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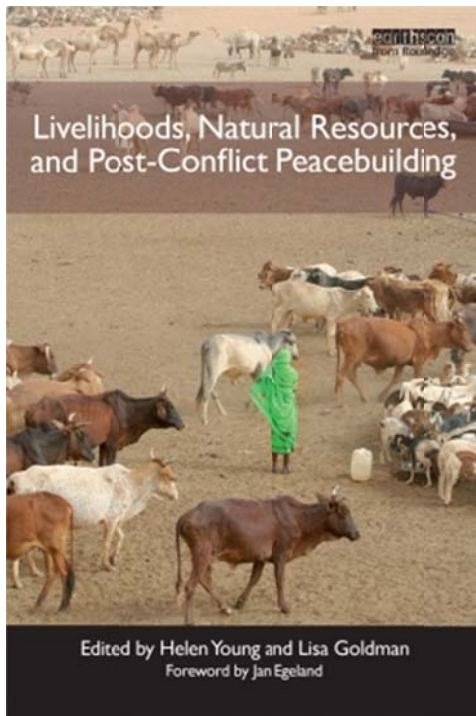
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### Mitigating Conflict in Sierra Leone Through Mining Reform and Alternative Livelihoods Programs for Youth

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# Mitigating conflict in Sierra Leone through mining reform and alternative livelihoods programs for youth

*Andrew Keili and Bocar Thiam*

Mining has been an important part of Sierra Leone's economy since diamonds were discovered in the 1930s. The promise of economic development offered by diamonds has been tempered by conflict, which has plagued Sierra Leone since the mid-1950s. Decades of bad governance incited widespread and recurring violence, which brought about a decline in the social and economic living standards of the general populace, especially in communities that depend on mining for livelihoods. During the 1990s, violence and unresolved social and economic discontent culminated in civil war (1991–2002), for which diamonds provided a principal source of funding. The growing demand for diamonds impacted mining communities and youth engaged in diamond mining, drawing the country's young population further into conflict as suppliers of conflict resources and as armed insurgents.

Livelihood opportunities in Sierra Leone are severely limited. A large portion of the country's population thus relies on the mining industry as a primary source of income. Over 250,000 people in Sierra Leone engage in artisanal mining for their livelihoods (McMahon and CEMMATS Group 2007). The industry is easy to enter, as it requires only minimally skilled workers, a small capital investment, and no infrastructure development. However, the mining industry and market chain often exploit the miners, who are subject to the vicissitudes of an unfair market system and commonly become indebted to investors (GOSL 2009).

Mining regions are frequently overcrowded, and miners labor under onerous conditions and earn little for their efforts. Dissatisfied with such conditions, many youth engaged in mining choose to abandon their communities. During the civil war, many youth who were unable to find alternative employment, frustrated by the lack of opportunity, and discriminated against by village elders joined rebel groups as armed combatants.

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This chapter introduces the diamond-mining trap that pushed Sierra Leonean youth to join rebel groups during the civil war and examines post-conflict efforts to improve national governance of the mining sector. Still, as many youth continue to face unimproved conditions in the mining sector following the end of the civil war, this chapter also examines specific projects undertaken to improve the lives and livelihoods of the country's youth population. It then assesses the success of various schemes to address conflict and insecurity through the development of alternative livelihood opportunities. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the persistent youth issues in post-conflict mining communities, emphasizing the need to prioritize community development programs.

### DIAMONDS, YOUTH, AND THE CIVIL WAR

Despite its abundance of mineral resources, Sierra Leone is currently ranked 177 out of 187 countries on the United Nations Development Program's 2012 Human Poverty Index (UNDP 2013). Poverty is pervasive in the country, with approximately three-quarters of the population living below the poverty line and earning less than US\$3 per day (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012).

Diamonds, first discovered in eastern Sierra Leone in the 1930s, play a significant role in the country's economy. Before the onset of civil war, the mineral sector constituted, on average, 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), 90 percent of its exports, and 4 percent of revenues (peaking at 8 percent in 1990). Researchers estimate that the mineral sector provides, directly and indirectly, over 250,000 jobs, employing 14 percent of Sierra Leone's labor force (UNEP 2009). It is the second largest employer after subsistence agriculture and is the country's largest foreign exchange earner (McMahon and CEMMATS Group 2007).

This reliance on mining cannot continue indefinitely. The seasonal nature of the work—mining generally happens during the dry season—means that even when the sector is thriving, alternative livelihoods must be developed for the off-season. And the sector is not thriving: artisanal mineral resources are being depleted and are thus becoming harder to mine. Diamonds in particular have become largely inaccessible to artisanal miners, and smuggling and other corrupt practices in the industry are rapidly exhausting the remaining supply. The fluctuating values of mining commodities also influence levels of activity in unpredictable ways.

Government policies and actions exacerbate pressure on the mineral sector by encouraging overcrowding in mining areas. The Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources grants mining licenses with no restrictions, even when the remaining minerals are below marketable grade (MMRPA 2009).<sup>1</sup> This practice results not

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<sup>1</sup> The ministry responsible for mines and mineral resources has had numerous names. In this chapter, *Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources* refers to the relevant ministry for the time period being discussed. With the passing of the National Minerals Agency Act in March 2012, the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources retained responsibility for policy making in the sector, and the newly established National Minerals Agency took on responsibility for policy implementation (MMMR n.d.).



only in wasted effort by the miners, but in wanton environmental damage. A requirement that licenses be withheld could potentially stop new entrants into artisanal mining; however, such a prohibition would succeed only if it were rigidly enforced and if viable alternative livelihoods were made available.

**The role of diamonds in the armed conflict**

From 1934 to 1956, all discovered diamond deposits were mined exclusively by the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), a subsidiary of the international diamond mining conglomerate De Beers (Gberie 2005; Abrahamsen and Williams 2005). Following the discovery of more diamond deposits and the corresponding rush to those areas by prospectors, the British colonial government introduced the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme in 1956 to prevent illicit mining and diamond smuggling. This scheme allowed artisanal miners to participate in diamond mining for the first time, breaking the monopoly previously enjoyed by SLST. Soon after Siaka Stevens became prime minister of Sierra Leone in 1967, illicit

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mining, which had previously been contained, exploded. Weak governance and the poor performance of key state institutions in the 1970s opened the door for a variety of companies and individuals to reap huge benefits from the diamond industry (Gberie 2005). Political acquiescence increased tension and led to conflicts, creating problems with security, transparency, and monitoring throughout the country.

Civil war broke out in 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) began its insurrection against the government of Sierra Leone. The RUF used diamond funds to sustain its insurgency, and the outbreak attracted the attention of individuals such as Liberian politician Charles Taylor, who was interested in smuggling Sierra Leone's diamonds and laundering the proceeds to fund his own patronage networks (Ojukutu-Macauley and Keili 2008). By 1998, annual diamond exports of between US\$25 million and US\$125 million were being smuggled through Liberia and used to fund the RUF's war effort (UNEP 2009). Many of the rebels were disaffected or unemployed young men.

### The role of youth in the armed conflict

The alienation of youth in Sierra Leone played a large part in catalyzing the country's civil war. Sierra Leone has one of the world's largest youth populations: approximately 60 percent of the population is under the age of thirty (nearly 50 percent is under age 15), and 60 to 70 percent of Sierra Leonean youth are unemployed (SSL and ICF Macro 2009; IRIN 2009c; Trenchard 2013). Employment in Sierra Leone is limited by a stagnant economy, state corruption, and a lack of government accountability. Pervasive corruption limits the growth of a formal private sector and deprives many young people of gainful employment. Employment initiatives undertaken by government ministries and agencies are stifled by a lack of accountability for appropriated funds. The political, social, and economic divide between the poor, unemployed youth and the corrupt and powerful arbiters of the traditional social structure—the chiefdoms—creates friction that has led to increased migration of youth into cities and has prompted them to join rebel groups, such as the RUF (Sommers 2007). Many of those who left their communities as children to join rebel groups, or who were abducted for that purpose, have since returned to their communities having adopted the rebels' behavior and view themselves as independent of pre-war mores and norms.

Prior to the conflict, Sierra Leonean youth were historically alienated from the center of the chiefdoms' political decision making through the customary tradition of deference to elders and by being relegated to low-level tasks (Abdullah 1998). They were excluded from the networks of patronage that provided social security and economic opportunity within their communities and forced to survive in poverty-stricken conditions—either by seeking employment in the saturated diamond pits or by exploiting the illegal possibilities presented by a rebel lifestyle. Isolating the youth demographic contributed to political violence, banditry, hedonism, and brutality as “lumpenised youth are inherently prone to criminal

adventurism” given their status as “socially uprooted, chronically impoverished and politically alienated” people (Kandeh 2002, 179).

The government of Sierra Leone now acknowledges that corrupt and oppressive governance in the chiefdoms contributed to the general climate of youth alienation that propelled the nation into conflict (Richards 1995). These factors must therefore be addressed as part of a transition to stability.

## **INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS POST-CONFLICT CHALLENGES IN THE MINING SECTOR**

The international community and the government of Sierra Leone have undertaken several initiatives to encourage transparency and accountability in the management of diamond revenues, the reintegration of excombatants, the allocation of reparations to victims, the reform of laws and regulations related to minerals and the broader environmental sector, and the management of mining rights (Kawamoto 2012). Although these initiatives are related to the complex phenomena that left Sierra Leonean youth with few alternatives to the self-defeating lure of diamond mining, they do not specifically target the alienated youth population (USAID-CEPSL Project 2009).

### **The Diamond Area Community Development Fund**

The first initiative to redirect mining revenues to the support of local communities was established in 2001, before the end of the civil war. The Diamond Area Community Development Fund was designed to redress the inequities of the government’s distribution of resources from mining. Roughly 3 percent of the export tax on diamonds was allocated to the fund and used for the development of local mining communities (MMR and MLG 2008). The Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, local government officials, local communities, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are all responsible for monitoring how funds are employed. Although directed to fund infrastructure projects within the various chiefdoms, the funds are often misused (Fischer and Keili 2005; Kawamoto 2012). In April 2011, for example, the government of Sierra Leone raided the Diamond Area Community Development Fund to help pay its national debts.

### **Reintegration and reparations programs**

At the beginning of 2002, a UN-led disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) operation disarmed 45,000 rebels, paving the way for national elections in May 2002. The DDR program, which involved compensation and skills training, made progress in meeting the needs of excombatants (UNEP 2009). However, it took almost six more years and additional initiatives at the international level to meaningfully address the needs of those affected by conflict.

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In December 2005, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1645 established the UN Peacebuilding Commission to advise countries emerging from conflict and propose integrated strategies to promote post-conflict recovery. The Peacebuilding Commission's role is to focus "attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development" (UNSC 2005, 2).<sup>2</sup> The United Nations General Assembly and UNSC requested that the UN Secretary-General also establish an independent multi-year, standing peacebuilding fund for post-conflict peacebuilding in Sierra Leone (UNGA 2005; UNSC 2005). As a result, the UN Peacebuilding Fund allocated US\$35 million to support the government's ongoing peace consolidation efforts in "youth empowerment and employment, democracy and good governance, justice and security, capacity building of public administration, and support to energy sector" (GOSL 2009, 101).

In December 2007, the government of Sierra Leone and the Peacebuilding Commission adopted a Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework (UN PBC 2007). However, the framework's minimalist wording left the Sierra Leonean government without the necessary enforcement mechanisms to deliver on its commitments to natural resource protection (Lehtonen 2014). Although the framework was intended to provide an outline for priority actions, peacebuilding as a function of natural resource management was a relatively new platform, and the mechanisms for turning priorities into action had yet to be created. This lack of direction led eventually to the creation of the country-owned and -created Agenda for Change,<sup>3</sup> which aimed to restructure Sierra Leone's programmatic priorities and identify the conditions necessary for achieving these priorities. The Agenda for Change aligned with assistance provided by the UN and was also supported by the Peacebuilding Commission as a new core strategy.<sup>4</sup>

In 2008, the UN Peacebuilding Fund allocated US\$3 million to a one-year project intended to boost national capacity and implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The government of Sierra Leone subsequently allocated US\$246,000 to a reparations program for those affected by the conflict (IRIN 2009a). These funds assisted the government in providing for more than 20,000 victims. A 2011 evaluation confirmed that the reparations were crucial "in providing hope for the population as part of the reconciliation effort" (UN PBF 2011, 10). The UN Peacebuilding Fund also allocated US\$4.4 million to fund a reparations unit within the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and a Special Fund for War Victims. The initiatives registered over 32,000 victims (UN PBF n.d.).

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<sup>2</sup> See also UNGA (2005, 2) and Lehtonen (2015).

<sup>3</sup> For *An Agenda for Change, Second Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2008–2012*, see GOSL (2009).

<sup>4</sup> This collaboration resulted in the publication of a joint programming document titled *Joint Vision for Sierra Leone of the United Nations' Family* (UNIPO-UNCT 2009).

Despite the relative success of the DDR operation for excombatants and reparations funds for those affected by conflict, there was a widespread belief that the perpetrators of violence were being treated better than the victims. Ultimately all of these initiatives were insufficient to meet the wider and more varied needs of young people, as many youth continued to toil in the mines because their basic needs were still not satisfied.

## **Legal and regulatory reforms**

Legal reform has been a central aspect of Sierra Leone's efforts to address environmental, social, fiscal, and accountability challenges related to diamond mining. The government of Sierra Leone has promulgated the Core Mineral Policy and passed the Environmental Protection Agency Act and the Mines and Minerals Act. These laws provide greater clarity to the operation of the mining and environmental sectors.

### ***Core Mineral Policy***

Promulgated in 2003, the year after the conflict ended, the Core Mineral Policy was intended to create and enhance an international investor-friendly mining sector, attract private-sector funds, and establish legal and fiscal regulation of all mining operations. The policy claims a free-market approach to ensure the development of best practices in the mining sector and seeks to ensure transparency in all licensing fees, royalties, taxes, and other forms of income from mining (MMR 2003). Thus, it requires that all information related to mining licenses be made available to the public. The policy applies to all mining operations, including artisanal gold and diamond mining, and operations of Sierra Rutile Limited and Koidu Holdings (GOSL and EC 2010).<sup>5</sup>

Although this policy was written in November 2003, there has been little progress in implementation. However, the government has adopted portions of the policy, such as the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), as well as principles of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

### ***Environmental Protection Agency Act***

The Environmental Protection Agency Act was passed in September 2008 to reverse the trend of natural resource depletion and degradation.<sup>6</sup> The act created

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<sup>5</sup> Sierra Rutile Limited is one of Sierra Leone's leading mineral sands companies and focuses primarily on the production of rutile, a mineral used to manufacture white pigment. Koidu Holdings, the first commercial entity to invest in the diamond mining sector following the civil war, is a joint venture company operating in Sierra Leone.

<sup>6</sup> Environment Protection Agency Act. Law No. 11 of 2008. [www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2008-11.pdf](http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2008-11.pdf).



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an Environmental Protection Agency as a semiautonomous body to coordinate and monitor all environmental issues within the public and private sectors. It stipulates that all projects involving mineral extraction must carry out environmental and social impact assessments to identify potential effects of mining operations so that mitigating measures can be developed to address them. The act also gives interested parties the ability to comment on the environmental impact assessments.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Mines and Minerals Act***

The Mines and Minerals Act, passed in November 2009, was intended to balance the interests of the mining sector, the public, and the government by addressing health and safety standards, environmental protection, and community development.<sup>8</sup> The act strengthens requirements for administrators and mineral rights holders, including mandatory reporting obligations. It also creates a new licensing regime to enhance investments and mineral-sector developments by preventing companies from holding land under license for extended periods of time without using or developing their properties. Finally, the act seeks to balance fiscal benefits in the mining sector by imposing higher royalty rates for precious stones and minerals and distributing these benefits among companies, communities, and the government (MMRPA 2009).

The act promotes local and foreign investment in the mining sector by introducing new provisions for exploration, mine development, and mineral marketing. It includes measures to reduce the harmful effects of mining activities on local communities and the environment by introducing language requiring transparency and accountability, in accordance with international best practice standards (MMRPA 2009).

Although the Mines and Minerals Act has been touted as a decentralized approach to mining management, control under the law is centralized: authority rests solely with the Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources. The minister has used this power to sign mining agreements that have favorable terms for mining companies. For example, a London Mining lease agreement, signed by the minister one day after the enactment of the Mines and Minerals Act, awarded London Mining a lease for a period of twenty-five years, after which it can be renewed for an additional fifteen years. Under the agreement, London Mining can collect scrap metals for resale and export without owing a charge, levy, duty, or royalty to the government of Sierra Leone. The company will also enjoy an 80 percent reduction in income taxes over the first ten years, followed by an additional 80 percent reduction in taxes on other revenue streams for the initial twenty-five-year period of the contract (Gberie 2010).

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of Sierra Leone's Environmental Protection Agency in the country's post-conflict period, see Brown et al. (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Mines and Minerals Act. Law No. 12 of 2009. [www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2009-12.pdf](http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2009-12.pdf).

## **The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme**

To further promote best practices, Sierra Leone participates in an initiative to reform governance of the diamond industry to meet international standards. The KPCS is an internationally recognized system of rough-diamond certification that is supported by industry self-regulation and is intended to assure diamond buyers that their purchases are not financing conflicts and human rights violations.<sup>9</sup>

Although Sierra Leone is a KPCS participant in good standing, the country has been unable to capture a significant proportion of the legitimate diamond trade. During the civil war, the RUF received up to US\$125 million from the diamond trade (Global Witness 2006). The international regulatory system has curtailed illicit smuggling operations, yet estimates suggest that up to 20 percent of the total annual production of diamonds is illegally smuggled out of the country (McConnell 2007).

A 2007 analysis of Sierra Leone's diamond mining sector by a KPCS review team concluded that "although the Kimberley Process seems to be a success in its efforts to stop the flow of conflict diamonds, improved government action is needed to reinforce the KPCS and address illicit trade" (CEMMATS Group 2007). The team also observed that the following were occurring on a regular basis: diamonds were being smuggled into and out of Sierra Leone; exporters, dealers, and financiers were operating without a license; officials were engaging in corrupt practices; and Kimberley Process certificates were being forged, with some of the forgeries involving licensed exporters.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the review team observed that Sierra Leone's recorded diamond exports had grown substantially, which indicated increasing levels of legal compliance. They noted that this uptick was hugely significant in a country whose internal system of controls had been weakened over decades by an asset-stripping dictatorship and then swept away by a highly destructive civil war (CEMMATS Group 2007).

## **The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative**

Sierra Leone became a candidate for the EITI in February 2008. EITI is an international standard that mandates transparency in extractive industries and includes a requirement that all monetary exchanges be reported. The initiative provides for the creation of a multi-stakeholder group, comprising all appropriate stakeholders, to oversee the EITI process. EITI is expected to improve revenue collection and management; create an attractive investment climate; build trust among the government, communities, and businesses; and provide a forum for discussing broader governance issues (Revenue Watch Institute 2011).

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<sup>9</sup> For analyses of the KPCS, see Grant (2012); Bone (2012); Mitchell (2012); and Wright (2012).

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In Sierra Leone, EITI is implemented through a multistakeholder group including mining companies, government agencies, citizen advocacy groups, and the media, and seeks to increase transparency within the mining sector. Information to be disclosed includes tax and fee revenues received from diamond, gold, rutile, and bauxite mining, but does not include payments related to oil extraction or other mineral sources (SLEITI 2010).

The successful implementation of EITI in Sierra Leone will require a significant increase in transparent practices on the part of both the government and private-sector companies, along with a large capacity-building effort to support the initiative.

### Management of mining rights

Finally, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Sierra Leone's Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, has introduced land surveys that use computer mapping to identify plot sizes, thereby improving mining transparency. These efforts are, in part, a response to Sierra Leone's history of unregulated mining operations and a mining industry with too few officers and wardens, many of whom are underpaid and lack proper training to provide oversight (Dumbuya and Van der Linde 2012; Revenue Watch Institute n.d.). The land surveys also work to reduce the potential for corruption and conflict when licenses are negotiated (UNDP n.d.; IRIN 2009d).<sup>10</sup>

### ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD SCHEMES FOR THE ARTISANAL MINING SECTOR

If Sierra Leone hopes to sustain its progress toward sustainable development and lasting peace, alternatives to employment in the artisanal diamond mining sector must be made available, particularly to the youth demographic.

The reliance on mining for livelihoods is principally due to Sierra Leone's weak local economy, with a limited number of viable, attractive alternatives. Many miners concede that mining would not be their livelihood of choice if they had other feasible options. One reason there are so few livelihood options is that donors rarely offer development assistance to mining communities, so there is not much credit or other support available for nonmining activities in those communities. Hence, artisanal mining will likely decrease when more attractive employment options are made available.

Serious efforts to improve employment options for artisanal miners also are necessary because the diamond supply (especially the alluvial deposit) is nearing exhaustion, making livelihoods diversification an essential development

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on regulating property rights in the mining sector as a way to stem conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, see Garrett (2015).

priority. Many attempts to directly address this issue have been related to agricultural production. The agricultural sector is critical to Sierra Leone's economy, accounting for approximately 46 percent of the country's GDP and 25 percent of export earnings (Cartier and Bürge 2011). Nearly two-thirds of the country's population depends on agricultural production for livelihood security. Therefore, one opportunity to diversify livelihoods is to support agricultural production of mined-out land.

There is a strong nexus historically between farming and mining and the associated population mobility. Artisanal mining has been viewed as a viable livelihood alternative in predominately agricultural regions, and combining seasonal mining and farming activities is relatively common in rural Sierra Leone. Some Sierra Leoneans believe this link is positive because it allows farmers to reinvest diamond income into their farms; many others are concerned that farm labor is not an effective alternative to mining because of restricted access to land under customary law, lack of opportunities for women, and perceptions among youth laborers that agricultural work is too tedious in relation to the economic benefits. In any case, interest in farming has drastically decreased as youth have been drawn away from agriculture, preferring to pursue employment in the saturated mining market in Sierra Leone as well as in the neighboring countries such as Liberia.

A number of alternative livelihood activities have aimed at providing employment to youth in particular; some of which also involve reclamation of land for environmental rehabilitation and use. The sections that follow discuss four such initiatives in greater detail.

### **Life After Diamonds**

Reclaiming and restoring land once used for mining supports alternative livelihood opportunities, improves living conditions, and promotes redevelopment in post-conflict communities. In many areas of the country, mining has destroyed arable land suitable for agriculture and other uses (DDII 2009). In addition, mining operations divert rivers and streams, diminish potable water supplies, and affect irrigation of food crops. While most mining techniques do not include rehabilitation plans, post-extraction land reclamation is an important step in creating alternative livelihood opportunities in the country's post-diamond future. Taking this into account, the government of Sierra Leone, in 2001, began collecting a land reclamation fee of Le 200,000 (approximately US\$67) for every artisanal and small-scale mining lease (200 foot by 200 foot plot) (DDII 2009). The cost of rehabilitating all of the country's mined-out land, however, will likely exceed the fees imposed on mining leases.

In April 2009, One Sky, a Canadian NGO, launched the Life After Diamonds: Land Reclamation for Agriculture and Advocacy pilot initiative with support from the Canadian International Development Agency and individual donors. The project, which targeted 120 rural communities and ran through June 2009,

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provided support for a community-driven initiative promoting development and sustainable livelihoods diversification among alluvial diamond mining communities in Kono District (in eastern Sierra Leone). Kono has the highest concentration of diamond deposits in the country, as well as extraordinarily high poverty rates and the greatest number of reported incidents of diamond-driven conflict (Wilson 2009). Communities in Kono therefore require special attention in the development and implementation of peacebuilding initiatives and livelihoods diversification programs.

The primary goals of the initiative included sensitizing communities to environment and health issues, strengthening local governance institutions, and empowering citizens to demand land reclamation and restoration. The initiative sought to accomplish these goals by building the capacity of various stakeholders within civil society to promote corporate social responsibility principles within the mining sector, to enhance livelihoods diversification and resilience, and to bolster food security. One Sky also trained community members in value-added agriculture (production techniques and processes that increase the value of agricultural commodities) and market research. To promote local ownership and project sustainability, One Sky partnered with the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, a national NGO. Through this work, One Sky and the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone engaged local communities in land reclamation to expand productive land and enable agricultural development, while at the same time addressing serious local environmental concerns (DDII 2009).

### **The Foundation for Environmental Security and Sustainability land reclamation and farming project**

The Foundation for Environmental Security and Sustainability (FESS) has been working at three sites in Kono and Kenema districts to provide employment to women and youth through land reclamation activities. By working directly with women and youth, FESS sought to provide alternative livelihood pathways and offer viable and sustainable job opportunities in mining communities. Such alternatives provide women—who generally lack education and access to jobs and skills training—with income-generating opportunities while also increasing stability in vulnerable regions, thus reducing the risk of recurring conflict (FESS n.d.).

In 2007, FESS began its land reclamation work with funding from Tiffany and Company and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). FESS approached the chiefdom authorities, who are custodians of the land, in an effort to reach agreement on the modalities of reclaiming and farming mined-out lands. FESS also organized community workshops that brought together a wide range of community leaders, local NGOs, landowners, women, youth, and others to seek agreement on how the activities would be implemented, how the revenue would be generated and managed, and who would manage the land once the project ended (FESS 2007).

FESS then recruited workers, both men and women, and provided them with land reclamation skills and farming tools. The reclamation activities were carried out exclusively by men because they required heavy manual labor, and the farming activities were conducted by youth and women. When one of the authors conducted a field visit to a FESS site in Kono in 2009, fifty men were working to reclaim the mined-out lands, and twenty-five men and women were farming peanuts and vegetables on the reclaimed lands. The project set a goal of reclaiming fifteen hectares of land every year, for a total of sixty hectares.

Workers at the Kono site engaged in land reclamation activities were paid a stipend of Le8,000 (approximately US\$3.39)<sup>11</sup> per day, and each farmer received Le4,500 per day (approximately US\$1.92).<sup>12</sup> In addition to this payment, the project provided lunch to workers, with a value equivalent to or greater than the approximately US\$2 per day that diggers would receive for artisanal mining (FESS 2007).<sup>13</sup> Produce from the farming activities was sold, and the money was allocated to the chiefdom for community development programs. In other areas, such as Kenema District (in eastern Sierra Leone), where the land belongs to a single family, 75 percent of the revenue went to the chiefdom and 25 percent went to the landowning family.<sup>14</sup>

### **The COOPI project**

COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale, an Italian NGO) is implementing a program in thirty-two communities in Kono District to help youth from ages fifteen to twenty-five begin farming on community land. The project helps participants grow rice, fruits, and vegetables, and it trains participants to preserve and sell the cassava and fruits they produce. This reinforces the government's efforts to encourage youth to engage in farming (COOPI 2005; IRIN 2009b). A 2008 study of seventy youth involved in COOPI's program found that at the beginning of the project, 60 percent were living below the national poverty line of US\$1.25 per day, but that once the project was underway, 90 percent earned between US\$2 and \$3.50 per day (IRIN 2009b).

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<sup>11</sup> This was the value of Le8,000 on January 1, 2007, while the project was still under way. The value of the leone has declined significantly in recent years.

<sup>12</sup> This information was obtained during interviews with FESS personnel during the author's site visit. The field visit took place in May 2009. The author met with Daniel Gbondo, FESS Field Activities Manager, and with both men's and women's groups involved in land reclamation and farming.

<sup>13</sup> The stipend offered through the FESS program is generally higher than that available through participation in the artisanal diamond mining industry, which ranges from Le500 to Le8000 per day (in 2010, that represented between US\$0.15–US\$2.00 per day) (Street Kids International 2010).

<sup>14</sup> FESS site visit by author in May 2009.

### Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace

With the support of the USAID, World Vision Sierra Leone and Management Services International implemented the Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace (YRTEP) program in 2000 and 2001 (Hansen et al. 2002).<sup>15</sup> The program—a community-based initiative to help reintegrate conflict-affected youth and excombatants through a six-month training course on a variety of subjects—defined youth broadly to include people in their thirties and forties, including anyone with a living father. The training course was divided into modules that addressed “literacy, numeracy, self-reliance, health, democracy and governance, education for peace, and community-based reconciliation and reintegration” (Hansen et al. 2002, 23), and included over 44,000 participants and facilitators.

The YRTEP program improved relations between excombatants and conflict-affected youth by training them together in integrated groups (Fauth and Daniels 2001). Activities focusing on introspection, peace, and reconciliation helped encourage enthusiasm and activism within communities and a reduction of violence and “rudeness.” The program has also spurred community development through such projects as community gardens, cobbler stands, sewing cooperatives, and road maintenance (Hansen et al. 2002).

Evidence of the program’s impacts on livelihoods, literacy, and numeracy is mixed (Fauth and Daniels 2001).<sup>16</sup> Although the program emphasized organizational development and proposal writing, proposals were rarely funded, which left participants frustrated. For example, one community could not find a funder for a series of vocational skills workshops that would have cost only US\$100 to implement. A 2002 program evaluation quoted one learning facilitator who commented, “You cannot sensitize people and then have them live in the streets” (Hansen et al. 2002, 30).

Some studies found that YRTEP had a significant effect on livelihoods. A 2001 impact evaluation found that youth were engaging in new activities focused on income and livelihood generation, and that many of them would not have engaged in those activities were it not for YRTEP. For example, 85 percent of surveyed project participants had planted crops, and 77 percent of those reported that they would not have done so if they had not received training through the YRTEP program. Similarly, 40 percent of participants said that they had started

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<sup>15</sup> Seventy-nine percent of participants were between fifteen and thirty-four years of age, and approximately one-fifth were over thirty-five years old. Just two participants were fourteen years of age or younger. Sixty-two percent of the participants were married, and 34 percent were single; only 2 percent were divorced or widowed (Fauth and Daniels 2001).

<sup>16</sup> In a 2001 impact study, 98 percent of surveyed YRTEP beneficiaries reported that their literacy had improved, although a project evaluation in 2002 suggested that “the development of the participants’ literacy and numeracy was generally very low” (Hansen et al. 2002, 29); see also Fauth and Daniels (2001).

businesses, and 77 percent of these reported that they would not have done so without YRTEP training. Smaller percentages of YRTEP participants had taken on an apprenticeship in a skill or trade (33 percent), enrolled in another training program (28 percent), returned to school (28 percent), or found work (15 percent). Within each of these activities, the majority—sometimes the overwhelming majority—of participants attributed their involvement to the YRTEP training they had received (Fauth and Daniels 2001).

YRTEP's youth learning facilitators received a small stipend to cover some of their expenses as they trained other youth on education and reintegration issues (Hansen et al. 2002). Some learning facilitators pooled their stipends to invest in their communities. One group created a fishing community, another set up a poultry farm, and a third founded an FM radio station so the YRTEP learning mode could reach the entire community over the air.

The reason behind the conflicting findings with respect to YRTEP's impacts on livelihoods and long-term community development is unclear, but additional efforts to support alternative livelihoods and sustainable community development would increase the effectiveness of projects following in the footsteps of this groundbreaking program.

## **CONTINUING YOUTH ISSUES IN POST-CONFLICT MINING COMMUNITIES**

Despite the many initiatives in place to address post-conflict issues in artisanal mining communities, troubles for youth persist.

Following the civil war, youth began migrating to cities, where they participate in the informal economy. The growth of the informal economic sector also rendered many redevelopment strategies, which focused on rural development and formal markets, defunct. Informal economies are often larger and more pervasive than formal markets, and therefore are considered to be a more viable source of income. In cities, men enter the labor force at a young age, but salaried positions in the formal sector are elusive. This can lead to an increase in self-employment—a mainstay of the informal sector—and can drive youth into marginalized areas such as slum quarters and artisanal diamond mining camps as they attempt to boost their status as consumers (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010).

The stimulation and possibilities that cities provide also catalyze the rural-to-urban migration of youth. Young people's perception that they can reinvent themselves and will be empowered in cities discourages them from returning to rural settings, where the rite of passage into manhood is often delayed or undermined by power struggles within their village (Sommers 2007). Many village elders control land access and tax the labor of younger men, further exacerbating the vulnerability of youth. Post-conflict reconstruction efforts to maintain political control over the country have focused on chieftaincy and customary law, but rural farmers often wished to remain independent of village rules because they



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did not trust the elders to manage financial distributions fairly. Many also felt that the corrupt administration of these elders was a direct driver of youth exile and youth involvement in the conflict (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). Indeed, lack of access to land and the absence of inherited land rights continue to present obstacles to programs aimed at improving agricultural opportunities for youth, and are widely cited as root causes of the country's violent history (Cartier and Bürge 2011).

Some youth, in search of employment opportunities, migrate across international borders to work in the Liberian artisanal diamond and gold mining industry. These migratory labor forces—labeled as “diamond boys” in Liberia—are widely known as the most experienced diamond diggers, although they are not well received by many Liberians, who use pejorative words such as “aliens” toward the migratory workers. Some Sierra Leonean miners have also been confronted by immigration authorities in Liberia (PRADD Project 2011).

Struggles in the Kono District illustrate the disorganization and dissatisfaction that continue to cause upheaval between youth and traditional leaders. Seventy-five percent of youth in the district are unemployed (IRIN 2009b). One group—known as the Movement for Concerned Kono Youths—blamed foreigners for the country's devastation and demanded that all foreigners leave the district (Gberie 2002). Subsequent conflict between two youth groups in Kono required the intervention of outside organizations (Gbenda 2003). The youth groups claim to represent the genuine aspirations of the Kono people for the meaningful development of the district, while traditional leaders and others find hope in the return of civil authority to address development challenges. While it is unclear if Kono youth will benefit from existing transition initiatives, there is a clear need to improve communications among the various stakeholders in the Kono District mining sector (CEMMATS Group 2006).

In 2010, a report published by Street Kids International, an NGO supported by the Diamond Development Initiative, analyzed alternative livelihood opportunities for youth in mining communities in eastern Sierra Leone (Street Kids International 2010). Through a workshop and pilot program for youth engaged in the mining industry, Street Kids International analyzed the personal experiences and ambitions of youth and identified a number of obstacles currently undermining alternative livelihood opportunities. For example, the program uncovered a continuous need to provide academic and job training opportunities for youth, especially in areas with low literacy rates, and specifically for girls and young women. Small business pathways should also be encouraged, especially in the small-scale agricultural sector (for example, cocoa, mixed farming, livestock rearing, and honey production) and the urban service sector (for example, taxi service, mechanical service, and vocational trades including textile design, embroidery, and carpentry). Finally, the workshop study indicated that while youth recognize that employment and alternative livelihood creation is a priority of the national government, they are becoming increasingly impatient with the lack of progress and youth consultation in government action.

## CONCLUSION

Inadequate employment opportunities in mining, the country's largest industry, coupled with the oppressive governance of community elders, left youth in Sierra Leone with few economic options other than joining rebel forces. Building a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone requires the creation of alternative livelihoods independent of the artisanal mining sector. While credible attempts are being made to create alternative livelihoods in artisanal mining regions, these activities are limited in both impact and scale and are hampered by funding shortages. Additional resources should be invested in the creation of these alternative livelihoods and community development programs.

Continued efforts to strengthen governance and the rule of law in Sierra Leone are also important. Such efforts should include measures to ensure peacebuilding and consolidation, strengthen national security, reform the public sector, enforce an anti-corruption agenda, combat money laundering and financial crime, provide access to justice, improve respect for human rights, and address poverty and youth unemployment. Other important needs include government decentralization, parliamentary and civic oversight, improvements in local governance, and attitudinal change. Conflict management methods that protect stakeholder interests while enabling the development of consensus solutions must continue to be used in artisanal mining regions.

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