



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PAPERS

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT CONFLICT PREVENTION & RECONSTRUCTION

Paper No. 12 / April 2004

Social Capital and Survival: Prospects for Community-Driven Development in Post- Conflict Sierra Leone

Paul Richards
Khadija Bah
James Vincent

Summary Findings

This social assessment study of Sierra Leone seeks to analyze and evaluate how collective action functions in rural communities recovering from the war in Sierra Leone. The objective is to better understand poverty and vulnerability in order to strengthen the National Social Action Project (NSAP), a modality for funding direct community action administered by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) as part of the Transitional Support Strategy for post-war recovery and poverty alleviation in Sierra Leone.

In the rural areas, the division between ruling lineages and dependent lineages, and migrant “strangers” is perpetuated through the control lineage that elders exercise over marriage systems, and over the labor of young men. This is a strong push factor in the decision of many to leave the rural areas, and opt instead for diamond digging where they become vulnerable to militia recruitment. Reversing this rural outflow will require a changed mindset, local legal reforms and better rural market opportunities. High rural outflow represents a problem for community-driven development, since projects depend on community contributions generally put forward in the form of the labor, especially of young men.

Nevertheless, there are still rural institutions that work and are respected. Membership cuts across the divide between leading lineages, commoners and strangers. Evidence is presented that club activity has increased as a result of war and displacement.

As a result of humanitarian aid, ad hoc committees appointed by relief agencies emerged, generally known as Village Development Committees (VDCs). These tended to be dominated by leading lineages, and are argued to have added to the divisions between rural elites and the bulk of the poor.

Furthermore, the report argues the failure of chiefdom governance was a cause of the war. A consultative process launched by government in rural chiefdoms in 1999 and 2000 revealed a pattern of local complaints about failed local institutions. Local people voiced many good reform ideas, however the consultation was not extended to the newly accessible areas following the November 10, 2000 Abuja agreement.

Part 2 considers how the state re-established itself in the countryside through restoration of chiefdom administration and current progress towards administrative decentralization. As an example is considered proposals to create a hierarchy of local management committees in the education sector. The emphasis on a hierarchy of management institutions apparently at the expense of parent power is indicative of concerns to retain political control over a decentralized process. Part 3 discusses the nature of “the community” in rural Sierra Leone, and analyzes the main sources of poverty and vulnerability. It argues that women, youth, and strangers have been politically marginalized, and that the rural community is typically divided between leading lineages and the rest.

There are ten main conclusions of the assessment six of which have specific operational implications for NaCSA.

- The SA identifies an agrarian crisis as a major cause of rural poverty and war in Sierra Leone.
- The agrarian crisis is institutional; the rights of land-owners are over-protected and the rights of rural laborers under-protected.
- The agrarian crisis is technical; the opportunity structure is weak due to inadequate markets, roads, credit, training and technology policy.
- There is a lack of true cohesion in rural communities to support community-driven development.
- There is evidence of extensive change in social attitudes among marginalized groups in the countryside, and these changes need to be understood and built upon.
- CDD is threatened by undemocratic procedures, villagers’ lack of knowledge of their rights, and lack of local capacity to handle project inputs.
- CDD is threatened by fraud, and a failure to understand that fraud is an institutional failure, not a cultural failure.
- CDD implies that international and local implementing partners need to develop new roles and skills.
- CDD requires collective action, which in turn is underpinned by a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Agencies will need to “do no harm” and to respect the sacred as an aspect of local culture.

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Community-Driven Development Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| ADR | Alternative Dispute Resolution |
| CARDA | Commoners Agricultural and Rural Development Association |
| CDD | Community-Driven Development |
| CDF | Community Defense Force |
| DDR | Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration |
| DfID | Department for International Development (United Kingdom) |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization (UN) |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organization |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NaCSA | National Commission for Social Action |
| NAF/SL | National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone |
| NCDDR | National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NSAP | National Social Action Project |
| RoSCA | Rotational Savings and Credit Association |
| RUF | Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone |
| SA | Social Assessment study |
| SLA | Sierra Leone Army |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNAMSIL | UN Peacekeeping Forces in Sierra Leone |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |

Foreword

As the Bank has expanded its development efforts in conflict-affected countries, it is increasingly focusing on approaches that seek to empower communities and promote community participation in post-conflict reconstruction across a wide range of countries and conflict settings. This approach builds on the Bank's increased emphasis on community-driven development more broadly, but also recognizing that in countries affected by conflict or its aftermath, societies and communities face even stronger imperatives and more complex challenges in rebuilding social capital, empowering and providing voice to communities, re-establishing good governance and accountability, and generally rebuilding the social fabric torn apart by violent conflict.

With the growing recognition of the potential of community-driven development in conflict environments, there is also a need for more systematic assessment and evaluation of different experiences, of the trade-offs involved, lessons learned and adaptations in different settings. This working paper, published jointly by the Community-Driven Development and Social Capital Team and the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction (CPR) Unit and the in the Social Development Department, is part of a broader effort to begin addressing some of these questions.

The Working Paper presents the findings of a study to assess the social context and the capacity for collective action, or social capital, in rural areas, carried out on behalf the National Commission for Social Action of the Government of Sierra Leone. The key aim is to better understand poverty and vulnerability in order to strengthen the community-driven development process being implemented by the Sierra Leone National Social Action Project. The study was funded by the Community-Driven Development and Social Capital Team (Social Development Department), and the Africa Region CDD Committee, with generous support from the Government of Norway.

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Paul Richards also thanks colleagues in the Technology & Agrarian Development Group (Guido Ruivenkamp, Kees Jansen, Harro Maat, and Conny Alemekinders) and apologizes to his students for disruptions. Inge Ruisch (secretary to the group) was resourceful in maintaining electronic communication with a team “in the bush” (even if this did at one stage require us to borrow a scanner and crossing Bo to a bakery with a computer, where the smell of fresh bread compensated for the deficiencies of the software!). We are also grateful for the insights of Dr. Malcolm Jusu (Rokupr Rice Research Station) and Emmanuel Gaima (UNDP, Freetown). Dr. Jusu guided us through the complexities of Kailahun District, and Mr. Gaima through the complexities of government decentralization. The Commander of the Pakistani Battalion of UNAMSIL in Kailahun provided Paul Richards accommodation for several surprisingly comfortable nights under canvas, and thanks are also due to Dr. Sahr Fomba, Director of the Rice Research Station Rokupr, for accommodation in the caravan parked outside the (at the time) repaired but unopened station guest house. The Country Director of FAO helped secure the timely loan of a vehicle for Khadija Bah after the one we hired failed. The Country Director of CARE-Sierra Leone (Nick Webber) and the manager and assistant manager of the CARE rights-based food security project (Tiziana Oliva and Samuel P. Mokuwa) enabled us to make use of data collected as part of the base-line study for that project. Mr. Mike Margai was our driver, infinitely knowledgeable about avoiding traffic on the back streets of inner Freetown, government offices and procedures. Alfred Mokuwa was a hard-working research assistant, and happily our extensive travels did not undermine his concurrent MSc research. Krijn Peters (a Wageningen PhD candidate) is thanked for supplying us information from his extensive interviews with former RUF cadres. We also benefited tremendously from interaction with members of other World Bank study teams in Sierra Leone—thanks especially to Drs. Elon Gilbert and Dunstan Spencer, Professor Edward Rhodes, J. P. Amara and colleagues of the sector study on agriculture, and Anton Barre and Steve Archibald, consultants to NCDDR and to the NCDDR/World Bank study on ex-combatant reintegration respectively, for many helpful discussions. We pay special tribute to the many people in villages, camps and administrative centers up and down the country who patiently answered our many and at times (doubtlessly) painful questions, or who walked with us to show us things they felt we ought to see or experience. Paul Richards acknowledges many years of friendship and cooperation in his two main anthropological field work villages (Mogbuama and Lalehun) and expresses sympathy on the recent death of Paramount Chief Martin of Kamajei Chiefdom and concern at the extremely arduous conditions of life in Lalehun on the as yet barely resettled margins of the Gola Forest. A full list of contacts and contributors to the study will found in the appendix.

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Executive Summary

The social assessment study (SA) of Sierra Leone seeks to analyze and evaluate how collective action functions in rural communities recovering from the war in Sierra Leone. Capacity for collective action is here considered social capital. The study asks how has war modified (depleted or added to) stocks of social capital in typical rural communities. The objective is to better understand poverty and vulnerability in order to strengthen the National Social Action Project (NSAP), a modality for funding direct community action administered by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) as part of the Transitional Support Strategy for post-war recovery and poverty alleviation in Sierra Leone.

The social assessment offers a processual account of social capital. This means asking how such capital is built up and how it works. The study has four parts. Part 1 is an account of social capital in rural Sierra Leone, describing and analyzing processes of collective action in the countryside. Part 2 is an account of the impact of governance (in a broad sense, including interventions by development agencies) on local processes of post-war collective action. Part 3 is an account of stakeholders, rules and behavior, social and gender diversity, conflict and determinants of participation, vulnerability and risk, and key areas for policy intervention and reform. Part 4 is an assessment of the main findings and their significance for NSAP.

Part 1 covers chieftaincy, lineages, families and households, the legacy of domestic slavery in the countryside, “secret societies,” community labor, labor clubs and rotational credit associations, and patterns of recovery. Leading lineages control chieftaincy and land. This control was established in the early 20th century when the British recognized the rights of “first comers” resulting from forest colonization and expansion of trade in the 19th century. A concern to avoid the conditions of the 1898 war (chiefly an uprising against the British) dominated subsequent policy, and even today is cited as a political reason to soft-pedal reform of key rural institutions (marriage rules and land rights) which continue to serve to reproduce the advantages of leading lineages, and thrust others into relationships of poverty and dependency. Some chief families not recognized by the British continue to struggle for their rights today, and may have at times allied their interest with that of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) along the Liberian border. But by and large the root causes of the war of 1991 are different, and lie to a great extent in the poverty and instability of large numbers of rural young people “spun off” from village society because of control exercised by village elders over land and marriage. A theme running through the report is that re-absorption of these young people will require a more open rural opportunity structure, and to attain this, land allocation and marriage rules will have to be revised.

Part 1 also analyses rural society as divided between ruling lineages and dependent lineages and migrant “strangers” (the latter comprising 20-40% of rural society). This division is perpetuated through the control lineage that elders exercise over marriage systems, and the labor of young men. Young village women marry very early (in their mid teens), which greatly reduces girls’ chances of education and more independent development in later life (we subsequently identify rural schooling and the need to ensure greater participation by girls as a priority for development). Young men, through bride service and court cases for “woman damage” and disrespecting elders, lose control of their own labor power. This is a strong push factor in the decision of many to leave the rural areas, and opt instead for diamond digging where they become vulnerable to militia recruitment. Reversing this rural outflow will require a changed mindset, local legal reforms and better rural market opportunities. There is a problem here for community-driven development, since projects depend on community contributions generally put forward in the form of the labor, especially of young men. High rural outflow means that community labor burdens and the demands of bride service fall disproportionately on the young men who remain. Many have become resentful of the demands made on them, and either join the rural exodus or refuse to

participate in community development activities, especially when village elites are seen to be involved in the misappropriation of funds and materials.

Nevertheless, there are still rural institutions that work and are respected. Membership of gender-based sodalities (the so-called secret societies, notably Poro for men and Sande for women) is nearly universal in rural areas. The village sodalities in Sierra Leone, organized around initiation, turn children into young adults, bonded to withstand the rigors of reproduction and community defense. A new form of initiation (hybrid between Poro and hunter traditions) led to community civil defense, and the community defense force (CDF) continues to supply social capital for community reconstruction after the war, though this potential has been neglected in the demobilization process. Revival of initiation ceremonies for girls has been among the first priorities for villagers upon re-settlement. The Sande society has proven potential for spreading messages about women's sexual and reproductive health, but (again) is currently neglected in community-driven development (CDD). Other effective village institutions include village labor clubs (*kombi*) and rotational credit associations (RoSCAs). Membership cuts across the divide between leading lineages, commoners and strangers, since it depends on an individual functionality readily assessed by other members (i.e., repayment of loans or work turns). Evidence is presented that club activity has increased as a result of war and displacement. Some of this activity is organized along new associational lines (e.g., around sports, religion or CDF membership).

Part 2 is a treatment of governance and civil society. It is first important to take some account of what happened in during what we term here the "humanitarian interregnum," the period from 1997 (when the elected government was driven into exile) to the point at which chiefdom administration and local courts recommenced (September 2000 in most parts of the south and the east, but not complete in Kono and Kailahun District and most parts of the North until the chieftaincy elections of December 2002). We discuss the emergence and significance of ad hoc committees appointed by relief agencies, generally known as Village Development Committees (VDCs). These tended to be dominated by leading lineages, and have (through alleged mishandling of relief supplies) added to the divisions between rural elites and the bulk of the poor (including migrant strangers and young people from dependent lineages). Everywhere, we encountered loud complaints about corrupt connivance between VDCs and implementing partners. Sometimes these partners were "mushroom" national NGOs, but the complaints and allegations against field staff of the main international NGOs were often as loud. This is reflected in new demands for self-management of development by village populations, but also for reform of VDCs along democratic and accountable lines.

But not all the problem was rooted in the humanitarian interregnum. Chiefdom governance was also in disrepair, and we report evidence that its failure was a cause of the war. We also point to the great value of the consultative process launched by government in rural chiefdoms in 1999 and 2000 to prepare for the restoration of chiefdom administration. This process, managed by the DfID-supported Governance Reform Secretariat, produced over 60 consultation documents revealing a pattern of local complaints about failed local institutions, and in particular chiefdom treasuries and customary courts (both treasury and court clerks came in for much criticism). Complaints were also made about the arbitrary or corrupt actions of agents associated with institutions emergent in wartime—e.g., CDF "tribunals" and VDCs. Local people voiced many good ideas about where reforms were needed, and how to proceed with such reforms. But the consultation was not extended to the newly accessible areas following the November 10, 2000 Abuja agreement. Nor was any systematic attempt made, on the part of government or donors, to synthesize the lessons and undertake reforms. It is not too late, we suggest, to organize such a response.

Part 2 considers organized government response—how the state re-established itself in the countryside through restoration of chiefdom administration and current progress towards administrative decentralization. As an example, we consider the case of education, and proposals to create a hierarchy of local management committees. Despite a number of promising features the scheme may neglect a most

important aspect of village social capital—parent power. Parents are keen participants in lobbying for schools, and on building them by community action. A school is a project for which even the disgruntled young men will continue to give labor. Women with young children have little time to spare for the rounds of meetings necessary to mobilize community action, but they do attend school meetings concerning the progress and welfare of their own children. This seems one of the few opportunities for poorer women with little or no education to acquire the skills to participate in CDD.

The education example—with emphasis on a hierarchy of management institutions apparently at the expense of parent power—is indicative of concerns to retain political control over a decentralized process. A second example of the “umbrella organization” is the on-going attempt to organize a national farmers union. The rationalization makes sense—peasant farmers need to be organized to demand better services, but this particular initiative is organized by civil servants, or former civil servants, with funding from the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmer demands (on government as well as private-sector services) are likely to be better expressed if organized around a genuine collective interest—e.g., a crop or technique (e.g., cocoa or irrigation) or land rights issue (e.g., a national association of tenant farmers or farm laborers). It is unlikely that Sierra Leonean farmers share any collective interest solely through being cultivators. A case we cite, the FAO-supported women’s vegetable growing cooperative in Koinadugu District, is indicative. This assumes a collective gender interest, but in practice the association is run by a female elite, who sell vegetables grown by women “laborers” from a different ethnic group, at times hardly aware they are members of a major national cooperative. Enthusiasm in government for national umbrella organizations is probably a reflection of a mind-set associated with the politics of the one-party state, and offers little to CDD.

We emphasize the point by showing that there are some new interest-driven (or horizontally-organized) forms of social capital being created in post-war Sierra Leone, mainly in the provincial headquarters. The most striking examples are the several associations of motorcycle taxi renters in Bo, Kenema and Makeni. These are mainly associations of students and ex-combatants who buy motorbikes to operate as taxis on hire-purchase terms from Guinean traders. They have organized to deal with questions of unjustified repossession, conflict with the police and licensing authority over issues of papers and roadside harassment, safety standards, training, and the welfare of members. The Bo association explicitly claims to resist political incorporation, and has preferred to organize under commercial law, retaining the services of a Freetown lawyer to fight cases in court. The executive is explicit that this is a break with the pre-war politics of patronage against which ex-combatants (in both CDF and RUF) say they fought. Surveys of other interest-driven associations of young people in Bo reveal a high involvement of ex-combatants, and this can be taken as indicative that trade and craft-based union activity is of rising importance in the new Sierra Leone. It remains a problem for CDD how to support this modernizing energy, since under NSAP community remains primarily defined in residential terms. A key juncture might be to help ex-combatants organize for community reconstruction under NSAP. Opportunities would arise if NaCSA takes over the remaining case-load of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), and the craft-based associations are then involved in training activities or supervising ex-combatant groups on NSAP construction projects.

Part 3 identifies stakeholders, discusses the nature of “the community” in rural Sierra Leone, and analyzes the main sources of poverty and vulnerability. Points made above are more fully developed - that women, youth and strangers have been politically marginalized, that the rural community is typically divided between leading lineages and the rest, and that the most severe poverty and vulnerability is mainly found among strangers and members of weaker lineages, due to difficulties in commanding labor power in a strongly seasonal agricultural system. The more young men and women with weaker social backgrounds are exploited through marriage and via local courts the more they absent themselves from the system, which then bears down heavier on those that remain. The customary regime was devised by the British to avoid a recurrence of the 1898 war. In a political process dominated by mercantile elites interested more

in rents from diamonds than a dynamic agrarian opportunity structure the contribution feudal deference supposedly makes to rural stability has become a durable political myth. The war has exposed the myth's hollowness. Some of the war's worst violence was directed at the leading elements in the traditional system. Post-war, sections of the CDF, marginalized in the peace and demobilization process, are as loud in criticizing rural gerontocracy as the RUF. Donors need to take care that in reviving arrangements first devised to defend against the causes of the 1898 war they do not rebuild the pre-conditions for the war of 1991.

This is the basis of our discussion of conflict and conflict resolution. If rural institutions rooted in a world of domestic slavery (a status abolished January 1, 1928, only after much prodding of the British administration by the League of Nations, and a living memory in the minds of some older rural residents) were a factor in causing the war, evidence from young people marginalized in the demobilization process (young fighters whose commanders seized their guns, and young female "combat wives" for whom no provision was made) points to the danger of some slipping back into *de facto* servitude (only thinly disguised as "marriage" or "laboring" status). Many young men are in fact trapped in Kono digging diamonds for pittance wages. These are the main sources of potential future conflict, and the problem needs to be addressed through a more open rural opportunity structure, with an emphasis on tenant farmer livelihoods and practical assistance to the poor in acquiring their rights. Harmony models of local dispute resolution have some potential to ease tensions in rural Sierra Leone (the widely admired American model of Alternative Dispute Resolution is based on social capital exported from West Africa), but a more fundamental and conflictual struggle for social justice and human rights seems unavoidable.

Part 4 states our conclusions, three of which are of a general nature addressed to all stakeholders (and without attention to which NSAP is liable to fail), while six are specific, having direct operational implications for NaCSA.

- The SA identifies an agrarian crisis as a major cause of rural poverty and war in Sierra Leone.
- The agrarian crisis is institutional; the rights of land-owners are over-protected and the rights of rural laborers under-protected.
- The agrarian crisis is technical; the opportunity structure is weak due to inadequate markets, roads, credit, training and technology policy.
- There is a lack of true cohesion in rural communities to support community-driven development.
- There is evidence of extensive change in social attitudes among marginalized groups in the countryside, and these changes need to be understood and built upon.
- CDD is threatened by undemocratic procedures, villagers' lack of knowledge of their rights, and lack of local capacity to handle project inputs.
- CDD is threatened by fraud, and a failure to understand that fraud is an institutional failure, not a cultural failure.
- CDD implies that international and local implementing partners need to develop new roles and skills.
- CDD requires collective action, which in turn is underpinned by a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Agencies will need to "do no harm" and to respect the sacred as an aspect of local culture.

We end with a short discussion on the theme of social capital. Social capital can have negative as well as positive consequences. It can contribute to the short-term stability of a society experiencing political involution as well as have emancipatory consequences. Legal and political reform is not enough; the rural poor need practical opportunities to acquire and exercise their rights.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SURVIVAL: PROSPECTS FOR COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT IN POST-CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

Introduction

The social assessment study (SA) of Sierra Leone supports the National Social Action Project (NSAP). NSAP, administered by a government agency, the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), provides the resources for community-driven rural development via direct community financing. In so doing it supports two goals of the Transitional Support Strategy for Sierra Leone: to reduce risks of renewed conflict, and to generate sustained poverty reduction. The SA is required to offer some description and analysis of: stakeholders; institutions, rules and behaviors; social diversity and gender; participation and consultation mechanisms; and vulnerability and risk. The main questions to be answered by the SA relate to: (i) notions of community, processes of collective action (specifically, what is community and how are local decisions made, what community skill base might NSAP build upon, what local institutions are trusted and why, and how are community obligations viewed); (ii) risk and poverty alleviation (specifically, what are the priority needs of the poor and how are they changing, what is necessary to restore livelihoods, what are the causes and consequences of poverty, and what coping strategies are employed by different groups); and (iii) causes of conflicts, and conflict management (specifically, what are the roots of social conflict, how are conflicts handled, what resources exist for conflict resolution).

The focus of the SA is on rural areas, especially those newly accessible to government and development agencies following the Abuja accord between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) on November 10, 2000 and the nation-wide deployment of UNAMSIL (UN peace keeping forces) in 2001.¹ This reflects NSAP criteria, namely to address extreme poverty and vulnerability, which tends to be rural because the war was mainly a rural guerrilla conflict.

The questions above are best tackled via an account of capacity for collective action among the social groups targeted. Such capacity is sometimes termed social capital. Social capital is distinguished from financial, physical or human capital (e.g., investment in individual capacity through education). A number of analysts define social capital in terms of networks (capacity to shape action and events through deployment of contacts beyond the family or domestic group). Arguably, however, networking depends on more basic forms of organization and collective action. Our own emphasis is with these deep-lying elements—the infrastructure of social capital. In this report we use social capital to refer to any enduring sense of social solidarity or capacity for collective action, following in the sociological tradition of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). In Durkheimian theory, even “individualism”—treated as a fact of life or a given by Herbert Spencer and his latter-day neo-liberal followers—is collective action (i.e., a possible form of agency in societies manifesting a type of elaboration he referred to as “organic solidarity”, cf. Douglas and Ney 1998). For Durkheim, solidarities are grounded in a categorical distinction between the sacred and profane, and forged or changed through ritual action. The historical building blocks of agrarian society are families and forms of association based around occupational specialization (Durkheim 1957). Durkheim attached much significance to the fact that both families and occupational groups generally sustain welfare, regulatory and ritual functions (i.e., those that are not families are sodalities). The sodality (or sacred association, sometimes termed “secret society”) is the associational form in which rural civil society beyond the kinship group most commonly expresses itself in rural Sierra Leone (not least in the militias, through which the business of war is organized). In consequence any theory of social capital adequate to the task of social assessment must be able to encompass families and sodalities. A network theory of social capital remains ungrounded.

¹ The war was formally declared at an end on January 18, 2002.

Our account of social capital in Sierra Leone is processual. It focuses not on what social capital is, but how it is forged, deployed or changed (i.e., how it works). This processual account is divided into two parts. First, we illustrate what local processes of collective action are found in the Sierra Leone countryside and how (and how well) they function. Second, we analyze how governance (in a broad sense, including interventions by development agencies) impinges upon (builds upon or undermines) local processes of collective action. This focus on agrarian civil society and the state will place us in a position (in a third part of the report) to recognize stakeholders, discuss rules and behavior, account for social and gender diversity, review issues of conflict and determinants of participation, and assess vulnerability and risk. We will, in effect, be asking what works (and why) and what does not (and why), in rural communities reviving after the war, leading to the identification and discussion of key areas for policy intervention and reform. A concluding section draws together the findings and assesses their significance for NSAP.

PART 1: SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Families and Chiefs

Family structure (lineages) is the foundation of social organization in rural Sierra Leone.² Current arrangements should not necessarily be regarded as long-standing. The pattern has emerged from circumstances of extreme social flux in the latter part of the 19th century. Fenton (1948, p.1)—the standard work of reference on customary law in rural Sierra Leone—remarks that the interior was relatively peaceful until about 1874, after which for a period of about 15 years interior Sierra Leone was thrown into chaos by “a succession of captains of freebooters whose constant plundering and slave-raiding affected even the coast and the Colony [Freetown] borders, endangered British subjects trading up-country, and cut off trade.” These were the circumstances in which the British took administrative control of the interior from 1896, following the drafting of the Protectorate Ordinance. The system of governance was later termed “indirect rule” (i.e., rule by chiefs and through “native” institutions). Influenced by experience in Indian principalities, Lord Lugard theorized a scheme for the administration of Northern Nigeria, Indirect Rule, adopted throughout British Africa. The British in Sierra Leone (as elsewhere) tried to find out what social arrangements worked (i.e., were conducive to dealing with the threats to the commercial order Fenton describes), and then sought to document these as principles of customary law.

As Fenton notes, the political system encountered by the British in 1896 was “based on families and land.” In a situation of insecurity and social flux, precedence went to first-comers, provided they had the means to deal with the threat of war. A typical pattern was one in which a hunter established a base for his area of operations, to be joined later by kinsmen and their dependents, who established a successful farming community, to be joined by “strangers and accretions.” “Villages are thrown out,” and “war boys” (professional warriors) hired for protection and “to make conquests,” and so a chiefdom formed “of which the ruling family is that of the founder of the central town.” Fenton (1948, p. 4) gives the example of one Mende town of about 200 houses. This comprised the ruling family (supplying the section chief and town headman) and six other leading families linked by marriage alliance, and about “sixty houses of single families who have one or two houses each” inhabited by “a very few traders or craftsmen” and “farmers who are clearly late arrivals and strangers, [having] obtained land from original families within the last generation or two.”

² The patterns described are broadly similar for all Sierra Leonean ethnic groups and language communities, although some detailed differences in family and marriage arrangements do occur, and are sometimes important (e.g., the occurrence and incidence of marriage with the mother’s brother’s daughter).

This last remark pinpoints the system Fenton describes as recent, dating in many cases from no earlier than the period of mid/late 19th century anarchy. Hill (1984), an archaeologist, remarks that in Mende-speaking parts of the country oral tradition often begins, by convention, in about 1896 (i.e., from the moment of British take-over), even though material evidence suggests many settlements have much longer histories. Fenton makes clear how much the present system depended on British intervention. The leading family supplies the chief, but, at first, volunteers were hard to find. Matters only changed (Fenton claims) when the government greatly strengthened the position of chiefs by giving them the right to labor and other support in the Protectorate Native Law Ordinance of 1905. A two-class society was thus formed, made up of ruling families and others.

The ruling families divided into “treaty chiefs,” recognized by the British, and others who rejected British rule. Those who rejected British rule were especially notable in the Liberian border region, and some border chiefs (of Gola and Kissi background) adopted a somewhat migratory life-style between settlements and family segments in two or three countries (British-ruled Sierra Leone, independent Liberia and French-ruled Guinea). For this reason, Kailahun District has retained its reputation as a “difficult” region even to this day, and the Libyan-backed RUF exploited some of the grievances of these “excluded” families. It may be anticipated that struggles between (recognized and unrecognized) ruling lineages might once again surface as the crux of local politics in some District Councils.

The balance of society was made up of small farmers and “strangers and accretions,” as Fenton terms them. These were often refugees from conflict elsewhere in the interior. The accretions were (in fact) domestic slaves, sometimes sent to staff the remote farming outposts that became the basis for today’s smaller and more isolated villages. “Domestic slaves” (explained further below) were those lacking in family connections to protect them. Their status was continued for over three decades of British rule (until January 1, 1928), during which their labor power was at the command of the leading families serving as their protectors.

Lack of family connections is still a major source of vulnerability and poverty in rural Sierra Leone. It particularly affects some male ex-combatants and “war widows” excluded from the demobilization process (see below). An equally vulnerable group is village women from weak families. To understand the social dynamics involved in the vulnerability of rural women we need to look at lineage organization. The main land-owning families in villages in Sierra Leone are organized in patrilineages. Membership, land access and property pass in the male line. Women upon marriage remain strangers in their marital households. The children “belong” to the husband (and mothers will sometimes jokingly tell a child “go to your father, I am not your family”). The status of the woman—and how well she is treated upon marriage—depends crucially on the marriage contract.

Among village elites, marriage has long been a matter of strategic alliance, in addition to serving procreative and domestic functions (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). For instance, a high-status stranger (e.g., a merchant, or skilled warrior in the pre-colonial period) might be offered a woman in marriage from one or other of the ruling houses, to ensure commitment to the community (a locally-married merchant or warrior is less likely to “sell” the village, since it is his own children’s welfare he undermines through betrayal or exploitation). These alliances between founder and high-status settler lineages are often further cemented across the generations through preference for marriage between a son of the lineage and his mother’s brother’s daughter. In those areas of eastern and southern Sierra Leone where such marriage is favored, marriage payments are waived. This institution of elite alliance underpins the high social significance of the “uncle (mother’s brother) in many societies of rural Sierra Leone (especially along the Liberian border). The woman in such a marriage is highly protected within her

marital home by the potential influence of the uncle. Men sometimes complain this form of marriage undermines their authority over a wife.³

In other cases, the woman is protected from violence or other forms of marital abuse by her brothers. If her family is strong (i.e., she has influential brothers willing to ride to her rescue) she will be able to enforce her marital rights effectively. Ultimately, she may sue for divorce, and return to live as a member of her patrilineage. But her position is complicated by the nature of bride wealth transactions. If her family is poor, and she has been “married up” (to cement an advantageous alliance with a leading family) her brothers may not be able to return the bride wealth they have received, and will encourage the woman to stay in a less than satisfactory marriage. As a widow she may need to accept another husband from among her late husband’s patrilineage or risk losing assets (to her husband’s kin) that she has worked to create during her marriage. Assessing the status and vulnerability of women in rural Sierra Leone requires information not only about the marital household, but about her own patrilineage. If she comes from a weak lineage she may be “poor” in terms of vulnerability and exploitation, even though living in a domestic setting of some apparent domestic wealth.

The axis of the lineage system at any point in time is a line of half-brothers (i.e., male children of one father, whether or not from different mothers), ranked in seniority and influence according to strict birth order (even twins are ranked as senior and junior). Chiefs and other big men acquire many wives, and the line of brothers may be long. Family leadership and property is inherited from brother to brother. Brothers tend to form a corporate group around ancestral rituals. Most lineages hold an annual ceremony to recall founders and ask for the blessing of the ancestors on family affairs. The ancestors will also be addressed on other important occasions (introducing a new-born child to the community or beginning the building of a house). The lineage group also administers its joint property (notably farm land). Lineage members are likely to assemble before the start of each agricultural cycle to agree where they will lay their farms, and perhaps to discuss assigning land temporarily to strangers. Sisters are not excluded, and may take a prominent part in lineage matters if they are widows, or beyond childbearing age and less preoccupied with a husband and domestic duties. If the lineage group is a “ruling house” (i.e., a founder group recognized by the British as having the right to present candidates for chieftaincy elections) it will also meet to choose its candidate. This is where a competent older sister may enter the political scene. Among the Mende, in the south and east, women are permitted to contest for chieftaincy (including the position of Paramount Chief). Conscious of its “corporate” interests, a ruling lineage may opt to present a female candidate if other (male) candidates seem less able.⁴

Commoners and former domestic slaves also form lineages. Long residence tends to establish their *de facto* right to the land they cultivate. But under the situation shaped by British preference for indirect rule through customary law, weak lineages have tended to remain at a permanent disadvantage. Wealth flows down from leading families through marriage payments, but as noted, weak lineages tend to lack the resources to protect the labor of their sisters in marriage. Discrimination against the property of widows means that wealth cannot flow back into the sister’s patrilineage. The lineage remains subordinate to the leading lineages with which it is allied in marriage, and this tends to affect “voice.” The poor keep quiet about injustices because they know the extent to which their livelihoods are meshed with those of the

³ The institution is known in Mende as *kenya huan wui* (head of the uncle’s animal, i.e., the part the animal the hunter gives as a mark of respect to the chief). The veteran politician, Dr Sama S. Banya, alludes to it in commenting on the death of his nephew, the feared RUF fighter Samuel Bockarie (“Maskita”) (“Those who live by the sword”, *New Vision* May 9, 2003). Banya, one of President Kabbah’s advisors, was detained by the Army/RUF junta at Military HQ on June 16, 1997. Bockarie harangued his uncle “Who ever told you that you were my uncle...don’t even call me your nephew...when you used to drive in your Mercedes Benz in Kenema you never recognized me; well here I am now.” Banya adds, “How he came to be my nephew is another long story which only those who understand our culture and extended family system would understand.”

⁴ The position is different in northern chiefdoms. Among the Temne Paramount Chieftaincy involves sacred aspects associated with the (male) secret society and women are disqualified from selection.

leading rural families through marriage. It is also generally considered shameful to uncover someone's origins.

Crucial to the system are the young people. The position of boys and girls differs. Rural girls are married off very young (typically in their mid-teens). Data collected by CARE in Kamajei, Fakuniya and Bonkolenken chiefdoms in 2002-03 (Richards et al. 2002) indicate that the average age of first marriage remains incredibly low at 15.5 years (Table 1). This includes a handful of cases in which informants mention being married at age 9 or 10 (meaning they were pledged in marriage at this age, i.e., the parents agreed with a potential husband about initial marriage payments; for instance, the man would be responsible for the girl's initiation expenses). But most girls, in fact, begin to bear children not long after they have joined Sande (see below). In the least accessible villages in the CARE sample the average age of marriage is now lower for those marrying in the past decade than for those first married two or three decades ago. This reflects the lack of educational opportunities for girls. Even where the parents have kin in town willing to lodge a girl she risks coming back pregnant. The poor and vulnerable depend on the marriage payments of a wealthier older husband, or the labor power of a loyal young man in the village, reckoning it is too risky to send their girls to town where they have no control over the partners.

Table 1: Women's Age at Marriage (years)

| Women | Youth (SD) | Elders (SD) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Fakuniya, on-road | 15.7 (2.6) | 15.6 (1.7) |
| Kamajei, on-road | 15.8 (3.2) | 15.6 (2.5) |
| Kamajei, off-road | 15.3 (2.3) | 16.2 (3.0) |
| Bonkolenken, off road | 15.4 (3.0) | 17.0 (2.7) |
| ALL | 15.5 (2.6) | 15.7 (2.7) |

SD = Standard Deviation

Village girls threaten to defeat strategies of lineage alliance by finding lovers where they choose within the village. But it is even harder to control the young men. The issue (in regard to a young man) is not to impose an arranged marriage (choice of partner is left to the young man) but to ensure that his choice remains within the bride-wealth transaction system. Whereas weak lineages seek to ensure that their daughters cement advantageous alliances by selecting a "big man" (often a polygamist) as husband the concern with the young men is to ensure they marry within the confines of the village (or local) marriage alliance system. A youth defeats the system when he exercises the "exit" option. A weak lineage will tolerate its silent subordination to the leading lineages only so long as it can acquire wealth from the marriage payments of leading lineages. But often this means the young man subordinating his wishes (and labor) to the interests of his father or older brothers. Today, he is less sure he wants to stay in the village permanently, or that a position of rural leadership is what he wants in life. He leaves for town (or the diamond fields), makes his own money, and marries a woman of his choice. Some villages try to force young men to marry, and apply steep fines to young men "playing the field." This hastens the rural exodus of young men.

BOX 1: Village Marriage According to a Young RUF Ex-Combatant in Tongo Field

“I am from B. in Nongowa Chiefdom. We have problems with our elders in that village. They force young men to marry their daughters as soon as we harvest our first bunch of palm fruits. If you refuse they cause more problems for you than even being in the bush as a rebel. They charge you to court for smiling at a girl, saying they had offered you a girl and you refused...But the bride price is not reasonable. You will be required to do all sorts of physical jobs for the bride’s family, like brushing and making a farm for the family, offering your energy in the form of labor to build houses for them, and sharing the proceeds of your own labor, harvest or business, three-quarters to them, one quarter for you. For example, if you process one [50 gallon] drum of palm oil you will be forced to give them 35 gallons [70%], or you will lose your wife and be taken to court for breach of contract. This is not going down well with the young men of the village...we consider it a form of sexual harassment, but we are not girls, so no one cares. What most of us have done is to avoid the scene...here you can get some respite and marry a woman of your choice. In B. marriage is synonymous to slavery. Most of the young men who should contribute to development are forced to leave the village...this is one of the reasons why B. has one of the worst roads in Sierra Leone...because most of the young men go away.”

There is some agreement that exodus of young males fed the RUF rebellion (Archibald and Richards 2002), but to re-instate the local system seems only likely to intensify this rural exodus. Increasingly, the sanctions first permitted by the British to maintain the rural social system are resented by the young (e.g., fines for “woman damage”). In some cases (e.g., widow’s property) local custom is in conflict with both national law and Sierra Leone’s obligations under international human rights’ covenants. The issue is not to ask how to revive an old system of family, marital and land law, but to understand why it failed, and to seek to remedy its defects. Land stands at the heart of the system. The British cemented in place a first-come, first-served principle that is increasingly at odds with modern demands for a flexible agrarian division of labor. The issue is not to deprive lineages of their ownership of land, but to remedy an anomalous situation in which labor mobility (leaving one’s area of birth and becoming a stranger with lesser rights in another) undermines citizenship.

If young persons decide to leave their chiefdom of birth they lose rights to land. These rights are assigned only as a member of a lineage. At home they have a clear entitlement, but even in making a move to a neighboring chiefdom a migrant becomes dependent for access to land on the good will of a patron (in Mende a *hota kee*, literally “father of the stranger”). To be accepted as a person of good character may require residence over many years and the taking of a local wife.

BOX 2: Village Marriage According to a Young Female in Kamajei Chiefdom

“I am 17 or 18. This is my second child. The rebels came in 1995 when I was a girl. I survived the war in this area, in N., a *sokoihun* [Mende “corner” or bush hiding place] not far from here. This is my village [T., a farm village or *faka* comprising about ten grass-roofed wattle-and-mud houses about 15 kilometers north of the Bo-Taiama road]. I am married. Yes, we married properly. My husband works on the farm with my father and brothers. He will work for my father indefinitely. He is a young man. It is nicer to be married to a youth than an old man. I never went to school - it would have been good, but it is too late now.” Parents in Mobai, an adjacent village, told Steven Archibald and Paul Richards in 2002 that they would not send their girls for education until they had a local school. To send them to Bo—the alternative—would result in an unwanted pregnancy by a boy friend who would offer the parents nothing by way of labor and support, and the pregnancy would end the girl’s education in any case. “It is less risky with boys. They go out, and if they do something in life they will one day find their mothers again and help them.” No school would be built in Mobai until it was on a road; presently the village is more than 15 kilometers from a road in any direction.

The British protected lineage rights in land ownership because they feared the destabilizing consequences of provincial land sales. The Krio of Freetown were poised to become a plantocracy, as the railway advanced and opened up cash crop opportunities along the way. The impressive ruin of Thomas College at Mabang, intended to teach plantation skills, speaks to the seriousness of this ambition. The British hoped that the landowners would develop their own land, and to some extent they did, but at the expense

of the subordination of weak lineages and excessive rural exodus of impoverished youth resentful of being tied down. As argued by Mamdani (1996) for British Africa as a whole this fostered notions of being a subject rather than a citizen of the state. Some countries—notably Tanzania—undertook far-reaching reforms at independence. The Tanzanian peasant has only one political identity, as a citizen of Tanzania, and a corresponding right to work, settle and acquire property anywhere within the national space. No such reform took place in Sierra Leone. The economy was dominated by mining of minerals at independence, and agrarian reform was (and remains) a low priority. Young people quit their local citizenships to drift into mining camps, border regions and other parts of West Africa. Rebel war from Liberia was the ultimate price. Many of these footloose youth, demobilized from the war, will need to find homes, jobs and a sense of national identity in the agrarian economy (Richards et al. 2003). This does not mean re-assigning land acquired in the chaos of the mid-19th century (land reform in the conventional sense). But it may prove crucial to the formation of future sustainable family relations in the rural economy to formulate nationally applicable agrarian law in which the rights of tenant farmers are clearly specified and guaranteed. Strangers and accretions belong to the past.

Households

There is sometimes confusion between family and household. Family belongs to sociology (and law). The family is an institution (i.e., a set of rules that governs behavior through determining rights and legitimacy). In rural Sierra Leone the heart of the family is the patrilineage (i.e., a group based on notions of a founding father and descent through the male line). The household, by contrast, belongs to economics. It is both a productive unit (with outputs including subsistence, child rearing, and items or services supplied in return for income) and a unit of consumption and redistribution (including residence, welfare and recreation). It can be analyzed largely from the perspective of function (using a range of rational choice frameworks). Families organize also as households, but since the family is normative and household functional there is no necessary relationship between type of family and type of household.

BOX 3: Where Have All the Young People Gone?

During 2002-03 CARE undertook a baseline study of 43 villages in five sections of three adjacent chiefdoms (Fakuniya, Kamajei and Bonkolenken), adjacent to the North-South provincial boundary (Richards et al. 2003); 14 villages were on a motorable track, and 29 villages were accessible only by footpath. Of a random sample of 756 adults in the 43 villages, 423 (56%) lived in off-road locations. Young women (under 25 years) comprised 16% of all women in the sample. Young men (under 25 years) comprised 15% of all men. In both cases the percentage of under-25s in the population declines as inaccessibility increases. In villages with good vehicle access under-25s comprise 26% and 30% of the female and male population, compared to 12-14% in off-road villages. In the most remote settlements of all (18 off-road settlements in southern Bonkolenken chiefdom and 3 in northern Kamajei chiefdom) the number of under-25s is less than 6%. Even allowing for estimation errors (fewer people in off-road villages knew their exact ages, and some young men sampled were working distant farms) this is still a thought-provoking figure. Better opportunities elsewhere are surely a factor, but it is also in these villages that the lineage system remains at its strongest, and the labor of unmarried young men most vulnerable to exploitation by the elders through bride service and fines for woman damage.

In rural Sierra Leone before the decline of domestic slavery, lineages and their accretions organized as large joint households. Each household would make a single upland rice farm, employing a hundred people or more. There might be only one such farm per village. Typically, the head of household (in effect chief of the village) would feed and pay tax for all dependents, and distribute gifts of cloth and other consumption items around Christmas (a post-harvest festival for both Christians and Muslims). Large households broke up during the later colonial period, even though brothers might still live in a quarter, or large extended compound, together with their wives and children. Typically the village household now comprises one or two adult males, two or three adult women, and several children (5 to 10 persons in all). The households of artisans, merchants and Koranic teachers may be larger, due to the presence of numerous apprentices (Mende, *makeloi* “person under training”)

Table 2: Gender and Age Distribution in Selected Chiefdoms (years)

| Chiefdom | Gender | Under 25 Years | All Age Groups |
|------------------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|
| Fakuyima (good access) | Male | 28 (30%) | 92 |
| | Female | 25 (26%) | 97 |
| Kamajei (moderate access) | Male | 24 (12%) | 203 |
| | Female | 37 (14%) | 261 |
| Bonkolenken (poor access) | Male | 0 (0%) | 51 |
| | Female | 4 (8%) | 52 |
| ALL | Male | 52 (15%) | 346 |
| BASELINE | Female | 66 (16%) | 410 |

The single extended household farm was replaced by a number of smaller “family farms.” Today, in an average village of between 200 and 500 people, there will be as many as 30 to 80 separate household food crop farms of between 1.5 and 3 hectares. In the forest zone, where most cash tree crops are produced, perhaps half of all such households will also have access to some coffee, cocoa or oil palm trees, but only in about 10-20% of cases will these plantations be extensive (several hectares or more).

The minimal unit for full efficiency of operations in upland rice farming conditions, as generally found across rural Sierra Leone, is an adult man, an adult woman and several older children (who specialize in important and time-consuming tasks such as bird scaring). The poorest and most vulnerable household farm units are those where an adult (man or woman) is forced to manage alone, or where a couple lacks help from children. A small percentage (5-10%) of household farms are headed by women, but in most cases a “surrogate husband” (perhaps a young male stranger) is hired to perform the male roles.

Because the household farm is a functional arrangement and not an institution, it has no normative basis. Cases occur in which a man, a woman and some children combine to farm without anything other than convenience to link them (the children may be fostered, the man and woman may live in separate houses at night, and the unit disbands after harvest). More commonly, however, the unit will be linked by marriage and parentage, and endure from season to season. Because land belongs to lineages it is also common to find kinship linkages between the males heads of household units farming in a particular area. A group of brothers, for example, might prefer to farm close together. But strangers also fit into the picture, and people “borrow” land from other lineages even when they have family land of their own. The large “community” rice farm from the days of domestic slavery benefited from certain operational efficiencies (large numbers of workers ensured timely completion of farm operations). With a much greater present-day spread of smaller “household” farms, explicit cooperation among independent farm operators has to be devised (this is discussed further in the section on clubs, below).

Sodalities (Secret Societies)

Sierra Leone has long been a region in which important aspects of agrarian social life are regulated by gendered sodalities (sacred associations for males and females) organized around rituals of initiation and the maintenance of secrets, commonly called secret societies (e.g., Poro for men and Sande for women). Durkheim (1957) first recognized the importance of sodalities for extending social life in agrarian communities beyond the bounds of the farming household, and their dual character (as occupational groupings maintained by worship and sacrifice). Attested from the time of the first Portuguese contacts in Sierra Leone, Poro- and Sande-like associations provide for extra-family collective action around group tasks associated with community defense and biological reproduction. Rituals of initiation help form the sodality’s tight social bonds. Initiation imparts secret knowledge that serves to mark off the initiate from non-members. As first recognized in the sociological literature by Georg Simmel (1950) the primary function of the secret is to enlarge potential for organized social life through creating a closed (and thus coherent) group beyond the family or household (the content of the secret is of secondary importance, and

changed or denied if discovered by curious non-members).⁵ In settings where central authority is weak, e.g., where a state has not yet developed, or where authority is contested or has collapsed, the sodality is often, in effect, the government and the law. Respect for cult objects and “medicines” at the heart of the closed association is in effect respect for the group and its values—i.e., a basis for trust, social coordination and collective action—and can thus be regarded as a form of social capital (cf. Durkheim 1912).

The RUF used aspects of initiation to create its own distinctive social world of captive young people (after a short period as a modern guerrilla movement with aspirations to capture and reform the state, it reverted to a more basic type—a forest sodality). Community defense was organized on similar lines, first through invocation of Poro, and then (perhaps in recognition that many RUF captives were Poro members) through a new, syncretic association, based on the initiation practices of the Manding hunters’ guilds. New secrets were created to bond CDF fighters and to guard against infiltration.⁶ The CDF may have been new, but the process is not. Forest sodalities along the coast of Upper Guinea, attested in Portuguese sources from the 16th century, appear to have protected village society from some of the worst effects of penetration and subjugation by merchant-warriors during the 16th century “Mane invasions” (Rodney 1970). Nor is there anything specifically African about such a development. Initiation-based sodalities are a means to forge collectivities anywhere. A striking example is the group of left-wing intellectuals led by Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris (the *College de Sociologie*) who, building on Durkheimian ideas about cult and community, advocated the formation of sodalities in the 1930s as a foundation of resistance to anticipated Nazi invasion (Richman 2002).

The value of peer bonds formed through the shared experience of initiation should never be underestimated as an aspect of social capital. They continue to help women through the perils of childbirth and young men through the hazards of war, and are among the most durable forms of collectivity in Sierra Leonean society. Poro initiation is common among the Mende and Temne, and a factor (especially among the Temne) in chieftaincy. Other male associations that have major influence over rural politics and chieftaincy affairs include the Limba Gbangbani Society and Kpa-Mende Wunde Society. Compound heads (*kulokoisia*) in Kamajei chiefdom (Moyamba District) are only recognized as such where they are members of Wunde. Poro or Wunde fines and sanctions are steeper and generally more feared than those of the customary courts. Failure of young men to provide “communal labor” (obligatory work) is sometimes construed as a “bush” case, attracting strong sanctions. Sande (Bundu) Society for women is present throughout rural Sierra Leone. Re-starting Sande initiation is among the first priorities for war-displaced villages. In fact, the date of the first Sande initiation can be considered an important indicator that the first phase of resettlement is complete. In Gallinas-Perri chiefdom (Pujehun District), at the time of the chiefdom consultation (June 2000), Sande was reported to be the only social institution operational within the chiefdom, four years after resettlement had commenced. The initiation of boys can wait, but girls (who marry early in rural Sierra Leone, i.e., in their mid-teens) are considered un-marriageable until initiated, and so parents will prioritize resources for a girl’s initiation as soon as household income rises above the threshold of bare subsistence. Although associated (internationally) with the controversial practice of female genital cutting, Sande became an effective vehicle for the spread of messages about women’s reproductive health during the 1940s, a role that from time to time it seeks to revive (Margai 1948; Harding and Mokuwa 1993).

⁵ For an outsider to seek to know a secret is thus a kind of category mistake (confusing content and function), but dangerous, since the outsider’s (at times casual) search for knowledge is seen by initiates as a threat to society. This helps account for the very great care most rural Sierra Leoneans take to avoid speaking out of turn. “To know” requires making a sacrifice (whether the pain and expense of initiation or the fees due to a teacher), and generally, those who “know” prefer not to speak. Loose talk (gossip, betraying family secrets, etc.) destroys social capital (capacity for collective action).

⁶ Reports indicate some degree of penetration of both movements by “spies” sent to uncover the “secrets” of the other side (and thus undermine its capacity for collective action).

But strength of social bonding (an asset where there is a clear societal goal) can also be a negative feature when the social capital of sodalities is directed toward anti-social ends (as in a mafia-like organization). Secret societies are as good or as bad as the purposes they serve. Clearly, it is problematic if the solidarity of the closed association is used to subvert the legitimate authority of the state, or break the rule of law. For example, the 1991 constitution excludes armed militia such as the CDF. Civil defense supplied by hunter initiates against the RUF would be judged by many Sierra Leonean to be a positive and legitimate manifestation of the power of sodalities, but few would see the RUF's attempts to initiate its captives into a sodality organized along Green Book lines in the same light (Richards 2004). Elsewhere, the law is grey. Customary courts respect the right of the sodalities to discipline members, but what if punishments contradict rights upheld in the constitution, and what might be the line of appeal? Poro and Sande are not really voluntary associations (most young people are initiated at the behest of their parents, and scarcely have the capacity to object) and thus it cannot easily be argued that those who freely join an association should live by its rules. In any case (judging by the evidence cited below) these rules may be used in quite arbitrary ways, e.g., to strip young upstarts of labor and other resources, when charged with "disrespect" (Krio: *fitiyai*), thus undermining the power of democracy or markets to set free the imagination and inventiveness of the young. The following comments sum up a number of similar complaints about society elders by the young (Archibald and Richards 2002):

- [Secret] society heads levy fines on youth in the bush, subject to no appeal
- youths are never [appointed] chiefs, unless they become [secret] society elders, even if the best person
- youths have no rights over elders, they are always in the wrong.

This flags an important set of issues for CDD. The sodalities are pervasive, but there is some outspokenness by young people (post-war) about the dominance (and arbitrary decisions) of society elders. This may increase pressure to bring the sodalities more fully under the rule of constitutional law, or it might drive them underground with unpredictable consequences. The case of Liberia is not encouraging. Ellis (1999) argues that greater hostility to Poro and Sande by a Christian republican ruling elite tended to "privatize" the sodalities, adding to the burden of atrocities from that war as traditional ideas about initiation and sacrifice became detached from their proper context of institutional regulation. Currently Poro and Sande occupy a politically "exempted" space in Sierra Leone (here, the political classes are predominantly from the provinces, thus, in the main, initiates themselves, and reluctant to legislate). As often occurs on cultural frontiers the exempted space occupied by the rural sodalities may prove volatile if the current class of rural gerontocrats loses ground to the disgruntled young.⁷ However, one female RUF fighter, threatened by *sowesia* (Sande elders) with expulsion for breaking the taboo on killing, told Patrick Muana (Richards et al. 1997) that she would resist any such exclusion, and that (post-war) the society would have to adapt to its members and not the other way round. Thus, although currently associated with gerontocracy, the potential of the closed associations to change, and perhaps mobilize young people on a broader, participatory basis, should not be dismissed. The point about initiation and secrets is not that they are ancient but that they are effective in forming tight social bonds. Where a secret leaks out it is subject to change (since its power to instill social discipline has been lost). There is no sociological reason why closed associations should not abandon or reform harmful practices and build solidarities around imparting new skills or socially-useful knowledge. Gerontocracy may be subject to challenge if sufficient numbers of successful young businessmen or women choose to join rural sodalities. But it should be noted that most members of the Mandingo and (especially) Fula trading diasporas in rural Sierra Leone refuse membership. Apart from religious scruples, they fear the impact of initiation fees and fines levied in "bush" cases on their trading capital.

⁷ The RUF attempted to create a new sodality ruled by youth—some informants gloss the name of the RUF headquarters forest camp, the Zogoda, in Barrie Chiefdom, as Krio for "zoe (Poro elder) *go dai*" i.e., the place where Poro elders will meet their doom (Krijn Peters, personal communication).

New Social Capital from Closed Association: The CDF

The most interesting case of social capital arising from closed association during the war is the mobilization of large numbers of village young men of the country (at first mainly south and east, but later also in the north) for purposes of civil defense. Professional (craft) hunters (various terms in Sierra Leonean languages, but in Mende *kamajoi* or *kamasoi*) protect society against large and dangerous animals such as elephants and leopards, operating by stealth. In forest conditions they track, ambush and kill prey at point blank range. For this, the hunters require special magic to render them invisible. The medicine and knowledge are provided (for a fee) by skilled initiators.

In the early stages of the war these initiators adapted their knowledge to the initiation and protection of groups of young men willing to protect their communities by tracking and ambushing RUF marauders. This represented a combination of the social role of young Poro Society initiates, who are expected to defend their communities, with the esoteric knowledge of hunter initiators. A syncretic organization was born—the “hunter” civil defense. The incoming Kabbah government in 1996, distrustful of the national army, greatly encouraged the formation of hunter civil defense units to serve as a counter-insurgency force against the RUF. Training came first from the Nigerian army, and perhaps later from private security companies. CDF units were operational from around June 1996. The first recruits were mainly from Bo and Kenema. Many students volunteered (accounting for the large number of CDF fighters returning to full-time education upon demobilization), but an even larger number was recruited from among displaced farmers driven into Bo and Kenema by RUF raids.

From 1993, the RUF abandoned conventional warfare, moved into secure isolated forest camps and operated in small columns on foot along bush paths inaccessible to a motorized army (Richards 1996). During 1994-95 the rebel militia aimed not to take over the countryside but to empty it of population, which it did by widespread series of pinprick raids, driving terrified civilians into the main towns. Empty villages were then burnt to prevent return.

The principal aim of the CDF was to repopulate the countryside and deny the RUF free movement through the jungle. The RUF mounted attacks in army uniforms, and villagers never knew how to identify rebel from a distant, urban-based, government soldier. Initiation created the necessary social knowledge of who was who among defending forces. The rural CDF were deployed to their home areas with little more than shotguns, staves and bush knives, confident in the social solidarity and esoteric powers conveyed by initiation.

Back on village terrain, superior CDF knowledge of local bush paths and by-ways began to tell against the RUF. Many outposts were cut off, and even main forest camps (such as Bokor in the Kangari Hills) were surrounded and attacked by lightly armed CDF forces. Initiation spread successfully to parts of the north (e.g., Temne-speaking areas such as Bonkolenken and Kunike Barina chiefdoms, astride the strategic route to the Kono diamond fields). By early 1997 the CDF had changed the balance of the war, a situation (temporarily) reversed only by the revolt of a large section of the government army against President Kabbah in May 1997. The RUF joined an alliance with the army rebels, and reverted to conventional war. The complicated aftermath was ended only by the intervention of UNAMSIL and British forces, leading to definitive peace following the Abuja accord.

The subsequent disarmament and demobilization program (run by the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, NCDDR) was designed to remove the gun from Sierra Leone and minimize the threat from RUF and army rebels. A key feature was to offer rebel commanders incentives to collect weapons and register followers as ex-combatants, even though at times these included not the actual fighters but persons they nominated (wives, relatives, children of potential patrons, etc.) to smooth their own transition into mainstream society. The strategy was successful in picking up the weapons and in breaking up the rebel command structure. But it has left a longer-term legacy. First,

there is an unknown (but probably large) number of fighters deprived of any benefits, drifting back to low-prospect laboring activities in diamond pits and in the countryside, and harboring the kind of resentments that fed the war. Second, the strategy discriminates against the CDF, where a large number of combatants were never armed.

As a secret society the CDF has a cryptic command structure. It is a feature of closed associations that junior status in the wider world often corresponds to senior status in the association (there is a picture from the 1790s of the members of the Masonic Lodge in Vienna to which Haydn and Mozart belonged, showing the two composers—“servants” in everyday life—occupying a higher status than their aristocratic employers). Hidden from public view, the cryptic command structure of the CDF stands intact. Having fought to recover its land, even without weapons, the membership feels empowered, and believes it deserves a better deal than living under social conventions from the 19th century kept alive by the legacy of colonialism as perpetuated by rural elites.

Organizers of the CDF have told us that their movement remains mobilized. At issue is mobilized for what? Since they know how to fight guerrilla war even without weapons there is a sense in some quarters that they represent a threat to state authority (this threat might become real if their external leader, Sam Hinga Norman, is convicted by the Special Court of war crimes). But the non-armed majority of CDF fighters is currently back in the villages for which they struggled, more interested in agricultural rehabilitation than further violence. These CDF ex-combatants account for a large part of the rural labor force in many districts. It is a question whether their war-forged social capital might become available for the right kind of imaginative scheme of agrarian transformation. CDF labor sharing groups are widespread, but it might be better to work at the level of the organization as a whole, treated as an important war-induced social movement.

Merchants and Blacksmiths

Both merchants and blacksmiths are essential to any functioning rural community in Sierra Leone. They mainly reside in the larger villages. Many merchants (especially in the forest zone of the south and east) belong to a Manding trading diaspora, and trace their origins to Guinea or further afield in the West African “Manding” cultural realm. Mandingo merchants generally serve a double role as produce buyers and moneylenders, and are often married into the villages in which they reside. Fula traders (also by origin from Guinea) tend to live in towns, and itinerate the villages, often specializing in seasonal tree-crop produce such as coffee or cola.

The village merchant is less a businessman (or woman) than a social institution. In addition to economic activity, such as buying produce (often on the basis of advancing a farmer seed on credit), the merchant serves as the main source to whom people turn when they need urgent loans for social expenditure (notably, to cope with sickness and funeral expenses). The merchant rarely turns down such essential but non-productive advances, a request for which may arrive at any time of night or day, and while charging high rates of interests (arguably an objective reflection of the risks borne) rarely forecloses on bad debt, arguing that his relationship with village clients is a long-term one. Debt is thus a social nexus, binding villagers into a complex web of long-term obligations. The RUF understood this, encouraging villagers to join them in atrocities against not only village chiefs but also village merchants. Many merchants fled to Guinea, and are only slowly returning, having lost much of their capital as a consequence of the war. Village recovery is hampered by a major credit shortage, including loans for funeral and other social expenses through which the kinship system is reproduced. This shortage is eased but not fully offset by an apparent increase in RoSCA activity. Programs to get village merchants back on their feet may have not only direct economic implications, but also provide capital for reviving social relations.

Village blacksmiths supply an essential service in producing implements without which upland shifting cultivation or other forms of farming are impossible. Tools are often supplied on credit (and repaid in

labor on the blacksmith's farm). Blacksmiths tend to be regarded with fear by local populations, because of their knowledge of the mysteries of iron working. Like produce traders, they often trace distant origins within the wider Manding cultural realm. Unlike traders, they do not stay aloof from closed associations. As with merchants, reviving the work of village blacksmiths may have more than straightforward economic implications. Farm tools are essential for CDD as well as for regular farming. The village blacksmith is the preferred source of local tools, but often lacks raw material (good quality scrap) in the post-war economy.

Labor Mobilization

CDD implies mobilization of labor for intra-lineage collective actions. There are two main modalities—obligatory work and labor clubs. Neither can be fully understood without a grasp of the history of domestic slavery in rural Sierra Leone, and the legacy it has left in institutional practices and social memory (Richards and Vlassenroot 2002; cf. Shaw 2002).

Freetown was founded as a settlement for freed slaves. But the interior depended on systems of domestic servitude for labor, even into the period of colonial rule. The Atlantic slave trade was still alive in the Gallinas estuary and Cape Mount in first half of the 19th century (the slave ship *Amistad* sailed from the Gallinas in 1838 with Temne, Mende, Kono, Gbandi, Loma, and Gola slaves). At the British take-over of the Protectorate in 1896, it is estimated that about half the population of the interior lived in some form of servitude. A factor in the uprising of interior chiefs against the British in 1898 was their concern not to be deprived of slave labor (Protectorate Ordinance of 1896). Fearing recurrence of revolt, the British soft-pedaled on abolition. It was assumed the institution would die a natural death. Closer to Freetown, where there was a market for free labor, slave numbers declined sharply in the first two colonial decades. But on the remote Liberian border, where there were fewer options for emancipated laborers, up to half the population was still in some form of domestic slavery when the British, prodded by the League of Nations, implemented abolition from January 1, 1928. Grace (1977) records that up to a third of all cases before customary courts in Pujehun in the 1920s were actions to recover runaway domestic slaves.

It was once argued by historians and anthropologists that domestic slavery in the forest zone of West Africa was benign. Life was hard for everyone, and slaves lived no worse than children of the lineage. Only in the savanna did slaves form a distinct class and identity (Meillassoux 1971), because only savanna grain farming systems yielded large enough surpluses to sustain an elite. Forest farming systems allowed no seasonal surpluses, so everyone shared the same subsistence-oriented livelihoods. Studying slavery among the Vai, a group who straddle the border between SE Sierra Leone and SW Liberia, Holsoe (1977) arrived at a different conclusion (Box 4). The freeborn lived by trade. Slaves manned the farms, and lived less well than the elite. Trade and farming marked a firm class boundary.

BOX 4: Domestic Slavery Along the Liberian Border

Vai society was divided into freeborn (described literally as “children of the chief”) and *jonnu*, those lacking full kinship status (i.e., tied or dependent persons). There were four classes of *jonnu* in Vai society. The first were young men who had evaded the control maintained by elders over the rights of sexual access to young women. The crime of “woman damage” (adultery) led to “woman servitude.” The miscreant paid off this debt through laboring on the husband’s farm. If the husband had several wives, the young man might be offered his lover in marriage, but then had to work also for the “father-in-law” for many years to pay bride service. A second category of those in servitude were nieces and nephews pawned as surety for the debts of an uncle. The peoples of the Liberian border region share an institution known in Mende as *kenya huan wui* (the head of the uncle’s animal). The mother’s brother is second only in importance to the father as a protector and authority over a young person. But the relationship with the uncle is one in which certain behavioral rules between elders and youths are relaxed (it is what anthropologists term a “joking relationship”). The nephew has certain rights to make free use of the uncle’s “property.” One is to take the uncle’s daughter as a wife without paying bride price. But the reciprocal right is that an uncle in debt may offer his creditors the labor of his nephews and nieces as interest on his “loan.” Holsoe remarks that nephews pawned in this way retained their social status if they were Vai but their position tended to

degenerate toward domestic slavery where the pawn was not of Vai origin. Domestic slaves, obtained by a variety of methods including war and being born into slavery, were the third category of persons with no direct control over their own labor power. Geographical distance determined social distance. The groups most likely to receive harsh treatment were slaves acquired from a distance and placed in separate farm settlements (the origin of many of the daughter villages dotting the Vai countryside, and more widely in Sierra Leone, tributary to chiefdom and section headquarter towns. Holsoe remarks “some Vai felt complete contempt for their slaves and treated them accordingly.” A fourth category comprised slaves acquired for export (unredeemed pawns, criminal, war captives) but retained within Vai communities after the ending of the overseas slave trade by the mid-19th century. Vai slaves recognized their “class” position, and, when conditions became too oppressive, sometimes rose in revolt.

With the spread of trade networks in the interior, these conditions became general throughout the protectorate, reinforced by the spread of export crops in the 20th century. Chiefs and landowners laid plantations, but much of the labor was supplied by the former servile classes. The system was underpinned by British recognition of customary law (Fenton 1948). If former slaves moved to another community, they lost the right to plant tree crops, something possible only for members of landowning lineages. With a right only to grow annual food crops for subsistence, strangers were in effect migrant laborers, and earned cash through forming groups to work on the farms of the wealthy. When former slaves chose to stay put, they sometimes found it difficult to found a family. Families guarded their daughters, and preferred older men with the money to pay bride price. A former slave had only his labor power to exchange. Potential parents-in-law demanded bride service on their farm, which tied up a young man’s labor as surely as if he were still a slave. Many poor young men found sexual unions outside marriage, but most village girls were married off, some to wealthy polygamist, in their mid-teens. The rightful husband guarded his wives carefully, and many young men found themselves before the chiefdom court accused of woman damage (adultery). The fine was generally commuted to labor service on the farm or plantation of the wronged husband.

Community Obligatory Labor

Under customary law, villagers throughout Sierra Leone are liable for “community labor” (*ta yenge*, “town work,” in Mende). The categories of unpaid labor permitted by the Forced Labor Ordinance of 1932 included the building and repair of the Paramount Chief’s house (a practice revived under a British-funded scheme administered by the Governance Reform Secretariat 1999-2001, as part of a program for the restoration of Paramount Chiefs displaced by the war), construction and repair of government buildings (including rest house and court barri), labor required for emergency work against epidemics and famine, and communal services under the Public Health Ordinance, such as sanitation, protection of water supplies, and maintenance of main paths and bridges (Fenton 1948). In some circumstances (where there was no treasury to receive tax) a paramount chief could also require communities to make a rice farm.

Chiefs were also permitted to accept the “voluntary” labor of their subjects. Some chiefs used this as a pretext to build the roads along which they exported cash crops. Such labor was (in principle) offered by section chiefs, and disallowed by District Officers “if an appreciable number of persons in a sub-chief’s section objected to it” (Fenton 1948, p. 9). But the rules were only vaguely applied. An autocratic chief might still order every able-bodied person in a chiefdom to contribute to road making or other infrastructure projects, and impose severe penalties for defiance. Fining, flogging and jail were punishments for young men who tried to escape. The District Officer was required to ensure such labor was truly “voluntary...[not unpaid forced labor].” The problem was that chiefs had many ways of quietly sanctioning groups of young men who might dare deny they had volunteered.

BOX 5: Building a Bridge by Community Effort

The 7 kilometer track between the main Bo road at F. and M. is seasonally motorable in the dry season, but impassable when two rivers flood during the rains. The communities along the road agreed to make a bridge by community effort. A private donation provided half the funds, and Oxfam provided a matching small grant. Work was first attempted in 1989. An initial problem gaining the support of the Paramount Chief and Parliamentarian, both of whom argued that the track should be realigned to pass directly through the chieftom town en route to the provincial headquarters. This would have meant a longer road and a much more expensive bridge. Their argument was in part a pretext for gaining a more visible role in sponsoring the project. Objections were withdrawn after the Chief and Parliamentarian were asked to preside over the opening of the project. The grant holder was an educated son of the village preparing to study overseas. He bought materials and held them in his house in Bo. Villagers suspected him of diverting these resources, and using some of the money for his studies. Local interest declined. Work resumed only after a change of arrangements. The villagers took direct charge of the materials, and chose to keep them in the open store of the main village rice trader, a place regularly visited by villagers in the course of buying or borrowing rice. Still, the youth leaders refused to mobilize the young men for labor. They wanted to talk about a number of long-standing grievances between youth and local elders. Additionally, time was needed to visit other villages likely to benefit from the building of the bridge, to ensure that all such villages contributed their quota of community labor. Eventually dates were set for the work. Rice was collected in beneficiary villages to feed laborers, and women agreed to organize a rota to cook for the workers. Sand and stones were dug in preparation at the site. A technical team was hired from Bo for several dry-season weekends to supervise the work. Each village sent its quota of young men, food and cooks. The work proceeded successfully according to plan and the bridge was opened to traffic in 1992. It stands to this day. The existence of the bridge reminds everybody that they can combine for collective action. The communities along the line of the road will tackle a second bridge in 2004 with facilitation from the CARE rights-based programming initiative. Long-standing local quarrels (in part related to diversion of humanitarian resources during the war) have had to be addressed prior to planning community work. Conclusion: conflict resolution is an essential aspect of successful CDD.

Community obligatory labor is still used to maintain basic infrastructure facilities, and as a way of meeting the requirement for community contributions, in order to qualify for development agency grants (Box 5). Whether or not it can be made to work for community-driven development purposes depends on a number of factors. Not all chiefs are sufficiently respected to lead such initiatives. Today, communities will often prefer to organize themselves. The impetus may come from an educated descendent anxious to see local improvements. In other cases, a village may have enough organizational capacity to form a committee (perhaps an alliance between merchants, elders, women's groups and youth) and push ahead on its own. The role of the chief is to offer advice.

There are several problems with this type of CDD. First, does it really deliver collective goods? Even a road improvement may benefit the merchant classes more than ordinary village people (the young people who do the work may have no money to pay for transportation). Second, how much is a community facility actually community-owned? In addition to tensions generated over misappropriation of materials during construction, the use of a facility, a well or latrine, for example, may be restricted to elites and their guests. In one village visited as part of the SA, a well constructed through community action remained unused, having been pad-locked by a nurse for her private use. Hijacking a community project in this way further alienates the young people, who were dubious about giving their labor at the outset. Their organization is much greater than in the past, and subsequent community-driven initiatives may find the young people "on strike." The terrible state of some village roads has already been cited as the measure of the exploitation of young people through the institution of bride service. The sense of grievance of youths at the actions of the elders who "volunteer" their efforts is sharpened by the practice of chiefs protecting their own children from doing communal work. In fact, many children of chiefs are no longer around to be protected, since they have been sent away for schooling. The young people left behind are not slow to express anger that the lack of the education they so ardently desire renders them particularly open to exploitation for community work. It is not hard to see that resolution of inter-generational tensions between poorer young people and village elites is an essential prerequisite for CDD.

BOX 6: Some Comments by Youth on Tensions Between Elders and Youth in Rural Sierra Leone

- The heavy fines levied by chiefs on youths have led to many leaving the village. The chiefs are concerned that these youths will return and seek revenge on them.
- Chiefs victimize youths by imposing heavy and unjust fines, criminal summonses make youths run from the village, resulting in disunity and grievance
- Chiefs withhold benefits meant for the community, resulting in defiance by youths...chiefs protect their own children from doing communal work
- Those who pay fees and fines "never see any development"
- There is disrespect for youth leaders, youth leaders connive with chiefs to humiliate the youths
- [The chiefs] levy high fines on the youth, if you are sent to do a job and you refuse. Up till now the chiefs are pressuring us. They can summon [s] you...making you to pay a lot of money.
- Most of the young men and women were suffering...our chiefs and some elderly men were doing wrong to our young men and women...some young men prefer[red] to go and join the RUF, either to take revenge or to protect themselves.
- The elders were not really helping us. They cannot help any young person. Even if you have only minor problems, they...exaggerate it, taking it to the district chief and then, you as a young man, cannot handle the case anymore and have to run away. ...a case [was] brought to the chief and I was accused.
- The paramount chiefs were not honest because the APC government [was] corrupt... The [local] chiefs were also not honest because they did not tell the truth. If there is a case, the one who did wrong and [should] lose can easily bribe the chief and so becomes the winner.
- [Things are changing now, because] if we notice that you, as a chief...accept bribes or are doing bad, we will...kick you out of power because now we have a democratic government and we have to fight for our rights....if you, as a bad chief, will send us anywhere to brush some land or do some other work, we will refuse. ...you may summon us to the highest authority but...we will explain what you have done to us.

Various sources, see Archibald and Richards (2002).

Labor Cubs and Credit Associations

A big change in the village social system in the last half-century resulted from the rise in numbers, and decline in size, of household food crop farms. There is now a much greater need for organized labor sharing. Peak production bottlenecks are a regular feature of upland rice farming. Most tasks—brushing, ploughing (planting) rice, weeding and harvesting—benefit from a group or gang approach. The Temne word for a farm laboring gang (*kabotho*) was noted by Portuguese missionaries as early as the 17th century (Turay 1977). Formerly, however, gangs comprised dependent members of a large slave-based household. Today there are many more independent (male) heads of farm households, and it is these heads that form groups and arrange to rotate labor. The women of the farm household will also tend to arrange gender-specific rotation of farming tasks (notably weeding).

There are three main kinds of rotational labor sharing arrangement. The first, and simplest, is an informal agreement among neighbors, friends or kin to work together on the various cultivation tasks by turns. No financial transactions or formal registration is involved, but the host for the day is expected to provide food. The numbers involved are small (involving perhaps no more than 4 or 5 heads of adjacent household rice farms). The men share their labor to brush farms, the women rotate among the farms to carry out weeding, and both genders and children join hands to harvest. In Mende such a group is called *tee* (cf. *teelee* “to go from place to place” [Innes 1969]).

Second, there are specialized groups to perform urgent tasks, notably hoeing and covering the broadcast rice (ploughing). A specialized men’s ploughing group is known in Mende as *bembe*. Such a group is formed at the beginning of each farming season. One must be young and fit to join. The club agrees in advance how many days it will work (several times a week during the relevant 3-month period, May to July). Depending on the numbers of members (typically 5-10) and working days per week agreed (perhaps 2 or 3), each member gets a fixed number of turns (say 2 or 4 turns) during the planting period.

Members may opt to use all their allocation (if they have a larger farm plot) or sell some of their due days for cash to a non-member of the group seeking labor. Other farmers prefer to hire *bembe* rather than casual daily laborers, because the gangs have a good reputation for the large amount of disciplined work they achieve in a day. Peer pressure tends to ensure that everyone works to full capacity. The work tends to be better paid, as result. Young strangers play a leading part in *bembeisia* (pl.). It assures them access to sufficient labor to attain their first priority (a subsistence farm) while offering a chance to sell spare days for cash. This income is often used to buy food during the pre-harvest lean period. Children and dependent teenagers also form *bembeisia*. It makes farm work more entertaining (sometimes they bring musical instruments to accompany the work), but also promises some cash. Rates for these youth groups reflect their smaller amount of daily work output. The head of the farm household generally tolerates the initiative of young dependents in forming such groups since it guarantees access to a ready labor supply at urgent moments. A variant on the youth *bembei* is known in Mende as *gboto* (in Temne *ka-botho*). This appears to be the name applied to work gangs formed to carry out ploughing on the large pre-colonial village rice farms. Today, gang masters recruit dependent children to form such a group and ply them for hire, sometimes outside their village of origin. The *gboto* group tends to be quite large (perhaps 15-20 young workers) and at times comes with its own band of two or three drummers, led by a player of *kele* (the Mende slit drum). The work is paced by the music (which also serves to praise the strong and chide the lazy). The gang master maintains a firm discipline over the group, and at the end of the day those who failed to complete stints on time are the subject of various punishments, including beatings. This kind of group is found in districts where school attendance is limited. *Bembeisia* are supposed to be registered as cooperative groups with chieftom authorities, because the members enter into labor contracts, and there may be recourse to the chieftom court if members default, either to each other or to a farmer who has chartered the group. Not all groups register because of the fee involved.

The third type of group is known as *kombi* (company). This is a club with formal organization and rules. Farmers join by paying a small fee. The *kombi* carries out rotational farm labor and often acts additionally as a savings club or welfare association (Box 7). Arrangements are typically handled in periodic meetings. Some clubs meet every Friday to collect subscriptions to welfare or rotational savings funds. The *kombi* has numerous appointed officers, who handle discipline (e.g., fining absentees) and liaison with village authorities. Some *kombi* groups have written constitutions. Membership sometimes exceeds 50-60 persons, with male and female groups tackling gender-specific farm tasks. The primary membership resides with the male head of household; his wife or wives join under his sponsorship. But about 5% of family food crop farms are headed by women, a figure that may have risen during the war, and some “big women” join *kombi* groups in their own right, appointing male dependents to act on their behalf in male farming activities (notably brushing and clearing farms). The transaction costs of *kombi* membership (time spent in meetings and in dispute procedures during farming operations) are quite high, and not all heads of farm households think it worthwhile to join. The host for the day has to provide food and stimulants (kola, cigarettes, drinks) to an agreed standard, and a large group tends to become diverted from the task in hand by gossip and arguments. It is not uncommon to meet the household members the next day grumbling about the low quality of the work. Women sometimes joke that it takes them more time to patch and mend a farm badly ploughed by a *kombi* than to do the work themselves from scratch. Some *kombi* take on social functions. Members may share an interest in dancing or football. Other groups are faith-based (recruited among mosque or church congregations, for example). There is some evidence (see below) that these entertainment- and faith-based groups have become more important in the post-war recovery process. *Kombi* may exist indefinitely (some have continued for 20 years or more). Others quickly break up over disputes, e.g., the collapse of savings and loan activities. *Kombi* report to the chieftom authorities and chiefs and elders often serve as patrons. Some also register as cooperatives with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Widespread throughout rural Sierra Leone, the *kombi* are primarily cooperative labor-mobilization institutions, but their tendency to take on welfare and developmental functions means that they are important for CDD.

BOX 7: The Pre-War Pattern of Labor-Sharing Institutions in One Village

Mogbuama is a settlement of about 600 people in the northern Kamajei chiefdom, close to the boundary between northern and southern Sierra Leone. It is a rice-producing village, and sold a surplus of about 20-30% of all the rice it produced from 98 upland family farms in 1983. The average farm household size was 5.6 persons, with an average of 1.4 adult men to 1.9 adult females per household. Most labor inputs (87%) were derived from household sources. But to cope with bottlenecks, work groups of various kinds provided 11% of total labor inputs, focused on brushing, ploughing, weeding, and harvesting. Harvesting used 53% of all cooperative labor. Most households practiced informal labor sharing (*tee*). Farms sharing common boundaries were grouped in clusters of 3-10, and cooperation for activities such as ploughing (men) and weeding (women) was a simple matter. Friends, neighbors and family readily cooperate to harvest rice. *Bembe* groups are an important source of labor for ploughing. Three *bembe* groups comprised in all 21 adult male heads of farming households, while one comprised 14 dependent youths (i.e., youths farming under their fathers or brothers). There were in addition two such groups formed by male children of primary school age (with a total membership of 22). From time to time, two *gboto* groups, comprising male teenage children under a gang master, were hired from villages north of Mogbuama (Tentihun and Mobai) to plough larger farms. Two *mbele* groups, each with 16 members, were formed to harvest rice. These comprised both men and women. In addition, there were two general purpose work groups (*kombi*) operating in Mogbuama in 1983. One group, called *mbla* (“father-in-law”) recalling its original purpose to help with the bride-service expected of prospective husband, though in fact most of its members were now married, allocated six turns for brushing, and seven turns each for ploughing and harvesting to each of its 20 members. The other association of this sort began as an entertainment group (a dance society, with both male and female members; the women sing) but evolved into a savings club. It had about 40 members (24 male, 16 female). The men worked one day for each member brushing farms. The group then re-formed (with both male and female members) to harvest members’ farms. In some years this group also forms a women’s weeding group, but not in 1983. A third group (16 females and 4 males), primarily formed for savings purposes, arranged harvesting work (one turn each) on members’ farms.

Some generalizations can be attempted. Most village cooperatives in rural Sierra Leone are rooted in labor mobilization. Cooperative labor mobilization has two main ends. The basic purpose of the gang master is to discipline the labor of young people into an efficient farm workforce. But with the decline over the last hundred years of the large slave-based households issues other than a disciplined labor force have become important. A key problem today is how the small domestic farming unit copes with labor bottleneck problems. Not all soils are the same. Rainfall irregularities affect different soil types in different ways. Not all rice types mature at the same speed. Missing a window of opportunity can be a disaster, and not everyone needs labor on the same day. There is scope to create labor efficiencies out of agro-ecological variation. Some prefer their labor early, others late. But everyone benefits from getting the work done as quickly as possible once an individual window of agro-ecological opportunity has opened. Participating in an institutional arrangement that guarantees a fixed amount of timely labor in communities with considerable micro-variation in soils and topography (as is typical in Sierra Leone) is one of the main ways in which small, poor households handle climatic risks. Labor rotation among small family farming units is thus a key to food security.

Importantly, it is also a useful “school” for other forms of cooperation. Labor sharing clubs present opportunities to sell labor and thus generate cash. But equally, clubs formed for other purposes (e.g., to secure credit to begin petty trading, or for entertainment and religious solidarity) revert to labor sharing to lay foundations for other group activities. These other functions have become more important with time. They are especially significant for the emancipation of women and young men from the village land-owning elders who exercised control over their labor power during the colonial period. Consider RoSCAs as a case—in Fakuniya and Kamajei, chiefdoms’ post-war membership in RoSCAs was close to 16% of all declared membership of village cooperative institutions. Women (66%) and youth (58%) are especially well represented (Table 3).

Table 3: RoSCA Membership among CARE Clients, Fakuniya and Kamajei (2002-03)

| | Male | Female |
|--------|----------|----------|
| Youth | 13 (17%) | 31 (41%) |
| Elders | 12 (16%) | 19 (25%) |

One way a RoSCA builds up capital is to undertake farming. A groundnut farm (either as a group, or by sharing labor turns) is a favored option. Groundnuts can be planted on last year's upland rice farm with a minimum of clearing. The crop is not perishable, and fetches a good price. When CARE (taking a rights-based approach to post-war agricultural rehabilitation, from 2001 onwards) decided to offer seed inputs to all adults, and not via household heads as had been done previously, it was surprising to discover the extent to which seed requirements changed (Table 4). Women and youth now exercised an independent choice, and the requests for groundnut seed (as opposed to rice, the main request previously) rose, especially from young men. (It was already recognized that groundnut was a "woman's crop", and important for their empowerment via entry into petty trade, though earlier distributions had been hampered by the poor quality of seeds supplied).

Table 4: Seed Requests by CARE Clients, Fakuniya and Kamajei Chiefdoms (2002-03)

| | Groundnut | Rice |
|----------------|-----------|----------|
| Youth, male | 108 (54%) | 93 (46%) |
| Youth, female | 190 (75%) | 63 (25%) |
| Elders, male | 58 (38%) | 93 (62%) |
| Elders, female | 125 (70%) | 53 (30%) |

Post-War Recovery of Clubs and Associations

Mogbuama was part of the 2002-03 CARE baseline study in Kamajei Chiefdom, so direct comparison at a 20-year interval is possible. In 1982-83, (Richards 1986) about 52% of the adult labor force in Mogbuama was active in some form of labor-sharing club, with or without additional social or savings functions (group membership 168, adult farm labor force 323). In 2002, 73 (72%) of a sample of 101 young people and adults were active in declared membership of a rotational labor and/or savings club. In 23% of cases, it was specifically stated that the club had been formed before the war. Of post-war clubs, several were stated to be revivals of organizations in existence before the war, and in 24 out of 53 cases (45% of responses) the post-war club had been founded or revived in 1997-98 (i.e., in the two first farming seasons after displacement, before CARE, the humanitarian agency for the region, had begun operations). This indicates that revival of village labor-sharing clubs is not dependent on donor activity. The apparent increase in participation, compared with 1982-83, is probably real, boosted in particular by the popularity of groundnut farming (especially among women) as a means of starting up a RoSCA for eventual entry into petty trade. Groundnut farming accounted for 34% of all club activities (25 cases, and this was explicitly linked to rotational credit activities in 19 cases). Donor activity accounts for some of this increase. CARE has emphasized women's groundnut farming since 1999. There is, however, a major post-war change in the way club activity is embedded in Mogbuama social life. In 1982-83, entertainment (music and dance) was an important aspect of labor club activity. Entertainment remains important as an aspect of club organization in other parts of the CARE baseline area, but was not mentioned once in Mogbuama in 2002-03. Instead, religion is now a major factor. People mentioned in 24 out of 73 cases (33%) that labor club activities were now organized through churches or mosques. Conflict resolution reports for Mogbuama carried out by CARE speak of a "simmering conflict between Christians and Muslims" (Archibald and Richards 2002). This is unusual for a Mende-speaking village, whereas in the north, the great majority of farmers are Muslims. In Mogbuama, Christians account for perhaps half or more of the village population. It is clear that the religion-oriented labor clubs are new. The imam in Mogbuama stated the Muslim club had only just been formed and he was waiting to see what benefits it would produce.

The CARE baseline allows the post-war picture to be extended over a broader area, including parts of Fakuniya chiefdom, close to the border between northern and southern provinces, with large numbers of trade-oriented Temne strangers well-integrated into a Mende-speaking local population, and well served by aid agencies from both Moyamba and Mile 91, and a roadless tract of Bonkolenken Chiefdom in Tonkolili District (a Temne-speaking area) immediately adjacent to northern Kamajei Chiefdom, and largely inaccessible to the aid agencies. Tonkolili District was a major stronghold of the RUF (Foday Sankoh came from Kholifa Rowalla chiefdom), and the war front between the RUF and CDF lay on the borders of Bonkolenken Chiefdom until hostilities ceased. This area is newly accessible, and CARE baseline activities in 2002-03 represent the first move by any NGO south of the Taia river at Yele. The baseline data give a good picture of the range of variations of post-war village social capital to be found across a spectrum from villages where several years of NGO reconstruction effort have taken place to villages where rehabilitation work has only recently begun; however, data remains greatly hampered by lack of vehicle access.

The baseline was randomly sampled from all young people and adults claiming to be agriculturally active and thus registered for seed inputs under the CARE food security program in all villages in five chiefdom sections in Fakuniya, Kamajei and Bonkolenken chiefdoms. The area can be subdivided into road-accessible communities (Fakuniya and parts of Kamajei chiefdoms) and off-road communities (Bonkolenken and adjacent parts of Kamajei chiefdom north of Mogbuama). The off-road villages are nearly all within a newly-accessible area (as defined for purposes of the SA) and had had no post-war recovery assistance at the point the baseline data were collected (February-April 2003). About 67% of the sample speak Mende as their first language, and about 31% speak Temne (others 2%). The Mende and Temne are the two largest language communities in rural Sierra Leone, comprising about two-thirds of the total rural population.

Overall, 62% of all informants belonged to some kind of village club, primarily for labor sharing or savings (Table 5). The participation rate was slightly higher in on-road areas (64%) than off-road areas (58%). This difference is probably due to a larger number of trade-related RoSCAs in on-road villages. The primary purpose of membership was said to be labor cooperation in agricultural activities: 95% of cases in off-road villages, but somewhat lower (80%) in on-road settlements. Much of this difference is accounted for by the figures for two large, accessible, and trade-oriented villages—Bandajuma-Senehun (Kamajei) and Rogboya (Fakuniya)—where membership of clubs without agricultural labor sharing functions (principally RoSCAs for petty trade) accounted for 33% and 52% of all club memberships. A general participation rate in labor sharing clubs of 58% for off-road villages (including the newly-accessible villages in Tonkolili District) suggests no reduction, and perhaps an increase, in club activity over the last 20 years, despite the war, when compared to the figure of 52% for Mogbuama 1982-83 (then an off-road village).

Table 5: Representation by Gender of Citizens and Strangers in Village Clubs

| | Citizen (n=544) | Stranger (n=212) | Both (n=756) |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Male (n=346) | 77% | 73% | 76% |
| Female (n=410) | 51% | 43% | 49% |
| All (n=756) | 64% | 55% | 62% |

Memberships for youth (80%) are *greater* than the average (62%) across the total sample (Table 6). Male strangers (74%), i.e., those without land ownership rights, are almost as well represented as citizens (79%). This underlines the general importance of clubs in the emancipation of two groups (male strangers, and young men more generally) at risk of poverty and marginalization. Memberships for women are *less* than their representation in the total samples, and this is especially so for young women

(46%) and female strangers (41%). This may be a reflection of women's activity patterns, as well as their subordination. Most clubs deal with labor bottlenecks. Most women, including women of childbearing age, contribute heavily to farming, but more on a routine basis (recall that only 11% of all agricultural labor in Mogbuama in 1982-83 came from club sources). The major farming bottlenecks (apart from weeding) are activities in which men participate exclusively or extensively. Women form weeding clubs, and participate in harvesting, but men form clubs for the other major farm activities. When women do undertake club farming activities, it is often primarily to create a RoSCA fund. Credit for petty trade is the ultimate aim, not food security, and it is to be noted that young women are well represented in clubs oriented toward RoSCA activities. Even so, it seems likely that time pressures and domestic subordination do limit club activities by women, and this likelihood should be born in mind in assessing social capital for CDD. Certainly, it is very important not to waste the limited amounts of time women have available for club activities in badly designed, or incompetently or dishonestly executed, support interventions.

Table 6: Representation by Gender of Youth in Village Clubs

| | Youth (n=435) | Elder (n=316) | Both (n=751) |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Male (n=344) | 80% | 71% | 76% |
| Female (n=407) | 46% | 53% | 49% |
| All (n=751) | 62% | 61% | 62% |

Participation in a RoSCA offers some room for independent efforts by young wives, a group vulnerable to poverty. Few husbands object these days to a wife's independent income, provided it is declared (unexplained money suggests a boy-friend). The wife then uses her earnings to cover expenses such as school fees and medicines for her children, or to obtain items such as soap, underwear and cloth she might otherwise expect her husband to provide. Young men, however, are more limited. Through RoSCA membership they might hope to start some trading activity, and selling turns from a labor club might defray marriage expenses, but this does not deal with the political threat they are deemed to pose. A young wife with her own money is an asset to her husband, but not so a young man with money. Only a few women step on to the village political stage (especially during their child-bearing years), but an energetic and go-ahead young man with money is immediately assessed as a threat to the elders. If he seeks marriage, he may find himself bled dry by the demands of potential in-laws. If he remains single, he runs the risk of being accused of woman damage. Keeping young men in villages, and motivated toward collective action is a special challenge for CDD.

Social and Religious Aspects of Clubs and Associations

Among the social reasons for forming clubs, entertainment (music and dance) and sport (mainly soccer) were mentioned as a basis in 5% of cases. CDF force ex-combatants had formed laboring clubs in 13 cases (5% of all male reasons cited; the CDF was exclusively male). Twelve of these cases (8% of all male reasons cited) occurred in off-road areas. Faith-based clubs were the single biggest category where a social reason for formation was cited (12% in on-road settlements and 21% in off road settlements). All but four of 77 faith-based club memberships were found in the roadless tract of northern Kamajei Chiefdom, close to the boundary with Tonkolili District (45% Muslim, 55% Christian). It is in this area that simmering post-war tension between Muslims and Christians has been reported (Archibald and Richards 2002).

Whether religious tension is a more general factor in post-war rural communities in Sierra Leone affecting prospects for CDD is as yet an open question. Libya supported the RUF rebellion for some years, but this does not equate to support for Islamic fundamentalism; RUF leader Foday Sankoh, in fact, maintained a multi-faith movement (Archibald and Richards 2002). President Kabbah, a Muslim, has been criticized by some for seeking post-war aid from Islamic countries in the Middle East (including

Libya), while Johnny-Paul Koroma, the former AFRC leader indicted by the special war crimes court, invoked religious criteria in his presidential election bid in 2002 (he is a born-again Christian). Likewise, in Liberia, Charles Taylor (once a Libyan-backed rebel) played up fears of Islam in seeking backing from American Christian fundamentalists in his struggle with the LURD (he left office for exile in Nigeria to the backing of a Gospel choir). A striking poster centered on a full-length picture of Osama bin-Laden hangs on a veranda in an isolated farm hamlet in northern Kamajei chiefdom (about the only decorative feature in a newly rebuilt off-road village of mud and thatch houses), and the teenage girls in the village quizzed about the poster all knew who was portrayed, despite their lack of schooling. Even so, the tensions in northern Kamajei chiefdom probably owe more to local political factors than the “war on terrorism.” Male and female Mende-speaking citizens of all ages are equally well-represented in both Christian and Muslim clubs, suggesting that if faith-based labor organization reflects a growing rise in local religious tension, the difficulty lies between landowning families, and not between elders and youth, men and women, or strangers and citizens.

Patterns of Community Recovery

From 1994, RUF strategy involved emptying the countryside. Many villages were burned. The counter-strategy of the CDF (from 1996) was to re-populate the countryside, to deny the enemy free movement. The war subsequently focused on the diamond districts and main towns. For the agencies, village destruction and population displacement became key indicators of need. Settlements colonized by the RUF in the later stages of the war (e.g., towns and villages in the Makeni-Magburaka axis) suffered little physical damage. In Tonko Limba chiefdom we found the main villages largely untouched, but populations had been forced to hide in the bush, returning to undamaged settlements in 2001 with little food or seed. They claimed still to be very short during the 2003 hungry season. These places had been by-passed by humanitarian agencies over-reliant on physical damage to housing stock as the main indicator of need. It was even suggested by one agency we interviewed that populations with intact housing must have been RUF collaborators, and thus were undeserving of help.

In areas of higher levels of settlement destruction it is remarkable how quickly and completely former village sites have been recovered and rebuilt (sometimes with extensive help from relief agencies). The CARE baseline study in Fakuniya and Kamajei chiefdoms, close to the provincial border in the centre of the country found only 2 or 3 smaller sites out of 37 not yet re-populated. In most cases inhabitants estimated that 90% or more of pre-war populations had returned. This is testimony to the extent to which ordinary rural Sierra Leoneans are dependent on bush resources for livelihoods (Richards 1986).

Return has been accompanied by a variety of religious rites. In Lalehun, a village on the edge of the Gola North forest reserve in Gaura Chiefdom (Kenema District) visited in May 2003, no relief agency was yet operational (the rocky road with a series of extremely hazardous bridges was a major deterrent). But the population had reached pre-war levels, attracted by substantial cocoa and coffee plantations, and the fees payable by chain saw operators in the so-called “salvage” areas outside the forest reserve.⁸ The only proper new structure evident in the extensively damaged settlement was the partially rebuilt mosque. It is instructive that under unassisted settlement the mosque or church is the first target for reconstruction. Durkheim, the greatest theorist of social collectivity, taught that where there is society then there will also be religion, which in its most elementary form asserts itself through the distinction between the sacred and profane (Durkheim 1912). Left to their own devices, communities prioritize the re-establishment of the sacred.

Communities of the Afflicted

Development agency assistance is only a partial contribution to community life. It prioritizes construction of utilities (health centers and schools) and private dwellings, but omits the dimension of the

⁸ These operators are feeding the post-war construction boom in Kenema, 28 miles to the north.

sacred, through which the collectivity realizes power. The hazards of an exclusively secular focus were particularly evident when we visited two new communities for amputees and war-wounded supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council, both in the vicinity of Makeni (Bombali District).

In one case, housing for 8 families had been grafted on to an existing village. From different language groups, all but one of the families was from Bombali District, and had wished to be resettled in the area. The exception—a Freetown family—had requested to be settled at Waterloo in the Western Area, but had been told that Bombali District was their only option. The families combined amicably, since they had become friends in the amputee camp at Aberdeen and camp for war wounded at Grafton. Many of their needs, both sacred and secular, were met by the existence of the mature settlement to which they were attached.

The other case was a new community of about 15-20 families in identical material conditions, but separated by some distance from the community to which they were appended, torn apart by conflict. Daily social interactions were mainly restricted to the new settlement. As in the first settlement, the population comprised both Temne and Loko-speakers with different religious affiliations (the former being Muslims and the latter Christians). During our visit, tension between the community leader (a Loko) and the representative of the local landowner (a Temne) erupted. People wanted to engage in small-scale business, but admitted that because of seething conflict they had not been able to combine to form a rotational credit union. The source of the difficulty became clear when we were given a tour of the settlement. A Canadian relief agency had offered selected individuals support for a variety of projects (in one case a bread bakery). Emphasis on individuals at the expense of the community was an evident basis for the disagreement we encountered. A mosque made of sticks and as yet unroofed—a reproach among fine cemented houses - was eloquent testimony to the imbalance between sacred and profane. An offering to help thatch the mosque brought an enthusiastic response from a hitherto resentful and argumentative group. Christians asked for help with their own place of worship. A conversation took shape between the feuding parties about sharing labor on the two projects.

The point has been made that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is less about truth (putting the record straight about wartime atrocities) than creating opportunities for rituals of reconciliation. CARE Peace-and-Rights days (rituals of reconciliation first suggested by Minister of Youth and Sports, Dr. Dennis Bright) have proven to be effective in enabling subsequent collective action on development projects (Archibald and Richards 2002). Donors finding it difficult to support ritual activity as part of development assistance might, at minimum, seek to do no harm. This would imply ensuring the sacred dimensions of community life have securely taken root before pursuing practical assistance to individuals. A danger of the concept of social capital is that it abridges the distinction between the sacred and profane basic to collective action.

PART 2: GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Governance can be defined, in a broad sense, as including interventions by the state, development agencies and donors. The second part of this report addresses the question of how governance and communities interact. The aim is to form a picture of the post-war interface between governance and rural society, to assess what supports, and what is more likely to hinder, community-driven development. We consider: (i) the humanitarian interregnum, i.e., a period in which the state was absent from the countryside due to war; (ii) the way government has reinstated itself in rural areas in the post-war period; and (iii) some post-war changes in community collective action. Our conclusion is that the poorest and most vulnerable rural groups are still not adequately recognized by the state, or well-enough represented in local decision-making processes, thus posing a significant threat to NSAP.

The Humanitarian Interregnum

Prior to the war, the APC government paid little attention to agrarian institutions. The main objective for Presidents Stevens and Momoh was to control the flow of wealth from the diamond districts. The policy in agrarian districts was to ensure basic stability. There was often blatant interference by State House and parliamentarians in appointment of chiefs, irrespective of whether they were popular. In any case, popularity is a relative terms, since Paramount Chiefs are elected not by popular vote but by an electoral college of Traditional Authorities (TAs), each nominally representing 20 tax payers. It is a moot point whether tax records ever bore much relation to reality, and elections for taxpayer's representatives were rare events (lists have now been revised and vacancies filled). Although some TAs were strangers or women, the group as a whole mainly reflected the interests of local land-owning lineages. The war swept the system away, as the RUF rampaged through rural districts, imposing its own peculiar version of agrarian populism. Chiefs and merchants were singled out for "revolutionary justice" as exploiters of the poor. Chaos ruled the countryside.

The democratic regime of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (elected in 1996) had barely begun to re-organize local administration when it was driven into exile by the 1997 coup. On restoration by West African peacekeepers in 1998, the government had little effective control of any part of the provinces. The Lome peace accords (July 1999) opened some access to the provinces, though Kailahun District, the Kono diamond fields and much of the northern province were in RUF hands. The deployment of UN peacekeepers was disrupted in May 2000 by RUF abductions and a new advance on Freetown, and it was only in September 2000 (when the first of the Abuja cease-fire accords was negotiated with the RUF) that chieftdom administration resumed in government-controlled areas of the south and east. Access by chieftdom administrations to the former RUF-controlled areas depended on the completion of disarmament and the formal ending of the war (February 2002). A few Paramount Chiefs returned to their chieftdoms during the war. One was the Paramount Chief of Bonkolenken in Tonkolili District, who organized a large CDF force to secure his chieftdom against the RUF. Others were displaced in Freetown, or even overseas, and were reluctant to return, at times fearing the CDF as much as the RUF. Some chiefs died in exile, and were replaced by regents. The government organized a round of chieftaincy elections in December 2002 to fill vacancies.

We can thus speak of the period from 1997 to c. 2000 as an interregnum, or power vacuum, in the countryside. Led by CDF fighters, many farmers had returned to the countryside. Others never left it, subsisting in bush hideouts, or in some kind of loose co-existence with the RUF. What local administration there was collapsed into arbitrariness. Chiefs were at times self-appointed, and they (and CDF commanders) exceeded their legal powers, e.g., setting up village courts and levying arbitrary fines. International humanitarian NGOs operating in the difficult period between 1997-99 often had to improvise a local administrative structure. This is the main origin of the village development committee (VDC), a panel of village elites assisting NGOs to administer emergency relief.

Village Development Committees

Today, the VDC is sometimes presented by interested parties as a long-standing (pre-war) institution. In truth, most such committees seem to have been induced by humanitarian assistance, especially since 1996. Tommy and Kassibo (2003, p. 11) are precise in their characterization: "NGOs have particularly encouraged the formation of these committees to mobilize local resources and labor for self-help activities." They are also clear the VDC is an institution of the rural elite. "VDCs [comprise] "individuals from all walks of life—teachers, nurses, imams, pastors, midwives, etc.", with no mention of farmers, or the poor.

In its humanitarian work in Kamajei and Fakuniya chieftdoms, 1999-01, CARE set up VDCs, but then found them flawed vehicles (Richards et al. 2001). In rather chaotic operating circumstances, there was too little time to build capacity. In off-road locations the VDC ran the show more or less unsupervised.

Impressive records were maintained, showing large lists of names and thumb-prints tallying with the items distributed at road-head delivery points, but follow-up in interior villages suggested that many “beneficiaries” were unaware that they had been registered, or that items had been collected in their name. VDCs were instructed to ensure delivery of food aid, seeds and tools to the “most needy” (including displaced Temne villagers driven out of Tonkolili District by the RUF). The list of recorded beneficiaries frequently named the members of the VDC first. They were widely accused of distributing the balance of items to their kin and clients at the expense of the most needy.

In some case, items delivered with difficulty to villages were then sent back to Bo and Freetown to feed family members, including children at school. In one village the VDC had even passed a “law” that no young person (under 40 years) was to receive assistance, since youth had the energy to grow their own food. This provoked a walkout by village youth to establish a new farm camp. The elders were in some panic, when they told us the tale, that this camp would increasingly come to resemble one of the bush fortresses in which the RUF sequestered its recruits (Archibald and Richards 2002).

In follow-up baseline studies for the CARE agricultural recovery project designed to remedy some of these deficiencies, the issue of VDC composition and recognition has been rather carefully studied (Richards et al. 2004). The data are revealing. In 62 group interviews with young men, women and elders about the history of the war in 26 villages in Fakuniya, Kamajei and Bonkolenken chiefdoms, 17 VDCs were reported, but in 8 cases the evidence was disputed by one or other of the three groups. In only seven cases (26%) was it reported that the VDC dated from before the war. These reports seem to refer to committees formed for a variety of donor-driven development projects. Ten VDCs were formed post-war and nine villages reported no VDC.

In 756 randomly sampled interviews with project clients in on- and off-road villages, 38% claimed no knowledge of the existence of VDCs. Of those claiming such knowledge, only 51% could offer any plausible explanation of its purpose. Of such answers, 22% stated the purpose of the VDC was to provide accommodation and feeding for development workers, mentioning CARE field agents in particular in 9% of cases. The likelihood that CARE registered clients will have any knowledge of the VDC, or a plausible explanation of its purpose drops in off-road villages, and plunges to 12% and 10% respectively in CARE’s new operational area (the southern extremity of Bonkolenken chiefdom). Knowledge of the VDC and plausible ideas about its function is lower among women than men, and among strangers rather than members of land owning lineages.

In three larger villages with well-established VDCs, CARE clients were asked to name the male and female chairs of the committee. In Rogboya (Fakuniya chiefdom), only 44% could name a male chair and 52% a female chair, but divided their choices among nine and six persons respectively. The single most frequently cited name (the female chair) accounted for only 40% of citations. In Mogbuama, a village where the VDC had caused controversy by the way it had earlier handled relief supplies, 77% and 76% of the sample could name male and female chairs, but named six different persons in each case. The single most frequently cited names accounted for 50% and 62% of citations. In only 41% of cases were the names of the male and female chair called correctly (they happen to be a merchant and his wife, a representative of a chiefly lineage). In Gondama (a large off-road village in northern Kamajei chiefdom), 53% and 60% of the sample named 4 persons as male chair and 4 persons as female chair. Most people (86% and 96%) correctly identified the male and female chair (the latter a daughter of a former female Paramount Chief, and well-connected political figure in her own right).

Few people had much idea about formal procedures for selecting committee members. Most stated that they were chosen or endorsed by the community because they were well-connected members of the village elite who had the time, resources, knowledge and contacts to handle CDD processes. The implication was that the matter was largely between the persons selected and the development agency (in

this case CARE). Most people seemed relieved they did not have to pay toward the costs of the hospitality required. In general, then, these data tend to confirm the induced nature of VDCs and that there is a long way to go to develop a more comprehensive sense of ownership. An obvious problem demanding solution is that only village elites have the time and resources to invest in civic action of this kind. CDD is time-consuming, but there is no clear reward structure, or agreed basis for defraying the expenses of such activity. Most people seem to adopt a wait-and-see attitude; if anything good eventuates then fine, but meanwhile it seems inappropriate to interfere.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Community Recovery

As main actors during the humanitarian interregnum, NGOs constituted a kind of quasi-administration in some rural areas. A problem with this is that the international NGOs are driven by a variety of mandates, enthusiasms, hidden agenda and operating procedures. The government attempted to control the situation, nationally, through NGO registration and regulation (resisted by international staff, citing risks of corruption). Inter-agency committees were formed to coordinate activities, and to ensure most areas were covered without too many gaps or overlaps, but rehabilitation packages varied from agency to agency. In two adjacent districts or chiefdoms one agency might be giving away roofing materials and food, another only food, or one might offer food as a gift, the other only in return for work (e.g., villagers might have to prove they had established farms to qualify for assistance). Unequal treatment of adjacent villages fuelled wartime suspicions and conflict among neighbors. Ethnic tension was heightened in border zones (e.g., in areas along the provincial border between Moyamba and Tonkolili District dividing Mende and Temne speakers).

BOX 8: Women Criticize “Briefcase NGOs”

Women in Lower Bambara Chiefdom (which includes the diamond mining area known as Tongo Field) have formed an organization for activities such as vegetable cultivation, for which there is a ready market among alluvial miners. They complained strongly about the way NGOs hijack community-driven initiatives, inserting themselves in the proposal-writing process (for which they charge substantial “consultancy” fees), or writing proposals in the name of community groups, of which the membership knows nothing, until later discovering money has been accessed and spent with nothing on the ground. The group leader, Nancy Ngandu, remarked “If all the NGOs that have come here [Tokpombu] had ever done anything this place would have been developed long ago, but all they do is build houses for themselves.” There was considerable interest in the idea of training for community groups to enable them to manage development activities directly, to scrutinize bidding processes, and to hire and fire NGOs on merit and performance. (Field notes: April 29, 2003; Tokpombu, Tongo Field, Lower Bambara Chiefdom).

Villagers often became quite adept at playing the agency game—knowing how to ask for what agencies had to give even when this was not a local priority. One locality had a large number of badly constructed latrines, built by a humanitarian agency. None was safe to use. The sandy subsoil made them liable to collapse without warning. This danger had long been known by the villagers. Their own earlier efforts to build latrines had always been thwarted in this way, but the agency had a project quota to fulfill, and field agents and some well-connected villagers benefited from any materials that “fell off the back of the lorry.” Nothing was said. Scope to “play” with inputs was more important than successful latrines. Undoubtedly, enhanced scope for fraud (forming negative social capital?) has, more generally, been a major negative feature of the humanitarian interregnum.

BOX 9: NGO Proliferation under War-Time Emergency Conditions

The Commoners Agricultural & Rural Development Association (CARDAs) is a local NGO run from Ministry of Agriculture buildings in Makeni by a (male) group who appear to be ministry employees (or former employees). Its purpose is to organize women’s group farming activities and to improve food security and seed availability for rice and groundnuts. The head of CARDAs was displaced from Kono in 1993-94, and formed the NGO after noting “there were too many girls around with no support.” Rural women were organized into village outgrower groups, and produced crops from inputs supplied by CARDAs in 1995-97. The women kept enough seed for subsequent years and handed back the surplus to CARDAs in order “to grow the business.” According to the organizers, Le7.5

million was raised from sales to FAO in 1997-98 (probably refers to purchases funded by a grant from the Swedish government to enable relief organizations to purchase local seed for rehabilitation activities after the legitimate government had been forced into exile and government seed multiplication had ceased). The CARDA organizers then fled the RUF take-over in Makeni in October 1998. What happened to the money is unclear. CARDA was revived when the organizers returned to Makeni in 2002, and CARITAS supplied inputs. Once more, the project aims to supply seeds to women's groups and to collect the surplus to expand the organization, under a philosophy ("PROMOTE") advocating rapid organizational growth on apparent pyramid lines. The rhetoric stresses the inclusion of women in rural development, but organizers are vague about whether any such use of the surplus had been explained to and agreed by women members. We then visited one of the CARDA groups in Kapethe, a village in Safroko Limba chiefdom. Here, an energetic female organizer (M.) had first been in contact with CARDA staff during the 1990s (but in their other guise, as Ministry of Agriculture extension staff) over a poultry scheme that failed when the birds died. In 2000, M. had organized the women in Kapethe into a group for groundnut farming, with the idea that women would share labor to gain some income from crop sales. The group had its own name and monthly meetings (in M.'s version of the story it is a self-standing village women's labor club with eight members). On visits to Makeni, M. lobbied for help for the group. Her list of members was passed to CARITAS, who delivered food (for farm work), and rice and groundnut seeds. CARDA came on the scene in 2002 when its staff returned after displacement, and offered some technical advice, but M. insists the inputs came from CARITAS and that the women sell the surplus to take care of their own cash needs. The group claims little more than a loose affiliation with CARDA, and little or no knowledge of any earlier seed sales "to FAO." Seemingly, functioning village farming clubs are "borrowed" by organizations such as CARDA in order to make larger claims (to donors) that they represent women and the poor, without the beneficiaries being fully aware of the claims made on their behalf. An NGO may, in these circumstances, be little more than the re-packaging of the checkered history of a group of underpaid civil servants trying to survive.

The smaller, less technically competent, and less well funded national NGOs developed devious practices of their own. In the weeks before a major international agency carried out a needs assessment, it was not unusual for a "briefcase" NGO to collect money to register villagers (the going rate was Le500 per person), either claiming to be the advance guard of the legitimate agency, or making bold promises of aid of its own which it never could fulfill. Where villagers tried to mobilize themselves to approach a donor directly, NGOs sometimes stepped up to act as brokers, charging community groups fees (sometimes as high as Le5 million) to write proposals, and then reporting back that the proposal had been rejected, or that it would only be favored by the donor if changes were made (and these changes were generally of benefit to the NGO). We met widespread local disillusionment with these NGO practices at the village level (Box 9). One Paramount Chief who had remained in his chiefdom through much of the war, and fought alongside the CDF volunteers, was scathingly forthright; in his view, national NGOs were often little more than "income generating schemes for unemployed graduates."

The situation regarding NGOs is not specific to Sierra Leone, but generic in zones of post-war recovery. The defining characteristics of the problem are an abundance of government employees and others with administrative knowledge but no jobs, chaotic political conditions, and little direct knowledge by donors of social circumstances on the ground (or at times even of basic geography). Helander (2004) might have been writing about Sierra Leone. He is in fact describing conditions in Somalia:

The very term NGO acquired a bad name during the UN intervention, when the number of NGOs mushroomed uncontrollably. There are still a good number of organizations that are acutely aware of the shifting agendas of foreign donors and who rapidly adjust their own priorities accordingly. When 'women's issues' is the rule of the day, the foreign visitor will find a host of very articulate local organizations ready to take up work in that field. If the foreign concern is repatriation of refugees, freshly formed 'repatriation societies' will crop up. It is probably unavoidable that with a largely unemployed and rapidly growing urban population, for every sincere initiative there will be a larger number of less scrupulous set-ups. As long as casual visitors are ready to naively distribute funds without setting up systems of accountability, these types of organizations will continue to exist. There are no limits to the

inventiveness of such scams. Relatives abroad are often relied upon to establish contacts with new, unsuspecting, donors.

BOX 10: Repeating Old Mistakes? Women Growing Vegetables in Kabala

Chinese technicians working on a rice project first encouraged (male) farmers around Kabala to grow fresh vegetables in the 1970s. A good road from Kabala to Makeni opened up the Freetown market in the mid-1980s. FAO set up a project to support women vegetable farmers. The scheme supplied seeds, credit, and subsidized trucking. A large cooperative was formed, with two sections (30 “intensive” groups producing for Freetown, 150 “traditional” groups growing local vegetables). “Traditional” groups were mainly located in the more inaccessible Limba villages. “Intensive” groups included both Limba and Koranko farmers, but leadership was exclusively in Koranko hands. The scheme prospered (a number of the women claim to have built houses on their profits), but subsidies proved divisive. Unable to access cheap transport, unless using their wives as a front, men were squeezed out of vegetable farming. Women, it was assumed, would be more likely to use their income to support their families, but some women began to behave like men, reportedly abandoning children and divorcing husbands in favor of younger boyfriends. Leadership rivalries also became a problem. A power struggle arose between the politically well-connected but uneducated leader of the cooperative, and an energetic rival who succeeded in gaining the confidence of the younger women. Politicians, always looking for resident “brokers” to manage rural constituencies, took sides. Problems intensified as a result of the war. Both women fled to Freetown via Guinea, taking project documentation, bank accounts and trucks with them. The vehicles were used as transport to generate income intended for eventual relief work, but Freetown was too distant from a rank-and-file membership living under rebel control to facilitate accountability, and accusations began to fly. The project has only a tenuous internal democracy, and women in the more far flung villages seem at times hardly aware of activities beyond their immediate group. Ethnic tensions remain a problem between the Limba “rank-and-file” and the Koranko-dominated executive, seemingly the group to benefit most from the project subsidies. Revived in 2003 with DfID funding, and a focus on resolution of the leadership rivalries, the project has so far paid insufficient attention to basic tensions around gender, ethnicity, and age.

Helander makes telling points about “casual visitors” and accountability. Some international NGOs (INGOs) are in effect casual visitors. Senior expatriate staff work on short contracts, spend most of their time in the capital, and build up little or no direct knowledge of social conditions in the rural communities they serve. Nor is there much interest in filling this void.⁹ We talked to two INGO managements as representative stakeholders in NSAP. One group expressed interest in the social assessment only as a guide to what the donors were likely “buy.” “Don’t tell me about the country’s social problems, or what went wrong in earlier interventions, only about how I can put together a new proposal to attract donor funds” was one manager’s rather blunt view of the situation. Another INGO had acquired relevant social knowledge, but was unenthusiastic about putting it to work. It had put in a bid to do capacity building for NSAP, but complained that the money on offer was very small. In fact, most of the proposal was overhead, and the agency withdrew its bid when asked by NaCSA to scale down the amount. It was made clear to us that the routine business of handing out commodities and condoms generated a bigger turnover of funds without which the large expatriate salary bill could not be paid.

It is clear, however, that the days of what has been termed “truck-and-chuck” humanitarianism in Sierra Leone (Archibald, personal communication) are strictly numbered. NSAP creates a positive demand for detailed social knowledge. If INGOs and national NGOs are to find a longer-term role it will be in acquiring social knowledge as a basis for building the capacity for CDD and direct community financing. In other words, the demand will be for software skills, and not input supply. It may be useful, therefore, to think in terms of a division of social knowledge into that which can be generalized from country to country (under the general rubric of the new institutionalism) and that which is cultural (social knowledge

⁹ Even INGOs with a long-term presence in the country lack institutional memory concerning previous social interventions. One such agency had commissioned a history of its activities worldwide, including good material on Sierra Leone, where its operational record covered more than three decades. We could find no one on the senior staff in Freetown who had read the volume.

specific to Sierra Leone). The comparative advantage of INGOs might seem to lie with the former and of NNGOs with the latter, as a basis for NSAP capacity building activities. Whether cultural knowledge is as specific as it seems is a point for debate.

The Return of the State

A key problem for the democratic government from 1996 was to reclaim the countryside after many years of neglect, decay and destruction. The RUF inserted itself into an agrarian vacuum. Through abduction the movement hastened a process of rural exodus already begun by the exploitation of young people with weak social protections. The Kabbah government was clearly conscious that something better, and more sustainable, would be necessary if a return to war was to be avoided. A start was made by addressing the issue of rural people's own perceptions of why the system had collapsed, and what might be done to reduce local tensions that feed violence.

In 1999-00, DfID funded a series of about 70 local consultations in accessible chiefdoms (mainly in the south and east). The process was managed by the Governance Reform Secretariat. This initiative put rural conflict management on the agenda, as a prelude to mobilizing the labor of community youth to build houses for Paramount Chiefs. This was in itself the symbolic step to advertise that government was about to return to the countryside. In some ways a rather provocative reversion to colonial forced labor, the house building exercise was made tolerable to many young people because the consultation exercise gave them an opportunity to air their grievances. Community consultation ought at that point to have become a national institution. In this instance, there was no follow-up, but it is not too late to remedy the situation under NSAP.

Each consultation lasted two days, and typically involved approximately 60-100 people. Chiefdom authorities, women and youth (including CDF fighters) were invited to discuss issues separately. Discussions were sometimes triggered by role-play exercises. Complaints were then aired in plenary, and an agenda for reform agreed upon. There were some obvious methodological weaknesses (some facilitating agencies were less familiar with participatory methods than others, and specific groups—e.g., nursing mothers and strangers—were either under-represented or not invited). Even so, the consultations are very revealing both of how rural administration collapsed into arbitrariness prior to the war, and of the typical conflicts plaguing rural communities that fed the war (Box 11).

The kind of problems between elders and youth, men and women, and strong and weak lineages discussed above were frequently aired. The leading motifs are the subordination of women (especially under the prevailing system of marriage and family organization), the ineffectiveness and dishonesty of many chiefs, and especially corruption in the local justice system (including the tendency to use fines to control and exploit young people). The emergence (prior to disarmament) of the CDF (nominally the force opposing the rebels in the countryside and loyal to local chiefs and tradition) as a law-unto-itself is also clearly apparent. This last problem was resolved by the apparent effectiveness of the disarmament and demobilization process.

BOX 11: Chiefdom Consultations 1999-00: Some Extracts

Barri Chiefdom (Pujehun District), June 4-5, 2000. Women complained that men “exploit their wives for material gain.” Resentment at the patrilineal system surfaces in the comment that “the extended family system has made us poorer after the war.” Women’s lack of independence is apparent in the complaint that “the timetable for women’s activities is dictated by men [and that] women are not allowed to plan for themselves.” Youths also complained they were “not considered in decision making” and that chiefs and CDF leaders were “dishonest and vindictive.” Interestingly, women thought an answer to their problems was to send their children to school. The elders, whose main problems included “bad roads,” “climatic change” and “slow rate of payment of [government] salaries” were more interested in foreign investment, low-cost building materials and agricultural mechanization. In discussing governance the “hard-heartedness” of the court chairman, “especially to youth” was noted. Conducting marriages and presiding over “land [cases], rape, family disputes and burglary matters” he levied exorbitant fines. The court

clerk connived in the injustice by issuing false receipts. These failures were said to have “contributed immensely to the escalation of the war.”

Bumpeh Ngao Chiefdom (Bo District), June 3-4, 2000: Civilians complained about an out-of-control CDF. It had “no regard for the rule of law...[and] the High Priest conducts illegal courts and imposes heavy fines on civilians, which is literally enslaving the people in the area in debt.” In one area the CDF had incited the “community against their Section Chief,” with the Battalion Commander accused of “arresting and mistreating [government] contract road maintenance workers.” An OXFAM well construction project for Bumpeh town “had been abandoned because of a split between the newly elected Section Chief [a powerful woman with external political support] and youths of the town.” Elders noted that power struggles among “big men” in the absence of an elected Paramount Chief was leading to “incidence of ritual murder” and that there was a problem between “dishonest chiefs” and “lawless youths.” A civil society group complained that “there are many kangaroo courts in the chiefdom” and that “chiefs levy heavy fines.”

Gallinas Perri Chiefdom (Pujehun District), June 6-7, 2000. The consultation was disrupted by the arrival of 50 CDF fighters, wishing to use the meeting place. A comment from the report states “[The CDF] torment their people and feel above the law”, and quotes them as boldly remarking “we don’t take orders from useless chiefs.” CDF and youth representatives in the meeting complained about the lack of “benefits for fighting” and an “unsympathetic community.” But they explained their own problems as arising in part from a “central command system poorly coordinated” and lack of coordination among their leaders. Elders complained about a lack of salaries since they returned four years previously and the “ruthless and uncontrollable CDF” who “refuse to take part in any communal work.” In general, “young energetic men refuse to brush farms,” preferring instead to seek “excitement and fun.” Women commented on traditional culture “paving the way for discrimination against women”, and problems with husbands “who have abandoned farming and joined the fighting...or gone diamond mining, and “the early marriage of girls.” Once again the local justice system was a central concern, with complaints about the private appropriation of fines by corrupt officials or informal “courts.”

Dodo Chiefdom (Kenema District), September 15-16, 2000. There was a rift in the chiefdom between two ruling lineages, fuelled by a politically well-connected Freetown-based “son of the soil.” Youth complained about unemployment. “Revenue collected is not accounted for”, and there is “no transparency between the administration and youths, who are always referred to as children and confusionists.” Lacking any encouragement to stay in an inaccessible chiefdom, they migrate “to other areas with better facilities.” Having risked their lives defending the chiefdom, the CDF volunteers feel exploited. “The leaders of the CDF do not represent the interest of their juniors to the authorities [but] greedily confiscate any good that comes...Chiefs must involve the youths in decision making for the chiefdom.” Women resented their lack of involvement in decision making, and especially the lack of “any significant role in [chieftaincy] elections.” “Only involved in cooking and labor,” they lack steady income sources, and yet are “asked to pay licenses and worst of all marriage fee.” Assistance from NGOs for war widows “is controlled by the males (chiefs) [and] does not reach the targeted beneficiaries.” Sources of conflict are conversion by the authorities of “chiefdom money to their own personal use.” The Court Clerk, who “working with an illiterate court chairman, embezzles monies collected in the court.”

Unfortunately the consultation program ran out of steam. The cycle was not extended to the newly accessible areas in 2002. There has been no follow-up on the kind of grievances revealed in the reports above. We found little systematic use of the findings of the reports in government (copies are mainly requested by researchers and consultants). We came across no evidence in the field that reports had been forwarded to the community groups who had contributed the contents, or that findings had been locally debated with a view to reform once chiefdom administrations had been re-established. This was an important opportunity missed. The process should be de-coupled from the business of restoration of chiefdom governance, and revived as a key element in preparation for democratic, accountable community-driven development under NSAP.

Chiefdoms Revived

Chiefdom administrations were reinstated in much of the south and east from September 2000. The intake of Paramount Chiefs from the 2002 elections for vacancies caused by deaths of chiefs during the war marks some change—many are now highly educated, and maintain business or professional interests in town. But this means that there is already a tendency for some chiefs to commute to their chiefdoms.

In one case, the day-to-day business was being handled by the chief's (clearly highly competent) wife, who gave us his business address and mobile phone number in Freetown for us to make further enquiries. Several of the new chiefs have returned from periods overseas. (We met one who was a US citizen; he gave an accurate thumbnail explanation of the Bretton Woods financial institutions to his advisors, when we introduced ourselves as consultants to the World Bank). How close these new chiefs will prove to be to the problems of, for example impoverished women or stay-at-home youths, remains to be seen.

BOX 12: The Perspective of the Court Chairman

SB is the court chairman of an isolated, Class C chiefdom in the northern part of Bo District. We find him working in his extensive upland rice farm, a couple of kilometers from the village. At first he is reluctant to talk, and gives an alias. Likely, he is a CDF man, and is worried about investigators from the Special Court. The RUF scattered the chiefdom in 1995, but the CDF took control in 1996 and the people returned in 1997. The court barri was burnt during the rebel displacement. The court re-opened in September 2000, and a new Paramount Chief was elected in December 2002. All court records prior to 2000 have been lost. SB was appointed by the Regent Chief, and is waiting to know whether his appointment will be confirmed under the new chief. He heard (over FM radio) two months ago that there is to be a training for Court Chairmen. He has not yet heard from the District Officer when this will be, but he visits the Bo District Office regularly. He has only ever been visited once by the Customary Court Supervisor, but is frequently summoned by his office in Bo. In fact, he will travel there tomorrow for a case review. He has never been visited by the Customary Law Officer, who covers two provinces and doubles as State Council. He occasionally receives his stipend (Le40,000/month, about \$18) for his duties as Court Chairman (this has been paid six times out of 36 monthly payments due since September 2000). He has heard that District Councils will set tariffs for fines in Customary Courts. He lacks a copy of Fenton's *Outline of Native Law* (1948), but has a copy of the *Local Court Act* (1963) to guide him on procedure. His priority for a more effective court is a lock-up (locally, people only understand strong measures, he argues). Also, the court needs more chiefdom police (the chiefdom has only three, with two assigned to the court, one of whom is sick). The police have been paid as irregularly as he, and the stipends are even lower (Le30,000/month). The court lacks a typewriter (it was looted). All documentation is hand-written, and he pays for the paper from his pocket. A cash and receipt book was bought from chiefdom revenue. Without a typewriter there are no duplicate records. In appeals to the Magistrate's Court, the Court Chairman has to attend the appeal in person to present hand-written records. He has not been consulted by the Justice Review Commission; only chairman from Class A and B chiefdoms were called.

Customary courts have also operated since September 2000, but judicial reform, capacity building, resources and supervision remain major issues. So far there are many signs of a return to business as usual. Resentments revealed in the chiefdom consultations are likely to be fuelled further by the slow pace of reform of the local justice system (Box 12).

Decentralization: The Example of Education

The government of Sierra Leone has agreed on decentralization. Elections to District Councils will take place in 2004, and thereafter many basic activities (e.g., provision of health services and education, road maintenance and agricultural extension) will be handed over to development committees supervised by district assemblies. Currently, district and chiefdom recovery committees serve as a prelude to decentralization.

BOX 13: The Perspective of the Accused

A. is a former ground commander of the CDF. Stalwart of a *kombi* in 1983, and leader of the same labor cooperative in 2002, he is still considered a "youth" at age 45. The CDF recovered his village in 1997, reversing two years of RUF occupation. Sittings of the chiefdom court resumed in September 2000. One Saturday night in March 2002, A. was involved in a brawl with another ex-combatant. The following week he received a neatly hand-written official summons to attend court accusing him of public affray. He had borrowed Le30,000 (about \$15) to buy seed rice to plant a 1.5 ha. rice farm cleared of its heavy war-time growth of trees. He remarks that he knows the court plans to find him guilty, and fine him the money he has borrowed. This means he will no longer be able to plant the farm. His woman will leave him. He will have no option, he says, but to become a fugitive from justice. His best chance is to go back to the diamond fields, where he once spent some time mining. He is familiar with the

tactics of war, and has handled a semi-automatic weapon. He comments darkly that next time he might fight for the other side. He decides to stay, but the court fines him Le100,000. Paying off the loan will absorb all his profit from farming for the year. From his perspective, the court process is not justice, but a means for elders to tax the labor of young men and drive them out of the village. Conscious of the damage done by arbitrary fining, the government promises reform. But the pace is slow. Training for court chairmen is about to begin, and district councils, when elected, will publish schedules of permitted fines. But meanwhile chieftom treasuries lack money to pay official salaries and the government lacks the personnel to offer close supervision of customary courts. (Field notes: April 2002, SA field interview, June-July 2003.)

Decentralization is supposed to bring government closer to the people, and make it more accountable and transparent. There is some evidence that holding cabinet meetings in provincial headquarters has already encouraged certain interlocutors (including chiefs and CDF spokesmen) to raise pressing local concerns, such as the state of provincial roads or the lack of provision for war-wounded or the dependents of dead veterans. Graders are evident on the worst stretches of road from Freetown to the provinces, even in the rainy season. But a big question is whether this amounts to no more than effective penetration downwards of the old-established patrimonial, gerontocratic political culture, or offers genuinely new openings for the peaceful expression of the concerns of a hitherto disempowered, disillusioned and embittered younger generation, including (crucially) those who actively engaged in the war. The signs are mixed, to say the least.

Schooling, especially its extension to rural girls, and the involvement of parents in school management seems a crucial test case for decentralization. The Ministry of Education aims to provide a primary school in every chieftom administrative section. Many rural parents have considered girls' education a low priority, especially in Muslim-dominated communities in the north. One northern Paramount Chief (Marampa, Port Loko District), however, has recently declared an ambition to ensure that every girl in his chieftom receives primary education. These are indications of progress, but the messages on school management are more mixed. The government proposes, in addition to district and chieftom education committees, school management groups run by a mixture of teachers, parents and local "leading lights." Ensuring adequate representation of the mass of younger, poorer rural people on these committees will represent something of a challenge.

Direct parent involvement in running the local school is potentially an important way of building skills in community participation. Meetings concerning school business that directly affect the welfare of their own children are one of the few occasions for which the rural poor—especially young mothers—will prioritize time to attend. The Ministry of Education is cautious, nevertheless, about the idea of basing school management directly on committees elected by parents. One reason given by the Minister, Dr. Alpha Wurie, is that in areas with low educational uptake the pool of parents is too low. It is necessary to have wider local representation to build support for the school. He proposes management committees formed by selection or nomination, to include local elites, but does not rule out that membership might be validated by some kind of voting procedure where communities desire it. But, his civil servants explained to us, in their view this was too advanced for the majority of rural areas in the country, where country people still take their lead from natural rulers. It was not clear whether this was a Freetown mantra that has survived the war or was based on direct studies of parental attitudes indicating that conservatism and deference in educational matters are exceptions to the social changes wrought by the war. In our own fieldwork we found that parents from commoner backgrounds are keen for direct involvement in school affairs, and are as prepared to question the authority of chiefs and educated professionals as they are in other areas of post-war rural life.

We agree that there is a difficult balancing act between actual and potential parents. But the too easy acceptance of the argument about natural rulers and the slow pace of rural social change risks packing school management committees with the rural elites who dominate the affairs of VDCs. The power of

teachers on such committees must also be scrutinized. Teachers are subject to frequent transfer. Their loyalty lies with the employer paying their salaries, and the Sierra Leone Teacher's Union, one of the more impressively organized apex professional organizations in the country. The Union is strongly associated with a national civil society movement, but has yet to demonstrate that it can break free of a "Freetown consensus" and act and think locally. Apex organizations, we suggest, are not natural allies of CDD. This is why democracy and parent power in rural schools is important. It is a crucial battle ground between new (bottom up) and old (top-down) ideas about empowerment.

BOX 14 : Participation in School Issues

Mothers with young children have very little time to allocate to their own projects. They cook, look after their children and help manage the family farm. If young mothers are to be engaged in community-driven development, they need opportunity and experience in participation. Young mothers will commit time to attend the various meetings called by the school to discuss the welfare and progress of their children. In M., a large but quite isolated village, we encountered the end of year meeting of the village primary school. The purpose was to distribute report cards. Attendance comprised the three teachers, the children, and about 50-60 adults, mainly parents. A few elders were also gathered, including the section chief, to preside. Long familiarity with public meetings in this village made clear this one was different. Over half of the adults were young mothers. Normally, meetings would be dominated by men (both young and old) and older women. Each child's name was called, the position in class announced. Those with high grades were praised; those who had failed were told they would repeat a year. The card was handed over to the child, and then immediately passed to the caregiver (in most cases the young mother, but sometimes the father). Several young fathers were former members of the village CDF. The head teacher withheld some report cards. A "voluntary" contribution of Le500 had not been paid. "But what was this contribution for?" asked one of the fathers (an ex-combatant noted for his bluntness). The answer dwelt on the need to prepare older children for the common entrance exam (for secondary schools). This would take place in the nearest town, and the children would not want to be disgraced. The CDF man persisted in his challenge. He later told us he suspected this was simply a "tax" levied by the teachers for their own needs. No young mother spoke in the exchange, but they all listened keenly to the altercation, nodding their assent to this rather unusual instance of the parental right to query a teacher. In 25 years of fieldwork, only one similar case was encountered: when a wealthy village trader challenged a headmaster for having administered a severe flogging to his child while the worse for drink. Talking to mothers separately, they agreed meetings about school business were the one event they would definitely make time to attend. (Field notes: July 18, 2003.)

Organizing the Farmers

School management is not the only area where the state has a key role as a provider of social services. Health and agriculture are two others. We consider here the example of agriculture.

The idea circulates among Ministry of Agriculture professionals that farmers need a strong umbrella organization. A National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone (NAF/SL) is in the process of forming. It claims (or aspires) to represent 7,261 farmer associations, many of which have been organized in connection with life in displaced camps in response to humanitarian programs (including an estimated 1,644 women's rural associations). NAF/SL makes an argument that this is too many, and that as people leave the camps and resettle they need to re-organize under a national umbrella organization. NAF/SL claims (or hopes) also to represent rural cooperatives (1,754 of which have been registered with the Cooperatives Department of the Ministry of Trade and State Enterprises since 1949, but of which only 120 (including 14 women's cooperatives) seem to be currently operative, mainly in the artisanal fishing sector, where special conditions prevail. Sixty percent of functioning registered cooperatives are RoSCAs. In short, the NAF/SL aspires primarily to represent farm labor sharing clubs and RoSCAs, but also includes VDCs. It compares its role to SLANGO, an umbrella organization representing and regulating national and international NGOs. NAF/SL hopes to become the voice of the community-driven rural development process.

Apex organizations require an act of parliament to operate. NAF/SL lacks enabling legislation. Meanwhile, it operates as an NGO. It claims to have first come into being in 1987, as a producer's wing of the Ministry of Agriculture, after proposals first mooted at the conference of the Sierra Leonean Agricultural Society in 1982. Aims include organizing farmers "properly into structured groups/associations at village, chiefdom, regional and national levels," mobilizing input supply, and organize marketing associations. It operates with an annual subvention of Le160 million from the Ministry of Agriculture, and has recently held elections throughout the country for local representatives. People we asked in the villages had generally heard of the organization, but they were unclear about how they had "voted." There seems to be no "electoral role." NAF/SL is vague about exactly how many organizations it represents. The procedure appears to resemble that of the election of paramount chiefs (through an electoral college of largely self-selecting lineage elders). Registration is Le25,000 per individual and Le55,000 per association. It is unclear what benefits members receive for their fee.

It seems that NAF/SL is regarded as an arm of government, reaching out into the farming community, rather than a farmers' trade union. Questions arise about whether village-level farmer groups have asked for, or need, such an organization. NAF/SL stresses efficiency arguments. Too many organizations competing cannot be efficient. It wants to impose a single clear hierarchy of farmer representation. Despite the language of participation and empowerment, the NAF/SL organogram looks more like a Christmas Tree, with an administrative hierarchy reaching up from village level to national apex perched on a narrow stem rooted in a plant pot labeled farmers. There are also questions about its agenda. The private sector should supply farmers with inputs and credit; organization with apparent political functions should not. Lobbying for farmers' interests is a highly relevant aspiration, especially where so many people make their livelihood from the land. What is less clear is whether the NAF/SL has any capacity to represent the different and competing groups in the agrarian landscape. It is strongly supportive of women's issues, but appears to operate with a notion of gender essentialism. On the special needs of young men and migrants in farming communities, it appears to say nothing. Farmers are farmers, and have common interests. For example, it seems doubtful whether it will be a strong advocate of the flexible land tenancy agreements needed by young migrant farmers and young wives with weak family protection.

New Interest-Based Forms of Collective Action

The NAF/SL is an instance of a state-encouraged vertical organization for collective action. It consolidates what Durkheim would term mechanical solidarity—groups (in this case farmer clubs) bound together through recognition of their essential similarity of function. An important issue is that the countryside in Sierra Leone might no longer be (if it ever was) a "coral reef" of villages serving the same basic livelihood functions. Specialization (according to comparative advantage) is important in a modern economy. As post-war recovery strengthens, market forces, and thus rural occupational differentiation, will play an increasing role. It follows that farmers and other rural producers increasingly need "lateral" organizations that represent them according to their varied interests.

This sets up a new basis for social solidarity: society formed out of the respect citizens develop for specialized voluntary associations and occupational contributions. Durkheim termed this organic solidarity. We might thus envisage the emergence of associations of oil-palm planters, coffee producers, tenant farmers, cassava millers, female produce traders, young farming mothers, etc. Representing their collective interest through an apex organization would only become an issue once the different associations have developed their agenda and programs. Artisanal (coastal) fishing is the one occupational area where this happens already on any considerable scale. Fishing, and smoking and marketing fish are activities with considerable potential for collective action. Fishermen and women marketing fish are quite strongly organized into cooperatives according to task-group specialization. Where they federate, they tend to do so outwards, among fellow specialists, and not upwards into an apex organization, comprising all trades within the fishing sector.

Stronger development of collective action along horizontal (specialized, interest-driven) lines is an evident feature of post-war recovery in Sierra Leone, and alert civil society activists have already noted the change. Zainab Bangura remarked at the stakeholder discussion on the social assessment study terms of reference (May 7, 2003, Bank of Sierra Leone complex, King Tom, Freetown) that, pre-war, the main mode of organization for civil society groups was as a locality-specific association, of the kind that is (potentially) a component in a federation of national ethnic political associations, but that post-war, interest-based associations are much more prominent (e.g., wet-fish sellers association, cassette sellers association, gari sellers association, or clubs organized around activities such as sport or drama). A similar change has been noted above, in regard to village labor clubs, where a post-war social role as sports or religious associations is more prominent. Interest-driven groups specialized by occupational or social role tend to operate differently in the political arena than those united by residence or descent.

An example is the emergence of several motorbike renters' associations in the main provincial towns, where post-war the two-wheeled motorbike taxi has tended to replace the conventional 4-wheeled kind. Self-reintegrated ex-combatants are prominent in each association. The machines are imported from Conakry by businessmen, who then offer them to riders on what are effectively hire-purchase terms over six months. In Kenema, the association combines students and ex-combatants. The students are prominent on the executive "board," with several sharing a machine, which they each ride part-time, to pay for their studies. They are either attempting university entrance or studying at the Eastern Polytechnic. The organization has more than 600 members throughout the Eastern Province with branches in the diamond towns of Tongo Field and Koidu, and an elaborate constitution. The executive members work with the police and civil society in Kenema to report nighttime movements by suspected thieves. In Makeni, a major RUF base until the end of the war, the association is smaller (100-200 members) and has a rather unruly, predominantly ex-combatant membership; the executive board is struggling with basic issues like trying to get riders to ride less recklessly, to register their machines and to pay for insurance. Some of the bike owners appear to be ex-combatant commanders, who rent the bikes to riders who were formerly under their command. The Bo association has a politically alert executive board, working to improve discipline and safety, contesting police harassment and opening up training opportunities to female riders. Of 380 members (September 2003), most are ex-combatants; 54 (RUF 12, SLA 4, CDF 38) are registered (i.e., passed through NCDDR disarmament and skills training, but moved on to bike riding under their own initiative) and 302 (RUF 96, CDF 206) are un-registered ex-combatants. The large figure for the CDF is plausible since most youth in Bo Town, a major centre of resistance to the RUF, joined the CDF. The 96 who claim to be former RUF combatants excluded from NCDDR programs is evidence of the extent to which ex-combatants from the rebel movement either avoided formal DDR, and tried to reintegrate themselves (a preference among abductees with supportive families) or were "diddled" out of their guns by former commanders. The fortunes of these associations are worth following for the light they throw on ex-combatant self-integration, the new business opportunities to be tapped under conditions of post-war economy recovery in the diamond districts, and the post-war politics and social capital of horizontal (interest-driven) forms of social association and collective action.

BOX 15: Interest-Driven Social Capital: The Bike Renters Association

The Bo Town (Motor) Bike Renter's Association is a trade association of motorcycle taxi operatives. Executive members recalled that some bike taxis plied from Kenema to the Tongo diamond fields (about 20 miles, on especially bad roads) before the war. The upsurge of two-wheeled taxis in Bo is largely a post-war phenomenon, however. Many four-wheeled taxis operating in the outskirts of Bo pre-war serving diamond-mining operations (along the Sewa and as far as the hills around Boajibu) disappeared during the war as a result of frequent ambushes or lack of spare parts. Two-wheeled taxis began to fill the gap. Conventional taxis tend to be owned by big men, who recruit a driver as operative. Two-wheel taxis offer more scope for owner-operators; they are less expensive to buy, and can be acquired on credit from Guinean suppliers at a payback rate of one million Leones per month for 6 months. Thus the riders are less dependent on big-man patronage and politics. The Bike Renters Association in Bo

represents riders and owner-operatives, and was established in March 2000, in part as a response to demobilization. CDF fighters were in the process of being disarmed but lacked job opportunities. The union started out with four ex-combatant organizers and a handful of bikes, which they chartered to riders they had helped train from among unemployed CDF ex-combatants. Currently, the association has 380+ members, but substantially fewer bikes on the road (a bike is often operated by two riders so that potentially it is available for hire for up to 24 hours a day). In response to President Kabbah's 50:50 gender initiative, the association has recruited 45 unemployed young women to learn to ride (currently they lack bikes for training purposes, but have started to train ten recruits). About half the executive board is comprised of ex-combatants, including some former RUF fighters. They have registered the association under commercial law as a company limited by guarantee, and employ a Freetown solicitor as their legal representative. They avoid big men as political patrons, believing these men manipulated them to fight the war, destroying their own environment in consequence. The big men, by contrast, they point out, sent their families safely overseas, having "the wings to fly" as soon as conditions became intolerable. The young people fighting the war had no alternatives to fast failing educational or health systems. For this reason, they have vowed not to fight each other with weapons again. Commercial law is a better tool, they argue. They give an example. It costs up to Le500,000 (for registration and commercial insurance) to get a bike on the road. The Road Transport Department takes the money and then sits on the papers, sometimes for a month, claiming administrative delays in Freetown. But since bike owners are required to pay Le1 million per month on the machine, they need to earn revenue from day one. They suspect the Department passes the names of pending registrations to the police, who then harass the riders with papers pending for bribes or fines, and wonder whether the big men transport owners are behind this, anxious to reclaim business opportunities for 4-wheeled commercial transport. In February 2003, this flared into confrontation between the bike riders and the police in Kenema and Bo, resulting in the arrest of 32 riders and the levying of high fines (averaging Le100,000). The association went on strike, supported by the women traders who are among the major clients of the two-wheeled taxis. According to the executive members, the confrontation required the intervention of the (British-seconded) Inspector-General of police, and court action by the association's lawyer, who succeeded in having the fines reduced by an average of 40%. Strikes and court actions, they suggest, are their new weapons in a struggle for a fairer and more inclusive society. The executive was clear about potential weaknesses on its own side, e.g., the need to improve safety (clients refuse full-face helmets, for fear of tuberculosis, and the association is currently experimenting with the old open-faced helmet, probably adequate for spills at the rather slow speeds at which Honda taxis typically travel on rough dirt roads). The executive also has rules against inadequate footwear, speeding and dangerous riding, and for dealing with passenger complaints. Riders who fail to meet standards can be punished by fining, suspension or corporal punishment. They have recently introduced an over-vest with the association name on it as identification for registered riders, and maintain a mechanic's section. Currently the Bo association aspires to be the national two-wheel taxi operators union of choice, and currently has members in Kenema, Pujehun, Tongo and Kailahun, as well as bikes and operators stationed in some of the larger outlying villages in the Bo area (such as Yamandu). The executive agrees, however, that rival associations should be perfectly free to organize as they wish. The association would be willing to federate under a more general civil society umbrella, provided any such apex organization supplies helpful advice, representation and monitoring, but the executive is openly skeptical about the mushrooming of self-appointed civil society groups, referring scornfully to "those fake organizations that make an office with three chairs." Some Lebanese traders contract bikes and riders to supply their bush mining operations. The bikes go everywhere, even into the remote villages and mining camps, whatever the state of the roads and the rains. Bike-jacking is a problem, but would be solved with better communications, and better liaison with the police. This is a reason the union is keen to foster less confrontational relations with the authorities.

Community Reintegration: The Displaced and Ex-Combatants

Understanding the post-war interface between state and communities in rural areas requires us to take account of changes in the way post-war rural communities think and work. It seems clear from a variety of sources, including the government's own chiefdom consultation documents, as reviewed above, that deferential attitudes have been brought into question by the war (cf. Archibald and Richards 2002). Rural people are now more prepared to challenge authority and seek accountability from government or other service providers. There is also some evidence that horizontal forms of solidarity have started to spread to the agricultural sector.

Two main factors can be cited. The widespread experience of displacement is one. Villagers say that in the displaced camps they compared notes on how they had been misled by some of their leaders in the past. They also saw, for the first time, the prices urban producers paid for their produce, and realized the extent to which they had been exploited by merchants. They were also exposed to better schools and other urban amenities. This has fuelled a desire for substantial post-war rural change.

The second factor is the re-integration of ex-combatants. About 70,000 adult fighters from all factions were disarmed and entered the demobilization process. This is only about 3-4% of the national age cohort (or if we take account only of the male fighters, about 10% of males in the 18-40 age cohort). But in reality, numbers of ex-combatants in rural areas are much higher. Records for the Kenema CDF show that only about 14% of fighters were armed with weapons acceptable to NCDDR as a basis for demobilization. The actual number of CDF fighters in Kenema District was 16,491 (about 22% of the male 18-40 age cohort).¹⁰ If we add in about 10% for males aged 18-40 mobilized by the RUF, we arrive at a figure for total mobilization of about one third of all males in the age group. This figure should be adjusted upwards both for rural areas and non-elite groups. The conclusion is that perhaps 50% of all ordinary rural males in this part of eastern Sierra Leone has had some direct fighting experience.

Wars change social attitudes, not least among combatants. The skepticism of the young CDF fighter about what the school teachers intended to do with “obligatory” parental donations to the (possibly bogus) “school fund” in M. is but one example of such changed attitudes. More dramatic was the case of registered ex-combatants in Makali (Kunike Barine chiefdom). This group was encountered in October 2002 during a DfID-funded consultancy on strengthening civil society (Jay et al. 2003). At that stage, 110 combatants complained they had been registered but had not yet begun to receive training packages (with the exception of a small agricultural group). Most had demobilized as RUF, but explained that in reality they had fought the war as CDF, changing only to protect their community from being burnt by the RUF in the final moments of the conflict. In a follow-up meeting as part of the social assessment study (September 12, 2003), a group of 88 assembled to report that they had now begun their training, but lodged a long series of complaints about inefficiency or corruption on the part of NCDDR’s implementing partners (a British-funded consultancy and two Christian mission-based national NGOs). Typical alleged abuses included the delivery of sub-standard materials or tools, and only part of promised packages (e.g., partial payment of allowances or food for work). Cards were punched or dockets signed off as if the full amount had been received on a take-it-or-leave basis. Anyone refusing to hand over a card to be punched was deemed to have refused the full package, and the goods were withheld. Promises to return with the balance were rarely made good, except where ex-combatant leaders were visited at night and “bought off” with what was owed “on the quiet.”

The Makali group of ex-combatants knew that NCDDR was scheduled to close by the end of 2003, but the implementing partners ceased making visits from about July. Staff were said to have left the program or had been re-assigned elsewhere. The few implementers still venturing to Makali went in fear for their safety. One was seized by the ex-combatants and brought to the Paramount Chief, who advised against violence.

The leader of the agricultural group of ex-combatants in Makali was a forceful fellow who had been trained by the World Vision agency in conflict management, as part of program to teach ex-combatants about civil rights and to dissuade them from taking the law into their own hands. He outlined the series of official complaints his group had lodged with the police, UN peacekeeping forces, the Paramount Chief, and the district officer, to no avail. The group had also written to other ex-combatant groups in Yele, Magburaka and Masingbi in the neighboring chiefdoms to ask about their experiences. The conclusion they had formed was that their treatment was systematic. Peaceful methods seemed a waste of time. We

¹⁰ All CDF fighters were male.

were asked—rhetorically, but with a clear threat implied—what we would advise them to do if any of the agents of the implementing partners were to visit Makali once more.

Like the Paramount Chief, we advised patience, took down registration details and asked for a review by NCDDR, a request readily granted. Whether on investigation complaints will be upheld, and if so, whether alleged “inefficiency” and selective delivery of benefits is to be interpreted as NGO corruption or deliberate policy to “divide and rule” ex-combatant factions, is unclear. But it is a dangerous situation that so many disillusioned young men now returned to their communities have tasted the empowerment of mobilization. To the grievance of registered ex-combatants must be added the equally great, if more diffuse, sense of frustration among a much larger number of un-armed CDF ex-combatants. It is perhaps understandable that the government deliberately targeted the RUF in demobilization, and encouraged (or turned a blind eye) to some degree of cheating among the ex-combatant leaders themselves, or their service providers, as a way of breaking up the bush-induced solidarities deriving from a half-digested diet of student radical Green Book rhetoric and the guerrilla theories of Kim Il Sung. But to leave the marginalized CDF to stew in its resentment seems a much riskier ploy.

This neglect is not only dangerous, it is also a wasted opportunity. Some interesting cooperative agricultural projects have begun to appear, organized by ex-combatant leaders, but including village people. One of the potentially most interesting, in Kailahun District, is led by a partnership of RUF and CDF ex-combatants. The projects of this kind that we visited evidence some of the same kind of horizontal solidarity, and potential for self-integration, of the motorbike renters association. Government, for the longer term security of the nation, needs to take these emergent interest driven agrarian groupings seriously, since they offer the potential to incorporate a large number of rural jobless young people, and to benefit from the short-term action plan for agriculture adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture (e.g., farmer field schools).

NSAP Sensitization

The NSAP direct community financing program was launched mid-September 2003, as this report was being compiled. It is too early to say much about implementation. But during fieldwork we took the opportunity to discuss sensitization activities with NaCSA field staff in Kailahun and Bombali Districts, and to spend some time observing a community sensitization session in Kholifa Mabang, a chiefdom headquarters in the *boliland* (flooding grass plains) region, an area with notably poor rainy-season communications.

Kailahun District was long a centre of RUF operations and is only now beginning to recover. The main road from Pendembu is practically impassable during the height of the rains, and other roads are in a terrible state of repair. There is a shortage of vehicles in Kailahun town, the district headquarters. NaCSA staff has been dependent on the loan of a UN vehicle for sensitization work. An attempt was made to cover two of the Kissi chiefdoms in one day, but due to the appalling state of the roads only 90 minutes could be allocated to each meeting. Clearly, this is inadequate to convey anything beyond the bare idea of NSAP, and then only to people in the chiefdom headquarters.

The meeting we attended in Kholifa Mabang was not so pressed for time. The messages conveyed were accurate. But the mode of address was formal, followed by a question-and-answer session. The Temne-speaking member of the team noticed that some of the translation from Krio was not always precise. The audience was predominantly male. Some younger men were present, outnumbered by elders. The females in the audience were older women. It seems likely that the message was heard mainly by members of landowning lineages. The accuracy of presentation was praiseworthy, but it seems unlikely the message would reach the more far-flung villages or marginalized interest groups. The methodology of the governance reform secretariat’s chiefdom consultations (two-day workshops with extensive role playing and break-out sessions for the articulation of the separate views of women and children, young

men, ex-combatants, and chiefs and elders) might be worth considering to ensure more systematic and far-reaching impact.

PART 3: WHAT THE SOCIAL ASSESSMENT REVEALS

In this third part of the SA we answer, on the basis of information collated and analyzed above, the main questions posed to the SA team. These concern:

- Stakeholders and decisions. Who are the main stakeholders in the CDD process, what is the nature of their stake, and how are decisions made?
- Community. What is community? What opportunities exist for participation, and how do these opportunities vary according to gender and social diversity (class)? What local institutions are trusted and why? How might NSAP build on this legacy?
- Poverty alleviation. What are the main causes of poverty and what coping strategies are employed by different groups? What is needed to restore livelihoods? What are the priority needs of the poorest, and how are they changing? What are the main sources of vulnerability and marginality?
- Conflicts, and conflict management. What are the main potential sources of conflict, and the main risks of continuing or future conflict. What is the capacity for community conflict resolution?

Stakeholders and Decisions

Who are the main stakeholders in the CDD process, what is the nature of their stake, and how are decisions made?

Stakeholder groups

Three main groups of stakeholders—government (local and national), local and international NGOs (service providers), and rural clients (divided into land owners and migrant/stranger elements, and further subdivided by gender and age) have been identified as main stakeholders in NSAP

- The government's stake derives from its role as a provider of services (health, education, basic infrastructure), responsibility for national security (including food security) and broad interest in fostering a dynamic opportunity structure (especially in agriculture, the main potential source of sustainable self-employment for a majority of younger rural citizens). Since the Abuja cease-fire agreements, a prime concern has been to re-establish a government presence throughout the countryside, leading to revival of a number of old and frankly inefficient institutions of chieftdom administration inherited from the colonial period. The local court system has been a particular target for intense local complaint (as evidenced in the chieftdom consultation documents of the government's governance reform secretariat). Through NCDDR, government has also taken the lead in the reintegration of ex-combatants. A divide-and-rule approach has been taken to this group, with the RUF favored over the CDF and commanders over rank-and-file. This is reflected in the relatively low significance accorded to agriculture in skills training. In general, ex-combatants (*sensu lato*, including CDF volunteers without automatic weapons and mobilized but unarmed groups such as former members of the RUF combat wives unit) are a more numerous and important group in rural recovery than official figures imply. Disgruntled groups disarmed but not thoroughly demobilized represent a major potential security threat. A change of gear is now needed if instability is to be avoided. The governance approach to rural areas needs to stress greater inclusiveness of young people, and concerns for rights and democracy. Decentralization is a key opportunity to establish new interactions between (rights-bearing) citizen-groups and government agencies (as duty-holders).¹¹ There is also urgent need to re-visit an old colonial distinction between classes of citizenship, to ensure rural labor mobility does not diminish the rights of intra-rural migrants.

¹¹ Some lessons relevant to NaCSA initiatives can be found in Archibald (2003) reporting on the CARE rights-based approach to agricultural rehabilitation in northern Moyamba/southern Bonkolenken districts.

- NGOs (international and local). NGOs have become major rural service providers, but stemming from the humanitarian interregnum, services are delivered according to policy objectives determined by donors or the NGOs themselves, with low levels of client consultation, rather ineffectively coordinated by government, and only loosely regulated by (so-called) humanitarian principles (e.g., the injunction to do no harm). National NGOs are widely accused of inefficiency, imposing projects on clients unasked, and of rent-seeking behavior. But it is far from clear that INGOs should escape the same charge. Both groups at times appear more interested in turnover and job protection than listening to local needs. NSAP is a major opportunity for reform, by, in effect, creating an internal market. The stake of the NGOs will thus change from quasi-authoritarian to quasi-market provider. This is a market in which new skills and services will be required. NSAP implies much more attention to building local capacity to manage CDD. Judging by the low level of NGO interest in bidding for the first round of such contracts, this will be a major bottleneck. The nature of the NGO stake is changing faster than some local managements appear to realize, and there is urgent need for high level work on the implications of NSAP for NGOs, both nationally, through SLANGO, and internationally via donor consultation in Washington, London, etc.
- Rural society. The specific target groups for NSAP have a major stake in a successful agrarian economy and society, their major source of livelihood and support. And collective action (notably RoSCAs and labor sharing clubs) already plays an important part in sustaining livelihoods. Analysis has suggested that there is much that is wrong with or ineffective about the current agrarian system in Sierra Leone, and the source of the difficulty is more than just a question of developing a modern, technically sound agricultural opportunity structure, even though this is an important goal. Job-creation in agriculture is also hampered by the need to address historically-rooted agrarian social questions, neglected during the years of one-party rule and the diamond boom, but put firmly back on the agenda by the war, and the way war has changed rural attitudes and opened up debate. Steps have to be taken to give young marginalized groups more voice and stake in rural futures. NSAP is potentially an important tool for enhanced rural solidarity, but only if biases against the active participation of strangers, youth and women in CDD are removed.

How stakes vary at village level: strangers, youth and women

The stake villagers hold in community development depends on whether reinstatement of the old system serves their interests. Elders from strong lineages (male and female) hold stakes in reviving the old system of first-come advantage. Members of weak lineages sometimes align themselves with the strong, because they are too poor to risk biting the hand that feeds them. Strangers, those who have migrated from their own chiefdoms to find work or escape customary social controls, have a lower vested interest in a system that offers them few clear property rights, and ties them to village patrons in subordinated and deferential social relationships over the longer-term. Those with the lowest stake of all are young people squeezed for labor by the marriage system and local custom.

The key factor holding the old system together is not chieftaincy; all communities need wise leadership, and reinstated chiefs have the possibility to earn respect through exercise of their dispute-resolution skills. Where the shoe pinches most is the local legal system. The administration of justice is one aspect—court chairman and court clerks are repeatedly singled out in chiefdom consultations for criticism—but the law itself needs reform. Local law consolidates an agrarian structure that first threatened the security of British rule in Sierra Leone in the late 1890s. This undercuts the stake that many young people might otherwise have in rural society. To reinstate the system is to guard against recurrence of the 1898 war, not the conflict of 1991. Some local custom may, in fact, be in conflict with national law and international human rights conventions signed into national law. Depriving widows of property, woman damage, induction of minors into closed associations without informed consent, and denying continued education to pregnant schoolgirls may all be areas where custom and rights diverge.

When young men protest about bride service, arbitrary fines and loss of labor to dubiously communal investments mainly benefiting elite lineages, they have the option to leave the village. There is a market for unskilled male labor in the diamond pits, but the predicament of young women is different. Unless they get an education, their main exit option is to sell their sexual attractions. Marrying earlier in the village is safer. But then they are tied down by commitments to their children. Village girls whose weak lineages “marry them up” to a more powerful family are doubly tied by the fact that quitting a marriage will pose problems for fathers and brothers, who depend on bride wealth, and the longer-term benefits of bride-service, for their own survival. Walking out on a marriage spreads ripples of extreme poverty and vulnerability within a girl’s family. This means young wives tend to stay. The few young women who in fact volunteered to join the RUF and become fighters were typically unmarried, and frustrated by lack of educational opportunities.¹²

Consultation and decision making

Democracy is weakly rooted in rural Sierra Leone. In this regard, the lead is set by national politics, where the one-party style of thinking is evident in an enthusiasm for apex organizations. In consultations over decentralization, local interests have tended to favor a no-party option for local government elections.

Attendance records show government decentralization and chiefdom officials and local landowning elites have dominated consultations. The chiefdom consultations were specifically designed to articulate differences in perspective between chiefs and elders, women and children, and youths. In some cases, the CDF was also given (or insisted on taking) a separate part in discussions. Break out sessions for these different groups revealed very important differences in perspective that would not otherwise have come to light in general meetings dominated by elders. But no role was allocated to migrants, who normally constitute between 20-40% of the rural population, despite their legally recognized status as strangers. We have very little information about what strangers tend to think as a group, yet it is regularly asserted that when a young man has had enough, and leaves the village to become a stranger, it is the beginning of vulnerability to rebel recruitment.

There is often an appearance of consultation at village meetings. Women and youths regularly attend. Sande elders represent women’s collective interest over reproductive issues. Youths are represented by “leaders of youth.” Strangers have no collective representation; their landlords or patrons speak on their behalf. The real decisions are made when a group of elders retires from the meeting to “hang heads” (Murphy 1980).

Networking is also crucial to understanding how village decisions get made. Many messages to and from the village community are handled by local brokers, who pursue factional interest through the skilled management or withholding of information (Murphy 1980). Already these brokers are ahead of the NSAP game, judging by the extent to which the “material culture of signboards” reflects the imminent demise of the local NGO and its replacement by the community-based organization. CARE baseline inquiries about how ordinary villagers viewed VDCs made it clear that members of such committees were perceived as those wealthy enough to spend and resources on brokerage activities. No one, it was argued, could afford to work for the community welfare for free. It was assumed as a matter of course that those who invested time in fostering links between the village and government service providers or NGOs (e.g.,

¹² “There were about 20 young boys and girls in my village—7 girls and 13 boys—who joined the RUF willingly, without force. The main reason was the lack of job facilities and lack of encouragement for the youth..” (RUF female ex-combatant, interviewed by Krijn Peters, November 2002).

by hosting field workers) must take their cut, the only matter of interest being whether there was anything of benefit left for ordinary people.

War has induced some changes. The leader of the village young men's association is now more apt to speak out, and this is especially so where the young men remain mobilized as CDF. Rather than a resource, this mobilization has been seen by the government as a potential threat to its own weak authority. CDD could be instrumental in changing this perception if it were to lead to the peaceful gathering of collective energies for rural development. Clear and positive thinking about ways of using the social capital of reintegrating ex-combatants is perhaps the major gap in NSAP so far.

The chieftom consultation documents provide some evidence that women are also more vocal than before the war. The documents reveal women complaining about their lack of involvement in selecting chiefs, or about local officials who control and divert project benefits intended for women. Appeals to gender solidarity are not uncommon, but sometimes these are put in negative terms (as the complaint that women fail to combine).

As noted, the issue of gender solidarity needs to be carefully contextualized through an understanding of the lineage system. Women in powerful lineages act to preserve the lineage advantage. It matters whether a woman member of a VDC, for example, is a commoner (a migrant, an IDP, a wife from a weak lineage) or a member of the ruling elite (e.g., the wife or sister of a chief). CDD based on generic appeals to female solidarity would result only in the consolidation of existing patterns of advantage.¹³

Exploitation of women's labor and property needs to be addressed through reform of customary law. Young women locked within the system may be the group to benefit the most from access to basic forms of grass-roots collective action (village RoSCAs, parent-teacher associations), but the opportunity costs of the time young wives from weak lineage are asked to give to collective action should be given special attention. For example, female elders and *kombra dem* (young, nursing mothers) favor different times of day to attend meetings. It is almost impossible for young women to participate in meetings outside the village at any time, and especially during the middle of the farming season.

Community

What is community? What opportunities exist for participation, and how do these opportunities vary according to gender and social diversity (class)? What local institutions are trusted and why? How might NSAP build on this legacy?

The typical post-war rural community is still strongly locality-based. The NaCSA operational manual for direct community financing (NaCSA 2003) considers, rightly, that the rural community is to be defined primarily in residential terms. The village section is still much as described in Fenton (1948)—a village cluster based on marriage alliances between first-comer and weaker land owning lineages. But today there is in most areas an additional 20-40% of internal migrants farming or digging diamonds with uncertain rights. Village-based brokers maintain links to wider political and economic systems. (Murphy 1980). These include schoolteachers and merchants, as well as better-educated members of leading land-owning families. In diamond-mining chiefdoms, the brokerage system takes on a more systematic form, and includes close management of digging sites by representatives of land-owning families and mining “supporters.” In the Kono alluvial mining areas, some elements of the RUF command structure appear to survive in the management of diamond pits. In Tongo Field, the system of supporters and landowners is supervised by a government-appointed committee. Some RUF and CDF commanders have attempted to

¹³ Khadija Bah (personal communication) suggests it is important to replace gender analysis with social analysis (i.e., gendered activity seen in the context of social relationships). A participatory process might include some acknowledgement and discussion of the ways in which wealthier women and men are similar (or different) in their behavior to poorer women and men.

organize their own reintegration around farming cooperatives linking their own fighters and villagers, though the civilian aspects are as yet undeveloped. Some new horizontal (interest-based) elements have begun to appear in rural community organization, augmenting the traditional but strong modalities of RoSCAs and farm labor sharing clubs. Producer or supplier cooperative principles are increasingly apparent in some aspects of rural transport (bike taxi riders) and agro-processing (gari-processing gangs). Some ex-combatant groups are reported to be involved in cooperation for activities such as block-making, or aspire to form companies to bid for small infrastructure projects.

Customarily, the young men living in a residential community will come together seasonally to brush roads or make stick bridges. Some communities manage to persuade their young men (by preparing food) to undertake more ambitious projects—the making of a short length of motorable or building a community school. By offering communities an entitlement in the form of purchasing power, NSAP is likely to further undermine a modality for self-help that, arguably, is on its last legs in any case.

This flags an important issue. An important element of community cohesion is historically rooted in rights to labor shaped in the late 19th century and pinned in place by colonialism. Colonial legislation provided very specific guidance on the circumstances under which the chief's historical right to command forced labor became permission for such labor to be offered for community purposes. Colonial district officers corrected abuses, but the institution was never entirely disengaged from its pre-colonial roots in domestic slavery. Young people continue to read community action as a form of coerced extraction of their labor. This reading is especially likely where it is thought that the village elite has appropriated financial resources provided for community development projects. The subsequent anger is highly destabilizing. NSAP still requires a community contribution, payable in cash or kind, and one way this can be fulfilled is through labor, so the danger remains. To maneuver safely in this area will require great attention to local sensitization, and a broader, legislative approach to protecting the labor rights of the young.¹⁴

At issue is the fact that inter-generational conflict in rural areas has increasingly taken on the nature of a class conflict. Generalized rural poverty masks important differences in “wealth in people,” i.e., power to command scarce labor. This varies by seniority, gender and lineage. Command of labor was once mainly inter-generational (elders commanded the labor of youth). A factor in its transformation into class conflict is the tendency of the more powerful members of the village community to send their own children outside for education. This (*de facto*) excuses them a share of community labor, which falls disproportionately on the uneducated or village educated. A chief with children at school in Freetown must of necessity look for others to carry out domestic or town labor. Those with children living away from the village are in fact “mining” the resources for collective action in the village. Young village males carry the major increased burden of community work and young females the major increased burden of domestic work. Females, especially those from weak lineages, are married at a frighteningly young age, in a system in which quite high levels of polygamy still prevail, by parents anxious to secure bride wealth or bride service.

This kind of community labor is likely to prove increasingly unreliable as a source for CDD, and NaCSA will have to pay attention to alternative ways of securing community contributions. This cannot be done without a great deal of learning on the job and close consultation with rural communities about what makes sense to them (e.g., taxing households on the basis of absent members).

¹⁴ The NaCSA operations manual stipulates that no labor is to be donated by individuals under the age of 16. Gary Walker (consultant adviser to NaCSA) comments that this will need to be enforced and that enforcement may be difficult in rural areas with traditions of child labor.

It will also be important to learn the lessons of the village institutions that are already trusted. As we have shown, these are mainly RoSCAs and labor clubs, where all members have equivalent stakes. Evidence that these forms of cooperation are not undermined by the agrarian inequalities between stranger and citizen is apparent from the findings that male strangers are as active in *kombi* and RoSCAs as any other social groups. This type of collective action also builds organizational capacity and confidence among the poor and vulnerable. There is a special problem, however, over the opportunity cost of time spent in consultations. Young mothers find it especially hard to participate in meetings. They prefer different times of day than elders (including older women), but they do make time to attend parent-teacher meetings, and this is one important context in which capacity-building for young women might be emphasized.

In regard to clubs, etc., a general lesson is to ensure that organizers share the group interest, i.e., have the same long-term stake in the activity as the ordinary members. It is not wise to appoint literate schoolteachers (with no local roots, and liable to be transferred at any time) as secretaries of RoSCAs, despite their record-keeping abilities. It is better to appoint a mother with farming responsibilities and children settled in the village, like the other members, and teach her the record keeping skills (or ask the teacher to act as her amanuensis). The woman will not disappear, and thus can be called to account. Appeals to a generalized community interest or gender solidarity should be treated with suspicion.

NSAP can build on this legacy first by understanding it, and then devising procedures of its own after careful community consultation, and drawing upon the lessons learned. The key issue will be to ensure the representativeness of village management groups, and avoid the negative lessons of VDCs, to build the capacity of representative groups, and constantly to be aware of (and thus to monitor) the numerous ways in which the village elites will seek to undermine the credibility of non-elite representatives through back channels; a simple, favorite technique is to demand kick backs and then spread unsubstantiated rumors of misappropriation against those who refuse to play the game. There should be no mistake that NSAP and CDD are power games, and that elites never cede power lightly. Efforts have to be made to encourage the weaker groups (youth, strangers, *kombra*, etc.) to organize, but it is also necessary to map local power structure. Elite groups compete with each other, and this is an important source of potential checks and balances.

Poverty and Vulnerability

Poverty alleviation. What are the main causes of poverty and what coping strategies are employed by different groups? What is needed to restore livelihoods? What are the priority needs of the poor and how are they changing? What are the main sources of vulnerability and marginality?

The main causes and alleviation of rural poverty

Research has shown that seasonal hunger, debt, and weak family support are significantly implicated in long-term poverty in rural Sierra Leone (Richards 1986). Seasonal hunger and debt exist in perpetuating cycles. The household seasonally short of food cannot engage farm laborers to break planting bottlenecks, except by taking part in labor clubs, mortgaging the crop or taking a loan. Sickness, age, and lack of male children to send as deputies may prevent an older household head from benefiting from labor clubs, the major means to ensure timely labor among households with low reserves. Households with daughters not sent away to school can secure the labor of a son-in-law as bride service, but households without children are truly vulnerable, and perhaps permanently in debt, or dependent on the good will of a more powerful patron.

Household members pursue a range of livelihood options as coping strategies, including farm laboring, various craft activities, planting annual cash crops (notably groundnuts for women and young men), planting of tree crops (restricted to land owners), and hunting and gathering in the forest or bush (Richards 1986). Older women used to plant and spin cotton for production of country cloth, a reserve

currency for weddings, funerals and family emergencies such as sickness. But cotton planting and country cloth production is a notable casualty of the war, probably because the knowledge transmission cycle has been disrupted. Some amputees have been trained as weavers using the local double-heddle tripod loom, but complained that local thread is very hard to acquire.

Some of these livelihood options have been reactivated, e.g., a focus on groundnut seeds for women in NGO seeds-and-tools packages. But these initiatives are undermined by untimely distribution or fraud in procurement, resulting in distribution of very low quality seed, which in effect wastes the scarcest resource of beneficiaries, their agricultural labor (Richards et al. 2001). Oil palm packages for CDF ex-combatants opting for agriculture are a good idea, but undermined by inadequate inputs and incomplete supply. More emphasis on improving the quality and extending the scope of this kind of work is still needed, as is support for rehabilitation of small plantations and small-scale developed swamp rice production facilities throughout the country. Most such interventions, however, benefit individuals rather than communities as such, and so lie outside the scope of NSAP. They can also be criticized as benefiting mainly landowners and the better-established households with labor to spare. Reaching the poorest of the poor will require other means.

The priority needs of the poorest groups in rural areas depend on whether they remain within their home villages, or move and become, potentially, footloose young recruits to any revival of rebel or bandit activity. For those remaining, the cycle of hunger and debt must be broken, but without placing greater demands on labor, or requiring the security of land ownership. This requires a refocusing of agrotechnology on “low-input” food security crops. This is an established trend in farmer practice in Sierra Leone and West Africa more widely (Richards 1985; Reij and Waters-Beyer 2001). FAO assessments (seemingly based on good data) show that cassava, the greatest food-security crop of the African poor, has expanded its output, year by year across the war-time period in Sierra Leone (1990-02). This fits the general historical pattern in Africa. Cassava was a crop introduced from South America to Western Africa and the Congo basin during the uncertainties of the period of the slave trade. It has since spread throughout the continent, at times in spite of official discouragement. Its periods of greatest advance generally coincide with wars and famines. For example, its first widespread use for human food in eastern Nigeria occurred in the aftermath of the influenza-induced hunger of 1919.

Sierra Leoneans like to think that they are a rice-eating people, but even before the war, half of the national diet was supplied by other crops; cassava was the single most important. The post-war economy will be aided by the further introduction, testing and uptake of the best of the modern disease-resistant, such as the IITA higher-yielding sweet cassavas.

Something similar is happening in regard to rice. On the more frequently farmed upland fallows of north-western Sierra Leone in Kambia District, a trend towards readoption of the older, hardier, and less demanding African Rices (*Oryza glaberrima*) has been noted for some years, at the expense of the more recently introduced, higher yielding Asian Rices (*O. sativa*) (Richards 1997; Jusu 1999). We noticed the same is now true of the uplands in the north-central part of the country, where on several transects north of the Makeni-Kono highway, all upland rice seen in the field in July-September was the African species. This was the area of the country controlled by the RUF at the end of the war, and uplands were used more intensively due to the embargo on relief supplies of food. Farmers explained that only *O. glaberrima* would now grow on their impoverished soils. But they also emphasized that the African types—though much lower yielding—were advantageous in that the food value was higher (they “stay longer in the stomach”) and crucially they ripen more quickly, thus limiting the impact of the pre-harvest hungry season which initiates the cycle of hunger, indebtedness and chronic poverty. Measurements by Jusu and Richards (for a national sample of 160 rice cultivars of both species grown under standardized conditions at Rokupr Rice Research Station) indicate that the upland *O. glaberrimas* typically ripen two-three weeks quicker than equivalent Asian upland varieties.

The widespread readoption of *O. glaberrima* represents something of a paradox. Undoubtedly, since it is much lower yielding than Asian Rice equivalents adapted to Sierra Leonean upland farming, this represents a reduction in locally grown rice available for the national market. But because of its superior adaptation to local conditions and needs, the latter due to its earlier ripening, readoption of *O. glaberrima* actually represents an improvement in the basic survival chances of the poorest rural groups. During the past ten years, a Sierra Leonean breeder working at WARDA, Dr. Monty Jones, has succeeded in overcoming sterility barriers to the consistent crossing of Asian and African rice, and WARDA has recently released a number of hybrids with some of the hardy features of African Rice while retaining the superior yield potential of Asian Rice. Some have been quite successful in Guinea, so there is a good prospect they will work well in Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Agriculture has adopted a proposal for the on-farm testing and adoption of the so-called “nerica” rice as part of its short-term action plan for 2004-05. Recent experience shows that on-farm screening and dissemination of new planting materials is often well handled by groups. Delivery modalities highly compatible with the CDD philosophy include the FAO Farmer Field School methodology, also recently embraced by the Ministry.

It is possible to envisage that existing social capital among the village poor—labor clubs in which tenant farmers are well represented, or women’s farming groups, for example—should be the basis for some of these kinds of experiments. A problem with crop-screening projects is how they would be chosen under NSAP’s envisaged procedures. Groups needing these innovations tend to be voiceless. But more generally, it is always difficult to get farmers to ask for something with an unknown value. Some smart capacity building might be needed among women’s and tenant farmer groups, and ring fencing of inputs to cover any such eventual requests. NaCSA should certainly liaise closely with the Ministry of Agriculture on the “nerica” initiative, and any similar pro-poor food-security interventions.

The needs of the poorest who quit the village and become footloose present a different kind of challenge. Meeting their needs requires, in general, progress towards a more dynamic and open agrarian opportunity structure. This is important not only to improve farming, but also for the modernization of the alluvial mining sector. Alluvial mining remains the main option for the most vulnerable young men spun off from the rural sector. But it pays only a starvation wage, and remains a breeding ground for millenarian discontent. The methods of mining are also wasteful and inefficient. A more productive agriculture and better wages in farming would cut the supply of cheap labor to alluvial mining that acts as a disincentive on investment in better and more mechanized production methods by mining supporters. Overhauling the rural opportunity structure is a task for decentralized government and the market, rather than for NSAP. Legal codes must respond to growing demands by young strangers and women for property rights. Counter to the argument that any major redistribution of land ownership would threaten disorder or undercut the rural basis of support for the ruling party, it should be explained that strangers probably stand to benefit as much from guaranteed tenancies as any shift in actual land ownership. Market places, storage and processing facilities, roads and micro-credit are crucial to an improved performance by the farming sector. Roads and market places require government action, although there is some scope for community-driven development in repair of village access roads.

Other requirements are probably best left to market forces as clearly envisaged in the concurrent World Bank/FAO sponsored agricultural sector review document. NSAP needs to be equally clear about where it should and where it should not intervene. Rural machinery, such as power saws or the milling gear used in *gari* (cassava meal) preparation, generally needs to be mobile over quite a large area to make money, and to be privately owned to ensure adequate maintenance and attention to depreciation and eventual replacement. A subsidized “village” (women’s group) machine (as has resulted from some CDD work by an international agency operating in the center of the country) is not a good idea, since it is unlikely to be sustainable, but meanwhile inhibits the likelihood of regular visits by commercial entrepreneurs owning such equipment.

It would be doubly unfortunate if developments of this sort were also to slam the door on returning ex-combatants. Parallel to the development with motorbike taxis, some ex-combatant gangs have begun to operate in rural areas using milling sets and chain saws. This type of activity was an important modality for rural self-reintegration by ex-combatants from the Biafran war in early 1970s Nigeria. Another promising development along these lines is the efforts being made by some ex-combatant groups to recover abandoned rice swamps. Swamp development has long been identified as important vent for surplus in rural Sierra Leone, but subsidized development schemes have tended to undermine the learning process. Many swamps were developed under donor projects, but abandoned when subsidies stopped. Yet swamps developed by farmers without subsidies, and in their own time, often over several generations, are in more-or-less permanent cultivation today. There is some scope to bring war-abandoned or mining-damaged swamps up to standard on the basis of best local knowledge. Groups will need to study why swamps failed, and redesign or rehabilitate them accordingly. They will need training, including business skills, basic equipment and tapered start-up support (cash for work or food in year one, half-rations in year two, nothing in year three). They will also need guaranteed short-hold tenancy agreements, perhaps handing back a swamp to its owners as soon as it is restored to full production and moving on to a new contract.

Vulnerability and marginality

From a distance, it seems all villagers are equally poor. There is no denying the lack of amenities in rural areas. Equally poor living conditions, however, mask considerable variation in vulnerability to external shocks (e.g., poor rains) or marginality (lack of social protections, as seen in the inability to control one's own labor or marriage prospects, or to extract emergency assistance). Some communities are disadvantaged as a group, due to poor resources and extreme isolation. Some far-flung villages in underpopulated Koinadugu District are notorious in this respect, but there are pockets of such isolation and deprivation throughout the country. NSAP rightly envisages responding to the needs of these hard to reach communities, irrespective of region. We visited one such community, Lalehun, Gaura Chiefdom, on the edge of the Gola Forest, unassisted by any agency since the war ended, and encountered villages even on main roads (e.g., in Tonko Limba chiefdom) where agencies "drove through, but never stopped.

There are also sharp variations in vulnerability and marginality within villages. The pattern is generally that male strangers and in-marrying wives are in a weaker position than those from land-owning lineages. Young wives from weaker lineages are more vulnerable than young wives from strong lineages. Irrespective of lineage, the labor of young men is exploited to make the local marriage alliances (the basis of lineage elders' power), and elders try and control young men through cases brought before customary courts. An older woman from a chiefly lineage, by contrast, may have almost as much protection as a male elder, and indeed some are so "un-marginal" that they enter village politics or even succeed in becoming Paramount Chiefs. By contrast, older people from weak lineages, whether male or female, sometimes struggle to stay alive, especially if they lack dependents to help in farming.

None of this variation resolves into clear and simple social status differences based on gender, age or local citizenship. The true differences are revealed only by painstaking social analysis. A problem with CDD is that donor agencies tend to have rather simplified perceptions of these variations. Too easily it is assumed, for example, that the vulnerability of women will be resolved by targeting aid to women and having female representation on committees, but the agents of this process at village level are likely to be women from powerful lineages. It might seem like a reform to have a woman as chair of the VDC, but it may not be if she is the sister of the chief, and working more in the interest of her lineage than of women more generally. At times, agencies become "hooked" on presumed successful examples of gender empowerment. Yet, in the cases described above, such initiatives sometimes mask a complex series of class, ethnic and gender-based power struggles, with (at the top) a reversal of the roles of women and men, rather than genuinely greater levels of equality and emancipation, and (at the base) villagers,

sometimes separated by an ethnic divide from the project management, ending up as little more than an exploited gender-based labor force.

These problems are, as we have tried to show, systemic. They cannot be quickly fixed by changes to the NSAP operational manual.¹⁵ Systemic solutions will, in the longer run, have to be found. The marginality of young women of marriageable age is probably best attacked by attention to improving the availability and quality basic education for girls. Basic education of girls is a right, and not to be defended alone by utilitarian arguments, but even so parents must be convinced. A village school offering decent basic education, especially where this provides skills that translate into rural life, allows parents more of a sliding scale of adjustment, and less of an all-or-nothing choice between education and access to a daughter's labor power through marriage alliance, than the current system of "posting" children to town.

Girls do not like the traditional system, but many settle to it when they have children. The young unmarried men, however, pose a tougher challenge. Demands made on their labor reduce the rather minimal stake they feel they have in rural society. They tend to get up and go. Since Durkheim, it is well known, sociologically, that young men are prone to high rates of risky behavior, or suicide, because they are not yet tightly bound by commitments to society (Durkheim 1952). This is where the nub of the problem of war lies. Kriger's (1992) study of peasant reactions to Zanu-PF's guerrilla war in Zimbabwe shows that lack of place within the rural community was a factor in high rates of recruitment to the guerrillas among unmarried youth (both boys and girls), whereas older groups in the farming community were non-committal about, or even hostile to, prospects of joining the movement. Similar considerations appear to be a factor in the adaptation of rural young people to the demands of the RUF in Sierra Leone. Thus, stabilizing young unmarried men in rural communities is a priority for the further consolidation of peace. As argued above, this will be achieved by prioritizing an open agrarian structure, and by urgent attention to a range of agro-technical issues.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution¹⁶

What are the main potential sources, and main risks, of continuing or future conflict? What capacity is there for community conflict resolution?

Potential sources of continuing conflict

Agreement is now emerging that conflicts of the kind experienced in Sierra Leone are fought by marginalized young people from rural areas lacking education and access to livelihood opportunities. This represents a departure from earlier claims that war was a product of urban drop-outs—an underclass of lumpens, according to Abdullah (1997) and Rashid (1997). The general process we identify in this study as causing marginalization of rural young people can be termed "agrarian involution," but not in regard to pressure on land (as in Geertz's famous study of involution in Java), rather in terms of pressure on labor supply. As more powerful lineages export larger numbers of young people into urban education, pressure grows on the young people who remain to provide more and more of the domestic services (via early marriage for young women) and agricultural and other labor (via bride service and community labor for young men). Young women and men from vulnerable groups, unable to progress via education or working on their own account, and finding themselves increasingly exploited, have few routes of escape other than commercial sex work in towns or laboring for pittance in the diamond fields. Enrolling in war provided temporary release for some, while entrapping many others.

¹⁵ Currently the authors are working on a summary presentation of the main findings of the current report linked to a short discussion of what NaCSA can and cannot do, and where it could have the greatest impact.

¹⁶ This section draws on material presented in a linked report on ex-combatant integration (Richards, Archibald, Bah and Vincent 2003)

The same causes of extreme vulnerability and marginalization remain. Demobilization has helped remove the gun from Sierra Leonean society. An approach targeted to commanders also helped break the central command of the RUF, and weaken the influence of movement ideologues. This has been at the cost, however, of intensifying the risks of marginalization for lower ranks and many young civilians associated, willy-nilly, with the rebel forces. RUF commanders collected the guns of their fighters and received chits for their reintegration package in return. These they were then supposed to distribute to the fighters in question. As was probably calculated, a number of commanders took the opportunity to ease their own reintegration into society by redistributing the chits. Some of these chits went to wives, others to nominees of chiefs in whose settlements the commanders wished to reintegrate, but for every wrongly directed chit (and false ex-combatant) there is an equivalent number of real fighters who have lost their chance to start a new life.

Some were strong or resourceful enough to find their own reintegration opportunities; some have gone back into diamond mining, others ride motorbike taxis on hire-purchase terms in provincial towns. But others have been less lucky. They have sunk into the rural underclass in an agrarian society undermined by a mercantilist regime interested more in feeding its followers from food aid than reorganizing and modernizing the countryside. New forms of agrarian servitude are beginning to emerge (Box 16).

BOX 16: The Story of a RUF Ex-Combatant

M. is a former RUF fighter. A Mende, he was abducted in the south of the country in one of the RUF's first sweeps through the region in 1991. As an illiterate teenage farm boy, he learned nothing of the movement's ideology. Most such recruits served as porters and laborers in RUF farms. M. spent most of the war as a member of the household of a leading fighter (Colonel J.). His "boss" taught him the rudiments of how to handle a weapon (how to "cock and fire"). M. ended the war with a semi-automatic in his possession, and was qualified to be registered for demobilization. Colonel J. collected M.'s weapon as required by NCDDR, but registered it in the name of a female companion instead. J. and his girlfriend joined a skills training program and later settled in the diamond fields, opening a small tailoring business. M. remained in Magburaka, a Temne town and a main RUF centre at the end of the war, but without any demobilization support he was soon on the verge of starvation. He moved to an off-road village about 5 miles north of Magburaka where a village head man took him on as his "stranger." The man fed him in return for farm labor. The chief had a large plantation of 22 acres, which he had established to educate his children, who were all away at school. The work was too much for the chief alone, so he was happy for M. to help him. When we met and interviewed M. (September 2003), he had to all intents and purposes slipped into a kind of modern-day *de facto* domestic slavery. He lived in an isolated farm hut on the plantation, 3 miles from the village. Speaking no Temne, he had few social contacts. He was reliant on his patron not only for food, but to pass on any information that might be gleaned from the radio about demobilization benefits. In a voice choked with emotion, he told us how he had been "robbed" of gun and benefits, was grateful to his current "boss" for rescuing him from starvation, but how, paid only in food and tips, he could see no way of ever reintegrating into society, except if he ran away to the diamond districts to dig, where God might grant him his portion. His ultimate aim was to find his family from whom he had been separated for 12 years. What he needed was a regular wage to be able to contemplate a trip back to the south to search. His father was dead, he knew, but he hoped his mother was still alive, since she had re-married an educated man and moved to Bo, the provincial centre of the south. (In fact she had died, but two sisters remained at the house off Sewa Road and were keen to welcome their brother). But to make the journey to Bo he needed not only the truck fare (about a week's wage at the national minimum, but far beyond his current resources) but also an amount several times greater to buy simple presents (cloth, soap, etc) through which affection and respect are conveyed in rural Sierra Leone. After 12 years of fighting for survival with the RUF, he was deeply uncertain whether would be viewed by his family as an outcast.

We have collected material similar to the experience of M. (Box 16) from young women, widows, associated with the RUF. Their men were either fighters who abandoned them or were killed in fighting, or civilians who were murdered. At the end of the war they find themselves far from home and with no support. The RUF recruited heavily in the east, along the Liberian border, but at the end of the war mainly controlled an enclave in the north of the country, stretching from Makeni to the Kono diamond fields. Whenever the RUF moved it took its, in effect, captive civil society with it. With children to

protect, but with no access to demobilization benefits, these RUF war widows have little choice but to opt for a kind of low-status marriage in the rural districts in which they currently find themselves. Village polygamists are more than happy to acquire a hard-working wife for free and with no lineage to protect her interests. If the escape route for the young men like M., stranded in rural servitude, is to revert to diamond digging, the escape for these young women is to come into Makeni and other main towns and engage in commercial sex work, in the hope that something better might one day open up. Those afraid of street life in town (as the women we talked to put it) are in effect condemned to a lifetime of domestic servitude, out of contact with their kin.

J. G., a woman leader in the RUF who had spent the years 1998-01 in the Makeni axis but is now returned to her powerful political family in Kailahun District, told us that the problem was widespread. Because of the way the RUF recruited and moved, there were now (she thought) thousands of displaced young people associated with the rebel movement, but fallen through the net of demobilization; Mende-speakers in Temne areas, Temne-speakers in Mende areas, and Sierra Leoneans scattered through rural Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. Without local languages and the protections of their families, even the educated ones are vulnerable to the kinds of processes of dependent incorporation just described. In a countryside short of the labor of young people, where those who possibly can have sent their own children away to school (in the case of the national elite to schools overseas), it is too tempting to see the labor of these young scatterlings as a providential gift. The village patron of a young man like M., or the village polygamist husbands of the war widows described above, have no incentive to trace families or pass on information about reintegration opportunities. In fact, J. G. knew that in some cases they were doing the opposite: feeding their ex-RUF wives or laborers the false information that it was too dangerous to contemplate a return home because young people tainted by the movement were supposedly being killed by lynch mobs on the street.

Conflict management

There are two issues in regard to conflict management: local capacity for informal dispute resolution and reform of the formal justice system.

A classic ethnographic analysis of informal village-level dispute resolution in north-western Liberia (Gibbs 1963) inspired Richard Danzig's (1973) seminal paper outlining a model for a decentralized, community-based system of criminal justice, which, according to Avruch and Black (1996), constituted a major early push towards the development of what, in the United States, is now known as alternative dispute resolution (ADR), a widespread "cultural and institutional adjunct of the American legal system" (p. 50). Much of what James Gibbs wrote about the Kpelle moot could be said of informal dispute resolution at family and village level throughout Sierra Leone. The agencies who push varieties of ADR (i.e., harmony-based dispute resolution, Nader 1991) as a contribution to post-war peace-strengthening in Sierra Leone are bringing home a form of social capital that the region has already exported. Since villagers are familiar with the modality, efforts to revive and strengthen it are likely to work rather well.

The single biggest example of the harmony approach to conflict resolution in post-war Sierra Leone is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but there have been other significant examples of non-adversarial conflict management, notably the extensive series of consultations on chiefdom governance coordinated by the DfID-funded Governance Reform Secretariat, and implemented by a number of mainly national NGOs, following a methodology developed by a British INGO, Conciliation Resources, active in Sierra Leone from 1996. The consultations were launched in 1999, prior to the restoration of chiefdom administration in accessible districts from September 2000. The basic methodology, a special two-day event involving facilitated discussions by different stakeholder groups (women and children, male youths, combatants, chiefs and elders), produced fascinating results, throwing much light on the causes of the war, even if some stakeholder groups (notably strangers) were excluded, and questions of follow-up and feedback have been neglected by the government and DfID.

A number of agencies, CARE and ActionAid among them, have built on this experience, and use a modified and expanded version of the methodology for a variety of purposes (e.g., to resolve community disputes and mobilize CDD). It is thus a pity that the exercise was not extended across the newly-accessible areas, to inform (for example) the work of the DfID-funded CRP, which did little, by the admission of its management, to analyze social problems prior to launching reconstruction activities intended to “dynamize” local social recovery.¹⁷ This raises important questions about the *lack* of donor and NGO stake in social analysis (and ultimately in the communities they assist) under the tyranny of project deadlines, expenditure targets and accounting requirements. The gap in life styles between urban and expatriate elites and village communities becomes an issue; those who assist do not have to live with the problem if things go wrong. In implementing NSAP, NaCSA should seek to advance upon the social capital for consultation and participatory analysis of social disputes resolution built up during the humanitarian interregnum, and revisit with government the issues of how to extend the approach to the newly accessible areas, and in general develop a more inter-active approach to dealing with the issues these consultations reveal.

ADR has been criticized because of its harmony model assumptions. Fundamental injustice needs to be confronted (Nader 1991). ADR is a useful low-cost way of resolving misunderstandings, or “bracketing” conflict too complex to tackle locally, but is no replacement for a functioning, effective and honest legal system. The reform of the justice sector is an issue on the governance reform agenda in Sierra Leone, but there are mixed signals. It seems that reform of customary law may take a back seat. The donors have different views. DfID supports chieftdom administration, including reform of customary courts. UNDP wants to reform and expand access to the magistrate court system (the next higher level).

There is a clear alternative. Sierra Leone is signatory to many human rights conventions incorporated into national law. Action under customary law, such as fines for woman damage, or the seizing of a widow’s property by the dead husband’s lineage, may be contrary to national law, and could be appealed as class actions by lawyers working in collaboration with rural development agencies. One such arrangement, involving a Kenema-based lawyer from the legal-aid agency LAWCLA working with the CARE rights-based food security project in central Sierra Leone, can be cited as an example of a collaboration that might prove more widely useful, pending longer-term reforms. This implies a twin approach from donors—continued support for the government justice sector review, while supporting agencies to engage more generally in rural justice issues. We suggest that ADR and the class action approach are both appropriate to address some of the conflicts that may arise under NSAP.¹⁸

¹⁷ Arthy (2003) mentions that CRP ran community reintegration workshops, but in regard to lack of formal linkage to the chieftdom governance reform program, notes that “facilitating dialogue between communities and chieftdom authorities [was]...not [an area] that CRP... set out to address in any uniform or systematic fashion” (p.7).

¹⁸ NaCSA should formulate a strategy for anticipating and resolving any community conflict arising from NSAP interventions. It may wish to do this by both adding to its in-house capacity in this area and by building cooperative links with other programs and agencies in Sierra Leone with experience of dispute resolution and conflict mitigation approaches

PART 4: CONCLUSIONS: KEY FINDINGS RELEVANT TO THE NATIONAL SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT

We divide these conclusions into three areas that are of a general nature addressed to stakeholders as a whole, and without attention to which NSAP is unlikely to succeed, and six areas that are specific, and addressed to NaCSA and the NSAP process directly.

Conclusion 1: The SA identifies an agrarian crisis as a major cause of rural poverty and conflict in Sierra Leone.

The agrarian crisis reflects an over-concentration by the state, over a long period, on the minerals sector and failure to attend to the conditions that would support and stimulate non-mineral rural livelihoods. Nor has there been any antidote at the level of politics (e.g., the emergence of any strong political party reflecting farmer interests). Where the government has invested in agriculture by borrowing to fund Integrated Agricultural Development Projects, much of the investment has been subject to capture by elites. There have been some reforms (e.g., the breaking of the state's monopoly over produce marketing), but inappropriate policies and ineffective institutions in other areas (e.g., education and skills training, justice, land reform, credit and rural transport) still inhibit agriculture's potential to be a powerhouse for youth self-employment. In general, a weak state lacks confidence in democratic or market solutions, evidenced in the desire to set up pyramid organizations for farmers. The government still wishes to be seen in a patrimonial light as the guarantor of national food security, if no longer through direct importation, through joint-venture partnerships and subsidized farm mechanization. It remains ambivalent about the need to address land tenure issues, reiterating the colonial doctrine of first-comer rights. An apparent disconnect between the perceptions of rural people and government on agrarian issues is exacerbated by the failure of parliamentarians, elected on a list system, to spend much time with rural constituents. The nature of the agrarian crisis remains poorly articulated by opposition parties and the press. The peace process reinforces this anti-agrarian bias, with its emphasis on the RUF (a movement founded through Libyan-backed student-led political intrigue) contrasting with lack of attention to the government-loyalist CDF, an agrarian counter-force comprising many young farmers, now disgruntled by their lack of opportunities and exclusion from demobilization programs through not bearing conventional arms.¹⁹

Conclusion 2: The agrarian crisis is institutional; the rights of land owners are over-protected and the rights of rural laborers under-protected.

Land and labor lie at the heart of the agrarian crisis. Some allege that to interfere with 19th century first-comer privilege would destabilize rural social structures. In our view, this is to prioritize the causes of the 1898 war of 1898 over the causes of the 1991 conflict. The right of first comers is not the crucial issue. Young people leave rural areas because they cannot clearly calculate the returns on investment of their only asset (their labor), due to the often arbitrary use of custom by elders to "tax" labor. A stranger will be given land for annual food-crop farming for a token payment only so long as he meets the customary expectations of landowners. In other words, access to land by mobile young people depends on conventions of good behavior, not solid economic arrangements. Instead of paying a rent agreed in advance, the migrant farmer may be expected to assist a landlord at times of weddings and funerals or in electoral contests, and certainly not to opposes his wishes during consultative meetings on community-driven development! Young men who speak their mind, or who try to evade local demands for bride-

¹⁹ The bias was first apparent in the Lome agreement, which focused on the RUF to the exclusion of the AFRC forces (mainly troublesome renegades from the government's own disbanded army). The bias has since been perpetuated by the decision of the demobilization agencies to work only with those surrendering conventional weapons. The CDF's figures for Kenema District (Richards et al. 2003) show modern weapons to have been much more common, in the hands of CDF fighters, in Kenema township and the diamond areas (notably Tongo Field) than in rural chiefdoms, even though some of the rural areas experienced a great deal of fighting and RUF damage. The marginalization of the rural CDF remains a sore point within the organization, which the government or donors have yet to address.

service and community labor, are subject to local litigation. Young women continue to find themselves pawns in a marriage game between local lineages; the average age of first marriage in the villages remains at mid-teenage. Those who break free are accused of immorality, and discriminated against in terms of educational opportunities. Because customary demands are essentially incalculable - and subject to inflation when land-owning families face difficulties - it is hard to make rational decisions about agro-technical investments, such as fertilizer or new crops. The innovative, entrepreneurial young migrant farmer is all too easily squeezed back into subsistence conformity. For some, the diamond fields or urban sex work seem the only escape. What is needed are transparent and legally enforceable land tenancy agreements, with rent replacing customary dues.²⁰ Currently, a number of such arrangements have emerged *ad hoc*, e.g., to support RUF ex-combatants opting for agricultural skills training as part of their reintegration package (in one case, a 25-year lease was arranged by a sympathetic Paramount Chief). Short-hold tenancies are already permissible under existing land-tenure legislation, so it can be argued that the key reform is not the land law itself, but supervision of local justice. The chiefdom reform consultations reveal a consistent pattern of abuse of local customary processes by court chairmen and clerks. These abuses are likely to continue while the training of officials is poor, salaries are paid irregularly, if at all, and inspection by government law officers remains perfunctory.

Conclusion 3: The agrarian crisis is technical; the rural opportunity structure for youth self-employment is weak, due to inadequate markets and infrastructure (especially poorly-maintained roads), lack of credit and training facilities, and inappropriate technology.

The necessary reforms are mainly matters for the current agricultural sector review, which inter alia addresses how to improve agricultural training, modify tenure systems, open up rural credit, promote a more appropriate technology policy for women and the poor, etc. The general orientation of the agricultural sector review is to support progress toward a market-oriented agriculture in Sierra Leone, and replace older practices in which a political leadership's capacity to "feed people" sustained a system of patronage and deference at the expense of one built on democratic values. The intended result is to open up better agricultural production opportunities for all comers, notably including those whose agricultural labor is currently subject to exploitation (young people, and young women and migrants in particular). The social assessment study supports the agricultural sector review by drawing attention to some specific areas where NSAP might support the kinds of changes just mentioned. NSAP is generally weak in conceptualizing agro-technical issues that might be supported by CDD. A list of possible areas of intervention includes farmer field schools for labor gangs, community-based experimentation with "nerica" rice, and swamp rehabilitation through training and funding ex-combatant labor groups.

Conclusion 4: There is often a lack of true social cohesion in rural communities in Sierra Leone to support a community-driven development approach. Community contributions levied in the form of labor, as envisaged under NSAP, will prove especially problematic.

Community-driven development is dominated by the more powerful lineages and depends on the exploitation of labor of young people with weaker social protections. The mixture is explosive where village elites collude in the misappropriation of funds for community development raised on the basis of a village labor contribution. This labor contribution comes disproportionately from younger people denied opportunities because of early marriage and lack of education. Children of chiefs and other powerful local actors tend to be elsewhere (pursuing an education, or in urban jobs) and thus not part of the community labor pool. The requirements for NSAP include intensive capacity building for project management committees, more representative membership of such committees, more honest and

²⁰ There is surprisingly little solid evidence of population pressure on land in Sierra Leone, despite predictions to this effect from the 1930s (Richards 1996). In part, this is because much of the land is being held "in trust" for sons and daughters who have migrated to the city or diamond fields. But this is why reform focused on guaranteed short-hold tenancies (rather than redistribution of ownership) will be helpful. It allows temporarily under-utilized land to be more effectively farmed by those currently willing to farm, without damaging its role as a long-term social security net for the urban poor.

transparent management procedures, with agreement of weaker as well as more powerful interest groups on how these procedures should work, and detailed negotiation with communities about the basis, in equity, of community contributions to NSAP projects. This will require very substantial capacity building at the community level. The idea that communities can in any straightforward way file a proposal request, turn it into a plan and then monitor the implementation, seems questionable, given what the social assessment reveals about the divided nature of rural communities. Much of NaCSA's work under NSAP will, in fact, be joint, intensive, and long-term learning with communities about how to forge cohesion and build social capital through resolving the manifold problems and disputes that become apparent only when a project is "approved." Without taking this open-ended, processual, learning-oriented, people-intensive, conflict-sensitive approach (and supporting it properly in terms of capacity-building resources), NaCSA risks creating a tokenistic approximation to CDD, which, in fact, will mask a return to "business as usual" (i.e., the unfortunate tendency, apparent in some current initiatives, to "dump" school buildings and other physical facilities in villages with little understanding of the tensions and divisions that prevented communities from maintaining these facilities in the first place, or that provoked some sons and daughters of the village to guide the RUF to destroy them).

Conclusion 5: The SA reveals extensive post-war change in social attitudes among more marginal groups, and procedures need to be put in place to monitor, analyze and respond to these changes.

A very important aspect of ARD as practiced under the humanitarian interregnum was the extent to which communities were open about and prepared to deal with internal tensions that had led to the war. It is a great pity that DfID and other donors lost interest in the chiefdom consultation exercise, and that the government has yet to pay the results sufficient serious attention. There is in-country capacity to extend the series to all chiefdoms in the newly accessible areas, and this should be a priority for NSAP. Indeed, in our view it is the logical opening to NSAP for all communities. Willingness to expose and confront *lack* of community social capital, and deal with unresolved grievances should be a basic pre-condition for a successful NSAP application. NaCSA, and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, into which it may eventually integrate, should develop considerable familiarity with and capacity in this kind of community conflict resolution, and enter into clear agreements with communities about follow-up work, whether in the context of NSAP, or through discussions about dealing with local grievances more generally.

NaCSA should monitor and understand some of the new forms of collective action crossing the rural-urban divide, apparent in initiatives such as the regional and national bike taxi renter unions, and apparent also among new rural service providers (chain saw gangs, gari making gangs, etc.). Efforts should be made to build upon this kind of horizontal social capital by opening up NSAP application procedures to groups organized on other than residential lines.

There should be on-going assessment of the problem of disappeared youth.²¹ What happens to the young people who leave the villages, or the ex-combatants who were marginalized from DDR? We need to know what sort of numbers are involved, their gender balance, how many have slipped into near-domestic slavery in rural areas (across the region, and not just in Sierra Leone), how many have returned to the diamond fields, under quite oppressive conditions of labor exploitation (it needs to be established if labor conditions are significantly worse than before the war), and how many lurk outside as members of the militia forces still operating in and around Liberia. If communities are rebuilt under NSAP, without including the disappeared youth in a more stable and committed relationship to the rural social structure, then it is easy to predict that the war must one day return and that the rural violence will in all probability be worse than before.

²¹ It may be important for NaCSA to retain a consultant to help with this monitoring activity, in taking over some of the remaining tasks of the NCDDR (closed from January 1, 2004).

Sierra Leone once had a good reputation for serious university-based social analysis, but the capacity has been dissipated by the war. Social analysis requires long-term, focused investigation, not a superficial examination of the records by consultants or advisors to donors with little in-depth knowledge or commitment to the country. In NSAP, NaCSA is undertaking some very fundamental experiments in social dynamics, with potentially very serious consequences if the processes are not carefully monitored and fully understood. The donors and government now need to rebuild academic capacity for social analysis as a long-term intellectual activity in Sierra Leone, protected by academic freedom. NaCSA, in turn, must develop as a learning organization, capable of responding both to messages from clients and communities through its commitment to participatory development approaches and to the kind of challenges likely to emerge from objective, data-driven social analysis.

Conclusion 6. CDD faces four main practical threats.

- Communities decide priorities undemocratically, or there is political partiality in the project selection process. Antidotes will include an appeals process, greater involvement of the political opposition and media in scrutinizing CDD (involving building capacity for such scrutiny), and a dynamic, inventive approach to participatory M&E.
- Old NGO fraud becomes new CBO fraud. This might become the case if there is uncontrolled and unchallenged involvement by the brokers who earlier facilitated the behind-the-scenes benefit sharing between NGO personnel and village elites. NaCSA will have to guard against strong pressures from powerful lineages and closed associations. The current rapid shift of the roadside signboard culture into “CBO” mode is a worrying sign that the brokers are ahead of the game.
- Village people do not know their rights, what to expect under NSAP, how to complain, or what to do when the complaints system fails to function, due to unresponsiveness by implementing parties, as in the CDF case described above. NaCSA should review and respond to some of the lessons of rights-based programming in Sierra Leone, as implemented by e.g., World Vision, ActionAid and CARE.
- There is a lack of basic capacity to handle direct community financing, including: low levels of literacy and numeracy, a poor or non-existent rural banking system (even some district HQ, e.g., Kailahun town, lacked a functioning bank at the time of fieldwork), and the need to rely upon elite and sometimes non-resident brokers to handle accounts. Capacity building should adopt a participatory approach, since community groups can devise checks and balances that work in the absence of literacy.

Conclusion 7. CDD will also be undermined by a failure to understand and guard against the main types of field-level fraud and corruption, and to understand these are institutional rather than cultural defects.

There is a pathology of survival. People have survived a difficult war in which many have behaved in ways they would not wish to have. Webs of kinship, societal obligation, and survivor guilt tend to perpetuate corrupt practices, or make it difficult for anyone to cast the first stone. However, it helps (as a prelude to better control) to talk about the main species of fraud in the neutral, analytical language of the new institutionalism, with its focus on solving free-rider problems, prisoner’s dilemma and the like. Many of these frauds recur due to lack of education and information, making a right to information a basic necessity for CDD. As information flow and communications improve, communities will then tend to mobilize to protest and prevent some of the major types of corrupt manipulation likely to occur in NSAP at field level. Five main village types of project fraud (in addition to outright theft, or the spread of malicious rumor to destabilize the honest) have been recurrently encountered over 25 years of fieldwork in rural Sierra Leone: (i) the partial or delayed delivery fraud: clients are given only part of what they are supposed to receive, but are forced or cajoled into signing as if all inputs had been delivered; (ii) collusion between brokers and implementers to overprice contracts, or divide part of the spoils; (iii) pyramid selling, where a cooperative project reinvests the collective earnings for rapid expansion, perhaps to impress a donor, or simply to “launder” profits and make them harder to trace, without the realization or approval of the mass membership; (iv) faking a large client base, e.g., by forging signatures and thumb

prints, or making bogus ID, to allow project staff access to “surplus” development funds for their own use—where nominal “loan recovery” is a functionality or success criterion, project staff are often smart enough to ensure the fake loans are repaid in a timely manner, the staff pocketing whatever they are able to make through commercial speculations; and (v) “taxation” of clients for “pre-registration,” to secure preferential access to inputs, or on (false) promises of assistance.

Conclusion 8: CDD implies that INGOs and national NGOs need to find new, specialized roles.

The idea of CDD was widely welcomed in rural communities, where war has generated more enthusiasm for transparency and democratic systems of accountability than some government spokespersons or NGOs tend to allow, but it was also clear that a new thinking is needed on the part of the agencies. Building a rights-based democratic culture in rural areas is a long-term process, threatened by the short-term perspectives of some donors and NGOs. The situation will be self-correcting to some extent, when the agencies with the shortest-term perspectives begin to withdraw, but change of attitude is also needed. NGOs are no longer “in charge.” Under NSAP, they become service providers to CDD. Also, the focus changes from commodity-handling to community capacity-building. This implies new partnership between INGOs and local NGOs which should reflect comparative advantage. INGOs have an advantage at the institutional level, i.e., in spreading best practice solutions from country to country. The local NGOs have a comparative advantage at the cultural level—i.e., understanding the complex blending of sacred and profane elements through which rural collective action is achieved.

Conclusion 9. Collective action is underpinned by the sacred-profane distinction. Agencies need (at least) to adopt a do no harm approach based on informed understanding of this distinction in a Sierra Leonean cultural context, especially in regard to the sodalities.

It is probably unrealistic to expect utilitarians to readily embrace the Durkheimian perspective that all social capital is underpinned by a categorical division between the sacred and profane through which the domain of the social is consolidated and protected (Durkheim 1912), and thus to see the necessity to invest in the *sacralization* of CDD processes (even though in truth neo-liberal donors work hard to render the market sacred). But a useful model in this regard is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Here, donors pay for truth, whereas success appears to be based on setting up opportunities to enact rituals of reconciliation (Tim Kelsall, personal communication). There is one area of rural activity where sacralization is already built in. Sodalities (it has been argued) represent a major if far from trouble-free body of social capital to have survived the war in rural Sierra Leone. Indeed, the emergence of the CDF as an organization inclusive of a large percentage of younger males over large parts of the rural interior suggests a major increment in this form of social capital. To work constructively with the sodalities (not excluding elements of the former RUF now oriented toward agrarian rehabilitation) is a major challenge for CDD. But it will be necessary to ensure that donors and INGOs have enough cultural knowledge not to trample on local efforts to reinforce collective values through initiation and other forms of ritual action. Those local NGOs experienced at conflict mapping, ARD, and participatory M&E are probably best placed to cultivate this perspective, and thus become direct partners of NaCSA in community capacity building efforts aimed at the sodalities.

A final comment: Investing in social capital for the new Sierra Leone

The above analysis has arrived at the conclusion that so long as major institutional reforms remain unaddressed, Sierra Leonean rural communities will continue to form social capital in ways that, in many cases, serves to reproduce poverty and disadvantage. In what ways might donors and government invest in rural social capital to break this vicious cycle and replace it with a virtuous cycle of poverty alleviation? The issue is not that rural Sierra Leoneans lack social capital, and that it has to be formed from nothing, but that “poor people’s access to their own assets is not protected by rights” and that this makes it “practically impossible for them to borrow, invest or accumulate” (de Gaay Fortman 2002, p. 33). Investment in strengthening the rights of the poor thus becomes a crucial issue. As we have pointed out, reform of local law and administration of justice are important dimensions, but in addition, the rural

poor need daily experience in exercising their rights. They need opportunities to learn what de Gaay Fortman calls “legal literacy,” the capacity to understand what the law offers. This skill will not be shaped in school, but through involvement in making claims or managing resources. Nor should law in this context be limited to “positive law” (codified rights and entitlements). The poor also derive their “legal literacy” from direct involvement in exercising command over “actual goods and services” (de Gaay Fortman 2002, p.28). Two investment channels become apparent. The first would be donor support for legal aid agencies willing to work in rural development and take donor funded class action cases on behalf of the poor. The second would be (as NSAP correctly envisages) involvement of the rural poor in the running of basic services. This returns us to the issue of the VDC. Village-level management structures must be developed on more systematically inclusive lines. Communities need to have facilitated discussions on locally-appropriate categorizations of vulnerability and poverty, and then (to qualify for NSAP assistance) be able to demonstrate that village decision-making and management processes are sufficiently inclusive not just of women and youth, but of specific categories of the disadvantaged (the chronically indebted, nursing mothers, households vulnerable to experiencing recurrent seasonal stress, households without land rights, the handicapped). There will also be a need to mentor actual village-level management processes. This implies NaCSA becoming involved with partners (including university social scientists and agencies experienced in conflict management) in developing cost-effective capacity-building and village support processes. Rural development institutes will need to generalize some of the lessons of NSAP in this regard, including what to do when things go wrong, and to develop training materials and short courses, for both trainers and village management groups. Having an overt development agenda should not be the only basis for this kind of skill formation. The rural sodalities and other local voluntary agencies should also be included. It will make sense, for example, to revive the idea of involving the Sande Society in the promotion women’s sexual and reproductive health (and HIV/AIDS awareness, in particular). Similar use might be made of CDF social capital for agricultural development. We repeat the point that a village institution standing out above all others in regard to forming the skills of the poor to manage their own resources is the school parents association, because of its capacity to engage the commitment and interest of younger people, including village women of childbearing age. The government is committed to a school in every administrative section. It follows that a program to shape and support such associations might be the single most inclusive vehicle for strengthening the fundamental freedoms and basic entitlements of the rural poor in the new democratic Sierra Leone. The possibility to promote this management vehicle should be a focus for debate both within NaCSA and in the on-going governance decentralization exercise

Annex 1: Communities Visited, Organizations Consulted and Main Contact Persons (April-September 2003)

National Commission for Social Action: on various occasions including briefing meetings, discussion of interim findings, discussion and comments on draft report (Kanjah Sesay, Syl Fannah, Saidu Conton Sesay, Sidi Bah, Tony Curren, Gary Walker, and others).

Other government organizations: PASCO (Dr Braima Josiah), NCDDR (Field Staff, Makeni), Ministry of Agriculture (Director of Agriculture, Makeni). Statistician General (Professor Bobor Kandeh), Ministry of Education (The Hon. Minister [Dr. Alpha Wurie], and senior civil servants).

International organizations: UNDP (Emanuel Gaima, Sylvia Fletcher), CARE (Nick Webber, Kelly Stevenson, Tiziana Oliva, Samuel Mokuwa, Francis Musa, John Pessima), DfID (Ian Stewart, Emma Morley).

Gallinas Peri Chiefdom, Pujehun District, 27th April 2003 (Bumpe and Blama, Ahmadu Rogers, Ansumana Lebbie [Section Chief], Alpha Bilee [town chief], Mohamed Tomba Massaquoi [chief's spokesman], PC I. B. Kamara [interviewed in Bo, 25th April] and others).

Barrie Chiefdom, Pujehun District, 27th April (Potoru): a group of about 20 people (men and women) in the Chief's Bari.

Gaura Chiefdom, Kenema District, 28th April 2003 (Joru: meeting of about 30 people - mainly men, including the Regent Chief - in the Court Bari; Lalehun Tawoveihun: meeting of about 60 people with women and youths well represented in the discussions), plus various informal meetings during house-to-house visits in the town and later in Lalehun Barracks (Bene Marah and many others).

Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Kenema District, 29th April 2003 (Tokpombu, Tongo Field: Lansana Charles [town chief], Madam Nancy [leader of Lower Bambara Women' Assn.] and others; Panguma: PC Alimamy Moiwai Fama and others).

Bo Town, Bo District, 30th April, Bo Town Bike Renters Assn. Meeting with 15 members of the executive.

Bramaia Chiefdom, Kambia District, 2nd May 2003 (Kukuna: meeting with PC Arafan Mumini II and elders, court bari).

Tonko Limba Chiefdom, Kambia District, 2nd May (Mabande, meeting with regent of PC [his wife Margaret], Alhaji Alimamy Bangura, Koba Bangura, Saidu Bangura [elders]).

Kambia Town, 2nd May, ActionAid office, Braima Salu and staff. Various informal meetings with traders waiting for transport to Conakry.

Rokupr, 3rd May, Rice Research Station compound, interview with Amara Kamara.

Freetown, Bank of Sierra Leone Compound, 7th May. Stakeholder Workshop [see workshop report for attendance list].

Niawa Lenga Chiefdom, Bo District, 27th June 2003 (Tondoya, interview with court chairman in his farm)

Kamajei Chiefdom, Moyamba District, 28th June 2003 (Mogbuama, interviews with [former] youth leader, Charles Konjo and Albert Charles, and various ex-CDF fighters, and later with [current] youth leader, Hamed Koroma en route to Fala junction, plus many informal conversations in and around the town, including visit to Ngiyema Quarter).

Bo Town, Bo District, 29th June 2003 (Methodist Primary School, Mission Road, evening meeting with representatives of various craft association, including Isata Kallon, chairwoman of the Bo Gari sellers association, Anthony Kontibi, Assistant Coordinator of the Bo Independent Youth Forum, Vandi Sama, secretary of the Cassette Sellers Association, etc.).

Bo Town, Bo District, 29th June 2003 (the “ghetto” at Maxwell Khobe Motor Park, meeting with the “ghetto” boss [Boss Conteh] and various male and female residents who wished to remain anonymous).

Kailahun Town, Kailahun District, 30th June-1st July 2003 (meeting with 15 ex-RUF fighters [including two women] at CBAN [two occasions], discussions with Jemba Ngobeh [ex-RUF], meeting with PC Mohamed Banya, meeting with the District Officer [Sulaiman S Koroma] and staff.)

Luawa Chiefdom Kailahun District, 2nd July 2003 (Sandeyalu village, various conversations with villagers, chairs of ex-RUF and ex-CDF groups [Kenei Braima, Senesie Braima] and town chief [Karimu Foyo Braima]; Gbalahun village [Mustapha Konneh, ex-RUF combatant and others], Gbayama village, Kissi Teng Chiefdom, various informal discussions).

Kailahun Town, Kailahun District, 3rd July 2003 (Victor Lahai, NaCSA, Peter Ganda, NSAP contact person).

Malema Chiefdom, Kailahun District, 3rd July 2003 (Kuiva, Abu Jaward, ex-RSLMF/AFRC irregular).

Lower Bambara Chiefdom, Kenema District, 4th July 2003 (Tongo Field: staff of GTZ agricultural skills training center, Braima Bangali (ex-RUF), Town Chief of Kpalima [Braima Amara Dugba]).

Small Gbo Chiefdom, Kenema District, 5th July 2003 (Boajibu, outlying villages, forest: ex-RUF organizers of Ndadabu Agricultural Project, chain-saw gang, “Big Daddy” and “Isaac.”

Makeni Town, Bombali District, 8th July 2003 (Sheku Fofana, NCDDR monitoring officer, Peter Bundu, NaCSA provincial coordinator, Numinous Kargbo, manager of the Commoners Agricultural and Rural Development Project [plus staff]).

Safroko Limba Chiefdom, Bombali District, 9th July 2003 (Kapethe village, Mary Kanu, Frances Conteh, Rosaline Sesay, participants in the CARDA women’s groundnut project, joined later by John Sesay).

Biriwa Limba Chiefdom, Bombali District, 9th July 2003 (Bumban, acting chief and various elders and senior women).

Kholifa Mabang Chiefdom, 11th July 2003: attendance at NaCSA chiefdom briefing on NSAP.

Marampa Chiefdom (Lunsar), Bombali Chiefdom (Makeni) and Wara Wara Limba/Sengbeh chiefdoms (Kabala and outlying villages), 29th-30th August (Paramount Chief and others, Lunsar, CARDA, Makeni, Koinadugu Women’s Vegetable Project, Kabala).

Valunia Chiefdom, Bo District, 4th September 2003 (Boamahun village, Mongheri village: ex-CDF fighters and elders [preferring not to be named], Paramount Chief [James Vonjoe] and others)

Kamajei Chiefdom, Moyamba District, 5th September 2003 (Mogbuama, meeting with Section Chief [Joe Harding] and youth groups, including ex-CDF fighters; Senehun [Bandajuma Section], interviews with woman leader [Iye Tarawali], and ex-combatants).

Bumpeh Chiefdom, Bo District, 5th September 2003 (Bumpeh town, meeting with PC J. C. Kposowa, about NSAP application guidelines).

Kenema Town, 6th September 2003 (meeting with Arthur Koroma [district administrator for CDF] and Ishmael Koroma [former battalion commander, Kenema District CDF]).

Kenema Town 6-7th September 2003 (various meetings with female ex-RUF fighters, executive of Eastern Bike Renters Assn [Tamba Momoh, Bismarck Vandi].

Makeni Town, 10th September 2003 (Sheku Sesay, Virtual Technology for Computer Training).

Bombali District, 11th September 2003 (Makama Three, a new village for amputees and war disabled, interviews with Alimamy Kamara, Adama Koroma and others).

Kholifa Rhowalla Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, 12th September 2003 (Ropol Junction, Sheriff Parker and staff of Bansal Agricultural Project [ex-RUF])

Kholifa Rhowalla Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, 12th September 2003 (Mathembere village, Pa Kapr Loya, asst. section chief and others).

Kunike Barina Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, 12th September 2003 (Makali village, a group of c. 80 ex-combatants).

Makeni Town, 13th September 2003 (interviews with six ex-RUF female commercial sex workers at 23 Lady's Mile; interview with Alice Pyne, ex-RUF female signals technician)

Kholifa Rhowalla Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, 13th September 2003 (Mathembere village, the simbek of Pa Kapr Loya, interview with Mohamed Foday, RUF ex-combatant farm laborer).

Makeni Town, 14th September 2003 (interview with Lamna Kamara, asst. secretary of the Bombali Bike Renters Assn.).

Bombali District, 14th September 2003 (Masongbo Amputee/War Wounded Camp, interview with group led by Saidu Mansaray [vice chairman] and Iye Bundu Barrie [female chair]).

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