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Whitney McIntyre Miller

Chapman University, [wmcintyr@chapman.edu](mailto:wmcintyr@chapman.edu)

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# Moving Forward in Sierra Leone: Community-Based Factors for Post Conflict Development

## **Comments**

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**Moving forward in Sierra Leone:  
Community-based factors for post conflict development**

**Whitney McIntyre Miller  
Northern Kentucky University**

### **Abstract**

War and conflict, while not manifested as economic or natural disaster, often bring the same consequences and damages and require similar capacity building. This article discusses the following four community-based factors, which contributed to the post conflict development of two communities in Sierra Leone, West Africa: (a) the inclusive involvement of community members for development and construction projects; (b) the use of culturally-responsive practices in community building; (c) leadership that is directly connected with the community; and (d) the combination of traditional and local development practices with western and governmental practices. These factors were derived from an intensive five-week qualitative and observational field study seven years after the cessation of a brutal eleven-year civil war in the country. In addition, the article demonstrates several ways that these community-based factors may influence other communities struggling to move forward after facing similar destruction from war, conflict, and disaster.

**Keywords:** Africa, community, conflict, development, post conflict

### **Introduction**

Although previous literature discusses war and conflict as independent of economic or natural disasters, the consequences and damages of each are similar in many ways. For example, communities experiencing economic, natural, war and/or conflict disasters often suffer from loss of infrastructure, work, and social capital. Consequently, countries suffering from natural and/or manmade disasters require much of the same community capacity building to move forward. This article discusses the four community-based factors that were influential in the post conflict

development of two communities in Sierra Leone. It also demonstrates several ways that these factors may influence other communities struggling to move forward after experiencing destruction from war, conflict, and disaster.

### **Sierra Leone: Background, the civil war, and preparing to move forward**

Sierra Leone is a country slightly smaller than the state of South Carolina located on the western coast of Africa, bordered by Guinea to the north and Liberia to the south (Pham, 2006). First established as a settlement for freed slaves from Britain, the United States, and Nova Scotia in 1787, Sierra Leone was eventually colonized by the British in 1808 (Alie, 1990; United States Department of State, 2008). After decades of political dissent, the country gained independence on April 27, 1961 (Alie, 1990; Keen, 2005). Local control of the government was far from improved, however, and subsequent years saw great political turmoil. A series of Prime Ministers and military coups brought a culture of rampant government corruption (Alie, 1990) which created a climate ripe for rebel groups to attempt to gain political and economic control (Keen, 2005).

During this time, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered into Sierra Leone's eastern villages from Liberia, where they had been training (United States Department of State, 2008). Formed with the intent to liberate the masses from the corruption and oppression of the government, the rebel forces ended up fighting to gain complete economic and political control of the country (Abraham, 2001; Keen, 2005; Writenet, 1997). The RUF forces often included youth, sometimes as young as eight years. In some cases, children joined because they agreed with RUF ideals and goals; however, more commonly, children were conscripted by force against their will. As members of the RUF forces, these children were often drugged to reduce their fear of the acts required of them within the communities. These acts could include raping

and murdering fellow community members. The children conducted large-scale massacres of civilians, and burned crops and houses (Binns & Maconachie, 2005; Writenet, 1997).

The civil war lasted 11 years. Military coups, failed peace attempts, and battles took the lives of between 50,000-70,000 Sierra Leoneans (Masin-Peters, 2003; Pham, 2006). An estimated 2.6 million people, or more than half of the 4.7 million population, became refugees in neighboring or other countries during the war. In addition, an estimated 1.2 million were at some point internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Pham, 2006; Writenet, 1997). These refugees and IDPs lost their families, their possessions, and their homes (King, 2005). In addition, hundreds of thousands of civilians were maimed and/or had limbs amputated by the rebel forces (Pham, 2006). During the period of the conflict, economic activities were disrupted and the infrastructure of the country was largely destroyed. Young women and men had been raped, forced into becoming soldiers, made to use drugs; and poverty, already widespread, worsened (Binns & Maconachie, 2005; Pham, 2006). It is, therefore, no surprise that Sierra Leone is considered one of the least developed countries in the world (United Nations Development Program, 2008).

Despite aid and involvement from the international community, the war left Sierra Leone facing many challenges, especially political and social, as it attempted to engage in post conflict development. Many communities were largely damaged or destroyed during the war and did not have proper water systems, road networks, electricity, schools, health care, community structures, and many other necessities. In addition, communities saw a severe decrease in population. Work had to be done to encourage the millions of refugees and IDPs to return to the country and to integrate ex-combatants back into the communities. They also had to establish

working economies among additional ways to move forward together toward a sustainable peace.

### **Review of Literature**

The condition of post conflict Sierra Leone was wrought with difficulties and the challenge to development was very real. It was clear that many factors would be at play in developing a community after conflict. With little research available on the overarching community development process in Sierra Leone, it was presumed that those factors included local and cultural forces, community leadership, ceremonies and rituals, and international and governmental forces. These presumptions were tested by reviewing the literature around more specific themes and the literature review then helped to create the “sensitizing concepts,” or themes that guided the research questions and interview protocol, rather than as a lens from which to view the data (Charmaz, 2005).

#### ***Role of local and cultural forces in post conflict community development***

The role of the local and cultural forces seemed critical to the process of overall post conflict community development and therefore important to investigate in this study. Creating both social and physical capital was seen as essential to moving communities forward. Social capital was defined as a community’s interconnectedness, norms of reciprocity, trust, informal safety nets, and shared ethics (Addison, 2003; Coyne 2005; Ferguson & Fritz, 2003; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Social capital should be built by creating a group identity among the local indigenous peoples and relevant groups, and ensuring that the process is culturally-relevant and locally-owned (Fayemi, 2004; Francis, 2000; Lappia, 2006).

Building physical capital, or the material elements of a community, was also emphasized. As previously stated, much of this capital was destroyed during the conflict. Therefore, new

community structures, such as markets and community meeting centers, and infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and hospitals, had to be built to meet the needs of the communities (King, 2005). The literature also warned about challenges to building both social and physical capital in post conflict communities in Sierra Leone. Challenges included corruption, lack of educated people interested in development, and a lack of resources (Gboku, 1993).

In addition to social and physical capital proving relevant to post conflict community development in Sierra Leone, the issue of culture change also seemed important to consider. Culture can be a complex issue in many communities and societies, especially in a post conflict context that may create a cultural shift. Literature about the importance of cultural change in community development is abundant (Ager, Strang, & Abebe, 2005; Ahn, Adamson, & Dornbusch, 2004; James, 2003). A smaller body of literature exists, however, focusing directly on cultural change for development in Sierra Leone. This literature shows that changing culture is a slow and deliberate process, and as with building capital, must come from the initiative of the people involved (Gboku, 1993; Green & Haines, 2002; Maton, 2000). This potential shift in culture was relevant for this study to examine, especially since previous work on these issues was conducted during and directly after the conflict.

In addition to the general notion of culture change, two subsets of culture were also examined as potential factors to post conflict community development. The first subset examined community leadership. The second reviewed the literature concerning ceremonies and rituals.

***Role of leadership in post conflict community development.*** Community leaders, especially the community chiefs, were seen as important to community development. The traditional community chiefs were in a loosely-based structure formalized under British colonial

rule (Peake, Gormley-Heenan, & Fitzduff, 2004; Sawyer, 2008), and limited the need for British government by being local representatives, levying taxes, and heading the court systems (Fanthorpe, 2001, 2003; Jackson, 2005; Keen, 2005; National Recovery Committee, 2002; Richards, Bah, & Vincent, 2004; Sawyer, 2008). This power led to some corruption, which alienated community youth, thus contributing to discontent that led to the conflict (Jackson, 2005; Keen, 2003, 2005; Peake et al., 2004; Sawyer, 2008; Thomson, 2007).

This brief history demonstrates the importance of further investigating the role of the community chiefs, especially as the communities in Sierra Leone have largely returned to the chieftaincy structure after the war. In some studies, community members claimed the chiefs were important in terms of cultural norms and in providing a sense of safety and security (Fanthorpe, 2005; King, 2005; Sawyer, 2008; Thomson, 2007).

Others, however, questioned whether pre-war abuses and corruption would be accepted by the community, especially by those who had fled to other countries and had varying cultural experiences during the conflict (Fanthorpe, 2005; Keen, 2003, 2005; Richards, 2005; Richards et al., 2004; Thomson, 2007).

An additional debate about the chiefs was whether they, or local leaders in general, would be useful in resolving conflicts at the national level (Adebajo, 2002), since they had little experience with change (Peake et al, 2004). The chiefs, therefore, are an important piece in the community development puzzle and must be examined in this study.

***Role of ceremonies and rituals in post conflict community development.*** The other cultural subset reviewed was the role of ceremonies and rituals in the development process. Interestingly, there was much more literature available on large scale ceremonies and rituals, compared to those that were community-based. Rituals that were local could be understood as

the cultural events that link community members to each other, the land, and the gods (Ray, 2000; Schirch, 2005). Local rituals in Sierra Leonean communities included traditional art, elders and chiefs, holy texts, confessions, the sharing of kola nuts to represent peacemaking, and community accord (Ferme, 2001; Mundy, 2005, Parringer; 1976).

In addition to general community rituals and ceremonies, there was also evidence of secret societies that organized rituals when girls moved into adulthood and when ex-combatants returned to communities in Sierra Leone (McIntyre, 2004; Naraghi Anderlini, Pampell Conway, & Kays, 2005). There were, however, concerns over issues of marginalization in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age in these local practices (Mundy, 2005). The overall importance and usage of these ceremonies and rituals as a piece of post conflict community development was still fairly unknown in the literature, which merited further examination in this study.

### ***Role of international forces in post conflict community development***

The international community, especially bilateral and multilateral organizations, played a role in development, as they provided overall aid after the war, including resources and policy advice (Chenge, 2002; Fanthorpe, 2003; Mlambo, Kamara, & Nyende, 2009; Rogers, 2006; United Nations Development Program, 2006; United States Agency for International Development, n.d.; World Bank, n.d.). This aid came quickly to help jumpstart the economy and begin local and national development projects. It also served to fund the government, which received half of its operating funds from international organizations. Like in many post conflict countries, however, the aid diminished over time (Baker & May, 2006; Freeman, 2008; Mlambo et al., 2009; UNDP, 2006; USAID, n.d.).

While this overview gives a sense of the larger scale projects, there was a debate as to the success of internationally-aided development on the community level. The largest question in

the literature was about the international community's ability to connect with community members and institutions. Some studies and reports revealed successful connections (United States Agency for International Development & United Nations Development Program, 2000; World Bank, n.d.). Others pointed to direct instances where communities did not feel connected or engaged with international entities, despite rhetoric to the contrary (Callway, 2005; Chenge, 2002; Fanthorpe, 2003). Therefore, the international community must be considered in this study both to understand its successes and limitations in overall community development.

### ***Role of governmental forces in post conflict community development***

Finally, the role of the government was presumed to be a factor in post conflict community development, but the influence of the national government had been scarcely researched. With rampant corruption at all levels of government, much of the research focused on good governance. This included combating corruption, working toward more employment in the country, and collecting taxes to meet increasing systemic issues such as the economy, education, healthcare, maintaining the peace, and an effective justice system (Fanthorpe, 2003; 2004; Glentworth, 2002; Grindle, 2002; Hope, 2008; Malan, Meek, Thusi, Ginifer, & Coker, 2003).

The current governmental capacity had to increase if it were to tackle both the governmental endeavors explained above and deal directly with the community (Hope, 2008). It was unclear whether the government had been, or would be able to meet these needs. Also examined was the establishment of the National Commission for Social Action, intended to link the government to both local communities and to international organizations. The interaction with these groups was said to have been stilted and wrapped in distrust. Therefore, it remained

unclear whether the government could strike a balance between various local and international community needs (Fanthorpe, 2003; Glentworth, 2002; Malan et al., 2003; Rogers, 2006).

### **Study Methodology**

The brief literature review provided earlier helped confirm the themes explored in this grounded theory study. Using grounded theory allows for the fieldwork data to be systematically compared and analyzed so that the stories and theories that emerged generate a more complete understanding of postconflict community development in Sierra Leone (Patton, 2002). The data, which revealed these stories and theories, was collected as part of dissertation research over an intensive five-week visit to Sierra Leone in May through June 2009 (McIntyre Miller, 2010).

Study subjects were members of two Sierra Leonean communities in the Northern provinces. The people in the Northern regions of Sierra Leone hail predominately from the Temne ethnic group and were approximately 60% Muslim, 10% Christian, with 30% identified as practicing traditional religions (Bambrick, 2004). Communities in the north tended to be farming-based (Binns & Maconachie, 2005), although there were also small enterprises in each of the communities. Due to the casualties of the war, the communities had more women than men, and more youth than adults.

The two communities selected for this study were chosen in the Northern region of the country because this region was the last stronghold of the rebels and had the longest, most recent effects of the war. The two communities were also selected because they housed chapters of a local organization whose members served as in-country hosts. These in-country hosts assisted in participant selection and served as translators for 15 of the 28 interviews. Interviews in each community began with three to four individuals identified through convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) by the local hosts. These were community members that the hosts knew were

knowledgeable and had been involved in the community development process or had stories of note related to the community's development.

After interviewing these initial individuals, the criteria of both convenience and purposeful sampling were used to expand the interview pool (Patton, 2002). In order to have a comprehensive understanding of post conflict community building through the interviews, participants were chosen through convenience sampling to match the researched demographics of each community in terms of age, gender, education level, and community power. This demographics-based sampling technique created a purposeful sample of the many ideas and experiences within each community about development in the post conflict context.

In order to gather these various ideas and experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants in each community (28 in total), each lasting less than an hour. Interviews were guided by protocol based on a preliminary investigation of post conflict community building in Sierra Leone and the themes confirmed in the literature review discussed briefly above. The interview protocol was edited for cultural sensitivity with guidance from Sierra Leonean contacts. As the protocol was used as an informal guide, there was room in each interview to ask questions to ensure correct meaning-making and full understanding.

Interviews, digitally recorded when possible, were transcribed verbatim during the country visit. In addition to fact-checking during the interviews, the in-country hosts reviewed a majority of the transcripts to verify meaning. The data in the reviewed transcripts was coded and manipulated to create an accurate emergent theme analysis. This analysis, as well as researcher observations and participation in events, meetings, and community interactions, helped to create the cross-case comparison discussed below.

## **Findings**

The themes emerging from the data can be categorized into four community-based factors that influenced post conflict community development. These are: (a) the inclusive involvement of community members for development and construction projects, (b) the use of culturally-responsive practices in community building, (c) leadership that is directly connected with the community, and (d) the combination of traditional and local development practices with western and governmental practices. Each of these four factors is detailed below, and for confidentiality purposes, all names are pseudonyms.

### ***Inclusive involvement of community members***

The first factor that influenced post conflict community development in Sierra Leone was the inclusive involvement of community members. Community involvement was seen in the building of both social and physical capital. Projects designed to build social capital in the communities were seen as fully inclusive and locally-run. Community members mentioned creating support and rehabilitation groups to help the community heal collectively from the trauma of the war. They also formed skills training programs, healing programs for sexual abuse victims of the war, alternative education programs for those unable to continue their studies during the conflict, and small economic ventures to increase the economic viability of the communities. All of these examples demonstrated the ability of community members to create development programs that were “locally built and their approach [was] traditional and from a Sierra Leonean point of view” (Banura, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

This local approach was also seen in some projects that built physical capital. Many community members shared their experiences of working together to build homes after many were looted of necessities or destroyed during the war: “If you help me, I’ll help you... If I go to his house to help, he will come to my house...” (Alie, personal communication, June 6, 2009).

For larger projects however, such as schools, hospitals, meeting spaces, wells, and roads, community members shared that they had to rely more often on international and governmental organizations and funding rather than just on each other. Community members believed that their work and involvement in these projects was essential to the success of development but several felt many international organizations did not allow them an equal hand in the process.

International organizations bring expatriates to do the jobs, [and] this is a burning issue. Most of these jobs could be done by Sierra Leoneans. They could employ the Sierra Leoneans as members of their staff to help; they could have more local people ... [but] the NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] come with expats and take the bulk of the work ... the communities provide the unskilled labor. (Banura, personal communication, June 8, 2009)

Community members believed that the international organizations saw them as unable to take responsibility for their own development- that international organizations would rather bring in their own people than trust the community members. Thus, their reliance on international sources extended from the need for resources to the everyday running of these projects.

Unfortunately, this study did not include conversations with members of these organizations, and therefore it is unclear about the feelings of those involved in the other side of the issue. Even if efforts were being made for more inclusion on behalf of the international organizations, data showed that community members felt quite disconnected. This demonstrated, then, that greater effort may be needed to include community members and ensure they felt local ownership in both the skilled labor of development and throughout the ranks of a project. Since community members are the base unit of any community, it is essential that they are at the heart of development efforts.

*Use of culturally-responsive practices in community building*

In addition to including community members in the development process, the data revealed that including the traditions of those people and society would also be beneficial. Several community members discussed the advantages of using culturally-responsive practices in community development, since it created a sense of belonging and familiarity throughout the process. Culturally-responsive practices included the elders in the communities, and also the youth. These young community members were encouraged to participate in order to connect the generations and ensure the continuance of these traditions (Banura, personal communication, June 8, 2009). The two culturally-responsive community development practices most discussed by the Sierra Leonean community members were ceremonies and traditional societies.

Ceremonies occurred within the meeting spaces of the communities and all members were invited to attend and take part. The ceremonies detailed by community members often connected the communities to the earth. Harvesting ceremonies brought people together within their cultural traditions to support the growing of crops and included music and dancing. Cleansing ceremonies, engaged in by some communities after the war, often included sacrificing animals and cleansing rebel burial sites as a way to wash the land from blood spilled and atrocities committed. These cleansing ceremonies served to appease the community's overseers so that community members felt a sense of togetherness and safety, encouraging more people to return to their homes (Arif, personal communication, June 7, 2009).

In addition to earth-connecting ceremonies, Sierra Leonean communities also engaged in ceremonies that celebrated life transitions. Although not a new phenomenon, celebrating life's transitions, such as naming a newborn child, marriage, and funerals, brought the community together. Both observations and interviews revealed that by celebrating these culturally-

responsive events, community bonds were established and confirmed. These bonds then allowed for a sense of community to develop, thus increasing social capital.

A more controversial means of using culturally-responsive practices for community development is the perpetuation of traditional secret societies. While a truly in-depth study of these societies is beyond the scope of this research, it was clear that these exclusive all-male and all-female societies were a contentious issue; in fact many participants hesitated to discuss them. In some cases, community members credited the societies with bringing people together, helping them heal from the trauma of the war, and teaching them skills for life and relevant traditional norms.

Others, however, accused the societies of unacceptable initiation practices, including female genital mutilation; using violence; the disempowerment of women; exclusion; and the prevention of free speech. The divide in opinions of traditional societies left their contributions to community development subject to debate or interpretation. Thus only some of the culturally-responsive practices in the community positively influenced the post conflict community development process.

### ***Leadership connected to communities***

The issues of cultural norms can also be seen within the leadership structures of the community, especially through the chieftaincy system. Despite the troubles of the past, this system was still widely used and considered essential to the success of the communities. Local community members shared three ways that the chiefs were able to use their leadership capacities to directly connect to the local communities: providing a sense of safety and security; working toward development needs; and settling community disputes.

Community members interviewed felt the chiefs were able to directly connect with the communities through their ability to provide community members a feeling of safety and security: “If the chief ran away from their community [during the war], the rest of the people also ran away. If [the chiefs] came back, that gave confidence to the people to come back and return to their homes” (Rosaline, personal communication, June 2, 2009). Although this was not always possible due to wartime casualties, having a chief in place in the communities, despite past abuses, was seen as a positive step in moving toward development.

The chiefs were also seen by community members as connected with the community through their intermediary role in facilitating receipt of aid for development projects from international organizations. In order to know the priorities of community members and ensure they were part of the process, meetings were held in community spaces or at the chief’s compound to discuss community development. This practice, however, occurred more often at the end of the war, due to high costs associated with hosting full community meetings. Community members, however, were often disappointed with the rarity of the meetings, as they felt they were an effective mechanism to maintain a connection with the chief and with the community desire to move forward.

The final way the chiefs connected their leadership to a community was through the settlement of disputes, which often involved land use issues or social conflict. “When domestic clashes occur [community members] can take the report to the chief and he amends it” (Ishmael, personal communication, May 29, 2009). The chiefs were known to “intervene ... and make compromises ... and get people together” (Rosaline, personal communication, June 2, 2009). The majority of community members felt that the chiefs settled these disputes with fairness and thoughtfulness, which enabled healing to occur between the disputants, and thus throughout the

community. “The chief [was] very truthful” (Miatta, personal communication, June 5, 2009) and “...tries hard to settle [disputes] well” (Arif, personal communication, June 7, 2009).

Several community members also discussed the government’s attempt to limit the chieftaincy corruption seen prior to the war by creating courts as a second appeal to those dissatisfied with the chief’s ruling. Community members found these courts to be quite expensive, however, and stated that they made the chiefs appear unfair and corrupt. For these reasons, they believed there was added incentive for disputes to be settled fairly by the chiefs the first time, thus strengthening community connectedness.

Emerging from the need to address past cultural norms in order for the community to move forward after the war, an additional form of leadership began in one community. Although not widely discussed by the community members, this was a new, co-gendered leadership that was seen in the community-based organizations.

If the chairman is a male, the vice will be a female; if the chairperson is female, than the vice is male. That is why the communities can be peaceful; always men and women are side by side in organization... [Prior to the war] the women were subjects of backyard activities, but now they are invited out of the house to help in development. Now they are being included in their rightful places in the community and the society. (Banura, personal communication, June 8, 2009)

Both new and old forms of leadership were seen as contributing to the post conflict community development efforts of the two communities in Sierra Leone by providing safety and security, settling disputes, working towards development needs, and beginning to balance power.

### *Combination of development practices*

The final factor that influenced post conflict community development in Sierra Leone in many ways combines much of the previous three. With local, governmental, and international groups working toward development, many community members felt progress would be substantially improved with combined efforts as they could “do things [the community] could not do by themselves,” (Suzan, personal communication, June 4, 2009). Although there are some examples of this collaboration described below, overall the instances were few. The data demonstrated that this may stem from a lack of inclusion of community members in international projects, and lack of governmental resources to meet the vast needs in the country.

One way that international organizations were able to collaborate with community members and their needs was through the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program. Although sometimes criticized for being solely focused on male rebels among other issues (Karamoh, personal communication, May 30, 2009), DDR programs were seen by some local community members as beneficial for community development because they taught ex-combatants “skills, like carpentry and driving, so they [would] not harm civilians anymore. This [was] helpful because once they [had] jobs it [was] easier for [everyone] to all live together” (Sinead, personal communication, June 4, 2009).

Community members also gave the international community credit for helping organize soccer matches on community fields so that the rebel fighters, the youth, and the overall community could find new ways of healthy engagement. Soccer is a tremendously popular sport throughout the country and community members believed it demonstrated friendly competition. Some matches were even inter-community matches to increase connections between communities. These matches “[brought] peace and unity so [that] people [could] live together well” (Sinead, personal communication, June 4, 2009). They also provided an opportunity for a

community to come together, ease some tensions from the war, and demonstrate that the groups could be united and work together toward community development.

The national government was also seen as connecting development activities with the community on some occasions. Community members stated that this was done primarily through the funding of infrastructure development, creation of the court system to ensure fair settlements to disputes, and collection of taxes to fund programs at the community level. As aforementioned, the national government also founded the National Commission on Social Action as an effort to connect government and international monies with local communities, although this program was not considered widely successful by respondents.

The greatest direct link and combined efforts that community members discussed came from some Members of Parliament (MP) representing the communities in the national government. Although their efforts were recognized by only some of the community members, these government officials were given credit for organizing groups to build roads, community centers, schools, health centers, and markets. In some cases, work on these projects was in exchange for food. One MP “increased agriculture projects of over 1,000 acres [and] does peace projects, cultivation of cassavas and vegetables. People farm these acres and then sell their products” (Zaria, personal communication, June 5, 2009). Although not as robust as the other three community-based factors influencing development, the collaborative efforts of the international organizations and the government have been moderately effective and may provide the greatest room for future development opportunities.

### **Discussion and Implications**

These four community-based factors offer direct lessons from the ways communities in Sierra Leone are moving forward after conflict. They also, however, suggest challenges that

must be addressed to fully help the Sierra Leonean communities, and others learning from these lessons, move forward. Both the past literature and study findings demonstrated that the inclusion of local community members provide a space for ownership and continued engagement in community development activities. Therefore, the lack of connectivity between community members and the international organizations should be tackled to ensure as much inclusion in development processes as possible.

The findings also show that the use of culturally-responsive practices, including the traditions and norms of the society, helped community members feel comfortable and connected in the development process. As also suggested by Mundy (2005), the culturally-relevant practices, especially the traditional societies, should work toward inclusivity to be most effective. This may be especially important when engaging youth in these processes, as past cultural issues played a role in the youth involvement in the war.

In addition, having local leadership structures in place to offer a direct connection with the community ensures that the views are heard by those in power and have a say in development projects and needs. Even with the assistance of the chiefs, however, the communities still had limited capacity and resources for development. This was partly due to the fund diminishment over time. Another important factor, though, was a lack of community connectedness and the limited ways multiple stakeholders work together. Increasing involvement and collaborative programs may improve this challenge.

Local leadership structures also contributed to development by being both culturally familiar and providing the potential to rectify past inequities and increase inclusion in the leadership and power of the community. In order for this to take hold though, the chiefs have to continue to move away from their history of past inequities, as suggested by Fanthorpe (2005),

Keen (2003), and Thompson (2007). Also, the new co-gendered leadership structure should be further explored and developed to ensure its acceptance by all community members.

Finally, the findings revealed that new ways of linking all stakeholders involved in the development process together can ensure greater success and focus resources, needs, and desires in a comprehensive way. Collaboration efforts may be the largest benefit to community development, but these occurrences were rare at the time of the study. Additional research may help to uncover more success stories of collaborative efforts. Despite the challenges, the findings, in addition to being considered individually, offer a broader lesson when viewed collectively. In order for communities to move forward, members must be involved in a way that allows for their input and stays open to their cultural experiences, while not discounting the positive role that other mechanisms, such as international and governmental efforts, can play when also engaged in the development process.

The experiences discussed above can be attributed only to the two Sierra Leonean communities, and are therefore not necessarily generalizable to other communities. The overall lessons learned, however, provide insights or transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other communities attempting to move forward after major struggles. While remaining cautious about challenges, the four community-based factors can be applied to other communities in several ways.

As revealed in both the literature and the findings, including community members in the development process is essential to increasing social capital and maintaining accountability for development. Communities must find unique ways of engaging members and accessing their vast human, if not financial, resources and inspiring their passion. It would be wise for communities to identify groups of people already formed and working together and develop

those relationships for the broader community good. Meetings were found to be a successful way to bring people together to engage in development in Sierra Leone, so perhaps regular meetings with community groups and members can provide the motivations and connections to increase development. Including representatives in all planning activities can help ensure that connectedness is valued in the development process.

Although not all communities necessarily possess the rich cultural and traditional heritage as those in Sierra Leone, other communities will have their own assets around which development practices can be honed and formulated including norms, practices, and events (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Communities should examine existing traditions, such as parades, festivals, or music and art events, and determine how they can be built upon to further bring people together. If such rituals and ceremonies do not exist, or no longer exist, events that are important and relevant to the community can be planned in order to bring the community together and provide a common activity around which to unite. Events that bring people together physically often create an emotional space to develop the bonds necessary to increase social capital. An important part of the lesson learned from Sierra Leone, however, is to ensure these traditions, ceremonies, and rituals are as inclusive of the entire community as possible.

Leadership can serve to connect community members with the development process. It may be important for communities to reflect on the leadership structures of the past and determine what had or had not been successful. Communities should ask themselves how those factors successful in the past could be maintained while those unsuccessful practices could be improved. Communities should reflect on how the historical and traditional aspects of successful leadership might be combined with more modern ideas and modalities to create a leadership

structure that is most reflective of the community's preferences as it moves forward toward development.

Some of these new modalities may look similar to the Sierra Leonean model of co-gendered leadership. The benefits of encouraging new leadership practices are that they may allow more community members to engage in leadership and in overall development by providing a space for marginalized groups to increase their community power. In addition to a co-gendered leadership model, other communities may consider shared a power structure among those of other varying groups; perhaps, political opinion, race, age, or experience level.

Finally, regardless of the leadership model found most effective for a community's development, those leaders may be able to connect not only to other members, but also to other stakeholders. Working with stakeholders, such as international and governmental groups and organizations, can help enhance the development process and can create new projects and means of implementation. With community members, leaders, and governmental and international entities united in a locally-based process and desire for development, community improvement is likely to increase (Checkoway, 1994).

Communities that embrace any and all of the four factors to benefit development may find greater success in constructing a future for sustainable peace. Although the two Sierra Leonean communities studied still have work to do, the efforts to include community members, use culturally-responsive practices, have connected leadership, and shared efforts among stakeholders are encouraging development and building stronger community futures. Other communities engaged in similar situations may find equal or even greater successes with the lessons learned than those communities studied.

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