
What Do We Gain and What Do We Lose by Using the Child Rights Framework?

WNCAC presentation
December 8, 2011

Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone amputees



War in Sierra Leone

- From 1991-2002
 - After years of corrupt one party rule, and weak state, diamonds and self-sustaining war economy
 - “youth crisis” education and unemployment
 - Fighting Factions:
 - Revolutionary United Front (rebels)
 - Sierra Leone Army (sobels, junta)
 - Civil Defense Forces (“Kamajohs”)
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Child soldiers in Sierra Leone

- All factions recruited children
 - Carried guns, commanded battle, porters, spies, cooks, “wives”
 - Boys as well as girls, all parts of the country
 - Some were abducted, some joined willingly
 - UNICEF estimates 10,000 children
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Methodology, Phase I

- ADD DATES
 - Multi-sited ethnography in Interim Care Centres for demobilized child soldiers
 - Participant observation
 - Ethics of research with children in post-conflict settings
 - Followed children in their everyday lives, in the centres, in school, in community, at play
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Interim Care Centre at Port Loko



Participant Observation



ICC School



ICC School



Still “raw”



Literally scarred by their experience



Methodology: Phase II

- Followed children back to their communities
 - Selected locations across:
 - Fighting faction
 - Gender
 - Rural/urban
 - Length of time away
-

School in Makosseh



Can you spot the former child soldiers?



Communities were rebuilding



living with reminders of war



Gratuitous photo of excited children



Results: Social Practice

- The standard narrative (I was abducted, it was not my wish, now all I want is to continue my education) is taught in ICCs
 - Children use that story in some settings, and other stories in school, among peers, etc.
 - “Child soldier” as an identity is created in social practice across a range of settings
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Results: Fighting Faction

- RUF boys were most likely to be able to access the material and discursive resources that came along with “child soldier”
- CDF boys, though they experienced similar trauma, found it more difficult to gain access to modern childhood

Question: what is gained and what is lost by deploying modern childhood and claiming child soldier identity?

Why ethnography?

- we can gain “evidence-based” and policy-relevant knowledge from ethnography that we cannot gain from other research methods
 - ethnography can reveal the life worlds of children from their own perspectives and illuminate alternate indicators of well-being
 - The “child soldier” is *political*
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Sierra Leone – 2003 – working with returnee children

- Assessment with parents and young people
 - Young people wanted to talk about education and opportunities
 - Parents wanted to talk about obedience...and definitely NOT rights
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Concern of the Ethnographic Study

– Feb-Dec 2009

The primary concern of research was human rights education (HRE), and the implications of its emergence as a site for addressing and reducing conflict in war-affected societies.

HRE and Translation

School settings and teachers proved useful for uncovering the process of conceptual appropriation and translation

However...

Eventually study had to also examine infusion of Rights Language into society at large.

i.e. -“ethnography of Information”



Presentation

- Conceptual Translation – key concepts
- How HR were disseminated in Sierra Leone
- What translation looked like in Sierra Leone
 - (Mis)understanding
 - (Mis)use and moral panic
 - Intentional Engagement
- Resulting Gains and losses

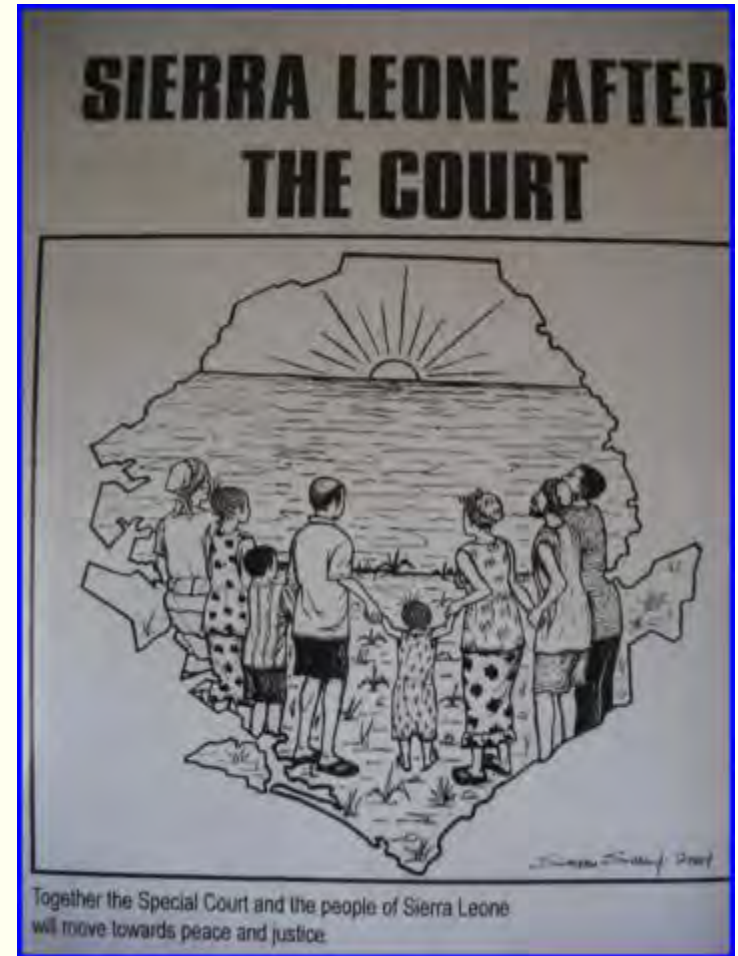


Culture – noun or verb?



Not Entering a Vacuum

“Those introducing new forms, institutions, discourses, or practices are continually confronted by frustration and failure, with the inability to impose the new system in whole cloth rather than in shreds. ...Uncertainty plagues the process...” (Merry, p.46).



Translators: who & how matters

“...Translators refashion global rights agendas for local contexts and reframe local grievances in terms of global human rights principles and activities...”

(Merry, 2006).”





Research Sites

- ***Policy institutions and Agencies***

- Ministry
- UN
- INGOs
- Emerging Issues (teacher training) Meetings



- ***2 Teacher Training Colleges*** (one in the capital, one up-country in smaller city)

- ***3 main Primary Schools in FT*** (others for sporadic visits)

- Islamic
- Christian
- Government

Modes of inquiry, Methods & Data Sources

Ethnographic Data collected over 10 months in two regions of Sierra Leone:

Participant Observation:

- General activities/ Lecturers teaching class at two TTCs
- Pre-service teachers in class
- In-service teachers in 3 PS
- In-service teachers during HRE trainings
- Policy sessions

Key Informant Interviews

- In-service teachers
- Principals in PS
- Lecturers at TTCs
- Policy representatives from the MoE, international agencies, etc.
- Youth (ages 18-24)

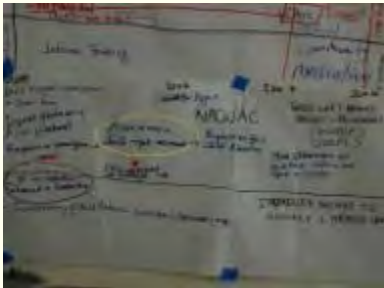
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

- In-service teachers at 6 PS
 - Pre-service teachers in 2 TTCs
 - Youth
-

Background-Human Rights and Rights-based programming

- CRC (1989)
 - End of cold war
 - Destabilized world
 - Disillusionment with development defined as economic
 - Development as a right
 - Security not just for nations: Human security
 - Emergence and dominance of rights based programming
 - End of conflict in Sierra Leone
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Unguided Process in Sierra Leone



PLAN International, Region of West Africa Radio

"I am a child but I have my rights too!"

The regional radio campaign "I am a Child but I have my Rights too!" is produced by Plan in West Africa since 1998 in collaboration with close to 100 radio stations. ...

After the War

- Workshops
- Awareness Campaigns
- Posters
- Radio Dramas
- Special Court
- TRC
- Child Rights Clubs
- HRE in schools



Human Rights, Flying all Around

Human rights... they brought human rights in our country but it was like just leaving, just bringing the human rights policies and they leave them. Now they are just flying all around, all around. Nobody guiding these human rights issues ...

(Group Discussion, In-service teachers, Kenema)

Charles: In addition...these rights we are in, let us say it was just dropped on us. They said, here is a booklet, it includes all the rights, they discussed it there in Geneva [others laugh] ...

(Group Discussion, Charles, Male in-service teachers, Kenema)

Rights booklet – UNICEF, 2003

Children have the right to know and practise their own culture, tradition and language



and the responsibility to respect others

Children have the right not to be engaged hazardous tasks that can affect their fundamental right to education, to health care, to be heard, rest and to play.



Rights-based Programming on the Ground

What happened, after the war, everybody had wanted to get to write a project on something. And this something was that which will attract the people. And when you say it's human rights and it's after war, then the people will approve of your project. They send you money. So all the NGOs, they all were just human rights, human rights. You see? Human rights to bring peace, human rights to bring peace and it was approved...

(Group Discussion, In-service teachers, Aaliyah, Kenema)

Resulting Translations...

- (Mis)understanding as Translation
 - The (Mis)use of Human Rights: Moral Panic and Children Without Limits
 - Attempts to make HR more robust
 - A language of right and wrong
 - Responsibilities to limit “going beyond” rights
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(Mis)understanding as Translation

Mr. Alpha: There was much misunderstanding again about human rights. Especially child rights issues and human rights itself – there has been lots of misunderstanding. I think up until the present moment, the misunderstanding is clouding people's idea about it.

(Interview, Sr. Lecturer, Freetown)

Teacher Perceptions

Massa: It's like [children] are misunderstanding the whole concepts [of human rights] so we are experiencing problems. ...But if you say I have all the rights, nobody controls me...

Aja: To be free – um hmm free. They feel free.

Massa: Nobody guides me, nobody protects me. There is misunderstanding!

All chorus, “free, free”

(Group Discussion, female in-service teachers, Kenema)

Youth Perceptions – Free?

Ousman: Well...you see, we hear about [human rights] from the radio and other places. We would say, human rights, it means freedom. Freedom to go where I want to go, freedom to say what we want to say, even to be different from the older people. ...

(Ousman, Male 19 year old youth, Freetown)

Leads to “waywardness”...

Francis: Yes, yes but you know the idea was misconstrued. Especially by the children. They think they can just go berserk and do any kind of thing out of the way, the rights of the child...*So when those things came up, you know it was not finally, it was not clearly defined. It was not clearly defined... They just aired it out. The rights of the child. This should not be done. That should not be done. That should not be done. So the children just grabbed hold of it....*

Eric: Nowadays, the parents – the children they don't want to listen to us. They only say it's human rights, human rights, human rights... You see because at the end of the day they become now wayward.

(Group Discussion, Aberdeen male teachers, Freetown)

The (Mis)use of Human Rights

Teacher Translations: Moral Panic and Children Without Limits

- *Teenage Pregnancy, Prostitution, Rape*
 - *Video Halls*
 - *Dress Code*
 - *“Cults”*
 - *Drugs/ Pornography*
 - *Legacy of Child Soldiers – a Culture of Disrespect*
 - *Violence in Sports*
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Rights to blame for moral decline

*P: There was a reverend with a son, and his wife did not like him watching those movies that my friend was talking about. And so they stopped the boy from going to the movie. You know what the boy did? He went into his bedroom and tied a rope to his ceiling and went into it and put the chair up and killed himself. So, that boy did that and that reverend and his wife were arrested. **It's this preaching of human rights...***

F: So you see that – we that are preaching the rights, the human rights, the child rights. We also have to talk about their responsibilities. It does not mean that when they stop you from going to movies you should go and kill yourself.

P: He did! ...When the police came they arrested the mother and the father...it's this thing of Human Rights... It's pathetic.

- Observed, April training session, Kenema

Community Effects

Kimani: It is greatly affecting our community...before this pronouncement of this rights of the child, our people they used to control all of us in one form. There was no one, no one person's child. Everybody - everyone helped.

But now because of this rights right rights...the children will directly tell you “you don't have right to pass any kind of discipline on me.” So most of the children are wayward. It is really affecting the community.

(Interview, Kimani, Kenema Secondary School, Kenema)

Intentional Engagement/ Translation: Attempts to make HR robust – language for right & wrong

Massa: It's like [children] are misunderstanding the whole concepts ... *How we [teachers] think about this human rights...is like guiding and at the same time telling somebody what is supposed to be done. And in the same vein telling somebody that this is not good. This is wrong, this is right. Don't do this to this person ... you have your own responsibility.* (Group, in-service female teachers, Kenema)

The image shows two pages of handwritten notes from a group discussion. The first page is titled 'GROUP 3' and has columns for 'Title' and 'Gender'. The second page is titled 'GROUP 3 CONTINUED' and lists items 19 through 25.

GROUP 3	
Title	Gender
1. Drug Abuse	>
2. Corruption?	
3. Greed/Selfishness	>
4. Illiteracy	>
5. Rape/Sexual Violence	>
6. Political intolerance	>
7. HIV/AIDS	>
8. Teenage Pregnancy	>
9. Conflict	>
10. Abject Poverty	>
11. Harmful Cultural Practices	>
12. Unemployment	>
13. Domestic Violence	>
14. Child Labour and Child Abuse	>
15. Misuse of Public Fund/Property	>
16. Idleness	>
17. High infant mortality	>
18. Injustice	>

GROUP 3 CONTINUED	
19. Abuse of Power	>
20. No fear for God	>
21. Inequality	>
22. High Crime rate	>
23. Child Abduction	>
24. Prostitution	>
25. Tribalism	>

Responsibilities to curb “No Limits”

K: Looking at the child rights – of course these pupils do not know their limitations. They do not know the limitations. They are just concentrating on my rights “This is my right, this is my right,” and they don’t know their limitations. ...

...And I want the human rights activists to really concentrate on those areas and teach them rights and responsibilities at the same time, again their limitations...

(Group Discussion, teachers Kenema Secondary School, Kenema)

Results of “misunderstanding” & “misuse”? – Gains and Losses

■ Gains

- New language/ awareness for Resistance to Injustice
- Laws enacted and “translated”
- Children “empowered” to resist

■ Losses

- Parents abdicating responsibility to children
 - Ability to achieve personhood by children and young people
-

Gain: Language to confront tradition & injustice

Jeniva: ... The war happened and brought the change because people moved from everywhere and came into the city and saw the pattern of life that was in the city. And after this, women's eyes were opened and they had more understanding and the introduction of the human rights in the mass media and discussions, sensitization....The thing is most times, we did not know. We didn't know. We didn't know that we had the right to challenge certain things in the home, in the work place and even in the community. And so now that is awakening in them and so the more we propagate it, I think it will have a great impact on our society.

(Interview, Ms. Jeniva, Freetown)

Moses: [Human rights] is for people who are marginalized. Human rights will come in and because of this, they will use the concept of the rights. It caters for those who do not have. The same rights we are having, just because you have more than the individual, you don't have to marginalize. So human rights will come in and say it is wrong.

(Group Discussion, Moses, male pre-service teacher, Kenema)

Gain: Laws and Translation

Kono District Child Protection by-laws FOREWORD

Children are like diamonds that can only fetch the highest price when polished.

It is with this belief in mind that the stakeholders came together to prepare this bye-law (sic).

The by-law when properly applied will stimulate the thought of parents and other committed partners to provide a conducive learning environment that motivate the academic growth of children, especially girls.

The total wholesome growth of girls can only take place when all partners are united and ready to work with the bye-law for the good of their children.

Quality children will emerge out the readiness of parents to support their girls to attend and complete school. Therefore parents and community can only get the best out of their children especially when they sacrifice their time and money for their well being.

However the bye-law will may only serve as a guide for the well being of their children. There may be many more ways. I appeal to all users of the bye-law to use as many tactics as possible and relevant and applicable to their community.

We must all join hands to educate girls for worthy price as diamond polisher polishes his diamond for a better price.

Gain: Children have agency:

- To take Parents to Police for abuse
 - To run from FGM/ Secret society initiation
 - To discuss address taboos and inequalities—
 - Girls education
 - FGM
 - Marriage and women's rights
-

Positive Perceptions - Teachers

Yeah, [human rights] is good. It is something good....it is a very good idea because formerly when we were growing up, we don't have that opportunity. Yes, but I think now this is a world of opportunity for the children. If we can ... understand that right and to understand that responsibility, the country as a whole will change for the better. The children too.

(Group Discussion, Alhaji Primary School, Freetown)

Loss: Parental Role abdication

Amadu: You see one thing again, last week I learned a lesson from a child now growing up - saying children's rights. The child begged his father to give him lunch. The father said "today I don't have money." And then the child said "I am going to take you to the police station to get my own share of your own property." [laughing]...

[The Father] said "Is that right? You small boy, you are just coming up and you are not yet big, you learned that sense to take me to the police station? Now, I am going to be very much careful with you, tomorrow you will want to kill me for your property. ...I said today I don't have money and you told me you are going to take me to the police station. For what again?"... Because soon as they are trained on child rights, that is the problem...

Most times they call the father to the police station and detain them! Then most times the father or the mother will say – whatever this child does I don't care...

Yeah! Once you decide to take your father or mother to the police station because you have done something wrong in the home and they want to flog you, whatever you do after that they don't care.

(Interview, Mr. Braemah and Amadu, Kenema)

Tamba: These human rights – they are ruining our children... “If you beat me daddy I will report you I will take you to the police.”... I have heard it. **...And mostly when police intervene, the parents will say no. If police is the one that is feeding my child, well let them take the child now.... and then they will abandon the child, let the government take the child. But the government does not have provision for that...**The parents will definitely decide, ok if only if they are taking care of my child, let him take the child. And be responsible for him. You see? So the man will just flee.

But most of these laws will not work in Africa. It is contrary. It's really harming or causing trouble, this human rights issue. It is causing trouble. instead of good it is causing trouble for our children, Nicole.

...So that is why we have a lot of street children. It is not that the street children do not have parents but just because they don't want to take control that is why they are on the street.

Cultural Justification for this

Anthony: And er, so many times you know, I have heard about human rights mostly in homes where our parents do make some comments...*parents you know, in this case, somehow take it that it is giving children the audacity to do things that are not good towards their custom and tradition ...*

So parents therefore force their children to go their own way, since [those bringing rights] say they are all equal as human beings and so they just take it that by so doing, if we are all equal then no respect for me. For me, I am responsible for the daily bread, I am the bread winner of the family! And so [parents say] if we share the same right, then you have to stand by yourself. Yeah, and so they try to at least, quote the whole thing in the wrong way. They [adults] try to misunderstand everything .

(Group Discussion, SHINE Boys, Freetown)

Loss: Personhood as understood in African Tradition & Moral Education

When a human being fails to conform his behavior to acceptable moral principles or to exhibit the expected moral virtues in his moral conduct he is said to be “not a person.” The evaluative statement opposite to this is “he is a person” means ‘he has a good character,’ ‘he is peaceful-not troublesome,’ ‘he is kind,’ ‘he has respect for others,’ ‘he is humble’.... A rider is required here: while children are actual human beings and members of the community, they are persons only potentially and will achieve the status of personhood in the fullness of time when they are able to exercise their moral capacity.

(Gyekye, 1998, p.50).

Community and Moral Education

In terms of moral reasoning and moral education, we can see the individual in African cultures as an organism. *An individual can be seen as a personality being trained by the community into a moral person, with its rules and principles, and with other people's actions as models, to warrant being called a person. ...* The moral person is an individual who has been sufficiently trained in a specific moral sense, educated in a broad sense, and socialized by the community in certain prescribed ways of behaving toward other human beings...

(Ikuenobe, 1997, p.34, emphasis added).

Social Responsibility central to personhood

“In African communal tradition, ‘personhood’ does not describe a human being with body and mind but an individual who indicates by his actions that he can accept and meet certain standards of social responsibility to achieve recognition”

(Ikuenobe, 2006, p.58),

Therefore, rejection of community norms and obligations is a rejection of opportunity for personhood.

Human Rights Iceberg

- Rights translated in particular way that led to these gains and these losses
- Every setting will have translation

Human rights has grown out of and remained implicitly connected to a whole set of concepts that are there beneath the surface...

What happens when that tip is isolated and broken off, and married to a different set of norms beneath the surface, as happened in Sierra Leone?



President Bai Koroma – 50 year jubilee speech to the nation

To me it is a moment of celebration and a moment of deep reflection. Celebration because we have been through what we have been through as a nation. But today we are a peaceful nation. We are a nation that has agreed on electing our leaders through the democratic process. We are a nation that is building up our democracy. We are a nation that is riding high in terms of human rights...



Thank You!
