

Rethinking Strategy to Youth Development in Pujehun District:

Pujehun Computer Learning Center

Charles Kaikai

Northwest University

Abstract

Sierra Leone represents a microcosm of the myriad challenges facing the entire sub-Saharan African continent. It is one of the countries recently ravaged by war and challenges including poor health, lack of educational opportunities, gender inequality, environmental issues, agricultural development, and economic sustainability. One of the central reasons Sierra Leone ranks near the bottom of the World Development ranking is because of the sad state of its educational system and lack of human capacity development. Today, the world has grown more urban and interdependent with globalization taking a center stage in our lives. The pace of change has accelerated and now is the time to take the leadership posture in designing a program keeps pace with globalization while at the same time refocusing on massive youth unemployment and empowerment. The youth need more than English, mathematics proficiency, and the ability to solve intellectual puzzles in order to become competent citizens in our society. In this regard, a complementary educational system will be established on the model of a computer-learning center in Pujehun town to help buffer the lack of quality education that has plagued the district for so long. The implementation of this project will also help the youth in Pujehun district be empowered through economic opportunities, political liberties, social empowerment, and enabling conditions for good health and financial stability in the future.

Keywords: war, educational opportunities, gender inequality, youth development, globalization and economic sustainability.

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Abbreviations

CDF: Civil Defense Forces

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

IMF: International Monetary Fund

SAPA: Structural Adjustment and Poverty Alleviation

RUF: Revolutionary United Front

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

MODEL: the Movement for Democracy in Liberia

LURD: Liberia United for Reconciliation and Democracy

UNITA: National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

SPLA: The Sudan People's Liberation Army

UNAMSIL: United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

NCDDR: National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration

PCLC: Pujehun Computer Learning Center

SLPP: Sierra Leone People's Party

SLAF: Sierra Leone Armed forces

ECOMOG: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

IRC: International Rescue Committee

MGP: Match Grant Program

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

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Introduction

Years of grievous official mismanagement of the country's economy and the subordination of governmental institutions, including the judiciary system, led to a deeply corrupt rule of law and system of governance in Sierra Leone (UNHCR, 2012). This long breakdown of statehood and institutions in Sierra Leone culminated in an 11-year bloody civil war that further destroyed the fragile infrastructures and claimed the lives of thousands of innocent civilians including women and children. Today, the country is experiencing a mixture of democratic and dictatorship systems, poverty, lack of developmental programs, massive waves of youth unemployment, and the aftermath of the civil war, which ended in 2002. As a result of these challenges people, particularly demobilized unemployed youths, have moved to urban areas in search of their livelihoods. Sierra Leone is deeply entrenched in the poverty trap due to debts over the years to powerful multilateral institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The policies and programs introduced by these multilateral organizations in the 1980s such as Structural Adjustment and Poverty Alleviation (SAPA) and Green revolution have significantly altered the structures of the country's economy, resulting in a massive growth of unemployed youth in urban areas while reducing corresponding non-service sector jobs (Kwame Abrefah, 2003).

The youth in Sierra Leone face many problems, particularly in the aftermath of the war. These problems range from lack of full participation in the political system and shattered family dynamics to violence, armed robbery, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, and unemployment. The poor people in Sierra Leone are at the mercy of politicians' whims, philanthropist charities,

NGOs, and multinational institutions. Neither the politicians nor the philanthropists can offer these people what they truly need if they are excluded from the very development programs that are catered to assist them (Perkins, 2007). My goal for the Pujehun Computer Learning Center project is to increase youth participation in today's job market, as well as food security, and economic and personal development of the devastated district that continues to languish since the end of the civil conflict in 2001.

Problem Statement

The issue of poverty and youth development is not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leone and Pujehun district in particular. Poverty is the fundamental reason for the lack of development in this country. The youth population represents some of society's most marginalized members who, paradoxically, need society's help the most. Millions of Sierra Leoneans lost everything they owned during and in between the military mayhem, and of course after the war. The war produced for the first time in the history of this country a multitude of "homeless" people begging for survival in the city streets of Free Town and other provincial district headquarters.

Housing is viewed as an important solution in dealing with homelessness. The war destroyed the structures that the people called home. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, the Civil Defense Force (CDF), and the Sierra Leone Military Forces purposefully set ablaze homes, schools, hospitals, libraries, and government offices in their path of capturing or retreating from towns and villages. This has created a huge housing crisis for the average Sierra Leonean. In addition, the lack of affordable housing efforts by the government has been one of the leading indicators of homelessness in this country. Despite the government's recognition of the problem, their lack of enthusiasm for creating public housing authorities, the high cost of private renters, coupled with low paying jobs, is adding untold stories to this predicament.

Another contributing factor to youth underdevelopment is lack of income. People without money do not have the ability to look for homes or apartments to rent and cannot pay for food, clothing, health care, or education to better themselves. After the war, the number of homeless youth has increased exponentially in Sierra Leone. According to United Nations Development Programme report, an estimated 800,000 youth between the ages of 15 and 35 are actively searching for employment (UNDP, 2013). The current unemployment figure is not welcome news to economic stability in the face of globalization that requires some forms of technical knowledge.

Substance abuse and mental illness are other potential factors that the youth of Pujehun district were subjected to during the decade of civil war. The most unfortunate part is the lack of adequate medical help and diagnosis of their current situation. It is sad to say, but as a result of these issues, we have a generation of youth with no future contributions to the development of Sierra Leone and to the betterment of themselves.

The reason for this malaise is twofold: (1) the unprecedented bloody civil war that destroyed and destabilized the country for over a decade, and (2) the form of educational training programs initiated by the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process failed to adequately address both the long-term and the immediate goals of youth empowerment in the country. Although there was a series of educational provisions and changes made by the Ministry of Education to accommodate and reintegrate the child soldiers, none of the curriculum developed adequately fostered the current educational realities of the 21st century global labor market.

The current education system lacks leadership development programs in its core curriculum. The youth grow up significantly lacking experiences and entrepreneurial skills in

creating meaningful programs toward economic empowerment. As Greg Campbell described, “Children mob you the moment you walk in the gates, begging for money, to the point where you have to wrestle them off of you before you’re dragged down. Little kids, some less than ten year old, hobble about on one leg” (2002, prologue). This scene coupled with hundreds more illustrates the dire need of the plight of youth in Sierra Leone. The civil war and the lack of tangible educational programs after the war affected the quality of life of the youth, making it extremely difficult for them to reach their full potential (Kwame Abrefeh, 2003).

The aim of Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) is not only to instill computer literacy on how to connect with other people around the world, but also to work with these at-risk youth, particularly the ex-child soldiers, to identify their skills and unique gifts in order to develop their self-image, esteem, and self-confidence. Thus, leadership development is the key to the continuation of permanent peace in the country. As Perkins argued, “I am convinced that the key to bearing lasting fruit is not in developing programs but in developing people-leaders” (2007, p.75). The purpose for the creation of Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) is to enhance the educational development of the youth in Pujehun district that never had this opportunity during the DDR process in 2002.

The youth in Sierra Leone grew up in an environment that barraged them with the same picture every day: poverty. These young people have spent their lives struggling to make ends meet. The political landscape in Sierra Leone favors only the few in power. The same political parties have been recycling the system since independence from the British in 1961. Pujehun district has a high rate of poverty, a menace that prevents against development in the district. Critical in this light is the lack of higher learning that was the bedrock of the district before the war.

The youth population in Sierra Leone is greatly marginalized; youth lack a career path and family support system due to their involvement in the civil war. This population deserves a better network of proactive advocates and social entrepreneurs to transform their current living situations into more productive ones. These youth live very risky lives and struggle daily for their survival. The lack of higher education in the district catapulted their easy conversion to become child soldiers during the rebel war. Today, without any formal education to sustain them, the majority of these youth are now living in the streets and engaging in criminal acts. As a result, many youth continue with the status quo of a gun-toting mentality approach to life rather than pursuing a different career path.

Development and Empowerment Concepts

Development entails a long term goal and commitment. Conn and Ortiz referred to it as “the process by which persons and societies come to realize the full potential of human life in a context of social justice... Development is the conscientization process by which people are awakened to opportunities within reach” (2001, p. 343). Bryant Myers (2008) encapsulated fascinating concepts of development theories by advancing the views of different practitioners to the meaning of poverty and how to approach it. Myers argued that “transformational development is a journey to recover our true identity as human beings created in the image of God and to discover our time vocation as productive stewards faithfully caring for the world and all the people in” (2006, p. 3). In retrospect, development transcends more than just the material world. It is a lifelong journey that never ends. Empowerment, on the other hand, involves local participation in decision-making, participatory democracy, and social learning (Myers, 2006).

Transformational development is one of the tenets being heavily considered in this thesis that proposes building a computer learning center in Sierra Leone to help the rehabilitation and

re-integration process of ex-combatant child soldiers who roam the streets in Sierra Leone with no future development focus. The computer learning center will focus on youth empowerment with a knowledge base that is centered on financial and economic sustainability. A depressed community striving to become self-sufficient needs outside technology and funds to get started. However, such a program must be designed and led by the people of the community. Therefore, the moment people truly discover their talents reflects the moment their lives take a new trajectory for brighter future (Myers, 2006).

Contextual Theory: People Centered Approach

Development is a complex word to define, whether it involves children, the economy, society, culture, or education. Positive youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences, which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent (National Collaboration for Youth Members, 1998). Despite the recognition of children as key components to development, the situation of being born and raised in poverty makes it difficult to meet their needs with tangible development programs.

The contextual approach to the creation of Pujehun Computer Learning Center in Sierra Leone rests on David Korten's *People Centered Approach*. The people centered approach rests on the assumption that the world is suffering from a threefold crisis: poverty, environmental destruction, and social disintegration. Korten, therefore, defines development as "a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations" (Myer, 2006, p. 96). Sierra Leone is endowed with

natural resources: gold, diamonds, coffee, bauxite, copper, rutile, and oil. However, the country has suffered tremendously due to lack of growth and development in terms of both infrastructure and human capacity development. Despite its mineral resources, the country ranked at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index (UN, 2011). As Daniel Groody observed, “The lack of resources and opportunities creates great social instability, and it is a fertile ground for desperate people to incite violence, if not terrorism” (2010, p.9). Thus, Sierra Leone witnessed a decade long civil war that completely destroyed and annihilated its fragile infrastructure. Thousands of innocent civilians including women and children were killed or adopted as child soldiers or sex slaves for the rebel commanders. Others were amputated, and a million more fled to neighboring countries to seek solace as refugees.

The people centered approach adequately reflects the changes needed to move the country in a different direction in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Development, therefore, is not an end point in itself but a continuous process that evolves just like culture. The fact that the new economic structure has made primary production such as agriculture and raw material processing industries less attractive speaks volume to the need for change in the educational paradigm. This shift in movement has caused a breakdown of the traditional cultures and structures that historically had been the centered piece to youth growth and development from infancy to adulthood (Kwame Abrefah, 2003).

Today, the youth of Sierra Leone need more than having English proficiency and the ability to solve intellectual puzzles in order to become competent citizens of our society (Abrefah, 2003). The educational system in Sierra Leone still has its foundation on colonial pillars. Leadership development is a non-existent and youth grow up significantly lacking job skills without programs geared towards sustainability and economic empowerment. They need

an education that will prepare them for the economy of the 21st century. The academic barometers in place in Sierra Leone are grossly inadequate and must be balanced by other equally valuable indicators such as civil responsibility, accountability, cultural skills, and vocational institution such as the Pujehun Computer Learning Center.

Child Soldiers and Demobilization Program in Sierra Leone

Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children, and the condition of child poverty in particular, have been increasingly pushed to the fore-front of the development agenda. However, during the same period there has been an increase in the number of child soldiers recruited by either guerillas or rebel fighters around the globe (Feeny & Boyden, 2003). The use of child soldiers is far more widespread than the current attention it typically receives. Sixteen of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered major civil wars in the past fifteen years (McGill, 2008). More than six million children has been disabled or seriously injured in wars over the last decade, and another million have been pushed into orphaned status (Singer, 2005, p. 5). In Sierra Leone, the total numbers of children recruited or killed is unknown. What is certain, however, is that 5,400 children were demobilized during the DDR process (NCDDR, 2002).

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) method to use children as combat material in Sierra Leone has changed the debate of armed conflict around the world, not because the country has suffered through a terrible war, but because of the prominent role of children fighting the war. As much as 80 percent of former RUF fighters were age seven to fourteen, and the majority of those were abducted (Singer, 2005, p. 5). However, the RUF was not the only group in Sierra Leone who employed child soldiers; both the SLPP government and its tribal militias (local hunters) recruited them as well.

In Sierra Leone, children experienced the greatest harm during the decade long conflict as soldiers and civilians. As McGill (2008) observed:

In these conflicts civilians are no longer ‘incidental’ casualties but are direct targets of violence. Mass terror becomes a deliberate strategy. Destruction of schools, houses, religious buildings, fields and crops as well as torture, rape, and internment, became commonplace. Modern warfare is concerned not only to destroy life, but also ways of life. It targets social and cultural institutions and deliberately aims to undermine the means whereby the people endure and recover from the suffering of war. (p. 3)

Sierra Leone is no exception, though. By the turn of the 20th century, child soldiers served in significant numbers on every continent of the globe. They have become integral parts of both organized military units and non-military forces. Since 1990, child soldiers have fought in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru (Singer, 2005, p.16). Africa is often considered an epicenter of the child soldier phenomenon, because of the number of children recruited by armed groups in civil conflicts. McGill (2008) highlighted some of these armies who have recruited children in Africa. They include the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Revolutionary United Front (RUF-SL), Civil Defense Forces (CDF-SL), the Westside Boys in Sierra Leone, and The Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

Conceptualizing Child Soldiers

The United Nations defines a child soldier as “any person under 18 years of age who is engaged in deadly combat or combat support as part of an armed force or group” (Singer, 2005, p. 7). It is important to recognize that in many parts of the world cultural and social

interpretations debunk this definition. In Sierra Leone, children are viewed by their parents as an integral part of the family. They are a source of pride, joy, and satisfaction. Children also play an essential role in providing food for their families at early ages, especially in rural settings. In most cases, children stay with their families, even when their marital status changes. For girls, childhood ends upon attainment of puberty status. They are often rushed into early marriages to older men because of poverty and other financial responsibilities and obligations.

Feeny and Boyden (2003) argued that the concept of child development is a process whereby all children develop through a series of progressive stages. Each stage of development builds on the previous one and any disruption, particularly a stressful or traumatic event such as war, would affect the child's later development often with life-long negative effects. In addition to the child development argument, Susan Greener also maintained that "the child's mind and body are integrated into the greater environment in a dynamic way with the child activity reorganizing his or her own behavior in responses to any change in the system" (Mission of Mercy, 2002). More often, these changes in environment include exposure to infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS), abuse, death in the family, and separation of war, as with child soldiers in Sierra Leone. The government leaders of Sierra Leone, since colonial rule, have all failed to address the needs of the youth population. To achieve a better understanding of this paradigm of child development, a holistic approach is needed in the implementation process.

Why Employ Children?

The use of children as soldiers raises the frequency, desperation, and savagery of conflict (Singer, 2005). The recruitment and employment of child soldiers is one of the most blatant violations of the norms of human dignity. As Miles and Wright noted, "Children belong to God and should be recognized for their inestimable worth and dignity- not for what they produce and

accomplish, but for who they are as God's own handiwork" (2003, p. 25). The value of children as God's own handiwork has been gradually eroded, and replaced by the insatiable human quest for earthly treasures. Children are no longer viewed as an essential part of transformational development. Instead, they are now regarded as sources of exploitation by adults to satisfy their egotistical ambitions. Whether conscripted as child soldiers in civil conflicts or financially exploited by multinational corporations as cheap laborers in factories in developing countries, children are vessels through which God's blessings should continue from one generation to the next (Miles & Wright, 2003).

The underlying causes behind the use of child soldiers are complex. They include the overarching problems of poverty, the lack of economic and educational opportunities, failure of democratic reforms in developing countries, technological advancement in weaponry, lack of defenses, and physical vulnerability.

Poverty

Poverty is a complex, multidimensional issue that can affect people at all levels of their existence. The combined issues of poverty and youth underdevelopment are not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leone and Pujehun district in particular. Poverty is the fundamental reason for lack of development in Sierra Leone. The government employs nearly eighty percent of the work force in the country. Private entities and privatization of major services are done under shady government deals and contracts that rarely represent the interest of the people. As a result, a huge segment of the population is left out of the equation, which the rebel leadership used to their advantage. As Groody observed, "Poverty is a pronounced deprivation in well-being. To be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter, and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate, to not schooled. It means having limited choices" (2010, p.10). Not all children were

forced into combat. Many of the children joined the different armed groups because of economic factors. Poverty and hunger are endemic during conflict and in conflict societies. As Singer (2005) observed, children, particularly those orphaned or disconnected from their families, opted to join the armed groups because they believed it was their only means of survival and access to regular meals and financial reward. In Sierra Leone, the child soldiers brought home the looted and stolen properties such as cars, televisions, DVD players, household furnishings, and money, which convinced other children to join the rebel movement.

Fiercest fighter

Children are fearless because they lack full understanding of their actions. Singer noted that “children are generally psychologically incapable of weighing all the possible consequences of their actions in realistic terms” (2005, p.81). In Sierra Leone, the RUF complimented the ferocious nature of the child soldiers by given them drugs such as cocaine and heroin laced with gun power to make it stronger. Transforming children into guerilla fighters begins with the recruitment process of abduction and indoctrination. In most cases, recruitments are rapidly followed by deployment in the frontlines to test their will power and fortitude. The children are given basic instructions in infantry skills: how to fire, reload, and clean their weapons, lay land mines, and set up an ambush. Brutality and abuses of the worst kind underscore each stage of their growth process. The ultimate aim of these abusive processes is to foster their dependence on the armed organization, and discourage any forms of escape plans by the children (Singer, 2005). In addition, many of the children, especially members of the civil defense forces joined the conflict because of personal experiences and being witness to violence perpetrated by the RUF to family members, close friends, or in localities where they resided. This violence was in the forms of massacres, amputations, sexual abuses and exploitations, death squads,

indiscriminate killings, tortures, and destruction of homes and properties. Vengeance can also be a powerful motivator for taking up arms against your enemies.

Lack of defense

The vulnerability of children in comparison to adult fighters matches the playbook of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In Sierra Leone, the RUF employed glamorous and impossible promises, which convinced most of the child soldiers to join the armed rebellion. As one child fighter described to Paul Singer, “They told us we’d all have our own vehicles. They told us they’d build houses for us. They told us many things” (Singer, 2005, p. 66). Other tactics used by armed groups to lure children into their ranks involve indoctrination, propaganda, drugs, and other social vices including underage drinking and sex. The RUF ultimate method of indoctrination involve the use of child soldiers in ritualized killing of others or family members immediately after their abduction (Singer, 2005).

Political power

Sierra Leone had been a peaceful country after independence from the British in 1961, but there were strong signs of frustration among the citizens even before the civil war. Like many other global south countries, there were legitimate claims that the elite class and the politicians were not interested in the well-being of the average Sierra Leonean. The politicians were actively involved in mismanaging the country’s finances, enriching themselves and fostering corruption, and nepotism. The standard of living for the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans was very degrading, in spite of the country’s endowment with numerous resources such as diamonds, gold, coffee, cocoa, and oil palm. As Campbell noted, “Neither on paper nor in person does Sierra Leone look like a country that produces some of the most beautiful and valuable diamonds sold by the \$6 billion per year international diamond industry” (2002,

prologue). Sierra Leone is rich in natural resources but lacks basic facilities such as safe drinking water, health care, access to quality education, and reliable electricity supply. The country ranked 180 out of 187 countries on the UN human development index in 2011 (UNDP, 2011). The life expectancy for both men and women in Sierra Leone hovers around 56 years. The infant mortality rate is one of the worst in Africa, with 76.64 deaths per 1,000 live births (CIA, 2013). As Groody shared the words of Colin Powell, “The war on terror is bound up in the war on poverty: the lack of resources and opportunities creates great social instability and it is a fertile ground for desperate people to incite violence, if not terrorism” (Groody, 2010, p. 9). In this case, the desperate mood did not create terrorism but triggered something bigger: an all-out civil war. The war claimed more than 200,000 people killed and over a million were forced from their homes into large refugee camps in neighboring countries (Donaldson, 2009).

Technology

Globalization and technological advances in transportation, communication, and information (the internet) have brought the world closer than ever before. Globalization has created massive wealth for entrepreneurs, and at the same time expanded the gap between the haves and the have-nots in developing countries (Friedman, 2000). The majority of the impoverished people are in Africa (Collier, 2007). These technologies have also transformed new weapon systems, which now permit children to carry and operate guns at excellent pace.

Forming worldview

Indoctrination is the act used by rebel leaders to imbue children with the new worldview of a fighter. Children are eager to learn new things, and because of their curiosity, they are typically much more likely to be persuaded by the ideology of the movement than adults (McGill, 2008). The indoctrination tactics of realigning the child’s allegiance and worldview

involves propaganda, through print media and the internet. The RUF leader Foday Sankoh encouraged the child soldiers to call him “pappy” which means “dad” or “father” to them (Singer, 2005). In this regard, the children were willing to follow the most dangerous of his orders without questioning his motives.

Children are victims of war irrespective of its underlying factors. Although the recruitment of children has been pointed in the past, the rate at which they are now being deployed at the fore front is quite alarming and astonishing. Children are forcefully conscripted to fight alongside adults, exposed to various traumatic situations, and transformed into killing machines. Whatever the reasons are, it is plainly wrong to put a child in danger, let alone arm him with a weapon. The results have been very damaging and traumatic to the children whom are violently deprived of their childhood and their lives. Child soldiers have been killed in record numbers in Sierra Leone and Liberia and are still being killed in Uganda, Congo, and Somalia.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program (DDR) in Sierra Leone has been rated as one of the most successful implementation of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in the world. The DDR program was framed on the Lome Peace Agreement of July 1999, which basically gave blank amnesty to the RUF fighter’s safe passage to reintegrate among the population they terrified for more than a decade (UNAMSIL, 2002). Disarmament and demobilization is a process of reintegrating child soldiers back into the community through the implementation of a three phrase steps: (1) disarmament and demobilization, (2) rehabilitation in the physical and the psychological realms, and (3) reintegration with families and the communities (Singer, 2005). Despite the need for a more holistic approach, the DDR program through the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

(NCDDR) played an important role in limiting tensions and forcing the RUF to come to terms with the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government of President Tejan Kabba. However, the DDR program excluded the child soldiers who escaped without their weapons (UNAMSIL,2002).

Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the DDR program in Sierra Leone have produced mixed results of the level of success attributed to the program. This prompted Humphrey and Weinstem to conduct a comparative analysis of the DDR programs in Burundi and Sierra Leone. They concluded that the higher-ranking combatants, particularly members of the RUF as well as Hutu and Tutsi militias were less trusting and highly suspicious of the democratic policies. Humphrey and Weinstem maintained, "Our examination of DDR programs produces little evidence in support of claims that these effectively break down factional structures and facilitate reintegration. Combatants not exposed to the DDR program appear to reintegrate just as successfully as those that participated" (Peloquin, 2011). To support this assertion, the following reasons are noteworthy. First, the war had adverse effects on both the population and the fighters. The level of destruction and death toll pushed both sides to sign the peace accord. Even though the average Sierra Leoneans were displeased with the Lome Peace Accord inculcated and transformed the RUF into a political movement, hardly any resistance in the forms of protest or public denunciation was carried out. Secondly, the RUF allied themselves with the military and took over the government through coup d'état on May 25, 1997. They became part of Armed Forces Revolution Council government lead by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. It became clear that the RUF quest for power and, privilege prevented them from starting another full-scale war in Sierra Leone.

Successes

The United Nations and other parties involved in the Sierra Leone conflict realized that long lasting peace in Sierra Leone could not be an achievable proposition without a successful DDR process due the history and lawless nature of the RUF fighters (Thusi & Meek, 2003). Through the DDR program former rebel fighters, civil defense forces, and renegade army personnel were successfully demobilized and reintegrated.

The DDR program accomplished its principal goals and objectives:

- To collect, register, disable and destroy all conventional weapons and ammunitions retrieved from combatants during the disarmament period.
- To demobilize appropriately 45,000 combatants of which 12 percent were expected to be women.
- To prepare and support ex-combatants for social-economic reintegration upon discharge.

Despite numerous setbacks and challenges, the NCDDR and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) conducted a highly successful mission that resulted in Sierra Leone being free from major conflict and set the stage for a permanent peace process. Demobilization for adults was more “fast-track” with a cash allowance of \$300,000 Leones (approximately \$ 143.00) distributed rapidly to adults who chose to return home or go somewhere to seek services. More than 72,000 people went through the disarmament and demobilization process well over the anticipated number of 33,000 (Women’s Commission, 2002). This rapid transition created a backlog for community-based reintegration programs, and other local structures put in place could not handle the sheer volume of graduates at lightning speed.

Problems

The monetary incentives used by the NCDDR to leverage the disarmament and demobilization process created additional problems for the returning fighters. These fighters had spent considerable time behind war zones and were engaged in lavish spending of looted properties. The money received from the NCDDR program was insufficient to support their lifestyles (Women's Commission, 2002).

The war also reinforced in many cases of the age-old domestic and gender-based violence in the country. According to the Women's commission (2002) report, "*Physicians for Human Rights*" it is estimated that approximately 50,000 to 64,000 girls and women were sexually assaulted during the war. Young girls and women adopted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLAF), Civil Defense Forces (CDF), and Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) were used in various capacities from combat duties to domesticity. The DDR process had tremendous impacts on ex-child soldiers and girls as they expressed powerlessness after their demobilization. Most of the girls who demobilized engaged in prostitution as a means of generating income because the DDR process failed to include them in the cash for weapons and other financial incentives programs. As noted by the UN Secretary General, "The successful reintegration of former child combatants and other children separated from their families requires a long-term approach and commitment with particular attention given to children passed by the formal disarmament process" (Women's commission, 2002).

One of the biggest problems was the inadequate facilities available for housing of the ex-combatants. The camps that were constructed in Bo, Kenema, and Port Loko, Lunsah, Moyamba,

and Daru to house the demobilized ex-combatants represented a tiny fraction to the composition and number of the RUF, CDF and the SLA fighters combined. (UNAMSIL, monograph#68).

The DDR programs and trainings, which were identified and put in place for the ex-combatants, were often not immediately useful to the young people to become self-sufficient. Local economies could not jump start the ball rolling because their structures were destroyed by the RUF. The few businesses that remained were looted by the government forces and their international allies-Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). In addition, funding all the programs that were identified became a severe headache for participating NGOs. In the northern town of Makeni, a DDR provider (called Caritas) maintained that the program for child and adolescent soldiers had been reduced from six months to three months (Women's Commission, 2002). The funding problem adversely affected the decision-making process of the children to either stay at the camp to finish up their programs or returned to rebel held territories and continue fighting.

Equally important to acknowledge is the nature of corruption, abuse, and financial fraud exhibited in the NCDDR. Both the ex-combatants and the local NGOs exploited the lack of oversight at the NCDDR to their benefit. Since tracing funds was a major obstacle, most ex-combatants were visiting multiple cantonment sites and receiving stipends without attending the rehabilitation program. The lack of promotion and support of educational programs resulted in massive amount of unemployed and uneducated youth and adults today.

Although the DDR program has been hailed as a successful disarmament and demobilization process, the NCDDR report for Pujehun District show a different conclusion. The gap in the DDR program, combined with the limitations in its education, livelihood, and

community advocacy components led to distrust and disappointment on the part of the demobilized fighters and the communities that received them.

Practicum: International Rescue Committee

Youth Development in Sierra Leone

The International Rescue Committee is one of the leading non-profit and non-sectarian agencies assisting refugees world-wide. The IRC was founded in 1933 at the suggestion of Albert Einstein to assist people fleeing the terror of Nazi oppression (personal communication with E. Perry, June 20, 2012). Since then, the IRC has been helping refugees who are victims of racial, religious, and ethnic persecution, as well as people who are uprooted by war and violence.

The IRC has several programs in Sierra Leone designed to help youth attain economic and social stability after the war. Since 1999, the IRC has initiated several development programs in Sierra Leone geared towards youth empowerment and economic growth. They include Education, Health, and Gender based violence in Freetown.

Education

The IRC, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports supports the general psychosocial wellbeing of children in Sierra Leone through education programs focused on meeting the educational needs of marginalized and disaffected children. Currently, the IRC provides educational support to over 9,000 children engaged in or at risk of becoming engaged in exploitative child labor through holistic intervention (IRC, 2013). They coordinate child labor educational programs and mobilize and sensitize communities at local and national levels about the inherent dangers of child labor practices. Through partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, the IRC provides youth with education and skills training opportunities, school materials, uniforms and tuition assistance vouchers. The IRC is currently

supporting and equipping 125 primary school teachers with distance learning capabilities to meet the challenges of the 21st century global labor force (IRC, 2013).

Health

Sierra Leone is rich in natural resources but lacks basic facilities such as safe drinking water, health care, and access to quality education and reliable electricity supply. The country ranked 180 out of 187 countries on the UN human development index in 2011 (UNDP, 2011). The life expectancy for both men and women in Sierra Leone hovers around 56 years. The infant mortality rate is one of the worst in Africa, with 76.64 deaths per 1,000 live births (CIA, 2013). To this end, the IRC's goal is to increase child and maternal survival rates by training public health staff and traditional birth assistants on basic reproductive health care, safe motherhood, childhood illnesses, and immunizations (IRC, 2013).

Gender-based Violence (GBV) Prevention

The program started in 1999, after the invasion of Freetown by the RUF and the horrors that emerged during their brief power sharing with the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Today, the program is assisting thousands of survivors of gender-based violence across the country. The IRC operates three Sexual Assault Referral Centers in Freetown, Kenema, and Kono, where survivors of sexual assault can access free comprehensive counseling, medical care, follow-up support and legal services.

Despite, the efforts of the IRC, women in the country are still facing an uphill battle of sexual and gender-based violence. In a recent PBS programme "Half the Sky," Amie Kandeh, IRC coordinator in Sierra Leone, narrated her frustration concerning the lukewarm approach by the police, the criminal investigation unit, and the judiciary systems for failing to prosecute the alleged child molesters. In 2009, out of 927 sexual abuse cases reported, none resulted in

conviction that year. In addition, in 2010, the newly created Family Support Unit attached to the police department received more than 4,200 reports of sexual abuses and violence. About a quarter of these reports lead to charges, and only 57 of them resulted in conviction. In relation to domestic violence, there were 1,543 reported cases, of which 759 were under investigation, 386 were pending and 106 resolved out of court and there were no convictions (UNHCR, 2012).

The frustrations among some IRC personnel with the judiciary process of not addressing gender-based violence in Sierra Leone echoed Bryant Myers concern about the role of international organizations meddling in the internal affairs of other countries. He maintained, “When we speak of transformational development, we must be clear as to whose story it is... It was the community’s story before we came and it will be the community long after we leave” (2006, p.112). The IRC failed to acknowledge that the people of Sierra Leone have their own stories and coping mechanisms to these issues even before the war. The sudden interpretation of rape and domestic violence in line with western values did not help the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) or the Special Court pioneered by the International Court of Justice to prosecute rebel leaders for crimes committed during the war.

Freedom as development depends on other determinants such as social and cultural arrangement, as well as political and civil rights. Sen argues that development is a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy (Sen, 2000). However, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) focusing on human freedom along western philosophy negates the success of its endeavor in Sierra Leone.

The IRC acculturation method of counseling sexual and domestic violence youth is inadequate in helping the girls achieve a smooth and easy transition from what has happened to them. One way to assist the abused girls toward realizing their freedom is to provide them with

resources that are tailored to their needs, while developing their potentials with sustainable tools for economic growth. The biggest problem facing the IRC's development efforts in Sierra Leone is due to its top-down and western approach of rehabilitation of victims of the war. As Gordon argues, "True innovation is much more likely to take root when it starts at the local level-with input and buy in from all the parties affected –and is highly tailored to local conditions" (Gordon, 2006, p.9). The IRC is only looking through a single lens of implementing programs based of western concepts, while ignoring the other determinant factors such as the cultural and traditional lifestyles of the youth in Sierra Leone.

Unlike the IRC, the aim of Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) is not only instilling computer literacy on how to connect with other people around the world, but also working with these at-risk youth, particularly the ex-child soldiers, to identify their skills and unique gifts in order to develop their self-image, esteem, and self- confidence. The computer learning center will focus on youth empowerment with a knowledge base that is centered on financial and economic sustainability. Thus leadership development is the key to the continuation of permanent peace in the country.

Pujehun Computer Learning Center

The Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) will implement a holistic and integrated approach towards community development that is centered on revitalizing and revamping the educational system in Pujehun district, as well as focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration process of ex-child soldiers and youth roaming around the district with no future path. This project will facilitate educational development by increasing the availability of technology and computer training that will eventually lead to sustainable economic capital and training as a catalyst for socio-economic growth of youth. The project, in the future, will work in close

collaboration and partnership with the Ministry of Education, Technology, and Science and other non-governmental organizations in Sierra Leone to advance the potential reality of the district by creating a higher learning culture.

Pujehun district lies in the southern part of the country along the tributaries of the Wangei River and the Atlantic coast. It is inhabited by the Mende ethnic group, which is the largest in Sierra Leone. The land is endowed with natural resources and is conducive for agriculture production. In 1991, Pujehun district was the first to succumb to the rebel incursion by the Revolutionary United Front led by Foday Sankoh with the strong backing of Charles Taylor (former President of Liberia). Unfortunately, Pujehun district happens to be one of the regions that saw the longest occupation by the fighting forces simply because of its geographical proximity to Liberia. The 12 chiefdoms in Pujehun district exhibit similar post-war conditions with towns and communities in ruins, educational infrastructures and agriculture production in shambles coupled with high poverty and youth unemployment rates. As an agricultural setting, the district suffered immensely as crops were destroyed and farming equipment was burned or looted. The war lasted over a decade with thousands killed, raped, and amputated. Since then, Pujehun district has been the worst place to live.

Post-secondary education is desperately needed to combat the aftermath of the civil war that still has a profound grip on the people and the district as a whole. Many qualified Sierra Leoneans including teachers and civil servants were killed or forced to flee the country and in the process took their knowledge to neighboring countries. This project will take the lead in providing skills and human capital required for building capacity development in the education sector in Pujehun district. The existence of a computer center will serve as a motivating factor in empowering the youth to complete secondary education, close gender inequality, and create an

avenue for the future financial reward of economic sustainability. As Newman argued, “Community based early intervention programs can drastically improve the educational readiness of children” (2009, p XI). The philosophy behind this concept is to help the youth overcome their early computer knowledge deficit, recognizing that it is not the ability to learn that they lack but the knowledge, experiences, and opportunities for learning.

Pujehun district has a high rate of poverty, a menace that prevents against development in the district. Critical in this light is the lack of higher learning that was the bedrock in the district before the war. The real problem in Sierra Leone and Pujehun district after the war is the widespread poverty that it created. Poverty does not only concern humans to live a difficult and unhappy life; it also exposes people to life-threatening dangers (Yunus, 2007). Thus poverty leads to hopelessness, which provokes people to desperate acts. The goal for this project is to increase youth participation in today’s job market, food security, personal, and economic development of the district that have been devastated and continue to languish since the end of

The Case for Pujehun Computer Learning Center

Development entails a long term goal and commitment. Conn and Ortiz referred to it as “the process by which persons and societies come to realize the full potential of human life in a context of social justice... Development is the conscientization process by which people are awakened to opportunities within reach...” (Conn & Ortiz, 2001, p.343). Sen on the other hand argues development “as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy” (Sen, 2000, p3). The growing lack of expectation in the educational system among the youth in Sierra Leone and Pujehun District after the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program has increasingly demoralized this segment of the population. Gary Gordon summarizes Thomas Friedman’s argument that the capacity to distribute information and services has created a new

reality. Friedman maintained, “The jobs are going to go where the best educated workforce is with most competitive infrastructure and environment for creativity ...” (Gordon, 2006, p. 3). Sierra Leone continues to suffer in maintaining quality-educated people to help develop the country. The lack of creating high paying jobs is causing most Sierra Leoneans to take their education to neighboring countries. As Sachs observed, “Happiness arises not only through the individual’s relationship with his wealth... but through his relationships with others” (2011, p. 162). The underlying aim of establishing this computer learning center is based on developing the potential of youth in Pujehun District.

The day-to-day routines in the school system have not changed much in a decade despite some adjustments made by the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) government of President Ahmad Kabba in 1993 with the introduction of a 6-3-3-4 system (Redwood-Sawyerr, 2011). The fact that the basic curriculum required of today’s student has remained the same does not adequately prepare the confidence building mechanisms for this young generation to compete at global level. Sachs further argued, “Being a responsible member of political society- is by asking not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country...”(Sachs, 2011). In Sierra Leone, the use of cell phones and the internet and the demand for computer usages have doubled within the last 10 years. The well-being of the Pujehun district today depends fundamentally on the recognition of these services and training youth to become pioneers of the future.

Nearly every state, county, city, town, and village around the world today is hitching its future to globetrotting corporations. Elected officials at all levels of government in developed countries have come to the realization that creating a favorable business environment attracts multinational export companies that ensure good jobs at good wages (Shuman, 2002).

Globalization has generated unmet economic challenges for developing countries to match their resources in leveling their growth in the international community (Sachs, 2011). The technological revolution of computers, the internet, and mobile telephones has ushered in a new emerging global class of wealthy individuals through decent pay and a host of opportunities.

The lack of viable and higher educational institutions in Pujehun District for so long can be viewed as a catalyst to the high illiteracy rate and the rejection of freedom to participate in the labor market (Sen, 2000). Sen further argued freedom to enter markets can itself be a significant contribution to development, quite aside from what the market mechanism may or may not do to promote that economic growth. The important aspect of this argument is that Pujehun district has long been disenfranchised when it comes to labor market and development projects. The lack of a level playing field in terms of producing educated elites to compete for higher paying jobs has put the people of Pujehun in a disadvantaged position for jobs in the private sector as well as at international level. The rebirth of Pujehun district can be achieved through the establishment of a computer learning center. The learning center will broaden the general view of the youth and inspire them to journey on with their educational career.

Objectives for the computer center include:

1. Maximize human potential
2. Hone the skills, capabilities, and attitude that will help build the foundation for a vibrant economy
3. Nurture the understanding that people can see things differently and that those differences merit respect rather than persecution. (adapted from Christensen, 2011)

Why a Computer Learning Center?

It is an accepted fact that the disarmament process within the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (NCDDR) was far from perfect. However, the collection and destruction of surrendered weapons spearheaded the peace process in Sierra Leone that ultimately ended a major conflict and was the precipitation of peace accord between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the government of Sierra Leone. Between mid-May and October 30, 2001, 24,079 ex-combatants handed in their weapons to United Nations Peace-keeping Force (UNAMSIL) of which 5,365 were child soldiers (NCDDR, 2002).

Increasingly in Sierra Leone today, there are two achievement gaps in our education systems. The first is lack of quality education between children in the rural areas to that of the children in urban cities. Second, the unparalleled incentives received by teachers in the private schools far outweigh their counterparts in public schools. It has become increasingly clear that students from rural settings are simply not learning the skills that matter most for the 21st century because of the above disparities. Wagner observed, “Our system of public education, our curricula teaching methods, and the test we required students to take –were created in a different century for the need of another era” (Wagner, 2008, p.9). To add to this debate, Susan Neuman (2009) also noted that children born in the rural areas do not fare well in our society. The odds against them are lack of incentives and skills in comparison to their peers in urban centers. Joseph Stiglitz further lamented, “Education is important-but if there are no jobs for those who are educated, there will not be development” (2006,p.26). This global achievement gap remains invisible to most of us in part, because it is fueled by fundamental democratic process and economic, social, and technological changes that have taken place so rapidly over the last two decades, a period that Sierra Leone was locked in bitter civil war with the RUF. Globalization has brought unprecedented prosperity to all particularly in communication and technological

development. These changes are so powerful, and until we understand them and rethink what young people need to know, Sierra Leone's future as a country remains uncertain (Wagner, 2008).

The moral case for investing in youth development is compelling. In a world so rich in resources, know-how, and technology, it is unacceptable that we allow today's levels of child deprivation to continue (Save the children, 2012). Investing in children's well-being has potential tradeoffs for economic growth, greater prosperity, and reduced population growth, and infant mortality rates in developing countries. It also puts the country in a better bargaining position when dealing with multinational corporations and private investors about adhering to the laws of the country.

No word better captures the new world economy than mobility (Shuman, 2002). The falling price of transportation has enabled technology, machinery, and natural resources to be affordably shipped to factories world-wide. As state-of-art technology proliferates around the world, and becomes more-user-friendly, it is increasingly being used to raise the productivity of poorly-paid workers in most developing countries but not workers in Sierra Leone. Furnishing the knowledge, skills, and disposition that empower citizens to make informed decisions, meaningful contributions to the work force and community development are the end goals of PCLC (Salamon,2012). Higher education in Sierra Leone has long been concentrated in urban environments and dominated by a few public and private institutions.

Computer-based learning is methodically gaining grounds as students, educators, and families find it to be better than the traditional teacher led classroom (Christensen, 2011). Computer-based online learning accommodates different paces of learning, and some software allows students to choose different pathways to learn the course materials. Pujehun Computer

Learning Center will accommodate home bound and home-schooled student's particularly former child soldiers who were not properly rehabilitated and reintegrated by the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program (DDR). In addition, these children grew up in rebel territories where they lack basic necessities including formal education, health care, adequate shelter, food, and family relationships that made it extremely difficult for them to concentrate in the school environment after their reintegration to civilian lives (Singer, 2005).

Globalization has opened the door for developing countries to join the competitive market not as producers of raw materials but as producers of the finished products. This new accessibility has created millions of jobs in developing countries and lifted millions more from extreme poverty to a relatively acceptable standard of living. Friedman (2000) claimed that the spread of global capitalism has raised living standards higher, faster and for more people than at any time in history. It has also brought more people into the middle class status more quickly in countries that joined the early bandwagon of globalization. Friedman wrote, "Today, even the poor people have a phone, they have cable television and they have electricity. I have all the basic things that rich people have. Now we can complain about the service (from the electricity or the phone company). Before we didn't have them, so we couldn't complain about them" (2000, p.353). In essence, even in societies that are deeply ritualized and rooted in customs and traditional values, globalization in the form of communication has gained some inroads (Assadourian, 2010).

Globalization and technological advances in transportation, communication, and information technology have brought people around the world closer than ever before. These technologies have also created millions of jobs for people in developing countries and lifted hundreds of millions more out of extreme poverty (Friedman, 2000). The philosophy of

sustained economic growth has now reached most of the world as the planet is now filled with people and economic activities much faster than anticipated. More countries are now joining the convergence club in order to tap into the economic boom created by globalization (Friedman, 2000). Yet, in Sierra Leone, and Pujehun district in particular; the effects of globalization are equally alarming. Globalization has created huge economic disparities between the urban dwellers and the rural poor, and between the urban centers and rural provincial districts. Pujehun district as a single unit can boast of only six secondary schools; Saint Paul's, Holy Rosary, Gobaru Secondary school, Potoru Secondary, and Zimmi and Fairo secondary schools. The district lacks higher educational institutions in comparison to other district headquarters in the country. Children without formal education start life with a severe handicap, one that almost ensures they will remain in abject poverty and further widen the gap between them and the rich children (Brown, 2011). As Edward argued, "Through education, sustainability can become firmly established within the existing value structure of societies while simultaneously helping that value structure evolve a more viable long-term approach to systemic global problems" (2005, p.23).

One way to ensure that Pujehun District is moving towards self-reliance and is competitive in nature is to encourage our youth population that there is more to education than basic classroom style learning that still mimics colonial vestiges. Brown summarizes Amartya Sen's assertion that "illiteracy and innumeracy are a greater threat to humanity than terrorism" (Brown, 2011, p.154). The current political upheavals still unending in Arab and Muslim countries from Africa to the Persian Gulf can be attributed to youth exposure to modern technology and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The youth population will no longer be silent in these countries.

Globalization has transformed the Sierra Leone population from rural communities to urban centers in search of jobs in the technology industries. The multitude of cell phone companies in Sierra Leone and the ever expansion of coverage in the rural areas has increased the construction on cell towers with multiple job openings. Thus, the economic disparity can be narrowed between the rural poor and rich urban dwellers by introducing the very technologies that have undermined prosperity in the rural areas, which can now be available and harnessed through the creation of the PCLC in Pujehun. Furthermore, collaborative partnership between the government, non-governmental organization, and the local communities in the district will help facilitate this center as an avenue for youth development and mobilization. According to a UNDP report in 2011, youth unemployment was one of the major causes of the war in Sierra Leone and remains a serious threat to the fragile peace that prevails in the country today. Wangari Maathai observed, "Leadership is not simply a matter of filling the top positions in a government, institutions or private businesses. Nor is it a quality restricted to the ambitious, the elite, the politically gifted or highly educated" (2009, p.111). In fact, leadership can take multiple forms to include the poor and those marginalized by systems, as well as the privileged in the society. The realization of good leadership can start with the establishment of this computer learning center for youth empowerment, mobilization, and participation.

Conclusion

The aim of Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) is not only instilled computer literacy on how to connect with other people around the world, but also working with these at-risk youth, particularly the former child soldiers, to identify their skills and unique gifts in order to develop their self-image, esteem, and self-confidence. Thus leadership development is the key to the continuation of permanent peace in the country. The moral case for investing in youth

development is compelling. In a world so rich in resources, know-how and technology, it is unacceptable that we allow today's levels of child deprivation to continue (Save the children, 2012). Investing in children's well-being has potential tradeoffs for economic growth, greater prosperity, and reduced population growth, and infant mortality rates in Sierra Leone.

Appendix

Business Plan: Pujehun Computer Learning Center**Executive Summary**

Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) will be developed to provide a unique forum for education for the hundreds of thousands who make up the underprivileged population in the district as well as to respond to the ever-increasing demands of computer usage gripping the world. PCLC will also serve as a gateway to the rehabilitation and reintegration process of ex-combatant child soldiers in district. Former child soldiers will acquire a hands-on approach to financial empowerment leaving behind a gun-toting mentality. The market demand for computer literacy is ever-expanding, and Sierra Leone needs to support the potential of its current population in order to be ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.

The Pujehun Computer Learning Center (PCLC) is geared toward resuscitating and revamping educational development in the district. The project is aimed at ensuring educational development as a catalyst for socio-economic growth and career development of the youth in Pujehun district. Pujehun district has a high rate of poverty, a menace that prevents development in the district. Critical in this light is the lack of higher learning that was the bedrock of the district before the war. The goal of this project is to reduce poverty that currently grips this district by empowering the youth with sound education that will pave the way for economic stability in the future. The project is also designed to strengthen national policy, strategy and coordination for youth development as well as sustain the establishment of basic support services for youth, including mentoring for micro and small enterprises and the establishment of career advisory services with the country's university (UNDP, 2011).

PCLC has identified a specific void in the marketplace and answers to consumer demands for high technology solutions to the nation-wide concern about the lack of basic computer facilities in our education programs in the country. With the exception of the few privileged people working for the government and NGOs, Sierra Leoneans lack computer access. How can we achieve a reasonable peace in Sierra Leone when these children never had a complete disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration process that involved incentives to financial and economic empowerment? PCLC's goal is to provide the community with an educational atmosphere for worldwide communication.

This business plan was prepared to request an equipment loan for \$25,000 that the business projects will repay in four years. PCLC will be incorporated as a limited liability corporation and will provide customers with a full-featured school-style computer education and also serve as an internet café. PCLC believes that successful collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Technology, and Science to implement computer courses in schools will provide a sufficient and loyal customer base. The company can sustain itself on income generated from these sources in the subsequent years.

Company Mission and Operation Overview

The greatest challenges and opportunities in business today are greatly related to the ongoing levels of technological underpinnings that are sweeping throughout the world. PCLC's goal is to create a unique, comfortable, and innovative environment that will provide affordable access to the internet and other online services, bring people together in a common forum, and offer a high-quality customer services and goods at a reasonable price. Innovation is not to be confused with invention. Our venture is more a case of creation and adaption to the reality that the future job market will squarely depend on professionals in the computer industry. PCLC has

analyzed and absorbed the current state of the education system as a mismatch in improving the quality of life for generations of Sierra Leoneans particularly the ex-combatant child soldiers, to become resourceful players in the development process as the country continues to nurture relative peace and tranquility.

PCLC will be formed specifically to advance the potentials of the youth population in Sierra Leone, and Pujehun district in particular, affected by the decade civil war that left them unemployable, uneducated, and unable to meet their basic human needs and the challenges of the 21st century global market. The company intends to establish a computer learning center with an addition of an internet café where people can pay a fee to access their email accounts and connect with friends around the world. The café will provide customers with a pleasant environment in which to enjoy great companionship over local delicacies and beverages. PCLC will also provide photocopying services and document binding processes that are currently unavailable in schools and in our communities. The collection of fees for these services will help provide financial guarantee that will allow the company to pay salaries and other administrative overheads.

PCLC will be incorporated under the laws of the Republic of Sierra Leone as a start-up company seeking to establish itself as a Subsidiary Educational Institute- Computer Learning Center for former child soldiers. PCLC will be strategically located in Pujehun at the Community Education Center Campus with its main office in the capital city of Freetown. We will be taking our business to the clients and our partners -the local communities and Ministry of Education, Technology & Science. The hours of operation will be Monday- Sunday from 9:00 a.m.to 8:00 p.m. PCLC will offer instructional internet classes and helpful staff on duty at all

times during operational hours to answer questions. These educational aspects will attract young people, adults, and elderly members of the community.

PCLC will create a unique space and a welcoming atmosphere different from other internet cafés in major cities. Currently, PCLC is considering two alternate distribution strategies. First, the company will embark on establishing its own product identification and a product line for distribution through partnership with the Ministry of Education and its internet café. The company expects to raise money through two development phases. The budget for the initial phase of \$25,000 will be loan from Seattle Metropolitan Credit Union toward purchasing computers and accessories, furniture, transportation cost, rent, and initial operation overheads. The second phase will be partnering with the Ministry of Education and local and international NGOs for logistics support in developing introductory computer curriculum in schools in Pujehun as a pilot project in the first three years. At this stage, the company has not formatted any specific investment structure but PCLC is fully interested in talking with professional investors with resources to fund both the development stage as well as the pivotal project. PCLC's primary goal is to bring the digital age close to the people that have so far been neglected, while empowering them to be successful leaders in the modern technological world.

Company Ownership

PCLC is a private and family held limited liability corporation registered in Sierra Leone. Mr. Charles Kaikai is the founder of the company. Mr. Kaikai will finish his Master of Arts in International Care and Community Development from Northwest University. He is well familiar with the current situation and all the stakeholders in Pujehun District.

Start-Up Expenses

PCLC's start-up costs include computer equipment, site modifications, funds to cover the

first year of operation, hardware, software and other equipment necessary to get its customers online. Other equipment costs include laser printers, a scanner, and shipment costs from Seattle to Sierra Leone.

Table 1

Sources of Start-Up Funds

Charles Kaikai	\$25,000
Total investment	\$25,000
Short-term liability	\$25,000
Government of Sierra Leone	N/A
Total funds available at start-up	\$25,000
Profit/loss at Start-up	\$25,000

Table 2

Uses of Fund at Start-Up

Legal	\$500
Letterheads, business card	\$1,000
Advertising	\$500
Rent	\$2,000
Computer systems	\$10,000
Communications (wireless models)	\$1,000
Furniture	\$1,500
Monthly subscription	\$250
Remodeling, decorator fees	\$1,000

Working capital for payroll	\$7,250
Total Start-up expenses	\$25,000

Location & Facilities

The site of Pujehun town was chosen for its low cost rent, lack of computer services in the district, and its potential to attract investors as the district is well endowed with natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds, coffee, cocoa, rubber, and timber.

Services Offered

Most of the literature reviewed and data collected points to the fact that people exposed to some form of computer literacy in developing countries have a greater ratio of gaining employment in this global era than those without. Poverty is a serious problem hampering the growth and development of the people of Pujehun District. In Asia and India, computer literacy and technology has attracted countless multinational corporations to invest in the youth of these countries toward employment in service industries and thus improved their standard of living. The current educational systems in Sierra Leone have not improved the quality of life that successful graduates perceived to get upon completion of their educational journeys. However, PCLC will provide information, products, job-skills training, and services geared towards changing this educational gap in Pujehun for the students and the unemployed ex-combatant child soldiers.

PCLC customers will have a full array of access to email accounts, or they can sign for a PCLC account. These accounts will be managed by PCLC servers and can be accessible from computer systems outside the PCLC network. Other services that will be available to customers include, but are not limited to, instructional internet classes, laser and color printing, scanning,

access to popular software applications (Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, etc.), and internet usage for personal or business purposes. For customer convenience, these classes will be held in the afternoon, early evening, and on weekends. In addition, the services PCLC will provide include:

- Conducting regular computer trainings/seminars in secondary schools throughout the district about the importance of computer literacy and its benefits with reference to the current global economy.
- Offering state-of-the-art equipment with high-speed connectivity and a comfortable, friendly environment for computer use by people of all ages. PCLC's objective is to establish a definite relationship with its clients while helping them make transitions in their lives from no computer background to computer proficiency.
- Assessing the current living situations and working conditions of community members to help clients define where they are now and where they want to be in the future.
- Conducting ongoing analysis to determine effectiveness of the current strategy and implement timely adjustments when necessary to improve on product delivery. PCLC will therefore record progress, reinforce positive activities, highlight and reinforce strengths and opportunities, and make adjustments to address continued weaknesses and threats to the ideals of the company.
- Developing strong partnerships/potential employers-local and international for possible placement and providing recommendations for higher education.

Market Plan

PCLC is faced with the exciting opportunity of being the first cyber café and internet provider in Pujehun district. It is also in an ambit of championing the use of technology to help

empower former child soldiers with the tools of becoming productive citizens in the country. The age of technology and the ever-expanding global economy for many have basically eroded the once popular 9 to 5 job. Companies around the world are now downsizing, outsourcing, laying-off, and transferring jobs to developing countries on the premise of saving costs and overhead.

Currently, there are very few internet cafes operating in the country. The few that are in operation still operate on old and slow systems with little incentives to expand and improve customer satisfaction. Computer usage is still in its infancy stages in the Sierra Leone. Only a few government officials, private enterprises, and NGOs are privileged to computer use. Our strategy is to start at the micro level with a few ex-child combatants, secondary school students, and adults in the community that are interested in learning the basic computer systems. PCLC hopes to establish a strong partnership with the Ministry of Education, Technology and Science through these pilot projects.

PCLC is determined to work in close concert with network providers to secure faster internet services in our café and school setting. The internet café will provide multi-purpose usage. From 8:00a.m. to 2:00p.m. classes will be available to people who want to learn basic computer systems: how to navigate through the internet, create email accounts, and use Microsoft office software.

Advertisement in print and broadcasting services will be fully utilized to market our products to the people who would really benefit from them. PCLC plans to network with the Ministries of Youth and Unemployment by providing computer classes and seminars on the importance of computer technology as another component of youth empowerment and also a healing process to the unemployed by creating a new avenue to economic sustainability. Traditional and conventional approaches to peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone only address

the symptom cessation of hostilities. The approaches never address the aftermath or the root causes of the war: poverty and economic marginalization. The formation of PCLC is geared toward using technology as an added component to both traditional and conventional methods of peace building initiatives but looking ahead to developing the capacities of these ex-combatants and the emerging youth population to meet the challenges of the 21st century global economy.

Marketing Strategy

PCLC believes that the company's use of state-of-the-art technology will quickly make it the industry leader in the field of both computer literacy and youth development and rehabilitation process in Sierra Leone. The company will target to achieve 50 percent market penetration on the in-ground market approach and about 50 percent on partnership with the government and other private agencies within its first-three years of operation. PCLC will target these specific market segments, former child soldiers, adults with no computer background, and government ministries and businesses in the country.

PCLC will cater to novices who want a guided tour on their first spin around the internet to give them the feeling of the new technology. Because internet usage is still new in Sierra Leone, PCLC will offer introductory classes to primary and secondary school students. In addition, after-school programs will be designed to meet the availability of ex-combatants that may be engaged in employment. PCLC strategies and its influencing factors are as follows:

- Provide knowledgeable employees focused on serving the needs of our clients
- Provide scanning, printing, faxing and copying services.
- Advertise in traditional media and local FM stations to help build customer awareness base.
- Develop brochures and organize free seminars for the public.

Table 3

Market Segmentation

Potential Customers	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Students (Primary/Secondary)	100	200	400	600	800
Ex- combatants	200	100	50	50	50
Local NGOs/ Government	8	16	24	36	48
Individuals	100	200	300	400	500
Total	408	516	774	1086	1398

Strengths

- The owner's acquaintance with many individuals in government and at local and community levels will help facilitate some inroads into acquiring some funds, infrastructure, and security guarantee in establishing our company.
- PCLC offices will be strategically located in the geographical market areas.
- Low operating cost.
- Lack of current competitors in the area.

Weaknesses

- Start-up company with no track record.
- No individuals, as of yet, identified to fill office positions requiring specific technical skills.
- PCLC recognizes that our service falls well into a niche of traditional held government bureaucracy that it will take a huge push to accept change.

Opportunities

The internet is increasingly becoming a primary source for seeking goods, services information, relationships, information, economic opportunities, and political empowerment. It is imperative that we start acclimatizing our youth population to its usage.

- Our first priority is to establish in-house commercial products through our well organized state-of-art internet café with modern amenities that will attract more people to visit.
- As part of our marketing strategy, PCLC will aim from the initial outset to work closely with the Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports to gain accessibility, endorsements, and contracts.

Threats

- The continue political instability between the ruling All People's Congress (APC) and the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) might cut into potential client base and profit.
- The continued recession and lack of amenities in the district could serve as a setback in motivating potential clientele.
- The majority of people living in the district are subsistence farmers which might greatly impact our internet price.

Financial Plan

PCLC has estimated its financial needs on the basis of two levels of investment risk, and as a result is determined to enlist funding support in two stages over the next three years. Ideally, the first stage of funding will come of taking a personal loan from Seattle Metropolitan Credit Union in the sum of \$25,000 in preparation for the initial product purchasing and other startup

costs- computers, furniture, storage fees, and accessories, shipment cost/clearing, rent, and administrative overheads – in the first year of operation. The second phase will seek funds from donors and partners in the United States and the government of Sierra Leone.

To place our financial plan in perspective, PCLC offers the following overview as requirements and expected achievements: stage one funding will allow the founder to purchase 10 computers, office furniture, and computer accessories, as well as cover the shipment costs, rental space, and operating budget of the internet café in the first year. The estimated time frame is nine months from funding to achieving our first goal. Total budget for this project is estimated at \$ 45,000-\$50,000. Allocation of the initial funding of \$25,000 may be summarized as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

10 computers/ software/ accessories	\$ 8,000.00
Portable Generator	\$ 800.00
Shipment/ clearing	\$ 6,000.00
Rent -annual	\$ 1,500.00
Internet service	\$ 500.00
Remodeling	\$ 1,000.00
Salaries/bills/miscellaneous	\$ 2,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 19,800.00

Corporate Income Forecast

The following forecasts are provided to demonstrate the economic and social incentives that have attracted me to this development project. I make no representation that the projection made here will be achieved or that the assumption of enrollments and computer usages on which they are based will remain constant.

The company five-year financial forecast isolates corporate operating profit from tutoring in schools and private class sessions as well as the expected development revenue from operating the internet café. Management will adhere to the creation of a detailed cost accounting system and reporting as part of the start-up procedure process. This will enable us not only to oversee-day-to-day activity, but also provide us an opportunity to match our funds to the number of people that successfully completed the program and continue to independently use our system to purchase computer time from us. The company plans to review and update its financial forecast at the end of phase one to donors and the government of Sierra Leone about the impact of PCLC on youth and community development in Pujehun district.

Table 5

Sales Forecast

UNIT SALES / PRICE	2014	2015	2016
Drinks	100 cartons	250 cartons	400 cartons
Hourly Internet fees	\$5.00	\$7.00	\$5.00
Memberships/ Gov. / NGOs	10	25	35
Contracts	5	15	30

Table 6

Corporate Profit and Cash Flow Forecast

	YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5
Operating profit	\$3,000	\$4,500	\$6,500	\$8,500	\$12,000
Licenses fees	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
Gross operating profit	\$3,000	\$4,500	\$6,500	\$8,500	\$12,000
Corporate overhead	\$2,000	\$1,500	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$3,000

Additional Financial Considerations

Internet sales will be calculated on the total number of hours each terminal is active each day and then generate a conservative estimate as to how many hours will be purchased by consumers. In addition, we hope to generate funds from developing partnerships with the government, local businesses, and NGOs in Sierra Leone. PCLC will be leasing an office space in Freetown and internet café and space for classrooms in Pujehun. Subsequently, after five years, PCLC plans to build its own structures in Pujehun.

Fixture costs. Fixture costs associated with starting PCLC include 10 computers, 2 printers, 2 scanners, 1 information display, 1 vending-like machine, 2 telephone lines, decorations, office spaces, and rent.

Utilities. Due to irregularities in electricity supply in both the capital and Pujehun, PCLC will purchase 2 portable generators with the capacities to power all equipment. The price for both generators is \$1, 600, 00. PCLC will be responsible for negotiating with the internet provider to secure all telephone lines, modems, and wireless receivers. In addition, a conservative cost of \$750.00 per month will be allocated to power the two standby generators at 12 hours usage.

Depreciation. To depreciate our capital equipment, PCLC will use the modified accelerated cost recovery method. PCLC computers will be depreciated over a six year period and donated to local schools that serve as a front line in teaching the children.

Loan Payable. PCLC acquired a \$25,000 loan from a credit union in Seattle at 8.5 percent interest rate. The loan agreement will be paid back at \$600 per month for the next four years.

Management Team

PCLC is a family owned business and will be managed by founder Mr. Charles Kaikai

with delegated authorities assigned to local management teams in the capital city of Freetown and Pujehun town. The founder offers experience and knowledge on the appropriate needs and demographics of the district. The founder's educational background will serve the company's general management, product development, and sales management in the first three years of operation. The general manager will develop and maintain the vision of the company. In addition, the founder will oversee marketing, finances, and the administrative sector. He will also provide final approval on all financial obligations and seek business opportunities and partnerships at home and abroad. The general manager will oversee the recruitment process of new employees. The company's product developer will be Hannel Hazaley, a computer programmer at Microsoft. The internet coordinators will be local professionals trained in computer operating systems in Sierra Leone.

Personnel Plan

PCLC staff will consist of 12 employees, 6 full time instructors, 2 technicians, 2 managers, and 2 office staff. Mr. Kaikai will receive no salary in the first two years of the company development. All other positions will be paid on a monthly salary based in local currency (Leones). These employees will be paid at a rate higher than government workers in Sierra Leone.

Conclusion

A critical contribution to the success of this business venture lies in a single human attribute: the capacity to innovate. The rapid technological changes and advancements sweeping the world cannot go unabated in Sierra Leone. Taking technological products from the conceptual stage to the implementation stage in Sierra Leone is not only changing the educational paradigm but also using technology as a means of empowering youth to develop as

productive citizens. Although, we do not wish to underestimate the inherent investment risks, there are some aspects of this project that are unique and rewarding. PCLC management is hopeful and confident that with proper investment and partnerships with the government of Sierra Leone, we can deliver a quality product that will be both socially impactful and increases profit potential for the students and the community.

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