



# SIERRA LEONE

# COUNTRY REPORT

## ON CONJUGAL SLAVERY IN WAR AND CONFLICT

Compiled by the Conjugal  
Slavery in War SSHRC-  
funded partnership

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This country report on Sierra Leone is written in collaboration with *Women's Forum Sierra Leone* and the *Conjugal Slavery in War<sup>1</sup>* partnership project. This report works to amplify and disseminate knowledge concerned with conjugal slavery in conflict situations, specifically in Sierra Leone. It succinctly outlines and privileges the experiences and voices of Sierra Leonean women abducted and forced into 'marriages' with rebel soldiers and commanders while in captivity. This concise report includes content from in-depth interviews conducted by Women's Forum in 2013 across various communities in the country.

By centering the voices and words of the respondents, this report contributes a better and more robust understanding of how conjugal slavery is understood within Sierra Leone across time, space and place.

In addition, the distinctive impact of this report supports victim-survivor findings and grounds their perspectives and positions around reparations and their ongoing needs to provide concrete findings on how to move forward regarding conjugal slavery in conflict affected communities in Sierra Leone.

All photos provided by the CSiW Project.

Title page: Photo by Karlee Sapoznik, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2011.

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*Figure 1. Photo by Karlee Sapoznik, Sierra Leone, 2011.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Brief background**

The civil war in Sierra Leone started in the Eastern part of the country in a small town called Bomaru in March 1991. There were numerous underlying causes for the war, including (but not limited to) intersecting issues of ethnic tensions, corruption, poor governance, and a collapsing of the colonial legacies that enforced 'law and order'<sup>2</sup>. However, the immediate catalyst of the war was the clash between government soldiers and rebels along the Liberian border.

The conflict saw numerous warring factions, including rebels from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (Liberia), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Burkina Faso), in addition to the Sierra Leone Army, and civil defense forces like the Donsos, the Kamajors, the Tamaboros and others. The war affected countless civilians, particularly girls and women many of whom were sexually assaulted and forced into marriage.

In July 1999, the Lome Peace Agreement was brokered between the rebels and the Sierra Leone government. It took three years to disarm 45,000 fighters, which signaled the end of the over ten year civil war<sup>3</sup>. In January 2002, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah officially declared the war over. Subsequently and through United Nations (UN) intervention, the government of Sierra Leone and the UN worked towards setting up a war crimes court<sup>4</sup>.

## **1.2 Legal Context**

After the peace agreement, the Sierra Leone Parliament passed the Truth and Reconciliation Act in 2000 following consultations with civil society groups and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as a transitional justice mechanism to foster national reconciliation and healing in Sierra Leone after the war. The TRC was inaugurated in July 2002, but research and investigations did not begin until April 2003.<sup>5</sup> The initiative provided an opportunity for the victim-survivors, perpetrators and witnesses of the war to share their experiences. The resulting TRC document is a historical record of what happened during the conflict.

It is estimated that 250,000 women and girls experienced sexual and gender-based violence during the civil war.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the TRC put forward recommendations on how the lives of women can be improved through legal, political, social and economic reforms (see dedicated Recommendations Chapter in Vol. Two of TRC Report). These recommendations laid the basis for various reforms relating to the status of women after the war.

Furthermore, a UN Trust Fund, managed by UN Women was set up with the goal to prevent gender-based violence and provide assistance to victims. The sum of USD \$999,999 was allocated under this fund in 2010 for two years (2010-2012) to provide 650 victims of sexual violence with skills training based on their prioritized needs.

## **1.3 National, hybrid and international proceedings**

In Sierra Leone, victim-survivors of sexual violence were one of the five categories considered by the reparations program. The other categories included: war widows, amputees, children/orphans and the war wounded.

The reparations program was implemented late in 2009, well after the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) program had ended. The program was launched in response to one of the provisions of the Lome Peace Agreement. This stipulated that the Government of Sierra Leone (with the endorsement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)) provides reparations for the war victims.

The Reparations Directorate of the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) embarked upon registration of victim-survivors, followed by the full implementation of the program. The initial funding of USD \$3,000,000 was donated by the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

In total, 3,602 victim-survivors of sexual violence registered for the program. Others who did not meet the deadline for registration did not benefit from the program.

#### **1.4 International Law on Forced Marriage as a Crime Against Humanity**

Given the specificities of the Sierra Leonean civil war context and the shift in legal precedent set surrounding sexual crimes during and after war, it is imperative to discuss international law on forced marriage as a crime against humanity in this report.

The Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) was created by UN Security Council Resolution 1315 in August 2000, and the court was established in 2002 through an agreement between the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone. The court, set up as a hybrid tribunal, was to prosecute “those bearing the greatest responsibility” for past human rights violations, covering crimes dating back to 1996.<sup>7</sup> In 2008, the Appeals Chamber of the Special Court of Sierra Leone found “forced marriage” to be a new crime against humanity, distinct from the crime of sexual slavery.<sup>8</sup> As a result, those deemed most responsible for crimes against humanity, and war crimes such as rape, sexual slavery, and other offences were prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, as a result of a collaborative initiative with the Government of Sierra Leone and the UN, The Residual Special Court of Sierra Leone (RSCSL) was established. This court took over the operations of the Special Court of Sierra Leone and began to oversee the remaining legal obligations of the SCSL. It is now in charge of protecting victim-survivors, controlling the enforcement of sentences, in addition to managing its predecessor’s archives.<sup>9</sup>

Over the years, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) have recognized a range of acts and omissions as crimes against humanity, of “other inhumane acts”. Some of the acts recognised as crimes against humanity of “other inhumane acts” include: sexual violence to a dead woman’s body;<sup>10</sup> sexual violence;<sup>11</sup> “mutilation and other types of severe bodily harm, beatings and other acts of violence”<sup>12</sup> and, more recently, forced marriage by the SCSL in *Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara & Kanu (AFRC case)*<sup>13</sup> and *Prosecutor v. Sesay, Kallon & Gbao (RUF case)*.<sup>14</sup>

The acknowledgment in international law that forced marriage was a prosecutable offence was brought about by the recognition that ‘marriage’ could be utilised as a means of enslavement.<sup>15</sup> Thus the first prescription of marriage in international law took place sixty years ago via the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery.<sup>16</sup> That instrument, under Article 2, requires States Parties to “prescribe, where appropriate suitable minimum ages of marriage, to encourage the use of facilities whereby the consent of both parties to a marriage may be

freely expressed in the presence of a competent civil or religious authority, and to encourage the registration of marriages.”<sup>17</sup>

Forced marriage was characterised and prosecuted before the SCSL as a distinct crime encapsulating a variety of both sexual and non-sexual acts which in themselves are criminal and may be regarded as crimes against humanity. Some of the distinct components of forced marriage are sexual slavery, enslavement, forced labour, rape and forced pregnancy committed in a systematic and/ or widespread manner. The Rome Statute of the ICC, like the statutes of previous international criminal tribunals and courts, has not specifically criminalized forced marriage but in several of the cases before the ICC, there have been reports of forcible abduction, continued rape, forced domestic chores and the imposition of marital status on women and young girls. In each of the cases of *Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo (Lubanga’s case)*<sup>18</sup>, *Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga (Katanga’s case)*<sup>19</sup> and *Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen (Dominic Ongwen’s case)*<sup>20</sup>. These serve as evidence of the practice of forced marriage presented before the ICC.



*Figure 2. Freetown, Sierra Leone. Photo by Annie Bunting, 2011.*

## **2 OVERVIEW AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

### **2.1 Number, date and location of interviews**

In 2013, more than 40 female victim-survivors of sexual violence during the war were interviewed in four locations: Bo, Matru Jong, Kenema and, Kailahun. A large majority of the interviews were conducted in either Krio or Mende and, later translated into English and transcribed.

The interviews were conducted in a quiet place on a one-on-one basis. Confidentiality was maintained in all cases, and participants were assured of this during the preliminary meeting. Each of them completed a written consent form, and in cases involving illiterate participants, the forms were completed on their behalf in the presence of credible witnesses.

## **2.2 Demographics of participants**

It is pivotal to note that the research was conducted eleven years after the war ended in 2002. A significant number of the participants (65 per cent) were between the ages of 30 to 39, 20 per cent were between 25 and 30 years of age and, the remaining roughly 15 per cent were over the age of 40. Participants in the second group (ages 25-30) were quite young when the war broke out, and many of them could not state exactly at what age they were abducted, raped by and/or “married” to the rebels.

## **2.3 Other observations about the interviews**

Time in captivity for all participants ranged from two months to eleven years. A few of the participants escaped from the rebels shortly after their abduction while others stayed with them until the end of the war. The majority of the respondents became pregnant in captivity and gave birth to children in the bush<sup>21</sup>. However, a few (approximately 10 per cent) did not become pregnant and additionally another 10 per cent had miscarriages. In one case, a rebel who impregnated a woman abandoned her, and she received care from an older woman in a nearby village. Another woman gave birth in the rebel camp but managed to escape with the baby. The major findings from these interviews will be discussed below.



*Figure 3. Aberdeen, Sierra Leone. Photo by Karlee Sapoznik, 2011..*

### **3 KEY FINDINGS**

This section contains key findings of the research.

The key thematic findings from the interviews were:

- φ Forced marriage as a tactic
- φ Conditions while in captivity
- φ Sexual violence
- φ Role of women
- φ Experiences after the war

### 3.1 Forced marriage as a tactic

The participants reported traumatic experiences with the rebels while in captivity. They state that their captors promised them safety during their sudden abduction, but they were nonetheless raped immediately after their capture. The interviewees detail forced sexual acts with some discussing their experiences of being coerced into serving as 'wives' to the rebels.

A 31-year old victim-survivor details her earlier experiences with the rebels:

*"After virginating<sup>22</sup> me, one of them took me as his wife." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

While some senior rebels were assigned wives, others were handpicked for the commanders and, in some cases, rebels selected women as their wives immediately after they were abducted. Some of these accounts are described below.

*"The rebels kept saying "you are my wife", we own you now." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*"A rebel approached me and said I was to be his wife." (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

*"He said you are my wife from today" (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*"He was very rough and had no pity for me. He said to me "come along with me, you are my wife." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*"Yes, one rebel assigned himself to me. I was forced to have sex with the rebel who had made me his wife." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

### 3.2 Conditions while in captivity

Participants reported inhumane treatment while in the bush. They were beaten, abused sexually and verbally, and often threatened with physical violence. The women said they were always afraid and lonely. They suffered from stress, malnourishment and exposure to the elements. These accounts describe the mistreatment and violence experienced:

*"Some women were treated with more respect than others. Some were taken as wives; others were used as thieves to join them on their raids. Others were maltreated. The rebels demanded sex always from us." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“Each one was invited [to] have a go. They said ‘you, I am going to marry you, take you to my village. I am in charge of you. You will have children for me.’” (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

Furthermore, this particular participant also discussed her experiences while pregnant: “I became pregnant and the rebel said ‘I will kill you if the child does not resemble me.’” (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)

In addition to experiencing emotional and sexual violence, the women were expected to cook, fetch wood and water, and act as porters for long distances. One interviewee briefly discussed this. “Some served as porters, sex slaves or ordered to go with them on raids.” (Interview, Matru, 2013)

The participants discussed numerous escape attempts that many embarked on, as well as issues with lack of consent from being in violent and forced unions. A 37-year old interviewee explains her experiences: “I was also thinking about the best plan of escape, I was also annoyed because the rebel did not ask my consent to be his wife.” (Interview, Matru, 2013)

Another participant discussed the consequence of escaping: “I was assigned to the rebel who abducted me. I tried to escape. I was caught and beaten brutally by the rebels.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)

Other participants corroborated these experiences as well:

*“I was made to perform all duties of a wife even though the rebel did not ask my consent.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*“I was not happy to be in a forced union. I knew that marriage matters were to be discussed among families and the consent of the woman was to be sought. Since this not happen. I felt really annoyed. But I had no alternative but to agree to the rebel’s order.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

### **3.3 Sexual violence**

In the Sierra Leonean context, sexual violence against women and girls was committed by rebels to terrorize communities. The rebels, often under the influence of drugs and alcohol, wreaked havoc on their captives. Forced marriage as discussed above is a form of violence experienced by girls and women, but it was not the only type of violence encountered. It is imperative to showcase and include the variance in sexual violence experienced and detailed by respondents.

Some interviewees describe their experiences with sexual violence:

*"I was used as a sex slave even though I was a suckling mother." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*"Six of them raped me." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*"I was forced to have sex with him whenever he wanted." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

One participant was raped by three men and became pregnant. She details her experiences:

*"I became unconscious as a result of the rape incident. There was no medicine; I was almost at the point of death. Only God saved me." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

Interviewees who were not forced into unions or to be 'wives', also experienced sexual violence:

*"No individual rebel took me as his wife. All of them had access to me." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*"I had only one friend amongst the women; she died during childbirth because of the strains of being over-sexed." (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

One participant who was raped immediately after capture discussed in detail her experiences of 'excessive sex':

*"I was not assigned to a particular rebel. All of them raped me. I was their sex slave. I was also [a] victim of excessive sex. The rebel used threatening remarks on me; he said, "If you attempt to escape, I will [shoot] you." (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

### **3.4 Role of women**

The mistreatment of women in captivity has been discussed in this report but it is important to explicitly include the various role of women as stated by the interviewees. Many of the participants reported variance in treatment between women. The hierarchy outlined the most respect being given to the wives of commanders, women who had joined the rank of the rebels on their own volition, as well as those who acted as combatants. The least respect was given to the women and girls who were used as sex slaves. A 37-year old participant reported this:

*“Women played a variety of roles. Some of them were taken along with the rebels on their raids. Some women seemed happy to be with them as they were benefiting from the booty.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

Other interviewees also discussed the variance in treatment of women in their respective camps:

*“The rebels determined the roles of women from time to time.... Some women were treated with more respect, especially those who were commanders’ wives.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“Some women were treated with more respect, especially the wives of commanders. They were known as ‘Big Sisies’.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

This is an important finding as it showcases that not all women were treated the same and women had some relative power and supports other literature that also corroborates this finding.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.5 Experiences after the war**

All of the women reported repeated sexual abuse. The frequency of this abuse led to pregnancies, some miscarriages, and childbirth in the bush. Respondents reported lingering physical and psychological pains and societal hardships from these experiences:

*“I had no means of sustenance initially; I also had strong emotional feelings about why all of this had happened to me.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“[I] plead with NaCSA [National Commission for Social Action] to continue assisting me as I have no husband. My condition (injuries sustained during wartime rape) has made men to shy away from me.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*“As a result (of rape) I had a miscarriage. I am not happy because I have no child.” (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

In addition to the systematic violence the victims suffered in the rebel camps, some also underwent other forms of violence from their own relations upon their return. When they returned to their communities, the women were stigmatized and rejected. Some of the women reported being rejected by their families due to their stay with the rebels or because of their health status. They said they were called names such as “rebel wives” and were ostracized. In these circumstances, some resorted to transactional sex to survive. Some of the interviewees discuss their experiences dealing with rejection and stigma:

*“Other people in the community regarded me as a rebel and made some unsavory comments about me.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“My mother was happy to see me once more. However, other people in the village snubbed me.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“Some victims are often stigmatized. They don’t feel good about this.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“My family regarded me as a rebel. I was marginalized. They snubbed me and I did not feel good about this.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*“I am regarded as a ‘rebel wife’ and this hinders my self-development.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

The participants in this study did not make any references to living with their ‘rebel husbands’ upon their return to their towns or villages. However, some perpetrators were living in the same communities as their former victims:

*“I need assistance for educating my child who has no father... I see some of the commanders. I feel bad anytime I see them.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*“He pleaded with me not to inform people about his misdeeds in the bush.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

The women did, however, share that the children they bore in the bush were still with them. They reported cases of difficult behaviour with these children, who are now young adults, and appealed for help in dealing with them.



#### 4 REPARATIONS: NEEDS OF SURVIVORS

Initial support for the victim-survivors included medical intervention, including VVF (vesicovaginal fistula) surgery, cash donation in the amount of \$100 dollars (Le 300,000) per person and psychosocial counseling.

Local NGOs and skills training institutions conducted skill training which lasted between three to six months. Participants received a stipend of \$40 a month during the training and courses were offered in tie dyeing, soap making, tailoring, and computers. At the end of the training, participants were given a micro grant of \$500 and a toolkit worth \$60.

The remaining victim-survivors have not received skills training due to the challenge of mobilizing additional funds.

Half of the participants contacted during this research have received skills training in addition to the initial \$100 grant. Another 25 per cent were registered but had no skills training, while the remaining 25 per cent did not register for the program and did not

benefit from it. Training was limited due to funding restrictions with money running out before all survivors had a chance to participate.

Many survivors of sexual violence did not register, and as such were ineligible for support packages available through NaCSA. Reasons for not registering were numerous and included a lack of belief that there would be tangible benefits, missing the deadline<sup>24</sup>, not knowing about the program, or not wanting to disclose experiences.

#### **4.1 Healthcare and Psychosocial Support**

Initial assistance and subsequent reparations programs made it possible for participants to access health care and psychosocial support as well as indirect support for children's education as the orphans and children formed another category of beneficiaries. Although all children were categorized under the Children and Orphan category, the special needs of children born in the bush were not recognized, and as such their children did not receive special recognition or assistance. This was confusing to mothers as these children were specifically asked about and referenced during the registration process.

Some of the women still have enduring health concerns such as stomachaches and mental health issues as a result of the trauma they experienced during the war. At the time of the program, insufficient attention was given to these lingering problems, which have now been compounded by the lack of basic facilities and services like housing and medical care on a longer-term basis.

Some of the respondents discuss this in more detail:

*"I don't think life is going on well with me because I don't have anyone to care for me." (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*"Some of us still need medical attention as we have lingering ailments as a result of our experiences during the war." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

Furthermore, although many of the women's children received initial support, some of these children have grown into young adults who exhibit signs of mental illness. These concerns must be addressed.

The low socio-economic status of these victim-survivors is a matter of grave concern as it is hindering their integration in their communities. In fact, they see their continued impoverishment as a sign that they have not received justice from the state.

In terms of acknowledgement of the harms they suffered, victim-survivors' feelings were assuaged partially through the psychosocial sessions organized for them. However, the interviews we conducted suggest there is a need for long-term psychosocial support, as a sufficient number of participants still bear physical and psychological scars from their traumatic experiences during the war.

At the national level, the President of Sierra Leone delivered a public apology in 2010 to the women of Sierra Leone for all the harms done to them during the war. The apology, delivered during International Women's Day celebrations, was in accordance with one of the provisions of the TRC report. While many survivors expressed appreciation for the apology, there is also broad consensus that all recommendations from the TRC should be implemented and many expressed disappointments that this has yet to occur.

It is significant to note that prior to the reparations packages provided by NaCSA, other organizations had provided various services to the victim-survivors. These services were delivered at the time of the women's return to safety after their captivity with the rebels. Some of these organizations included:

- φ Defence for Children International
- φ Bonthe District Human Rights Committee
- φ Women's Partnership for Justice and Peace
- φ Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
- φ Campaign for Good Governance
- φ International Rescue Committee
- φ Mercy Ships (now Aberdeen Women's Centre)
- φ Women's Forum
- φ Action Plus
- φ The Paralegal Arm of the Methodist Church (Sierra Leone)
- φ Save the Children
- φ Amnesty International
- φ LAWYERS
- φ Médecins Sans Frontières
- φ Marie Stopes
- φ Council of Churches Sierra Leone
- φ COOPI
- φ Family Support Units- Sierra Leone

*The phasing out of the Reparations program has left many gaps to be filled.*

The issue of adequate access to justice for victim-survivors of sexual violence during the war remains a challenge in Sierra Leone. Discussants opined that in spite of all the structures and initiatives put in place immediately after the war, much remains to be done. Respondents revealed that only a few perpetrators were tried and sentenced to long prison terms. The majority of perpetrators received amnesty and still live in communities with the victim-survivors. In addition, funds were not dedicated to the reparations funds in equal measure as was done for the DDR Programme for perpetrators; and finally, there are still a good number of victim-survivors who have not benefited from any form of reparations.

Some policies and programs were put in place to alleviate poverty among citizens in Sierra Leone. These include Social Protection Pillar 6 in the Agenda for Prosperity for Sierra Leone and Pillar 8 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The country has also seen localization guidelines for implementing United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 as part of the Women Peace and Security agenda, and the Sierra Leone National Action Plan on the above resolutions has been developed at the local government level. And yet, there have been no dedicated fund for women victim-survivors of the war after the reparations program was phased out. In fact, the victim-survivors' specific needs were further relegated into the background during the 2015 Ebola crisis and the need to provide for the immediate and long-term needs of Ebola survivors.

## **4.2 Expectations**

The respondents made appeals for assistance to ameliorate their status and condition. The hardest hit were those who did not benefit from the reparations programming because they did not meet the deadline for registration. Now that the reparations program has been phased out, they have little or no hope of assistance from that resource. They appealed to the researchers to help them seek avenues for help. For example, they insisted that there should be follow-up programs geared towards promoting their economic empowerment.

Care for vulnerable persons is now being addressed through social protection programmes like cash transfers for those who struggle most with poverty, but it is unknown whether the victims of sexual violence and other beneficiaries of reparations have been targeted for additional assistance. Regardless, there are still serious gaps in the reparation interventions. Those victims who never registered, those who live with lingering ailments, and those who received only grants but no skills for income generation continue to have pressing and largely unaddressed need for support.

The interviewees discuss their experiences with trying to receive support as well as ways that the government and organizations can help:

*"I have had access to the reparation program. In fact, some victims have not received anything from NaCSA. Please consider them by opening a new window of registration for them." (Interview, location not disclosed, 2013)*

*"[I] need assistance to do business. Even though I registered with NaCSA, yet I was not selected for skills training." (Interview, Matru, 2013)*

Although she was not selected, this participant reports one of her challenges to conducting skills training:

*"I will not be able to embark on any skills training now because I have to take care of my children."*

*"The hardest part was how to receive a good education. I applied for admission at the Opportunities Industrialization Centre (OIC). I could not pay the fees so I did not get a place... Survivors continue to appeal for more substantial support, especially for our children's education... Most of us are illiterate. We are appealing for support for skills training and financial assistance." (Interview, Matru, 2013)*

*"[The] government should make assistance for our children's education a priority. More skills training for victims is necessary. Victims should be helped to improve their socio-economic status." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*"I have not received any reparations. [The] government and others should help us with shelter and food. We plead with [the] government to help us, especially the women who did not register with the reparations program. Let them be given an opportunity to benefit from reparations." (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

One interviewee discussed her positive experiences with the assistance she received:

*"[I] thank God for assistance and for giving us a lease of life... now I feel like a woman unlike the past. Formerly, I was afraid to mingle with people. Now I am more confident. Now many programs involve us." (Interview, Matru, 2013)*

Victims who did register for the reparations program but did not benefit from the skills training portion of the program are now left with no sustainable means of livelihood. They further appealed for housing, medical and psychosocial counseling, as well as more peace building programs to prevent further outbreak of war:

*"NaCSA has done a lot even though a long time elapsed between registration of victims and disbursement of grants.... I feel more support should be given to victims of the war... I plead with [the] government to continue to support those seriously*

*wounded during the war... some of them are seriously ill (constant discharge) still need[ing] support. The unskilled and unregistered victims should be given an opportunity to register and benefit from reparations.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“I have not benefitted from any skills training program. I want them to know that war is not good. Women should unite to promote advancement, peace and prosperity for the country.” (Interview, Kailahun, 2013)*

*“I need assistance and more advocacy should be mounted for greater support to war victims.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

*“[I] plead for more advocacy to help our fatherless children to survive. Let provide assistance to give our children a better deal...[I want the] government to empower us economically for self-reliance. The NaCSA grant was a one-off payment and I used it to pay my child’s school fees. However, I am grateful to NaCSA for that initial help.” (Interview, Mattru, 2013)*

### **4.3 Observations**

Our first observation is that 50 out of 3,602 registered victim-survivors were randomly selected and interviewed. It should also be noted that this sample is not representative of all victim-survivors experiences. It is possible that those not interviewed would have other experiences not captured among the sample interviewed.

Second, there are still many unregistered victim-survivors who need to be helped. There is need for advocacy for funding to help them.

Third, lack of access to adequate information among victim-survivors may have led to them not coming forward when the Reparations Directorate made the call for registration. Information sharing is still a problem amongst rural populations.

Fourth, the high level of illiteracy among victim-survivors gives cause for concern as this could inhibit their understanding of issues pertaining to their welfare. Many could not have access to information about sources of assistance if this was presented in English; in addition, they were not fully aware of their human rights.

Fifth, victim-survivors’ expectations should be managed more effectively to promote reconciliation in communities. The late start of the reparations program and the inadequate funds for reparations coupled with the fact that some did not benefit from the reparations program, has left many anxious about their future. They still appeal for assistance to boost their socio-economic status.

Sixth, even after the war, rape continues. This calls for further investigation into links between sexual violence during and post-conflict<sup>25</sup>. Even during the Ebola crisis, when basic health and sanitation rules were to be observed, many schoolgirls became pregnant. More needs to be done to allow women and girls to gain control of their bodies and to educate individuals and communities to respect sexual and reproductive rights.

Victim-survivors of abduction, rape and forced marriage continue to grapple with challenges as varied as housing, skills training, health care, continued psychosocial support and lack of adequate (or any) education. Our research shows that it is crucial that legal aspects of forced marriage and rape during war are complemented with pursuing the goals for realizing socioeconomic enhancement for victim-survivors.



Figure 5. Bunce Island, Sierra Leone. Photo by Karlee Sapoznik, 2011..

## 5 Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The Conjugal Slavery in War partnership project is funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), 2015-2020.

<sup>2</sup> Peters, Krijn. 2011. *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Momodu, Samuel. 2017. "The Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002)". *Black Past* blog. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/sierra-leone-civil-war-1991-2002/>

<sup>4</sup> BBC News. 2018. "Sierra Leone profile – Timeline" <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094419>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Sierra Leone Handbook-TRC-2003](https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Sierra%20Leone%20Handbook-TRC-2003)

<sup>6</sup> Coulter, Chris. 2008. "Female Fights in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review*. No.88, p. 54-73 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/30140875?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/30140875?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

<sup>7</sup> 'The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reviewing the First Year'. January 2004. Retrieved from: [http://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files – Sierra Leone – Justice – Review – 2004 – English.pdf](http://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/Sierra%20Leone%20Justice%20Review%202004%20English.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Bunting, Annie – "Forced Marriage" in *Conflict Situations: Researching and Prosecuting Old Harms and New Crimes* Canadian Journal of Human Rights – Pages 165-185

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<sup>9</sup> Special Court for Sierra Leone, Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone [www.rscsl.org](http://www.rscsl.org)

<sup>10</sup> *The Prosecutor v Eliezer Niyitegeka*, Case No. ICTR-96 -14-T (16 May 2003), para. 465.

<sup>11</sup> *The Prosecutor v Jean-Paul Akayesu*, Case No. ICTR-96-4-T, (2 September 1998), paras. 688 and 693[Akayesu Trial Judgment].

<sup>12</sup> *The Prosecutor v Kvočka and others*, Case No. IT-98-30/1-A (28 February 2005), para. 435.

<sup>13</sup> *Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara & Kanu*, Case No. SCSL-04-16-A, Appeals Chamber Judgment (22 February 2008) para. 200[AFRC Appeal Judgment].

<sup>14</sup> *Prosecutor v. Sesay, Kallon & Gbao*, Case No. SCSL-04-15-T, Judgment, (2 March 2009) paras. 1464 and 1473[RUF Trial Judgment].

<sup>15</sup> Consider the following statement by the French Representative during the negotiations of the 1956 Supplementary Convention: "Marriage might be the last refuge of slavery and did not necessarily represent its mildest form", United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Committee on the Drafting of a Supplementary Convention on Slavery and Servitude, Summary Record of the Thirteenth Meeting, 25 January 1956, UN Doc. E/AC.43/SR.13, 27 February 1956, p.6; as found in Jean Allain, *The Slavery Conventions: The Travaux Préparatoires of the 1926 League of Nations Convention and the 1956 United Nations Convention*, (Martinus Nijhoff, 2008), p. 335.

<sup>16</sup> *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*, 7 September 1956, UNTS, Vol. 266, Article 1. see: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XVIII-4&chapter=18&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-4&chapter=18&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=en)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Case of *Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo* [Lubanga's case], ICC-01/04-01/06, 14 March 2012, para 629.

<sup>19</sup> *Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Case of Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga ICC-01/04-01/07* (7 March 2014) paras 958-960; Katanga and Ngudjolo Chui Decision on the Confirmation of Charges [Katanga Decision on Confirmation of Charges].

<sup>20</sup> *The Prosecutor v Dominic Ongwen*, Decision on the Confirmation of Charges, ICC-02/04-01/15 (23 March 2016), para. 91 [*Prosecutor v Dominic Ongwen*, Decision on the Confirmation of Charges].

<sup>21</sup> The 'bush' refers to areas outside the city that are undeveloped. Often 'bush' refers to forested areas rebels used to hide in and move between places. 'Bush' also denotes a lack of social sanction: i.e. bush marriages are not real marriages; what happened 'in the bush' is outside normal social order. See Coulter, Chris. 2008. "Female Fights in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review*. No.88, p. 54-73 .

<sup>22</sup> The term 'virginating' comes from customary Sierra Leonean law and refers to the act of having sex with a young girl without the consent of her parents . See: Ferme, Mariane C. 2016. "Consent, Custom and the Law in Debates around Forced Marriage at the Special Court for Sierra Leone" in Bunting, A.; Lawrance, B.; and Roberts, R. (2016). *Marriage by force?: Contestation over consent and coercion in Africa*. Ohio University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Coulter, Chris. 2015. *Bush Wives and Girls Soliders: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. Cornell University Press

<sup>24</sup> A 2019 decision by the Appeals Court for the International Criminal Court determined that liability for reparations should not be limited to individuals who applied prior to a determined deadline. Collective reparations need not stay within the requests received: '*Judgment on the appeals against Trial Chamber II's*

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*'Decision Setting the Size of the Reparations Award for which Thomas Lubanga Dyilo is Liable'* ICC-01/04-01/06-3466-Red 18 July 2019 | Appeals Chamber | Decision Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Case of *Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*. See also: Lubanga's Financial Liability for Reparations Set at US\$ 10 Million retrieved from: <https://www.ijmonitor.org/2017/12/lubangas-financial-liability-for-reparations-set-at-us-10-million/>

<sup>25</sup>McCarthy, Rosaline. 2019. Links between conflict-related violence and peace time practices: perspectives from Sierra Leone. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/links-between-conflict-related-violence-and-peace-time-practices-perspectives-sierra-leone/>