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# A Historical Study of the Emergence of Social Movements: Case Study of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum in the 1990s

Agnes Mariama Farma

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**A Historical Study of the Emergence of Social Movements:  
Case Study of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum in the 1990s**

A Thesis

Presented to the

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

By

Agnes Mariama Farma

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## **ABSTRACT**

The emergence of the Women's Forum during the 1990's in Sierra Leone is analyzed using the political process model proposed by Douglas McAdam. The strength of the indigenous organizations, the political opportunities presented by the civil strife of the period and the emergence of insurgency consciousness on the part of the women of Sierra Leone were identified as significant in contributing to the success of the movement in bringing an end to the civil war and influencing the peace process to address women's issues, indicating the usefulness of this model in analyzing the emergence of social movements in the Sierra Leonean context.

## **PART I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.**

The concern of this research is to explain the emergence of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum by using the political process model developed by Douglas McAdam (1982). McAdam (1982) argued that social movements emerge with cognitive liberation and develop further because of the indigenous strength of individual citizens in a relatively accommodating political environment. Of great importance to this model is the point that social movements can develop as long as the particular political situation supports and/or allows them to do so.

Sierra Leone became a beehive of social movements as a result of the level of human rights violations during the ten-year civil war in the 1990s. According to the United Nations statistics, by the early 1990s, Sierra Leone ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world notwithstanding ample natural resources including diamonds, gold, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, marine life, coffee and cocoa (John Hirsh 2001:33). In the same vein, Hirsh (2001) cited the president of Sierra Leone as having "said in a rueful 37th anniversary independence speech on April 27, 1998, Sierra Leone at independence ranked ahead of Malaysia and Singapore only to find itself almost four decades later ranked below even Somalia and Rwanda" (p.33).

Furthermore, Hirsh (2001) stated that, "unless domestic and external players directly involved in the conflict reverse their pattern of winner-take-all politics and commit themselves to the national interest, the future of Sierra Leone and the surrounding region will be dire indeed" (p.95). The decade old turbulence depleted the population and also drove hundreds of thousands into displacement camps and others as refugees into

neighboring countries. These events certainly created serious social and political problems for both the government and the people of Sierra Leone.

The 1990s were marked, therefore, by a political instability, in which there were five presidents over the ten-year period. The social and political turmoil further increased the rate of unemployment especially among the youth, including school drop-outs and university graduates who nurtured an urgent desire for changing the system. These severe economic hardships and deprivations reached explosive magnitude when mercenaries from Liberia crossed over to Sierra Leone and started to wreck havoc on innocent civilians along the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1991. The spill-over of the Liberian crisis presented an opportunity for rural youths to become transformed to a rebel faction. The faction came to be known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone under the leadership of a retired Army corporal Foday Saybana Sankoh.

The United Nations article on conflict trends stated that, “Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries on the planet, and during the past decade, its people have been victims of mass killings, torture, rape, and mutilations” (Conflict Trends, 2003, p. 12). As a result, there was an increase in the number of female heads of households, women and children found themselves in displacement camps all over the country, rising numbers of female abductees used as sex slaves by rebels, and worst of all, incidents of brutality including numbers of pregnant women slit open to determine the sex of the fetus and left to die. All these horrifying episodes fueled the emergence of massive and unprecedented civil society responses to what many Sierra Leoneans deemed as too important to be left in the hands of the politicians and the military alone. The efforts of these of civil groups and individuals were important at different stages; some were active in mobilizing public

opinion in favor of peace and democratization, while others operated in the shadows cast by the high-level international political maneuvering that led to the Abidjan agreement in 1996 between the RUF and the government of Sierra Leone. Hirsh (2001) noted that, the “women’s movement took the leading role in the campaign, joined by trade unionists, journalists, local council leaders, paramount chiefs, and well-known academics” (p. 40).

Theories of social movements have been closely connected with the general problems of societal development. In essence, many explanations about why social movements emerge suggest that movements come into being as a response to the discontent of the general populace and with the intention to address the problems emanating from a particular society. For this reason, most theories of social movements have been based on general approaches to the principles of societal development. While there seems to be a general consensus about the reasons for their emergence, the extent to which there have been variances as to which factors most influence movement emergence has been astonishing. Every movement has its own peculiarity, and the variance among movements leads to broad general assumptions of movement emergence.

The emergence of the Sierra Leone Women’s Forum in response to the grotesque and catastrophic civil conflict in Sierra Leone is one example of the formation of social movements. Barely four years into what turned out to be a decade of conflict, the Forum (SLWF), which was an amalgamation of over 50 women’s organizations with the initial aim of information sharing and networking, was unavoidably drawn into the broader spectrum of peacemaking. Among their key objectives was the intent to pressure the military government to speedily conclude the war, stop the gross violations of human rights especially as they affect women, and improve the participation level of the women

in the democratization process that was gradually unfolding in Sierra Leone. In this study, I explain the emergence of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF) by using a political process model, developed by Douglas McAdam (1982). The model is described in the "Rationale and "Theoretical Framework" sections of this research.

This research contributes to our understanding of the emergence of social movements like the Sierra Leone women's Forum, by applying the sociological model posited by Doug McAdam (1982). As a case study, it shows that women, if given the opportunity, can facilitate meaningful social change. Also, it is hoped that the application of the political process theory will generate new investigations on female activism in other developing societies, since this research initiates new inquiries into the genesis of organized nationwide movements in Africa which can be traced as far back as the independence struggles on that continent.

Finally, this thesis informs our understanding of programs that affect subsistence farmers, women, children and youth in other developing societies. In Sierra Leone, these social groups were absolutely and relatively subjected to deprivation and felt injustices of the war. Subsistence farmers and those with lower incomes felt the weight of the human rights atrocities and the economic depression of the war. These circumstances led to an increase of serious threats to the physical, socioeconomic survival of the women and children during the war. Therefore, SLWF mobilized to defend the country in the absence of normalcy and to bring the war to a final halt.

## **PART I.I: GENERAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SLWF**

According to the SLWF brochure, the “Sierra Leone Women's Forum was established in 1994 during the preparation for the African Regional Conference for the 4<sup>th</sup> World's Conference in Beijing” (SLWF Brochure1994:1). At first, the women responded locally by sharing information informally but it quickly became necessary to establish a more formal organization for sharing ideas, and building effective alliances. The movement had as one of its aims the mobilization of women to actively participate in the socio-political process of ending the escalated violence, reestablishing democracy, and building sustainable development. Through the mobilization of the women, the forum empowered them to meaningfully contribute to the peace process. The leaders of the movement’s founding members include: Ms. Amy Smyth, Madam Grace Williams, Ms. Iysha Dyfan and Ms. Yasmin Jusu Sheriff among others.

Furthermore, the SLWF brochure notes that the “the vision of the SLWF is a Sierra Leone free from violent conflict, where good governance prevails, and where women, from the majority of the population, have equality of opportunities in all spheres of life. Another objective is the empowerment of women to meaningfully contribute towards the attainment of durable peace and sustainable development of the nation” (Brochure: 1994. 2). Therefore, the SLWF recognizes its role as one of coordination, networking, and leadership. In particular, member organizations are able to tap into the Forum for information sharing, sensitization and awareness raising, lobbying, campaigning, building and utilizing gender sensitive partnerships, and for other resources. The SLWF built the capacity of women to organize, enhanced effective

coordination, and supported the efforts to promote reconciliation and peace building, advance democracy, and forward the issues of concern to women.

During the war, the movement continued to be active. An example of their participation in the political process is when several women's organizations such as Accord 97 and the Women's Crusade for Peace, both part of the SLWF, met with Sierra Leonean refugees in the United Kingdom and America, as well as in displaced persons camps in Guinea and the Gambia. The aims of these meetings were to encourage more coordination and to evaluate the needs of the movement in Sierra Leone. The war actually took a toll on the movement because after the January, 1999 attack on the capital city, the Forum's membership scattered once again. Some members left the country, taking their families with them in search of safety and stability in other countries.

However, the SLWF continually built on its past achievements. It continued to mobilize its members; harnessing their knowledge, skills, experience and energies to confront the continuing challenges of sustainable peace. A number of organizations countrywide within the Forum have held workshops to train women in peace building, trauma healing and conflict resolution. According to the Brochure, the SLWF continues to participate in post war recovery programs, some of which include:

1. Conducting needs assessment of women in the hinterland to determine the needs of the returning women,
2. Advocating for the expression; recognition and protection of women's rights through legal reforms,
3. Influencing the formulation of local and national policies for the advancement of women,

4. Striving to ensure the participation of women in the political and economic development of the nation,
5. Researching sexual and gender violence,
6. Establishing scholarship assistance for children of the victims of the war through the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAW),
7. Distributing relief supplies clothing and other items to needy communities,
8. Educating women nationwide on issues of gender equality, law reform, poverty, functional literacy, and increased political representation in decision-making positions for women,
9. Organizing workshops on HIV/AIDS and violence prevention skills (p. 4).

The following highlights some of the activities of the SLWF between June 1994 and October 2000.

June to October 1994	Planning meetings, Writing up of non-governmental contribution for the Dakar Conference, raising of funds to attend regional meeting on the Global Peace Tent activities in Dakar.
November 1994	SLWF participated in a regional meeting to prepare platform for action for the African regional and 4th Women's World Conference in Beijing. Return from Dakar with strong determination to participate actively in the process and return to democratic rule.
December 1994	Formation of the Women's Movement for Peace (sub wing of SLWF)
February 15, 1995	Peace March organized by the Women's Movement for Peace. The SLWF was firmly integrated in to the democratization process led by the new organization, Women organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN). The SLWF promoted democratization as a key to achieving sustainable peace and was the driving force behind the general elections in 1996 and the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in the same year.
February , 1995	SLWF participated in Bintumani 1 Consultative Conference on the electoral process and restoration of peace in the country
February 12, 1996	SLWF participated in Bintumani 11 consultative conference on the electoral process.
February 9, 1996	Women's March to petition the Interim National Electoral Commission on the electoral process.
1996	Participation in the Peace Tent in Dakar. The Forum members were impressed by the activities of the "Peace Tent" in Dakar and its relevance to contributing to the resolution of the conflict in Sierra Leone.
February 26, 1996	Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone.
March 1996	Presidential Run-off elections.
May 25, 1997	Following the military coup, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council in collaboration with the rebel faction (AFRC) took over Sierra Leone for nine months, driving the democratic government into exile in neighboring Guinea. Once again, it was the SLWF that led the public condemnation of the coup and called for a non co-operation with the AFRC, which was subsequently ousted by the Economic Community Monitoring Forces (ECOMOG) in February 1998.
March 6, 2000	March on the RUF leader, Foday Saybana Sankoh
October 2000	The SLWF established its permanent Secretariat operated by salaried staff; a coordinator; an administrative assistant; office assistant; telephone system; a hotmail account which is sierraleonewomen'sforum@hotmail.com and Motto which is Enlightened Women for a Brighter and Better Sierra Leone.

## **PART II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The conceptual framework for this research focuses on Douglas McAdam's political process theory. As background to the understanding of the political process model it is necessary to examine briefly the resource mobilization model. McAdam's political process model identifies three factors that are believed to be crucial in generating social insurgency (p. 40). These include (1) insurgency consciousness or cognitive liberation (2) structure of political opportunities and (3) indigenous organizational strength McAdam (p.40). McAdam (1982) presented these three variables to explain the development of social movements. Cognitive liberation/insurgent consciousness is the stage at which the participants in the movement add subjective meaning to their grievances. Members experience shifting political conditions as a group with a common goal. Therefore, McAdam (1982) argued that, "cognitions on behalf of insurgents or challengers include the collective action of comprehending and articulating the source of the dilemma" (p. 50).

The second variable in this research is the structure of political opportunities. A shift in the political opportunities for a social movement according to McAdam (1982) refers to "any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured" (p.41). He argued that, "among the events and processes likely to prove disruptive of the political status quo are wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and wide spread demographic changes" (p. 41).

Indigenous organizational strength is the third variable that allows social movements to develop. McAdam (1982) further divides indigenous organizational strength into four elements: (1) members (2) established structure of solidarity incentives; (3) communications networks; (4) leaders (Pp. 44-51). The already existing ideology and sense of allegiance that develops within the aggrieved communities, combined with the four elements can be used to overcome the problems encountered by the movement.

To recap these three broad concepts, insurgence consciousness, political opportunities and indigenous organizational strength are, according to the Political Process Model, necessary for the successful emergence of social movements. Leaders and members of social movements must be ready, aware, and have the opportunity to mobilize. Opportunities and organizations form the structural potential of the movement, both of which affect the consciousness of the group members and all three of which create the social movement. Therefore, this research examines the following questions:

1. How did the political climate in Sierra Leone in the 1990s contribute to the rise and development of Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF)? ( Political opportunity)
2. To what extent can we attribute the existence of the women's organizations to the expansion and success of the Sierra Leone's Women's Forum (SLWF)? (Indigenous organizational strength)
3. Was " the chance of successfully achieving its goal a key factor in the formation and development of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF)?. (Insurgency consciousness)

Based on the above research questions, the following hypotheses must be examined:

1. The political situation in Sierra Leone in the 1990s contributed favorably to the emergence and development of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement.
2. The success of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum can be attributed to the already existing indigenous women organizations in Sierra Leone which served as a stepping stone for a larger and more vibrant women's forum.
3. The Women's Forum that developed in Sierra Leone in the 1990s was as a result of an awareness of the need for change and the decision of the women to be instrumental in changing the situation.

### **PART III: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social movement theory seeks to explain how discontent among an aggrieved population transforms into collective action. Two important theories, “resource mobilization and political process theories start from the assumption that insurgency constitutes a set of rational collective actions by excluded groups to advance their interests” (Klandermans 1997: 203).

The resource mobilization approach emphasizes the role of organizations in the mobilization of participants in social movements. Movement organizations whether new or established play an important role in the growth of social movements according to McAdam (1982), Tarrow (1994), Marwell and Oliver (1993), Morris (1984), Connell (1980), Klandamans (1984, 1989) Schwartz and Paulb (1992). They encourage membership commitment and play an important role in the construction and reconstruction of collective beliefs and transformation of discontent into collective action (Klandermans 1997:121). The survival of a movement then is contingent upon the resources available to mobilize the participants. Organizations provide the means whereby resources are accumulated from individual and institutional supporters and are allocated based on the goals of the organizations. According to the resource mobilization theory, social movements emerge not so much because grievances increase, but because there is an increase in the availability of resources in an aggrieved population (Klandermans, 1997:120).

Even when the resources are available and the political opportunity structure is favorable, however, individuals are unlikely to act if they do not define the situation as a

collective problem that should be addressed through collective action. Therefore, McAdam (1982) proposed the political process model, which identifies three sets of factors that are believed to be crucial in the generation of social insurgency. These are: insurgent consciousness/cognitive liberation; the structure of political opportunities; and indigenous organizational strength.

According to Piven and Cloward (1979) “the emergence of protest movement entails a transformation both of consciousness and behavior. The change in consciousness has three distinct aspects (McAdam 1982: 49) First, the government depends on the support of the people but if the men and women who ordinarily accept the authority of their rulers begin to believe that its actions are unjust and wrong they begin to question its authority and legitimacy (McAdam 1982:50). Next, people who normally believe that they have no power to change the existing political arrangements begin to assert rights that imply demands for change (Costain: 1992). Finally, those same men and women begin to believe that they actually have the power to effect change. These authors suggested that, until and unless people systematically go through these stages, the forces of social movements will never be set in motion.

McAdam (1982) also argued that cognitive liberation addressed how members of the movement subjectively experience shifting political conditions as a group under social integration (p. 50). With the rise of such problems as prolonged unemployment, economic depression, and health issues, insurgent consciousness develops with fresh aspirations for change. Some of the issues which make people cognitively liberated include: new knowledge, advanced education, historical and socio-cultural background,

family, social connections, and experiences that will provide insight into how they think, what they want, and how they will fulfill their goals (Costain: 1992).

Cognitive liberation further implies a personal understanding and expression of the predicament by the aggrieved participants with a desire for improvement of their lives or to change the status quo. Thus, it is likely that a social movement develops when people individually have a sense or understanding that their rights have been violated and that something has to be done to rectify those wrongs. The overall changes from feeling powerless to a collective consciousness of the problems faced by the community are central to the emergence of social movements.

Costain (1992) claimed that, “protest movements arise out of the traumas of daily life; people have to perceive the deprivation and disorganization they experience are both wrong and subject to redress” (p. 41). McAdam (1982) found out that, “The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the rise of civil rights movements indicated awareness and readiness critical as components of the African - American liberation movements in the 1930-1970s America.

McAdam (1982) observed that political opportunity structure, according to Eisinger, (1973) can be defined as “ any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities” (McAdam 1982: 41). He suggested that political opportunity structure offered a more realistic approach for the development of social movements because it identifies a shift or deep structural change in the political environments opening the door to change. Among these shifts that are likely to disrupt

the established order are the following: wars; environmental threats; demographic changes; floods; hurricanes; droughts; prolonged unemployment; power disparity; division within the government; political exclusion; alienations; the economical situation; and the overall political climate of the country ( McAdam 1982). McAdam (1982) further argued that regardless of the causes of expanded political opportunities, such moves can facilitate increased political activism on the part of excluded groups either by seriously undermining the stability of the entire political system or by increasing the political leverage of a single insurgent group (p. 42).

The Central America Peace Movement provided an example of consequences of a shift within the political system. Smith (1986) noted that, “when the United States Central America peace movement began to mobilize in the early 1980s, it encountered a situation of divided government and elite defection--precisely the kind of conditions that fosters the successful emergence of movements contesting state policies” (p. 98). Therefore, political process theory explains the emergence of movements on the basis of changes in the institutional structure of informal power relation of a given national system. For instance, if the government adopted an ideology that does not win the support of a larger spectrum of the society it will create a vulnerable situation that will be exploited by social movements. Basically, the government’s plans must be appealing enough to address the majority of the people; otherwise, it may undermine the stability of the nation thereby paving a way for social insurgencies.

Based on McAdam’s argument, excluded groups are on the other hand seen as functionally powerless in the face of the enormous power wielded by the elites (McAdam 1982: 173). Hence, the power disparity between blacks and whites occurring roughly in

the quarter of the century from the 1930 to 1954 in the US served to undermine the politico-economic conditions on which the racial status quo was based and paved the way for the civil rights movement of 1950s and 60s. By tapping into the hidden potential of the masses, the African Americans were able to achieve a fair position within the American society. This process facilitated the development of the black movement by profoundly altering the shape of the political environment confronting the blacks (McAdam 1982:73). Ideological conflicts within governments and an overall lack of cohesion in any government provides a structure of opportunity for social movement activists to challenge the administrative policies of that government or status quo.

Alternatively, political opportunity structures may be discerned along so many directions and so many ways that it is less a variable than the cluster of variables--some more observable than others (Tarrow: 1988). In an effort to bring clarity to refining the concept of political opportunity (Porta: 1999) Brockett (1991), Rucht (1996), and Tarrow (1994) further argued that, "changes in political opportunity may be described as: relative openness to or closure of the institutional political systems; the stability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; the presence or absence of elite allies; the state's capacity and propensity for repression" (p. 99).

Furthermore, (Kriesi: 1995) found that, political opportunity structures are commonly defined along four main dimensions:

1. The degree of openness or closure of formal political access.
2. The degree of stability or instability of the political alignments.
3. The availability and strategic posture of potential alliance or partners.

4. The political conflicts within and among elites (p. 168).

In a similar vein Kriesi (1995), like McAdam (1982), noted that although the possibility for changes to occur exist at any point in time, the men and women who suffer grievances cannot anticipate such shifts at the time when they engage in collective action, which means that they have to take the political opportunity structure as it exists in the moment into account as they make their strategic calculations. In sum, McAdam (1982) argued that, “to generate a social movement, the aggrieved population must be able to convert a favorable structure of political opportunities into an organized campaign of social protest” (p.178).

The third component of the political process theory is defined as indigenous organizational strength, which according to McAdam (1982) consists of four elements. These include: active members; established structure of solidarity incentives that provide the motivation for membership; communication networks; and strong leaders. McAdam (1982) emphasized that, in the absence of this supportive organizational strength, “the aggrieved population is less likely to be deprived of the capacity for collective action even when confronted with a favorable structure of political opportunities” (p. 50).

Membership recruitment is conducted along network interactions in most movement organizations. McAdam (1982) noted that, “the more integrated the person is in the community, the more readily he/she can be mobilized for participation in movement activities” (p. 44). To demonstrate this point, McAdam (1982) argued that, “firstly, individuals could be recruited into the ranks of movement activists by virtue of their involvement in organizations that serve as associational networks out of which a

new movement emerge” (p.45). And secondly, indigenous organizations can serve as the primary source of the movement participants through what Oberschall (1973) has termed "block recruitment” (McAdam1982: 45). People take advantage of connections as a crucial component for soliciting organizations to participate in collective action. Friends or acquaintances already involved in social movements are more inclined to take part in collective action. In other words, some form of structural connections, which are already in place before participants join the movement incline, them to sympathetic alliances.

Further findings have emphasize that, networks play a crucial role in the process of individual participation in social movements and other studies which highlight this aspect include: (McAdam 1982, 1988, & 1989, Porta 1988 & 1995, and Klandermans 1997). These demonstrate that communication networks could serve multiple functions in organizations. They allow the participants to organize and reinforce their identities providing themselves with an awareness that encourages them to get ideologically closer to given social issues. Broadly speaking, communication networks and linking of participants and groups are central elements of social movements but these links are not permanent. Also, social ties might provide another channel for networking within the movement organizations. For example, movement organizations by their own actions or advertisements as well as media reports, websites, etc. might also provide another channel through which new supporters become attracted to the movement.

McAdam (1982) found out that many of the African American activists involved in the civil rights movement during the 1950s and later were members of Baptist churches before they devoted their time to fight against racial discrimination. Also, McAdam (1988) noted that the young students who worked on the Freedom Summer

Project in 1964 enjoyed social links, which greatly facilitated their commitments to the voter registration, campaign. These interpersonal ties have played significant roles in other radical movements, such as the Hut Tax War in Sierra Leone in the 1890s; the ANC's struggle against apartheid in South Africa; the Negritude Movement in Franco-phone African countries; the Aba Women's Riot in Nigeria in the 1960s among others. In addition, membership in similar organizations and the social ties by which aggrieved participants are connected suggest that people engage in collective action because they share certain norms and values. Thus, through these organizations, participants build and reinforce the identities that provide them with political consciousness and ideologically close to the issues at hand.

Another pertinent resource that provides participants' incentives to accomplish the goals of the movement includes personal gains by participants from the movement. Structure of solidarity incentives includes the myriad of interpersonal rewards that provide the motive for participation in these groups (McAdam 1982: 45). These personal rewards may correlate with the individual's motives for joining the movements. People join movements for various reasons such as personal benefits or because their friends have asked them to join. For example, they need to hear about the issues from the media and through friends and need to evaluate costs and benefits of membership before they join. It is the salience of these rewards that helps explain why recruitment through established organizations is generally so efficient (McAdam 1982). These established incentive structures as referred to by McAdam solve most of the "free rider problems" encountered by the movements.

McAdam (1982) referring to Oslon (1965) defined “free-rider problem” as the difficulties insurgents encounter in trying to convince the participants to pursue goals whose benefits they would derive even if they did not participate in the movement (McAdam 1982: 44). Social movement mobilization involves moving sympathetic supporters into active participants. The more successful a mobilization campaign the higher the proportion of sympathizers who actually participate, in other words, the more a positive attitude in fact results in behavioral support (Klandermans 1997: 7).

McAdam emphasized willingness, awareness and centrality of leadership as critical for the generation of social movements (McAdam (1982)). Thus, the survival of any movement depends on the presence of leadership that can provide direction, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their own position, identify the political opportunities, and is able to rally participants of the movement to face the challenges ahead. In certain circumstances, the leaders might be the initial members of the movements or organizations, or they may be appointed or elected because of their centrality in a specific community. Regardless of the timing of their recruitment, the existence of recognized leadership is another fundamental resource for coordination of activities and continuity of the social movement’s organizations. Leadership is not simple. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate good planning and critical analysis along with effective networking with membership to contribute to the success of the movement. Collective thinking and planning enables the leaders of the various organizations to avail themselves of every opportunity and resource available to achieve its goals. One thing that is certain, strong leadership inspires the participants to put their efforts together to achieve collectively in spite of the conflicting agendas that threaten to pull them apart. As

such, the presence of recognized and empowered leaders is as crucial to the process of movement emergence as a conducive political environment (McAdam 1982).

#### **PART IV: THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research is a case study using the political process model as posited by Douglas McAdam to describe the emergence of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum. The data has been collected from secondary sources using journals, emails, news articles and reports, the Forum's documents, the Constitution of Sierra Leone, leaflets, and position papers. The hypotheses to be tested were drawn from the research questions, which were based on the variables of political opportunity, indigenous organization and insurgency consciousness.

Researching an indigenous social movement has its difficulties. The major problem was access and availability of resources on the Sierra Leone Women's Forum. Part of the reason for this is because the SLWF, like many third world movements, has very poor documentation of its activities and manifesto. Also, with the formation of the Forum at the height of the conflict, many of its documents may have been suppressed to avoid further intimidation from the warring factions, destroyed in the war, or lost because it was never held at a central location. Sources such as newspaper articles and scholarly historical and political analyses provided documentation on the conditions at the time, many of the activities of the forum and the mobilization of women, and the role of women in the peace process and the returning to democracy.

## **PART V: DATA ANALYSIS**

The political process model with its centrality on the variables of political opportunities, insurgent consciousness, and indigenous organizational strength applies directly to the historical example of the emergence of the SLWF in Sierra Leone. A review of the literature suggests that, under worsening socio-economic situations, individuals and grass-roots organizations came together under an umbrella organization to mobilize for what they regarded as unjust treatment and the excessive violation of human rights. Social movements have been closely connected with the struggle to correct general social problems and McAdam's theory of social movements focuses on the development of such movements for addressing the frustrations of people within a particular system. Against this backdrop, the Sierra Leone Women's Forum came into being as a response to the problems and frustrations plaguing the community during and after the civil war which wracked that country in the 1990's.

While the Sierra Leone Women's Forum falls within the broader category of social movement's emergence, a proper analysis of the emergence of this movement in terms of the political process theory is best done by looking at the three variables of McAdam's model and how applicable or inapplicable these were in the case of the SLWF. These variables include insurgency consciousness/cognitive liberation, indigenous organizational strength, and the structure of political opportunities.

## **PART V.I: COGNITIVE LIBERATION/INSURGENT CONSCIOUSNESS**

In an attempt to answer the first research question, such issues as changes to the traditional male-dominated society brought about by the ravages of war and dislocation, an increase in the number of educated women in Sierra Leone, and the rise of women's movements in other countries were significant factors that led to the emergence of insurgent consciousness in the women of Sierra Leone during the 1990s. One might also suggest that because the women of Sierra Leone felt they had been marginalized over the years it accounts for the SLWF being in the forefront of the battle to restore sanity to a brutalized society.

A review of the existing literature on the emergence of the SLWF in the 1990s, suggests that the period under review witnessed an increase in the number of educated and professional women who were motivated by the democratic traditions in Western societies and wanted to educate their illiterate compatriots about the tenets of democracy. Their level of exposure to western influence and education helped to emancipate them, thereby inducing them to give voice to their complaints about the escalated atrocities from the war and the general trauma for all the women of Sierra Leone. Some of these leaders became so remarkable that the SLWF could not be mentioned without referencing them. They include: Ms. Iysha Dyfan – lawyer, Ms Yasmin Jusu sheriff-barrister and women's activist, Mrs. Amy Smythe- first Sierra Leonean Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ms. Elizabeth Alpha Lavalie- banker and politician, Ms. Christiana Thorpe- founder and chair of Forum for African Women; Educationalists (FAWE) a wing of the SLWF, Dr. Nana Pratt- President National Organization of women Sierra Leone (Williams 2003: 142). All of these women completed their education abroad in London,

Wales, and the United States. A critical examination of the academic achievements of these women supports Hirsh's (2001) assertion that "the women's movement took the leading role in the campaign, joined by trade unionists, journalists, local council leaders, paramount chiefs, and well-known academics" (p.40).

Postcolonial regimes in Africa were not receptive of the views of women and thus, lacking a voice in public forums, these educated women sought opportunities to have their concerns addressed. In addition, the issues of concern to women were growing exponentially as the civil unrest left women homeless, widowed, and victims of brutality. Therefore women's sense of awareness during the 1990s suggested that they were eager to take advantage of the transition in other developing societies especially as it concerned women's interests. Consequently, in May 2002, during the general election, one of the leaders of the Women's Movement Ms. Zainab Bangura was motivated and ran for the presidency--demonstrating the extent to which women perceived their role in the political process to have changed.

The Forum's success in recruiting women demonstrated the level of concern about the social and political crisis at that time, and an eagerness to participate equally with their male counterparts in public life. The level of awareness of the women in the movement was demonstrated through organizing workshops, seminars, and rallies in displaced camps throughout the country to sensitize women on those issues that affect women, and the steps towards a lasting peace. Massive demonstrations and peace marches were organized. The message of the women was propagated through public crusades, singing liberation songs, displaying gender flags and symbols, making public speeches, and constructing liberation slogans such as "*we want peace, peace the only way*

*forward*” among others. Female professionals, previously known for standing aloof from the concerns of ordinary people, danced through the center of the city, linking arms with female soldiers, petty traders and student nurses, singing choruses. The message of the demonstrators was simple and compelling: ‘*Try Peace to this senseless war*’ (Femmes-Africa-Soldarite: 2000) These responses correlate with McAdams’s initial definition of social movements where rational attempts are made by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutional means (Jasper: 1997).

The activities of the SLWF suggest that the previous traditional perception that the best place for a woman was in the kitchen and their primary role was the raising of children was gradually being displaced as a dream of the past in Sierra Leone. That women in Sierra Leone failed to organize prior to the 1990s illustrates that they were in a disadvantaged position to influence the state and be active in the political arena. Therefore, the various meetings and workshops, which were part of the 1990’s movement, transformed the women from feelings of powerlessness to feeling confidence and a willingness to identify the problems collectively and use the existing political opportunities to facilitate a change.

Another factor worth mentioning about the level of consciousness was the SLWF’s participation at the Beijing and the Peace Tent conferences in Dakar. Their participation in meetings must have transformed the former assumption that only men would provide security and address the financial and social needs of families while women stayed home and raised children. These values no longer matched the realities of life for the women of Sierra Leone in the 1990s. At the meeting in Darkar, the members

of the newly established Forum spearheaded many activities dealing with women's issues. Among other things, it was decided that Forum members should cry aloud for peace. They addressed the assembly saying "we were three years into the rebel war and governed by a military junta regime" (Brochure: 1994). They publicly voiced appeals to the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) that had overthrown the democratically elected All Peoples Congress Government in 1992 to hold elections and bring the war to a speedy conclusion. Letters were sent to this effect to Captain Valentine Strasser who was heading the military junta in Sierra Leone and other UN Agencies expressing their disgust about the state of affairs in the country.

The SLWF's successful participation at the Dakar Conference heightened their confidence in being a force for women at the Beijing World summit on women. "After the Dakar conference, the SLWF often met to strategize on how to make their presence felt at the UN and at the World Conference on women in Beijing" (SLWF Brochure: 1994). The women of Sierra Leone were influenced by the women of other countries where success in changing economic and ideological policies had been achieved.

Furthermore, after the Beijing and Dakar conferences, the SLWF participated in two national consultative conferences, Bintumani (1) in 1995 and Bintumani (2) in February 1996, which set the agenda for the elections and the peace process. The SLWF's participation and votes in these two conferences became a turning point in the national decision to proceed with multi-party elections and to negotiate a settlement to the conflict (SLWF Brochure: 1994). Also, the Forum called for women to constitute half the delegates of any formal peace negotiation body. Following the Bintumani consultations, women stressed the urgency of addressing issues such as thirty-percent

representation for women consistent with Beijing declaration, women's literacy, and health care. Thus, women had become participants in the political process.

## **PART V.II: STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

A shift in political opportunities is necessary for a social movement to develop according to McAdam (1982) and includes “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured” (p.41). He argued that among the events and processes likely to prove disruptive to the political status quo are wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic changes (p. 41).

The SLWF came into being at a time when the political situation was very turbulent and favored movement towards the political right. By 1994, the military regime was facing an acute rebel challenge and there was an outcry from the general populace for peace negotiations between the government and the rebel movement, which had hitherto not been explored. Added to this, there was a widely held discussion for multi-party elections to be held in 1996, to replace the one-party political hegemony that had dominated Sierra Leone for almost two and half decades. Moreover, there was a clarion call for all political rivalries to a round-table conference to map out solutions to end the conflict and organize the multiparty election and provide for a smooth transition of power from military control to a democratically elected civilian government.

Furthermore, the period of the 1990s was characterized by sexual violence within the Sierra Leone conflict, reports were made about the “widespread and systematic sexual violence against women and girls including individual and gang rape, sexual assault with objects such as firewood, umbrellas and sticks, and sexual bondage” (Human Rights Watch Release: 2000). In thousands of cases, sexual violence has been followed by the abduction of women and girls and forced bondage to male combatants in slave-like

conditions often accompanied by forced labor. Forum for Africa Women Educationalist presented at the Sierra Leone National Workshop on Women and Men in Partnership (2001) reported, among other things, that 55.4% of survivors (i.e. those during the January 6<sup>th</sup> 1999 invasion of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone) had been raped. Some children even witnessed their mothers being raped and gunned down by rebels. A total of 2,350 survivors were registered between March 1999 and 2000 under FAWE's Rape Victims program (FAWE Report: 2000).

Male patriarchy and entrenched cultural beliefs persisted to the extent that women who form 50% of the population continued to languish in silence while their male counterparts exercised power over them and forged ahead (Brochure: 1994). Prior to the conflict years, women were involved in politics through the participation in Committees and councils, even though these did not carry any significant power and thus could not broaden the political horizon that would play an active part in statecraft. There was great disparity between the level of education available to men and women. The adult literacy rate for women was low. Fewer girls attended school and there were high drop-out rates among those who did attend (Brochure: 1994). It was unfortunate that even those who graduated from higher training institutions were confined to traditional women's occupations such as nursing and sewing. Very few attended universities, which put them at a disadvantage to occupy high decision-making positions (Brochure: 1994). Therefore, they had very little opportunity to participate in public life.

Men had greater economic power as well. In the informal sector the gender stereotype prevailed where men were given greater opportunity to engage in lucrative occupations such as engineers, professors, auto mechanics, etc. and women were left to

pursue low-income activities such as soap-making and petty trading. Thus women were unable to develop leadership and management skills. They were not in control of the money from cash crops since the men pocketed that money leaving the women the produce from subsistence farming. (Brochure: 1994). In 1988/89 Labor Force Survey, 69% of petty traders were women where as 86% of service workers were men and 67% of professional/technical workers were also men (Brochure: 1994). These figures suggest that women could not make meaningful strides in economic activities because of inadequate skills, knowledge and lack of substantial credit facilities. Consequently, women suffered economic hardships in terms of high social and economic deprivation, high cost of public transportation, poor road networks and inadequate transportation facilities.

In the health sector, women and girls experienced difficulties, especially in the rural areas. Women lacked access to proper medical and reproductive health facilities; these, coupled with malnutrition, contributed to high maternal mortality rates (Brochure: 1994). Apparently, it was evidenced that in the thirty years following independence, women suffered from discrimination at various levels; their rights were violated even though the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) had been adopted by the UN in 1979 and the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) came into force in 1990; the Sierra Leone Government is a signatory to both documents (Human Development Report 2002). Even though efforts to address women's issues from an institutional standpoint gained momentum in 1988 when the Women's Bureau was established in the Ministry of Rural Development, Social

Services and Youth, not much was done to address strategic gender needs of women (SLWF Brochure 1994).

In a study conducted by the Women's Forum among returnees in transit from displacement camps in Loko Masama Chiefdom in 2001, out of 113 respondents, 36.3% of the sample had suffered multiple rapes, while 42.5% were given drugs; and 23.9% were force to engage in combat. Seventy-eight-point-eight percent (78.8%) of the sample reported that they had contracted sexually transmitted diseases after being abused (House hold Survey Report: 2000). In fact 61.9% of these did not receive immediate medical attention after contracting the disease (House hold Survey Report: 2000). Culturally, these actions pushed the limits any woman could endure. Taboos which maintain a civil society were violated as boys as young as eleven were ordered to rape middle-aged women in public and fathers were even forced to watch while their wives and daughters were raped (Brochure: 1994). Evidence of this gross violation of fundamental human rights of women during this war attests to a grave breach of humanitarian law. One effect of these atrocities was an undermining of the fundamental structure of society resulting in a breakdown in family stability and traditional welfare systems which was characterized by extended families systems. With the displacement of so many families widows, orphans, and others had no recourse but to turn to the state for assistance. It became incumbent on external and internal organizations to solicit help and provide succor to these populations.

The government's receptivity to the activities of the SLWF and their new-found political power was due in part to the fact that the government was fighting a war and needed support from national as well as international players to bring the carnage to a

halt. Therefore, the SLWF operated in a relatively conducive political environment as defined by the political process model.

The results of the women's movement were that women took an active role in the formation of social and public policy with a focus on post war conflict recovery measures in areas such as: health, economy, education, reconstruction, reintegration and rehabilitation schemes, education and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone.

### **PART V.III: INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH**

The third variable of the political process model is the strength of the indigenous organizations that allows social movements to emerge. McAdam (1982) divided this into four aspects: (1) memberships, (2) established structure of solidarity incentives, (3) communication networks, (4) and movement leaders (McAdam: 1982). In the case the SLWF, the general trauma and frustrations from the war unified the women with a common problem. Members were recruited according to their sympathies and concerns ranging from women in displaced camps, university students, professional women, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics and women from all works of life. All of them were touched by the gruesome violations of human rights and wanted national as well as international support to address their grievances, change the social conditions, and bring about peace. Through such formal structures as church membership and family ties to the informal associations of friendships and community interaction women heard about the groups whose aims were to correct the problems of the moment and they were motivated to join. The SLWF derived its funds from registration fees, monthly membership dues, donations from individuals and groups, government monies, non-governmental organizations and donor agencies, and other contributions, donations, and grants (SLWF Brochure: 1984).

Although human beings are multidimensional and cannot be easily understood, one can argue that in the case of the SLWF most of the members joined because of their response to the war and not because of personal rewards. The Forum's stated policy was to end the violation of human rights especially as it concerns women. It probably would have been pointless for any member to join for incentives or personal gains, because

since its inception, the women had been operating in an environment characterized by civil war that impacted negatively on its constituents (women and young girls) (Brochure: 1984). For example, the excessive violence that accompanied the rebel invasion of Freetown on January 6, 1999 including the chopping off of limbs, rape, and destruction of property, caused a large number of women and girls to seek refuge in neighboring countries (Brochure: 1984). Whether an individual woman was the victim of this violence directly, or not all, she still had a stake in ending it.

Another response of the women's movement to the crisis was to address the injustice towards women and children in particular and the community in general. Indeed much of the force behind the membership of contemporary social movements is the desire to remedy people's disappointment and frustration and their search for solutions to their economic and social needs. In many areas of the country, private and public buildings including schools, colleges, offices, industrial and commercial establishments, markets, stores, roads, bridges, were burnt down. The mining sector was hampered by illicit mining operations and the smuggling of "blood diamonds" to fuel the war. Preliminary official statistics however indicated that total diamond output including the "blood diamonds" in the war in the year 2000 amounted to over 67, 700 carats, as seven-fold increase over the 1999 figures (Brochure: 1984), indicating that although the diamonds funded the rebels their level of production was drastically curtailed robbing the government of necessary funds for social programs.

Communication networks were central to the development of the SLWF and defined the nature of connections among the different groups within the organization. Without networks, it would have been difficult to achieve the objective of the Forum and

to maintain the organization between the different groups of women all over the country. Networks were evidenced in the diversity of the memberships and the organizational structure of the Forum. The national committee of the forum comprised a total of 200 representatives--50 representatives from each of the four political divisions of the country: the western region (Freetown), Eastern, Southern, and northern regions. The General Assembly of the Forum meets once a year, although a special meeting may be called at anytime within the rules specified in the constitution (Brochure: 1984). The members of the advisory council were recruited from among those delegates. The Advisory committee also includes the minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs; the minister of Development and Economic Planning, an affiliate member of the Forum; two representatives from donor agencies; and a legal representative (Brochure: 1984).

Some of the indigenous organizations of the SLWF included the following:

1. Accord ' 97
2. Soja Town Women
3. Women's Association for National development ( WAND)
4. National Cookery Women Association (NACOWA)
5. Federation of Muslim Women Association of Sierra Leone ( FOMWASAL)
6. Zonta International
7. Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)
8. National Women on the Move
9. Sierra Leone Girls Guide Association
10. Soroptimist Sierra Leone
11. Legal Access through Rights and Social Justice
12. Methodist Church Sierra Leone Women's Network

13. Sisters Unite
14. Mothers Union Sierra Leone
15. Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) Sierra Leone chapter
16. Sierra Leone Labor Congress Women's wing
17. Sierra Leone Association of University Women
18. Partners Women's Commission
19. National Organization for Women
20. Graceland Counseling Services
21. Sierra Leone Women's Movement For Peace
22. Sierra Leone Market Women Association (SLMWA)
23. International League for Peace-S/L (WILPF)
24. Gender Research and Documentation Center (GRADOC)
25. Current Evangelical Ministry (CEM)
26. Community Development Alternatives for Women (CDAW)
27. West Africa Women's Networks
28. Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP)
29. Baptist Women's Union
30. National Council of Muslim Women (NCOMWO)
31. National Youth Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (NYMCOS)
32. Thorough Evangelical Women's Ministry (TEWOM)
33. Kambia District Women's Group
34. Stella Maris Vocational Institute
35. Women's Development Enterprise Scheme (WEDS)
36. Network Movement for Justice and Development
37. Gender Advocacy Program
38. Women's Evangelistic Fellowship International Sierra Leone Chapter
39. Prisons Women's Association (PRIWA)

40. The 50/50 Women's Group
41. Children Associated with War (CAW)
42. KATEKARAN Women's Association ( Makeni) ( SLWF. Brochure: 1994).

The SLWF recruited membership from all sectors of the country, irrespective of tribe, religion, culture, and social or economic status. Clearly, these organizations represent a diverse population involved in the movement with clearly defined objectives who were responsive to a wide range of interests and concerns. Because women from diverse groups were involved in the movement it was strengthened and was better able to address the needs and concerns of all women in their struggle for an environment where women and children's rights would be protected and the nation would be free of the brutality and corruption that had marked the years of civil war.

## **PART VI: FINDINGS**

McAdam's political process model identifies the factors necessary for the development of social movements such as the one which developed in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. The women's movement was instrumental in changing the political situation in the country resulting in a negotiated peace settlement, free and fair elections, and governmental changes to address the concerns and problems of the civil society. The political situation in Sierra Leone in the 1990s contributed favorably to the emergence and development of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement. The movement emerged at a time when the political stability of the nation was besieged by civil war. The instability of the government, the need for a lasting peace and the problems of dislocation of huge sectors of the society provided the opportunity for the women's movement to insist on a voice in the political process.

The success of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum can be attributed to the already existing indigenous women organizations in Sierra Leone which served as a stepping stone for a larger and more vibrant women's forum. Over forty women's organizations comprised the basis for the SLWF drawing from diverse religious, ethnic and social groups in all areas of the country and all economic levels. The existence of these organizations allowed women to direct their energies to collective action to address local, regional, and national problems. Thus, the strength of the indigenous organizations contributed significantly to the success of the women's movement. The success of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum can be attributed to the already existing indigenous women's organizations in Sierra Leone which served as a stepping stone for a larger and more vibrant women's forum.

The women's movement that developed in Sierra Leone in the 1990s was a result of an awareness of the need for change and the decision of the women to be instrumental in changing the situation. Factors that contributed to their awareness included education, exposure to western influence, democratic transitions in other countries and participation in an international movement on the status of women. Women became conscious of their own agenda and began to voice their political concerns and participate in the process of addressing the serious issues facing the country. Education, economic and social changes brought on by the displacement of families, and the need to repudiate the atrocities associated with the war spurred women to raise their voices in protest and demand change. In essence, the Sierra Leone Women's Forum came into being as a response to the problems and frustrations emanating from the society. The success of this movement illustrates that women, if given the opportunity, can facilitate meaningful social change.

## **VII: CONCLUSION**

While the sociological theories of social movements seek to explain how discontent among an aggrieved population transforms into collective action, the political process theory starts from the assumption that a social movement is a rational attempt by excluded groups to advance their interests through non-institutional means. The application of the political process model to the emergence of the women's movement in Sierra Leone illustrates the applicability of the political process model in this case.

Analysis of the variables suggested that political conditions of the civil war period provided the opportunities for the established indigenous groups to band together to address the nation's worsening socio-economic situations and consequently, formulated an umbrella organization to mobilize for what they regarded as unjust treatment and the excess violation of human rights.

Furthermore, the analysis of the women's movement in Sierra Leone illustrates the power of women to affect political, social and economic change. It is hoped that the application of the political process theory will generate new investigations on female activism in other developing societies. Many African nations, in the post-colonial period have faced similar crises in the forms of civil wars and social upheaval. This analysis demonstrates the need to investigate whether insurgency consciousness, political opportunities and indigenous organizational strength in these nations was able to nurture the establishment of similar movements to address social issues.

A closer look at the rise of nationalist movements in the sixties and seventies in Africa, whose ideology was founded on an assumed innate virtuousness of being African, can provide other cases where the political process model applies. Additionally, from a

broader perspective, this theory might be extremely germane for the current fast-changing political situations in many African countries where the political situation is in constant transition and changing rapidly. That political movements emerged in Africa at the height of such political opportunities would further accentuate McAdam's position that the ability of social movement's organization to collect resources depends on the support, chances and limits of the political surroundings. It is important to note that since the Sierra Leone Women's Forum provided an excellent case study for the application of the political process theory it remains certain that this model can be generalized for the emergence of all social movements in the light of this research.

## **PART VI.II: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL AND PUBLIC POLICY**

As Sierra Leone entered the post-war period, with the desperate implementation of the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF, it will be necessary for policy makers and implementing agencies to note that any solution to the conflict could not be achieved without taking the socio-economic causes into consideration would be likely to fail because, the previous causes would continue to fester until another opportunity for civil strife presented itself again. Thus, the government and its implementing agencies with the support of the International Community took urgent measures to tackle these problems to ensure that Sierra Leoneans will not again be plunged into the misery and destruction that blighted so many lives in the 1990s.

Since the role of women in development continues to gain recognition at both national and international arenas, there has been an urgent need to elevate the women through education from a life over dependence to a level of fair opportunity. Of particular importance, attention must be given to women's rights and gender sensitivity in the workforce. Given the above, educational programs should be set up to meet the needs and conditions of women at a grass root levels, and incorporate working with ex-combatants and youths, that were caught up in the conflict as victims, to develop culture of peace and nonviolence. Training manuals for conflict management, crisis management and other community issues should be developed in local languages. Women should be trained to continue the workshops and other activities provided by the movement to improve the conditions of the indigenous population and the leadership of the existing

women's indigenous organizations should be tapped to continue the struggle to raise the standard of living for women and children.

Moreover, both formal and informal educational institutions must face the challenge of producing men and women who, in addition to their particular skills as scientists, engineers, teachers, social workers, nurses, farmers, priests, artists, among various others, are committed to the establishment of democracy. The educational system should adopt a principle in the selections of what to teach and how they teach, with the aim of producing men and women who are both critical and creative. Students should be aware and committed to eradicating the social scourge of civil war and military dictatorship. Students should be encouraged to be thinkers and doers rather than accumulators of facts and received knowledge. This must be so if they are to be facilitators of change and working towards the realization of a just and stable society. Graduates, particularly women, should be encouraged to emerge from educational institutions with social awareness and an understanding of the factors necessary to make changes in the prevailing circumstances.

Economically, as a priority area, government and its collaborating partners should focus on issues such as poverty, unemployment, endemic corruption, weak rule of law, and a regulation against the illicit trade of the country's mineral resources such as gold, diamonds iron ore, rutile, bauxite, chrome ore, among various others. On graduation however, in Sierra Leone students are faced with unemployment. This is a social problem that has already resulted in a growing class of dissidents, disaffected citizens ripe for disruptive and anti-social action. Thus, the government must design programs to look into the causes of unemployment, appropriate political institutions and their managements,

causes of internal strife, and see how they can counter them. Previous neglect of these sectors was a significant factor in the social and political instability that marked the 1990s.

As long as a significant section of the population is left out of the basic enjoyments of the good things of life, when the opportunities present themselves these people will be ready to mobilize for change. The benefits of basic education and health care, and enhanced employment opportunities should be allocated equally to all segments of the society especially to most of the hinterland areas that felt the brunt of the human rights violations during the war.

The economic reconstruction, rehabilitations; and reintegration of a country emerging from war is complex and directly and indirectly shapes women's post-war conditions. In the case of Sierra Leone, economic reconstruction involves government initiatives to design a new framework of policies in which priority for growth and development will be identified. From a broad perspective, economic reconstruction involves the development of infrastructures and the development of a qualified human resource base to match the established priorities. In other words, non-skilled workers need to be trained and business need to be established to hire them when they are trained. To promote these activities in Sierra Leone, these initiatives must be supplemented with inputs of micro-credit schemes, loans and other resources to farmers and female heads of households in the hinterland areas. Money for these activities needs to be made available through the international development banks in the forms of grants and low-interest loans.

Also, policies should be designed to engage and strengthen groups and organizations such as the SLWF, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, trade unions, district descendant associations, women's and youth groups, development agencies, and religious organizations to complement government's effort in addressing social and humanitarian issues. The involvement of these groups will enhance the collective effort towards national reconstruction, and the rebuilding of the economic and material resources and the infrastructure that were damaged by the conflict. Building on the networks that are already established by the women's movement will speed up the process of rebuilding the society.

Furthermore, in Sierra Leone dispossession among women survivors is a problem. Because the war decimated the male population, many women were left as single heads of households without legal rights of access to land and property. Self-help organizations that advocated for change during the civil war must continue to focus on helping individuals and families who have no access to property or land. With assistance from the SLWF new groups may form or other groups may take on the task of establishing cooperatives to help one another with agricultural production, rebuilding houses, and to start savings accounts, access micro-credit schemes, and finance income-generating activities.

In areas of health, efforts should be made to encourage lower population growth by providing families and individuals with information and services needed to make informed choices about the number and spacing of their children. This will require adopting an approach that recognizes the linkages among population dynamics such as poverty and sustainable development. Increased efforts are needed to fully integrate

population issues into policies, plans and programs. The participation of the SLWF in this process is essential.

Also, as with other African nations, Sierra Leone is a nation with a high risk environment for HIV infection. Poverty and displacement exacerbate this risk since they reinforce vulnerabilities and lead to risky behavior, such as commercial sex activities. Programs should be put in place to ensure that all sectors of the country are involved in the global battle against the elimination of this deadly disease. Existing indigenous groups can play a powerful role in education and prevention of this disease.

Given the political conditions in Sierra Leone after the civil war the role of the women's movement has changed. Women are in a position to wield political power and influence the process by which the social ills of the population are addressed.

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