The Conflict Analysis of the Sierra Leone Civil-War

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Abstract

Sierra Leone like many other African countries plunged into brutal armed civil-war from March 1991 to February 2002, which caused a massive humanitarian crisis. Analyzing the conflict situation of the then Sierra Leon is, therefore, the main intention of this article. To this end, a qualitative meta-empirical literature based study was conducted. Important academic literatures, policy and regulatory documents are devised to collect the required data. Both the conflict tree and conflict mapping frameworks are employed in making the conflict analysis. The analysis of the article reaffirm that a multi form and complex structural and proximate factors contribute to the emergence, escalation and protract ration of the civil war in Sierra Leone. The colonial legacy, power competition, lack of democratic governance, repressive state measures, competition over natural resources and interference from regional neighboring countries were observed as main among the many factors. The article, also, examines the actors involved in the conflict. Each actor’s contribution, issue, goal and interest with different relationships are discussed. Finally, the article analyzed the dynamics of the conflict, focusing on the processes, changes (escalations and de-escalations) and the responses taken at national, regional and international levels.

Key Words: Conflict analysis, civil-war, Sierra Leone

1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, armed conflicts are internal conflicts which are mostly occurred in poor countries (Richards, 2003). This situation is what Mary Kalder (1999) called a new war where by the presence of new type of organized violence by non-state actors including: ethnic militias,
religious groups, terrorist groups, private security companies and organized criminal gangs. In Africa, since the 1990s, armed conflicts are a common phenomenon as in Rwanda, Somalia, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and others. Sierra Leone like many other African countries plunged into brutal armed conflict that lasted for over a decade. This article is, therefore, the analysis of the Sierra Leone civil-war that was happened since March 1991 to February 2002.

Conflict analysis is “the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors, and dynamics of a conflict” (Mason and Rychard, 2005, p. 2). It is an effort to understand the status of a conflict, why it break out, who are involved in it, and what factors contribute to its escalation and de-escalation (Wallensteen, 2002). A various tools can be employing to analyze conflicts. According to Jeong (2008) multidimensional frameworks of analysis are necessary to examine conflicts. Some of the commonly used conflict analysis tools are: conflict wheel, the onion method, the ABC (Attitude, Behaviors and Contradiction) method, the conflict tree and the timeline. This paper, however, adopts the conflict tree and conflict mapping frameworks of conflict analysis. This is because, while the conflict tree helps to differentiate the structure and dynamic factors and visualizing how conflict issues link those two aspects, the conflict map supports to analyze the actors and their relationships((Mason and Rychard, 2005).

Significant number of literatures have been done about the Sierra Leone civil war. The paper tried to assess the works of many scholars. For example, Coleman (2010) wrote his master’s thesis on ‘resolving intra-state conflicts: a case study of Sierra Leone’. However, Coleman examines the evolution and progress of the conflict, the various military interventions, the interplay of negotiations and military interventions, and various peace agreements in the resolution of the conflict. Kaldor & Vincent (2006) also made an article on ‘evaluation of UNDP assistance to conflict-affected countries: case study of Sierra Leone. However, Kaldor & Vincent analysis the conflict from the human security perspective. Bellows and Miguel (2006) also wrote a paper on ‘war and local institutions in Sierra Leone’. The authors studied the aftermath of the Sierra Leone civil war from the economic perspective with particular focus on how the conflict had adverse impacts on economic performance of the country by destroying physical capital, disrupting human capital accumulation, and damaging institutions. Camara (2012) also wrote an article on ‘Sierra Leone after the war reconstruction, aid and corruption. However, Camara examines the conflict from the concept of resource curse in which Sierra Leone was suffered from an eleven-year long civil war, from 1991 to 2002, that caused major setbacks for the country from loss of lives to a disrupted economic system.
Moreover, Richards (2003) also made an article on ‘the political economy of internal conflict in Sierra Leone’. However, Richards’s analysis was from the political economy of criminal perspectives and motivations in due emphasis on the role of non-state actors including the ethnic militias, religious groups, terrorist cells, private security companies, mercenaries and organized criminal gangs. Kamara (2009) also conducted his master’s thesis on ‘conflict resolution and peace building: the case of Sierra Leone’. However, Kamara examines the Sierra Leone conflict from the conflict resolution and peace building perspectives by considering the different measures and strategies including the diplomatic attempts and efforts that were employed by various parties in trying to secure a peaceful and durable solution to it.

Reviewing the above existing literatures and other early studies, the paper found that the Sierra Leone civil war is not studied from the conflict analysis framework. In other words, there are no academic literature exclusively focused on the conflict analysis of the civil war and thus there are no enough scholarly works that has been paid to the analysis of the conflict on the basis of the conflict analysis frameworks. Most of the early studies reviewed above focused only on some of the components of conflicts analysis either of the causes or consequences or external interventions. Unlikely to the early studies, this paper analysis the civil war from all components of the conflict analysis such as the context, the causes, the actors (primary, secondary and tertiary) and the conflict dynamics. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is intended to fill the literature gap mainly on the conflict analysis framework; thereby, it could serve as a reference to other scholars who are interested in the field of conflict analysis. Finally, this paper is found to be different from the early studies both in terms of its conceptual and theoretical frameworks. In terms of the conceptual and theoretical framework, this article analyses the Sierra Leone civil war from the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the conflict analysis framework. In contrast to the early studies, this paper employed holistic and integrated approaches and components of the conflict analysis tools predominantly the conflict mapping and conflict tree tools.

The paper is structured in to six sections. The first section deals with the introduction of the paper. The introduction section of the paper mainly highlights the conceptual framework of the conflict analysis and the paper’s methodological assumptions. The second section of the paper devotes on the context of the conflict that discuses on the historical and structural antecedents of the conflict, as well as the eruption, evolution and the progress of the conflict. The third section discusses the causes of the conflict. Under the causes section of the paper, both structural and proximate causes such as colonial legacy, power competition, lack of democratic governance, repressive state measures, competition over natural resources and interference from regional neighboring countries
are discussed. The fourth section of the paper also deals with the actors of the conflict. This section identifies the primary, secondary and tertiary actors of the conflict. The fifth section of the paper also focused on the conflict dynamics of the conflict. Under the conflict dynamics section, the conflict processes, the changes that could be expressed in terms of escalations and de-escalations and the undertaken interventions to address the conflict are discussed. The last section of the paper is its conclusion. The paper concludes that the Sierra Leone conflict is caused by multiple and complex factors under different actors but different interests and motivations.

Methodologically, this article employed meta-theoretical and empirical literature based study which is mainly descriptive qualitative research. The source of data is exclusively based on desk top review of secondary data sources such as academic literature, regional and international policy documents such as the United Nations and other regulatory documents.

2. The Context of the Conflict

The Sierra Leone civil-war was erupted in March 1991 and lasted in February 2002. The conflict is one of the most tragic episodes in the country’s post-independence history (Cheru, 2008). The eleven years of civil war claimed more than seventy five thousand lives lost, two hundred thousand injuries and 2.6 million displaced people (Camara, 2012; Kaldor and Vincent, 2006). The conflict is rooted in the historical and structural antecedents of the country. According to Coleman (2010), the actual origin of the civil war can be traced back to the 1970’s and 1980’s. Coleman further added that one of the key drivers for the civil war was the rebellious youth culture that developed during the 1970’s and 1980’s (ibid). The rebellious youth culture was an important factor in why it was the youth (including child soldiers) who took such an active role in the war once it started. The effects it had left on the social structures in the country were of course devastating.

Moreover, the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which reduced the ability of the state elites to use the resources from the diamonds to feed the neo-patrimonial structures, could be considered as another historical root to the conflict. This helped move the country towards the situation where the scramble for resources became desperate and which acted as a spark for the civil war. Furthermore, since its independence in 1961, the country has experienced political instabilities which characterized by repeated violent change of governments (Camara, 2012). According to Kamara (2009), from the ten different leaders who hold the position of head of state and government from 1964 to 2009, only six were gained the position through democratic process of the ballot box and popular elections.
Moreover, the country is endowed with huge diverse natural resources which include diamond, gold, iron ore, bauxite, and the largest deposit of titanium in the World (Richards, 2003). However, the huge potential and varieties of natural resources still have not significant positive impact to improve the quality of life of citizens of the country. Thus, it is possible to say that the civil war was further exacerbated by severe economic decline in the late 1980’s (Coleman, 2010).

Sierra Leone was a promising constitutional democracy and attained relative peace and stability during the first six years of post-independence which inherited from the UK’s Westminster-style of parliamentary democracy (Kamara, 2009). However, on March 1967, the country witnessed its first military coup d’état in a series of many onwards (Bundu, 2001). In fact, the military coup was short-lived and overthrown by another counter coup that turned the country into parliamentary government in 1968 under the leadership of Siaka Probyn Stevens of the All Peoples Congress (APC) (Kamara, 2009). Further, in 1969, a failed military coup was attempted led by Foday Sankoh of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (Richards, 2003). In democratizing Sierra Leone, the APC conducted four general elections held in 1973, 1977, 1982 and 1987 but all were fraudulent (Kandeh, 2003).

According to Kamara (2009), although the early years of the APC were promising, the later years were marked by considerable unrest, hunger, violence and poor economic management. Politically, Kamara further noted that in 1978, the APC declared a de facto ‘one party state’ and economically, the economic mismanagement caused widespread dissatisfaction and frustration, especially among the youth and the disadvantaged segment of the society (ibid). In a similar vein, Colman (2010) noted that the years of Siaka Stevens (1968 to 1985) Sierra Leone was ruled under one-party state which only the APC as the sole legitimate party. These situations provoked alienation and ‘propagated the seeds of armed rebellion and subaltern terror’ in the country such as for the establishment of the RUF whose main ambition was to seize political power (Kandeh, 2003). In addition to the political repression and leadership corruption, the economy was also slipped into a deep economic crisis characterized by de-industrialization, corruption and dependence on the petty commodity sector for social reproduction (Bangura, 1992). In this regard, Coleman (2010) also argues that the civil war was further exacerbated by severe economic decline in the late 1980’s. These political, economic and other social factors eventually led Sierra Leone into the March 1991 civil war. More specifically, on 23 March 1991, the invasion of eastern part of Sierra Leone by RUF led by Foday Sankoh and supported by Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) plunged the country into full scale civil-war which lasted for eleven years.
3. The Causes of the Conflict

A conflict that occurs within a society may be the result of several factors. It is difficult to clearly identify a single sole factor that is responsible for the emergence, escalation and protraction of the conflict regardless of being manifest or latent. Rather, a conflict has many roots. According to Mehler (2005), there are four types of causes of a conflict namely, the root causes, aggravating factors, prolonging factors and triggering factors. Likewise, there are multiple and complex structural and proximate causes for the civil war in Sierra Leone. In analyzing the conflict, the paper identified both structural and proximate causes of which among others include: colonial legacy, power competition, lack of democratic governance, repressive state measures, competition over natural resources and interference from regional neighboring countries.

3.1. Colonial Legacy

As like as many other conflicts in Africa, the civil war in Sierra Leone is rooted in the colonial legacy if not the only one. The country was under British colony there by it was ruled under the British laws and native customary laws with chieftaincy (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle, 1999). This means that the colonialism adopted dual administrative and legal systems dominated the post-independence governance structures of the country. The dual system of governance divided the people of the country into colony and protectorate (Kamara, 2009). The system favored the colony at the expense of the protectorate in the provision of basic social services and amenities as well as access to important services including education, healthcare, electricity, water supply etc. (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle, 1999). The inhabitants of the protectorate considered themselves as being neglected in favor of those in the colony, especially when the hut tax was introduced (Abraham, 1974). The colonial period clearly set down various factors that later exploded, such as the large distinction between the urban and rural areas. Such dual governance system continued post-independence Sierra Leone political system and successive governments continued to perpetuate the ills of bad governance left out by the colonizers (Kamara, 2009). Such political divisions within the society had their share on the civil war of the country. Further, the post-independence governments and their use of patronage politics to govern led to very high levels of corruption, which was fed by completion over the rich natural resources of the country.

3.2. Repressive State and Lack of Democratic Governance

Patronage systems and undemocratic governance are remained as the twofold major causes in most post-independent African states. In this regard, Sierra Leone is not exceptional. Since its
independence in 1961, the country was characterized by poor and undemocratic governance systems. According to Bellows and Miguel (2006), one among other factors that caused the civil war in Sierra Leone was the state’s failure to provide public services and promote economic development. In a similar vein, Kamara (2009), examined that since independence successive governments in were characterized by ills of bad governance such as corruption, unrest, violence and poor economic governance as well as impunity of resources at the expense of the public. What makes worse is that not only the country was ruled by one-party characterized by ills of bad governance, but also all the successive regimes came to power through military coup over one another. Reno (1995) explained that the one-party state APC served the interests of a small group of politicians and foreign diamond merchants while the public was denied basic public services. Furthermore, the state institutions such as the civil service, the judiciary, the police and the military were severely abused by the government officials to serve their interests at the expense of the interest of the public at large (Hirsch, 2001). According to Kamara (2009), these institutions were almost at the brink of collapse especially during the years preceding the conflict.

According to Richards (2003), the conflict in Sierra Leone was also due to the social exclusion of the young especially unemployment and youth marginalization. Richards further added that the total failure of the state to provide education and generate employment opportunities created a large pool of disenfranchised youth ready to rise up violent actions against the system (ibid).

3.3. Competition over Natural Resources

Sierra Leone is one of the natural resources endowed African countries. It has huge and valuable natural resources like diamonds, gold, bauxite and titanium a few among others (Richards, 2003). However, like other many African countries, economic factors such as poor management and competition over natural resources are another root cause of the conflict. According to Sesay (1995), successive regimes have failed to wisely manage the huge economic potential to the benefit of the people rather to the benefit of the ruling politicians. Similarly, Coleman (2010) argues that at the center of the conflict is the pervasive presence of resources and the presence of both greed and grievance between those claiming and benefitting from the system of patronage. In a related manner, Kamara (2009) stated that one of the root economic causes for the conflict is the corruption associated with natural resources. Especially, the corruption related to the diamond industry was rampant (Colman, 2010) what Paul Collier (2000, p. 96) called it “greed for resources”. Paul Collier (2000, p. 97) clearly identified that “the presence of primary commodity exports massively increases the risks of civil war.”
Furthermore, the competition to control and exploitation of the country’s huge natural resources and the inequitable distribution of the rewards from these resources led to the fomentation of grievances which successive governments failed to address (Kamara, 2009). In a related vein, Reno (1995) examined that the competition over natural resources and the unwise management of these resources led to the formation of the RUF supported by Charles Taylor, who had the desire over the diamond fields of the Kono region of Sierra Leone. In this regard, Keen (2005) stated that because large-scale diamond smuggling was possible only so long as the country remained in chaos, these diamond profits represented an important incentive for armed groups to perpetuate the war.

For instance, in 1991, the RUF controlled the diamondiferous region of Kono District in the Eastern part of the country (Camara, 2012). Again, by 1995, the RUF controlled three major mining areas for diamonds and bauxite - the principal revenue generators for the Sierra Leone government (Colman, 2010). As a result, RUF took advantage of promising combatants a better share in the rewards from the country’s natural resources (Kamara, 2009). This gave the RUF and other rebel groups the opportunity to obtain revenue from the sales of diamonds for procuring more arms and ammunition to prosecute the war. In this regard, Collier (2000) clearly examined that civil wars occur where rebel organizations are financially viable.

3.4. Interference of Neighboring States as Proximate Causes

The conflict in Sierra Leone was further complicated by the involvement of neighboring countries. According to Coleman (2010), the principal involvement of regional neighboring countries mainly Liberia and Nigeria prolonged the conflict. Similarly, Kamara (2009) explained that neighboring states such as Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Guinea directly or indirectly contributed their share to the conflict in Sierra Leone. The role of such neighboring countries is clearly discussed under the secondary actors section.
4. The Actors of the Conflict

The actors involved in the Sierra Leone civil war could be classified as primary, secondary and tertiary actors. Each actor has its own contribution, issue, goal and interest in the civil war with different relationships.

4.1. The Primary Actors of the Conflict

There are multiple primary actors that directly involved in the Sierra Leone civil war. Since the main conflict drivers center on issues of natural resources, governance, democracy and power but not limited to, it is not surprising that rebels groups, governments, tribes and local communities are the key actors in the conflict. Accordingly, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Civil Defense Force (CDF) are the main actors of the conflict.

The RUF led by Foday Sankoh was the principal actor of the conflict. The RUF was formed in 1980s by a group of activists seeking to overthrow the APC regime (Richards, 2003). The interests and needs of the RUF was to seize political power from the APC (Kamara, 2009), which in turn promoting the Orthodox Marxism, radical Pan-Africanism and Populism of the Green Book of
Col. Gaddafi of Libya (Richards, 2003). The other main actor of the conflict is the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). In 1992, NPRC removed the one party rule APC. The interests and needs of NPRC was to control the state power and resources (Kamara, 2009). In 1996 after four years later, NPRC was replaced by the democratically elected government of the Ahmad Tejan Kabbah – a coalition led by the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in March 1996 (Richards, 2003).

However, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) was unfriendly to the new elected government of SLPP because of the rivalry between the Army and the SLPP government and its pro-government ‘Kamajors’ (Kamara, 2009). The SLA was not interested to loss of power to a civilian government (ibid). This situation led to the coup d’état organized by the junior officers of the SLA to seize power from the democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on 25th May 1997 (Richards, 2003). The coup led to the formation of the short lived military regime, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) into which joined the RUF (Richards, 2003; Kamara, 2009). The conflict among various groups also led to the creation of new local institutions, as communities organized Civil Defense Forces (CDF) to protect themselves from the RUF and SLA. Thus, CDF fighters were civilians, often linked to traditional societies and they relied primarily on local fundraising for supplies (Bellows and Miguel, 2006).

4.2. The Secondary Actors of the Conflict

There were also other secondary actors which indirectly involved in the conflict. These actors can be identified as spoilers that benefitting from the conflict. In this regard, the West African neighboring countries like Libya, Liberia, Brukina Faso, Guinea and Nigeria with different interests were involved in proxy war in the Sierra Leone conflict (Richards, 2003). For instance, Libya supported the RUF with the assumption that Foday Sankoh was a true revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideology (Kamara, 2009). In believing so, a number of Sierra Leoneans including Foday Sankoh took military training at the ‘World Revolutionary Headquarters’ in Benghazi, Libya in the late 1980’s (Gberie, 2005).

Liberia is another proximate factor for the sustenance of the civil-war in Sierra Leone. Especially, Charles Taylor took measures of retaliation against Sierra Leone for allowing ECOMOG (the military wing of ECOWAS) to operate against the NPFL by helping to establish and arm the RUF (Coleman, 2010). Charles Taylor also backed rebel groups such as the NPFL and RUF (Richards,
2003). In reward, Taylor was rewarded benefit from the profitable diamond wealth of Sierra Leone (ibid).

Burkina Faso is another proximate cause of the Sierra Leone conflict. According to Kamara (2009), it provided military trainers to West African countries that have conflicts. In a similar vein, Gberie (2005) noted that most of the fighters of the RUF when invaded eastern Sierra Leone in 1991 were Burkinabes and Liberians. Further, the country was the facilitator and the transit for men and military support to Foday Sankoh’s RUF and Charles Taylor’s NPLF (Kamara, 2009).

Guinea is another factor despite of various literatures show that Guinea did not involve in the conflict. Rather, it was one of the major allies of Sierra Lone from the beginning to the end of the conflict. It hosted more than one million refugees and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah for nine months. However, Guinea accused of Liberia for providing a safe haven for Guinean rebels. In response, Guinea provided anti-Taylor rebels based within its territory. In counter response, Charles Taylor used the RUF as mercenaries to invade Guinea despite of its failed to control it (Camara, 2012).

The role of Nigeria remains controversial because on the one hand it was on the position to protect the vested interests of the military ruler, Sani Abacha, and on the other hand, it was pre-empted a mandate eventually given by ECOWAS (Ogunmola and Badmus 2006). According to Coleman (2010), as a regional hegemon in West Africa, Nigeria, entered to the Sierra Leone conflict with mixed motives. First, it was based on the bilateral basis between the two countries. Second, as an ECOWAS peacekeeping mission. In both cases, Nigeria’s political motives in supporting a democratic government in Sierra Leone, was also meant to enhance Nigeria’s diplomatic standing both in Africa and beyond (Coleman, 2010). However, two significant members of ECOWAS namely Liberia and Burkina Faso opposed the military intervention of Nigeria in Sierra Leone and were likely to lead to a protracted process in brokering a solution (Berman and Sams, 2000).

Moreover, private military companies (PMC) were another secondary actors that played significant role in the conflict. According to Musah and Fayemi (2000), both the Executive Outcomes (EO), Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) and Sandline International (SI) played significant role in manipulating the conflict in Sierra Leone since the 1960s. In a related manner, Francis (1999) argued that the primary motivation for these PMCs are exploitation of natural resources such as diamonds, oil and other mineral resources in the country. For instance, in January 1995, the NPRC contracted the GSG to train its military forces, but the later was quickly forced to
withdraw after sustaining significant casualties, including the loss of its team leader in a clash with the RUF (Vines, 1999 cited in Coleman, 2010).

The EO in particular, helped to neutralize the RUF threat to the Sierra Leone government and which in turn, secured mining concessions from the government as rewards (Coleman, 2010). Moreover, the South African Private Security firm and the EO combined known as the ‘Kamajors’ civil militia attacked RUF to retreat from the parts of Sierra Leone (Richards, 2003, p. 29). The South African private security firm and the executive outcomes supported the SLPP to end the rebellion held by the RUF (Kamara, 2009), which in turn regaining control of critical resources, in particular the Sierra Rutile mine and the diamond fields (Coleman, 2010).

4.3. The Tertiary Actors of the Conflict

The ECOWAS, the former OAU (now the AU), the Commonwealth of Nations and the UN and other individual states such as United Kingdom and the United States of America have played important role in the Sierra Leone conflict. More specifically, the role of ECOMOG and the United Nations to enforce peace in Sierra Leone was more prominent (Coleman, 2010). For instance, in February 1998, ECOWAS temporarily deployed troops to create the conditions for the longer-term presence of the UN military observer Mission in Sierra Leone (ECOMOG and 70 UNOMSIL). ECOWAS troops in Sierra Leone were widely credited for stabilized the situation and paved the way for the deployment of the larger UN force (Bah and Jones, 2008). Further, ECOWAS forces (ECOMOG) led by Nigerian troops contributed to the restoration of the democratically civilian government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah from the military group, AFRC and RUF in 1998 (Richards, 2003).

Furthermore, the deployment of United Kingdom troops contributed to end the war in the country. The UK deployment was short-term military support to the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) (Bah and Jones, 2008). According to Williams (2013), the Operation Palliser in Sierra Leone in 2000 between UNAMSIL and British forces was deployed to stop the advance of RUF to Freetown in breach of the Lome Peace Accord.
Figure 2: Conflict Mapping of the Sierra Leone Conflict

The following are key components of conflict mapping:

- Circles indicate actors/parties involved in the conflict.
- Size of the circles indicates the relative powers of actors.
- Straight line indicated a link, fairly close relationships, if the line is bold, it represents friendship.
- Double lines indicate alliance between actors/parties.
- Straight line crossed by double lines indicated broken relationships.
- Dotted line indicated informal or intermittent links.
- Straight line with arrow indicates the predominant direction of influence or activity.
- Zigzag line indicates conflict between actors/party.

Source: own articulation
5. The Dynamics of the Conflict

Conflict dynamics deals with the conflict processes, changes in terms of escalations and de-escalations and undertaking interventions. The conflict dynamics in Sierra Leone stared in March 1991 and reached at crisis stage up to 1996. According to Keen (2005), the invasion of Kailahun district of eastern Sierra Leone on 23 March 1991 by the RUF marked as the beginning of the civil war. A year later, on 29 April 1992, the NPRC led by Valentine Strasser brought a coup against the authoritarian leader, Joseph Momoh and captured state power in the same year (Kandeh, 2003). Although the NPRC was promised to protect the people against the RUF and return to democratic rule, these promises were far from been fulfilled (Kamara, 2009). Instead, war continued across the country and NPRC detained a number of senior officers of the APC. More specifically, in December 1992, NPRC executed 26 former APC politicians (Hirsch, 2001). As a result, due to the increasing pressures from the international community and popular uprisings within the state the four years administration of the military Junta of the NPRC was replaced by a democratically elected government led by Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) through the March 1996 election (Coleman, 2010).

Following the replacement of the NPRC by the civilian government of the SLPP in March 1996, conflict parties including the SLPP, RUF, EO and the Civil Defense Force (CDF) agreed to sign the Abidjan Peace Accord\(^3\) held in November 1996 (Richards, 2003). However, the peace accord was very short-lived because of the withdrawal of the EO from Sierra Leone and the RUF’s broke on what they had agreed and resumed their campaign of violence and terror (Kamara, 2009). As a result, in March 1997, Foday Sankoh arrested in Nigeria on weapons charges (Kaldor and Vincent, 2006). This situation led to the May 1997 military coup d’état which was orchestrated by junior officers of the SLA called themselves the AFRC and seized power by removing the democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (Coleman, 2010). After few weeks later president Kabbah fled to Guinea. The coup leaders then joined to the RUF to form the alliance AFRC/RUF Junta. As a result, there was a high level of violence against civilians\(^3\) in 1998 due to continued activity of the RUF and its allied AFRC (Kamara, 2009).

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\(^3\) The Abidjan Peace Accord includes amnesty for RUF, transformation of RUF into a political party, disarmament and demobilization of combatants, reduction of armed forces, and withdrawal of Executive Outcomes. (Executive Outcomes is dismissed in January because Kabbah cannot pay them within a few weeks, fighting resumes.)
In response, the international community such as the UN and, the then OAU and other member states condemned the coup led by AFRC. In particular, the UN imposed sanctions on the military Junta prohibiting the importation of weapons, military materials, and petroleum as well as a ban on international travel by members of the military junta (UNSC Resolution 1132, 1997). Further, ECOMOG troops battled the AFRC to return the power of the elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah who was in exile (Kamara, 2009). To this effect, in 1998, a peace agreement was signed in Conakry, Republic of Guinea calling for the restoration to power of President Kabbah despite the fact that AFRC continued to hold power (Coleman, 2010). Lastly, in February 1998, Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces overthrow AFRC/RUF and marched into Freetown (Karama, 2009).

Consequently, in March 1998, the elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was returned to Freetown and resumes his presidential duties after nine months in exile (Coleman, 2010). The international community continued and increased its support for the restored government by establishing a UN Security Council Resolution 1181 authorized the creation of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), with 70 military observers on 13 July 1998 (UNSC, RES/1181, 1998). The mandate of UNOSIL was to monitor the military and security situation in the country and the disarmament and demobilization of former combatants (Kamara, 2009). Further, the Mission was mandated to work closely with ECOMOG to enforce peace in the country. However, the security situation started worsening and deteriorated further especially when ECOMOG forces were forced to withdraw to positions closer to Freetown by mid-December 1998 (Coleman, 2010). Similarly, Kamara (2009) noted that although the efforts of UN and ECOWAS returned president Kabbah into office, on 6 January 1999, AFRC and RUF fighters attacked Freetown (Coleman, 2010). AFRC/RUF retreated to the interior of the country caused widespread atrocities including severe mutilations, torture, murder, brutal killings, and deliberate dismemberments in a campaign of terror against the civilian population under the code-named “Operation No Living Thing” (Hawley, 1999 cited in Kamara, 2009: 10). In response to the atrocities committed by the AFRC/RUF, the Nigerian-led ECOMOG peacekeeping force fought hard and was able to regain control of Freetown (Coleman, 2010).

The raiding of Freetown by the AFRC and RUF forces urged the Kabbah government to the negotiation. To this effect, in May 1999, a ceasefire agreement was signed the Lomé Peace Accord on 7th July 1999 (Camara, 2012). The Lome peace agreement was assumed as the most

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4 The Accord includes power sharing between Government and rebels, blanket amnesty for rebels, disarmament and demobilization, and establishment of commissions for human rights and for truth and reconciliation.
comprehensive and operational document concluded by the conflicting parties to end the conflict and bring peace to the country (Kamara, 2009). Although the peace agreement was signed between the government and the AFRC/RUF to solve the conflict through dialogue, it was short-lived and had a limited impact in securing the state (Dowd and Raleigh, 2012). Rather, the AFRC and RUF forces continued their attack which resulted to suffering of civilians such as chopping off ears, noses, hands and legs of non-combatants whom they consider as being unwilling to cooperate with them (Kamara, 2009; Coleman, 2010).

In response, on 22 October 1999, the UNSC authorized the establishment of a UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) up to 6,000 troops to restore order and disarm the rebels under Chapter VII Resolution 1270 (Kaldor and Vincent, 2006). However, RUF hostage the UN peacekeepers and their arms to advance towards Freetown and completely changed the military situation in Sierra Leone (Coleman, 2010). As a result, both the Kabbah government and the UN mission were in danger. However, thanks to the arrival of the military forces of the United Kingdom on 7 May 2000 in Freetown saved the UNAMSIL hostages (ibid).

Furthermore, on 17 May 2000, Sankoh was captured and arrested. This situation led to the change of leadership of the RUF from Foday Sankoh to Issa Sesay contributed to some positive cooperation with the government in implementing the Lome Peace Agreement in August 2000 (Richards, 2003). Both conflicting parties agreed to conduct general election which was scheduled for the early 2001 despite of the scheduled general election was postponed due to the security situation was not conducive for the running of the election (Kamara, 2009). Finally, it was on the 28th January 2002, the government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and leaders of the rebel groups declared the end of the war at a special ceremony held at the International Airport town of Lungi (Coleman, 2010). The election that was earlier postponed was finally held in May 2002 and the SLPP secured a majority of the seats in Parliament and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was re-elected for the second time running as President and Head of State (Kamara, 2009).

6. Concluding Remarks

The Sierra Leone conflict is rooted in the historical and structural factors traced back to the 1970’s and 1980’s. The civil war was a result of several complex factors. The colonial legacy of dual administrative and legal systems dominated post-independence governance structures and divided the people of the country into colony and protectorate. The system favored the colony at the expense of the protectorate in the provision of basic social services and amenities as well as access
to important services including education, healthcare, and electricity, water supply. Due to these reasons, the state resorted to one party state and various rebel groups who compete for power and resource. There have been primary, secondary and tertiary actors which have direct or indirect involvement in the conflict. The rebel groups (RUF and AFRC), the governments (SLPP and SLA), the tribes and local communities (the Civil Defense Force (CDF)) are the primary actors of the conflict. Moreover actors like neighboring countries such as Libya, Liberia, Brukina-Faso, Guinea and Nigeria were involved in proxy war to serve their interests. The ECOWAS, the former OAU (now the AU), the Commonwealth of Nations and the UN and other individual states such as United Kingdom and the United States of America have played important role in the Sierra Leone conflict. Since the outbreak of the conflict, there have been various conflict processes, changes of escalations and de-escalations and undertaking interventions including peace accords and military interventions. Finally, the paper recommends that the national reconciliation programs should be strengthened to include all important stake holders and actors to address the grievances and the past misdeeds; and thereby, they will contribute their own share to the unity, stability and post-conflict reconstruction processes of the country.

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