the youths to volunteer to be initiated into the Kamajor society as a means of self-defence. Eighty people were registered for initiation."[34]

57. In his statement to the Commission, another youth said he joined the Kamajors to defend his people from soldiers and the RUF:

> "The government soldiers who were supposed to protect us were the very ones who were killing and harassing our people. The RUF were also killing our people and burning our houses."[35]

58. The CDF militias started as a reaction to the abuses of the RUF and government soldiers. As the war progressed, though, the CDF was transformed into much more than a community defence force. This was particularly the case after the 1997 AFRC coup, when the CDF became an armed force dedicated to the restoration of the SLPP government. According to one CDF fighter:

> "In addition to the carnage and destruction caused by the rebels to our people and the land, for these kind of people to rule us was a mockery and a shame… My first deployment (as a Kamajor) was to go and fight the RUF at their base in Koribundo."[36]

59. As tensions flared, many Kamajor members learned to use the war for private gain. Although they were under oaths, taboos and a disciplined code of conduct that forbade them from engaging in certain acts, they nonetheless looted, raped, killed innocent civilians and conscripted children into their ranks.[37]

60. A farmer from Pujehun recounted his ordeal at the hands of the Kamajors:

> "Eight Kamajors attacked me on my farm. They invited me to their base, but I refused to accompany them. They maltreated me and while I sat on the ground they fired shots around me. As if that was not enough, they went on to harvest my pineapple and other fruits. Finally, they looted all my property and burnt down my farmhouse."[38]

61. Membership of the Kamajors was in some areas the only way of avoiding such abuses. Many youths joined the militia to seek this protective cover:

> "These Kamajors intimidated us so much as civilians that I decided to join them in 1997. I did it to gain the freedom of entering and leaving our village."[39]

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[34] Borbor Rambo Kallon, TRC statement recorded in Mano Dasse, Dasse Chiefdom, March 2003.
[35] Augustine Musa, TRC statement recorded at an unspecified location, February 2003.
[36] Brima Nallo, TRC statement recorded in Ngiehun, Lugbu Chiefdom, January 2003.
[37] See, for example, Rugiatu Kamara, testimony to TRC public hearings, Freetown, 14 April 2003.
[38] Mohamed Kebbie, TRC statement recorded in Pujehun Town, 25 February 2003.
[39] Desmond Hindowa Momoh, TRC statement recorded in Tokwama village, 11 December 2002.

Youths as Collaborators in the Conflict

62. In addition to their active combat roles, youths instigated horrific atrocities by collaborating with the factions in times of social tension or when control of a particular area changed hands. Youths were often the first residents to be sought out for information or local knowledge. By betraying the confidence of their communities and pointing fingers, sometimes without any rational basis, they caused many deaths and untold suffering:

> "When the soldiers recaptured Potoru… an indigene of Potoru showed the soldiers all the houses the rebels had been dwelling in… The houses were then burnt down by an SLA corporal…"[40]

63. When the war broke out in the east and the south, some young men who joined the RUF pointed out to rebel forces certain individuals they perceived as their antagonists or oppressors. Often these persons were tortured and killed. During the ousting of the junta in 1998 by the ECOMOG intervention force, irate youths not only formed "mobs" to beat up and summarily execute civilians, they also identified suspected AFRC sympathisers or disclosed their hideouts to ECOMOG personnel and Kamajors, who dealt mercilessly with their victims. Philip Sankoh described what happened to him:

> "Around 16 February 1998, a neighbour named Modupeh came with a group of Nigerian soldiers serving under ECOMOG… The soldiers attacked my friend and I… and held us at gun point … That same night they went over to the place where I had gone to seek refuge… and harassed the people, looted their property."[41]

The Impact of the Conflict on Youth

64. Instead of alleviating the neglect and marginalisation believed to be the prime causes of the war, the eleven-year conflict has actually compounded the problems faced by youths and had entirely negative consequences on their development. Many youths have been left disillusioned and frustrated.

Youths and education

65. A whole generation of youths lost their opportunity to advance their levels of education, which is so vital to the improvement of their status. Desmond Massaquoi recounted the circumstances that have denied him his schooling:

> "I was attending Christ The King College when the war broke out; I was in form three. I went for holidays to my village Kanguma, near Serabu in the Bumpeh Chiefdom. Rebels attacked my village, burnt our houses, looted our property and killed some people. Amongst those killed were my father, my sister and her husband. These people were the ones paying my school fees… I want to continue my education but there is no one to support me as my sister and her husband who supported me are dead.'"[42]

[40] Lahai Kamara, TRC statement recorded in Potoru, Pujehun District, 24 January 2003.
[41] Philip Sankoh, resident of Brookfields community in Freetown, TRC interview, 16 July 2003.
[42] Desmond Massaquoi, TRC statement, Bo District, 10 April 2003.

66. Displacement of the population resulted in high levels of illiteracy and a massive drop in the standard of education. As civilians sought refuge in the big towns, overcrowding meant that schools had to begin operating double shifts. Class sizes increased and the quality of interaction in the learning environment deteriorated. Even the few youths who were able to attend school received a lower quality of education. Many had their education halted abruptly by their enlistment into the fighting forces or abduction by the RUF.

67. In post-conflict Sierra Leone many youths who lost out on schooling believe they are now too old to return to school. They are destined to remain unskilled. Many are not just unemployed; they are unemployable. They can be seen all over the country, many of them begging and stealing in order to survive.

Psychosocial effects of the conflict

68. Many youths were brutalised and transformed into killing machines. They have been deprived of the positive aspects of their youth. Some young people were abducted as children and stayed with their captors throughout the eleven-year conflict. Many others lost parents and benefactors. In general youths remain bereft of the stabilising ties of affection, intimacy and emotional support. Denied these ties, they are vulnerable to emotional and psychological insecurity.

Drugs

69. Before the war, most youths consuming drugs used cannabis. During the war, they were introduced to more dangerous narcotics such as cocaine and heroin. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of young drug takers and the types of drugs they are addicted to.[43]

Loss of civic and social skills

70. The breakdown of community norms and socialisation during the ten-year civil conflict created youths without civic or social skills. Those in the fighting forces were inducted into a life of burning, looting and killing. They do not possess peacetime skills and are finding it difficult to accept and accede to authority. Refugees also had their lives disrupted. Thus many among them lack the social, civic and economic skills necessary for a disciplined peacetime life.

71. Youths have become been used to violence as a means of resolving problems. Many still hold onto the belief that they should resort to violence to get what they need.[44] They have been used to committing violations with impunity.

[43] See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 12 November 2003. See also Allan Quee, Director of PRIDE, a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the reintegration of ex-combatants, TRC interview in Freetown, 21 November 2003.
[44] See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 12 November 2003.

Limited livelihood skills

72. Destruction of infrastructure has impacted negatively on the range and availability of economic opportunities. Displacement meant abandoning farms and other commercial activities. Always on the run or in the fight, youths could not generate productive skills that were relevant to sustaining livelihoods in rural or urban settings. Many of them are at a loss as to how to rebuild their shattered livelihoods after the conflict. Lahai Kamara told the Commission:

> "I am discouraged because I do not know when I will be able to rebuild my life and be able to recover from my loss."[45]

Unemployment

73. Unemployment among the youth remains a major problem. The economy was destroyed during the ten-year conflict and as a result few jobs are available. Even where jobs are available, many youths do not have the required skills.

74. Every year hundreds of young people graduate from the university and have to scrounge and scramble for the very few jobs on offer. Ex-combatants who have learnt skills cannot find employment and are eking out a living as petty traders. Many youths sit around the streets and motor parks idling their time away.

Post-Conflict Efforts at addressing the Youth Question

Ministry of Youth and Sports

75. At the end of the conflict the government decided to give prominence to the youth question by creating a separate youth ministry. The government de-linked the responsibility for Youth and Sports from the former Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports because the youth and sports component was being dwarfed by the education component. A specific ministry with specific responsibilities for Youth and Sports was created in 2002.

76. One of the initiatives taken by the new ministry was the publishing of the Sierra Leone National Youth Policy, which was approved and launched by the government in July 2003. Through this policy the government hopes to empower youths not only to make them responsible citizens but also as an investment in Sierra Leone's future.

77. A programme of action for youth development has emerged from the National Youth Policy. It focuses to a large extent on the economic empowerment of youths. The ministry has recognised the fact that many young people have missed out on their youthful years. The action plan is an effort to do something to restore to them some of the benefits of youth.

78. The programme is faced with a number of constraints, however. The first is the lack of financial support to realise its objectives. Second, there are few well-trained people involved in youth work and the ministry finds it difficult to attract skilled administrators and organisers. The ministry is further faced with the challenge of convincing people that the youth question is now, more than ever, a national priority that demands national mobilisation.

[45] Lahai Kamara, TRC statement recorded in Potoru, Pujehun District, 24 January 2003.

79. Although the youth question has been declared as a priority in the policy and in the public speeches of government officials, it has been very difficult to translate such declarative emphasis into practical impact. This deficiency is symptomatic of the continued marginalisation of the youth. What obtains is a prioritisation of youth at the abstract level, with few tangible benefits for youths themselves.

80. Youths had wanted the policy enacted into law in an effort to make its provisions binding on the government. The policy was however launched without an effort to give effect to this demand. A golden opportunity was therefore missed.

The National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR)

81. The NCDDR was established in July 1998 to disarm and demobilise combatants of the RUF, CDF and SLA (AFRC) and support their reintegration into society.

82. Disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants was completed in 2002. As a way of providing an alternative to the fighting life, make up for the time lost in the bush and in order to reintegrate them into society, the programme supported more than 25,000 ex-combatants to learn various trades and skills. More than 7,000 ex-combatants were placed in the formal education system at secondary, tertiary and technical vocational levels. Some of these youths are already using their acquired skills to help rebuild their communities, thereby promoting the reconciliation and reintegration aspect of the programme.

83. As part of its reintegration work, the NCDDR worked closely with implementing partners – community-based organisations and local NGOs – to curb animosity against ex-combatants through the implementation of various reconciliation projects. Consequently, community members have minimised their open animosity towards ex-combatants.[46]

84. Nonetheless, a major constraint that is faced by many youths who have gone through the demobilisation and skills-building programme of the NCDDR is the poor state of the country's economy, which hinders the translation of their skills into practices that can sustain their livelihoods. The "crash course" nature of the skills-building exercise can be questioned. Many ex-combatants left the training programmes inadequately trained or lacking the necessary discipline to apply what they had learned. Many public transport users regard ex-combatants who qualified as drivers, the so-called "DDR drivers", as highly undisciplined.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

85. Many NGOs sprang up in response to the acute humanitarian crisis in the country. Through education, sensitisation and awareness-raising programmes, they have been able to reach out and propagate constructive messages to a wide constituency across the country. Ex-combatants and non-combatants alike have benefited from a wide range of assistance and empowerment programmes. Of particular interest with regard to this chapter, a whole new sector of the NGO community has evolved around the youth question.

[46] See the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR); submission to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 4 August 2003.

86. Many NGOs working with youth have specific aims and objectives (such as human rights, skills training and empowerment), but they all share a common goal – to transform youths into capable members of society. NGOs serving youths, however, must overcome a variety of obstacles in carrying out their work, including the perennial issue of resource shortages. Most NGOs access funds for programme implementation from donors outside of Sierra Leone. They have not been able to generate funds locally. Donor support in turn is inherently erratic. Donor priorities may change before the programme goals for youth work are met, leading to the abrupt end of the programmes.

87. Most NGOs depend on the services of volunteers because they lack funds to pay their staff adequate remuneration. Many volunteers have other commitments that make them less effective on the job. The youth NGO sector requires considerable further investment if it is to become a viable contributor to the social, political and economic development of the country's youths.

Conclusion

88. Sierra Leone has witnessed what the lethal cocktail of youth marginalisation and political manipulation can produce. Youths who had learnt to do the violent bidding of their masters soon applied these skills to further their own ends.

89. Hitherto mainstream youths – university students and graduates – were increasingly marginalised amidst the deteriorating political and economic environment of the 1970s. These youths linked up with the marginalised uneducated and unemployed youth, bringing with them ideas of "revolution" as a means of ending their marginal existence. Once the armed struggle had commenced many youths exploited the conflict for private gain. The war provided a useful cover for them to enrich themselves. Their looting campaigns made no distinction between private and public property, nor did their violence distinguish between combatants and ordinary civilians. As a result massive human rights violations and abuses were perpetrated by youths during the war.

90. Youths became participants in a conflict that entrenched their marginalisation. Inducted into a life of violent but unsustainable accumulation, they undermined the very attributes – schools, state resources, skills of civic interaction – they needed to escape their marginalisation.

91. In order properly to address the youth question, the means to escape youth marginalisation must be rebuilt and sustained. This national effort must include providing the skills to youths to participate productively in the economy. It also means encouraging the right attitudes. Youths themselves must be integral to the planning and implementation of youth-orientated policies and programmes. The construction of sustainable youth programmes can only be done through authentic dialogue between youths and their elders. As these processes unfold, it will become incumbent on the youth to demonstrate responsibility, leadership and accountability. In so doing, Sierra Leone's youth will at last come closer to finding its rightful place in society.