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‘They Call Me Warrior’: The Legacy of Conflict and the Struggle to End Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone

Elizabeth Mills, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, Jennifer Diggins and Tamba David Mackieu

October 2015

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'THEY CALL ME WARRIOR': THE LEGACY OF CONFLICT AND THE STRUGGLE TO END SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SIERRA LEONE

Elizabeth Mills, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, Jennifer Diggins and Tamba David Mackieu

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Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CDF	Civil Defense Force
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGM	female genital mutilation
FSU/SLP	Family Support Unit/Sierra Leone Police
GBV	gender-based violence
HRC	Human Rights Commission
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
MAGE-SL	Men's Association for Gender Equality
MICROCON	A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NACGBV	National Committee on Gender-Based Violence
NGO	non-government organisation
PPRC	Political Party Registration Commission
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Executive summary

Overview

A relatively small country with just over 6 million people, Sierra Leone has been the focus of considerable public and policy attention because of the recent Ebola epidemic and, before that, the decade-long civil war. Given the concern with finding ways to ‘build Sierra Leone differently’ in the post-Ebola context (IDS 2015), this paper considers some of the legacies of the country’s history. It focuses on gender and the emergence of a dynamic network of actors that reveal not only the country’s history of violence but also its capacity for ‘rebuilding differently’ to foster resilience and create long-term social transformation.

During the war, from 1991 to 2002, an estimated 50,000 people were killed and more than 500,000 were forced to flee their homes to escape violence. Statistics can never sufficiently capture the horror of the war, but they can indicate the extent to which multiple forms of violence permeated people’s lives. The legacy of violence is equally difficult to quantify but, as we found in our fieldwork in Sierra Leone from 2014 to 2015, it is woven into people’s everyday lives, and particularly in their sense of trust in each other and in formal and informal institutions. This report focuses on one particularly pernicious form of violence – sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) – as it is, and was, experienced by men and women.

The impact of the war and the country’s transition to democracy surfaces in lesser known ways too; in this paper we describe how networks of actors emerged in refugee camps and coalesced around a shared struggle to transform harmful gender relations and end violence. Based on fieldwork with these actors, we outline some of the social, economic and infrastructural challenges they face in their work to collectively foster gender equality and end SGBV.

According to the activists we engaged with in Sierra Leone, the challenge of addressing SGBV has sometimes been exacerbated by a limited conception of development, which too often assumes that models for social and economic ‘progress’ can be imported and implanted into highly complex contexts. Far greater attention therefore needs to be paid to local specificity, to the effects of sexual and gender violence on all genders, and to the recommendations made by those people and organisations working to create sustained and positive change *in* these complex contexts. The findings of this study speak to this complexity and are organised, first, around the factors that underpin SGBV and, second, around the key actors working to transform harmful gender dynamics through collective action.

Methodology

Between June 2014 and January 2015, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the Men’s Association for Gender Equality-Sierra Leone (MAGE-SL) undertook qualitative research with those actors working to address SGBV and achieve gender equality in Sierra Leone. The research had four aims: (1) to understand the nature and causes of SGBV as experienced by participants in Moyamba and Freetown; (2) to explore the key actors working collectively, across the country, to foster greater gender equality and to address SGBV; (3) to identify key strategies through which these actors work – collectively, and with men and boys – to effect positive change; and (4) to understand and document some of the key challenges they face in their work, developing a set of recommendations based on these local-level insights.

The research draws on a range of data collected through 25 key informant interviews, two stakeholder mapping workshops and 60 structured interviews (in Freetown and Moyamba), as well as two validation workshops and 13 follow-up interviews, also in Freetown and Moyamba.

Findings

The first section of the report traces the roots of violence in Sierra Leone and the emergence of a coalition of actors that seeks to respond to SGBV, focusing on our primary research partner, MAGE-SL. The second section outlines practical actions and limitations faced by these collective actors in their work to catalyse transformation to end SGBV and promote gender equality.

At a national level, the government's laws and policy reforms to address SGBV have provided some opportunities for progress towards gender equality. Between 2004 and 2012, the Government of Sierra Leone produced a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, enacted three Gender Acts and a Sexual Offences Act, and set up Family Support Units (FSUs) and other mechanisms to implement these laws. In addition to these laws and enforcement mechanisms, a network of national and local SGBV-related initiatives also surfaced in the wake of the war. While there are national and international actors working to address the factors that exacerbate the incidence of SGBV in Sierra Leone, our research highlights the initiatives of local actors and the challenges they face in their work to promote gender equality.

At a local level, the study outlines how the war itself was an important catalyst of transformation, with the emergence of organisations like MAGE-SL working to promote gender justice, and the increased and sustained activism of women advocating for peace, democracy and good governance. During and after the war, women's organisations responded to the disruption of social services and community-based structures by developing networks and alternative coping strategies to deal with problems such as food scarcity, sexual violence, and shortfalls in health and education provision. However, these organisations continue to draw on very limited resources for sustaining the implementation of these projects in the long term, making donor support critical to their ongoing activities. Further, as much of this work is carried out at the community level, it is often 'invisible' to national policymakers and international donors.

This study identified some of these important community-based initiatives and organisations, particularly those that are primary sources of support for survivors of SGBV living in rural areas. The recommendations outlined below seek to highlight some of these less visible initiatives by men and women to address the legacy of conflict, in their interpersonal relationships and in their communities.

Discussion

Over the past decade, anthropologists have suggested that the extreme marginalisation experienced by poor rural men was an important factor underlying Sierra Leone's collapse into civil war (Peters 2011; Richards 1996, 2005). The fighting factions were dominated by the poorest of young farmers – frustrated youths who, according to this argument, felt they had nothing to lose by participating in brutal violence. This 'crisis of youth' (Peters 2011) stands as a stark reminder of the ways in which violence may emerge from the frustration of young men who feel socially, politically and economically excluded and powerless – ignored by the state and bypassed by the promises of 'modernity' (Richards 1996).

This discourse is also strongly reminiscent of the 'crisis of masculinity' literature (Perry 2005) in which the gendered identity of men – writ large – encounters a catalyst that prompts

reflection and reconfiguration of masculinity (Perry 2005; McDowell 2000). However, since this term was introduced in the 1990s, studies have shown the limits to conceiving of a single 'masculinity' that can be mapped onto cisgendered men (Edström, Das and Dolan 2014; Connell 1994), or even a single 'hegemonic masculinity' that applies to men in power (Morrell *et al.* 2013; Hearn and Morrell 2012).

More recently, scholars have criticised international policy responses to violence and conflict that reproduce a gendered 'victim/perpetrator' binary without exploring men's experiences of violence (Dolan 2014). Like this report, studies in Sierra Leone point to a variety of ways – beyond the narratives of the crisis of 'masculinity' or of 'youth' – in which men and women are tied into a network of structural inequalities that call on local, national and international actors to be accountable for their role in entrenching inequality. The studies indicate that the war itself was not simply a conflict between factions within the boundaries of the state but one that drew in a global network of actors that fuelled the violence (sometimes extracting resources by using conflict, or engaging in misinformed attempts to mitigate it) (Bellows and Miguel 2006; Ross 2004; Richards 1996). These studies expose the intersecting fault lines of structural inequality that run along the seams of social, economic and political exclusion.

Not only has the Sierra Leone government implemented a raft of gender policies to address SGBV, but national and international policies have increasingly recognised these inequalities and the importance of tackling exclusion by distributing economic, social and political resources. For instance, the joint European Commission/DFID Country Strategy for Sierra Leone (2007–12) worked to increase the voice and participation of youth in governance structures, and developed a set of initiatives to reduce unemployment (measured at 60 per cent in 2007) (Hilker and Fraser 2009).

The legacy of civil war for SGBV in Sierra Leone is multifaceted: as reported in post-conflict settings elsewhere, studies suggest that levels of SGBV are notably higher in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the war than they were before it, as large numbers of fighters were reintegrated back into 'peacetime' society (Nowrojee 2005; Pruitt 2012). However, our discussions with activists suggest that the post-war context also provided a uniquely fertile space in which to begin to deconstruct models of masculinity that perpetuated violence and were destructive for men as well as women.

Our research suggests that national policy and the proliferation of workshops and training courses by civil society actors over the past 15 years have contributed to a shift in the public discourse around gender equality and SGBV in Sierra Leone. However, as Mr Mackie notes, the work to foster meaningful gender transformation needs long-term investment and support by international actors who recognise the structures underpinning inequality in post-conflict contexts.

Conclusion and recommendations

In the long term, political and economic developments at a national level will hopefully lead to greater inclusion, and improved life possibilities for individuals living in poor, remote communities. In the more immediate term, the success of MAGE's Men's Dialogue Groups reveal what a transformative experience joining such a group can be. They enable members of communities too long 'considered of no account' (Richards 1996: 149) to be engaged with respectfully and over an extended period, in discussions about their gendered identity and experiences. They can discuss their aspirations for a life defined by healthy relationships, and have the opportunity to be respected as a positive role model by other men. MAGE's 16-week programme of 'dialogues' recognises that working to shift gender norms is a long-term process. It requires patience, sensitivity and highly skilled local facilitators.

This is especially true in a post-conflict context such as Sierra Leone, where many people have been traumatised as a result of the violence they suffered, bore witness to, or participated in, during the war. Given the extent to which the country's decade-long war and people's experiences of SGBV remain present in everyday life, it follows that work to foster social transformation will also need to be conducted through careful long-term engagement. This requires collective action, not only among 'local' actors like MAGE-SL and its partners working in a sustained and contextually specific way with communities across Sierra Leone; but it requires long-term transnational collective action that is sustained and sensitive, linking international development actors with local organisations to collectively 'sow the seeds of change'.

Drawing on the views of the people and organisations we worked with in Freetown and Moyamba, as well as an analysis of the findings of the research, we present a set of recommendations for the way forward in addressing SGBV and transforming gender relations. These recommendations have been developed for international actors (including donors and multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies) and national actors (including government and non-governmental agencies and civil society organisations).

1. Support local networks of civil society organisations (CSOs) to disseminate knowledge on key legislation relating to SGBV

Our research suggests that very few people in Sierra Leone are aware of the laws around SGBV. This problem is especially acute in hard-to-reach rural communities, where levels of literacy are low, and people are less likely to speak English or Krio. Essential activities include:

- i. translating the laws into simple, reader-friendly English versions and/or local dialects;
- ii. producing posters and audio recordings in order to reach illiterate populations;
- iii. using community radio stations to broadcast discussions of SGBV in local dialects, involving community leaders like pastors, imams and *mamiqueens* (female chiefs);
- iv. support to enable organisations to travel to villages in remote parts of the country, to speak with local leaders and call community meetings to discuss the laws and their implications;
- v. continued support for the facilitation of workshop sessions on SGBV and gender equality to sensitise more communities to these issues.

2. Support the Family Support Unit (FSU/SLP) to enforce SGBV laws

While the Sierra Leonean government should be lauded for its progress in passing legislation to protect women's rights, the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police (FSU/SLP) needs much more support to be able to enforce these laws. Crucial support includes:

- i. resources to employ more trained police officers, including training to sensitise them and promote a deeper understanding of SGBV;
- ii. resources to provide counselling and safe accommodation for victims and witnesses in SGBV cases;
- iii. motorbikes to enable officers to travel to remote communities to investigate reported crimes;
- iv. increased support for communities to access FSU/SLP services in remote areas.

3. Disseminate Men's Dialogue Groups as an example of best practice

There is growing awareness of the need to involve men and boys in CSO activities to address SGBV and, as revealed in this study, one way of achieving major strides in this area is through dialogues with men. Fundamental support to ensure this includes:

- i. resources to provide ongoing training of facilitators
- ii. maintaining and sustaining men's motivation and active engagement by finding and fostering local male activists who not only understand the issues, but are also passionate about spreading the value of gender equality among other men and boys.

4. Foster a more holistic understanding of SGBV

Our research revealed that while certain forms of sexual violence, such as rape, were addressed by the legislation, other forms of SGBV (such as abuse on public transport, in market places, or at other centres of public service delivery) remained invisible. There is also the need to acknowledge the impact of SGBV on different members of the community by:

- i. sensitising communities to understand the many different forms that SGBV takes, including rape, forced marriage, marital rape (which remains a very controversial issue), and sexual harassment;
- ii. taking an intersectional approach to ensure that SGBV is addressed comprehensively, and that the most vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities, people with HIV, or those who have survived Ebola) are not left behind.

5. Work collectively to transform the structures and institutions that enable inequality to persist

Our study found that social transformation for gender equality truly takes place when different groups work together. However, the study also indicated that working with allies to address SGBV is not straightforward. Activities to sustain collective action include:

- i. engaging community leaders to establish a strong foundation for men's involvement;
- ii. engaging with religious leaders who have a large outreach and strategic platform via churches and mosques;
- iii. encouraging different stakeholders to come together in the process;
- iv. activists allowing community leaders to take ownership and lead the process. When initiatives are community-owned, community-led and community-driven, they are more durable and sustainable;
- v. further in-depth research is required to understand why and how Sierra Leone's south-east region was able to involve women in community leadership as paramount chiefs, town chiefs, etc., at a time when there was no evidence of inputs such as training or sensitisation on gender equality.

1 Introduction

A relatively small country with just over 6 million people, Sierra Leone has been the focus of considerable public and policy attention because of the recent Ebola epidemic and, before that, the decade-long civil war. Given the concern with finding ways to ‘build Sierra Leone differently’ in the post-Ebola context (Institute of Development Studies 2015), this paper considers some of the legacies of the country’s history. It focuses on gender and the emergence of a dynamic network of actors that reveal not only the country’s history of violence but also its capacity for ‘rebuilding differently’ to foster resilience and create long-term social transformation.

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According to the activists who we engaged with in Sierra Leone, the challenge of addressing SGBV has sometimes been exacerbated by a limited conception of development that too often relies on the assumption that models for social and economic ‘progress’ can be imported and implanted into already highly complex contexts. Far greater attention therefore needs to be paid to local specificity, to the effects of sexual and gender violence on all genders, and to the recommendations made by those people and organisations working to create sustained and positive change *in* these complex contexts. The findings of this study highlight this complexity and are organised, first, around the factors that underpin SGBV and, second, around the key actors working to transform harmful gender dynamics through collective action.

2 Research background

2.1 The gendered legacy of conflict

It is widely estimated that up to 250,000 women and girls in Sierra Leone experienced some form of sexual or gender-based violence during the civil war. The violations they experienced were characterised by the most extraordinary and inexplicable acts of violence, including multiple and gang rapes, abduction, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced labour and mutilation (Cohen 2007; Nowrojee 2005; Marks 2014). While the particular types of violence were extraordinary, as noted by Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (International Center for Transitional Justice 2004: 3), the incidence of SGBV committed against women during the war built on pre-existing patterns of gender violence and a system of gender relations in which women were socially, economically and politically marginalised (Barnes, Albrecht and Olson 2007; Nowrojee 2005; Ojukutu-Macauley 2013; Taylor 2003).

Multiple forms of SGBV have also been experienced by men and boys during Sierra Leone's conflict (Taylor 2003; Maclure and Denov 2006; Nowrojee 2005). While there is some evidence on the extent of this violence, the relative dearth of information reflects Del Zotto and Jones's (2002) assertion that sexualised violence against men during conflict remains 'surrounded by a wall of silence' (cf. Eves 2010; Freedman and Jacobson 2012; Sivakumaran 2007). Like SGBV committed against women, sexualised violence by men against other men also reflects a gendered order, in which power is asserted by the perpetrator over the victim (Tadros 2013; Edström *et al.* 2014; Sivakumaran 2007, 2010). In times of conflict, this power, embodied through sexual violence, can and frequently does reflect a broader political struggle between factions represented by the perpetrator(s) and victim (Oosterhoff, Mills and Oosterom 2014).

During Sierra Leone's conflict, all military factions committed SGBV, including the three main groups (the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Civil Defense Force (CDF)), and the West Side Boys, a splinter group of the AFRC (Taylor 2003). There are also documented cases of SGBV perpetrated by peacekeepers with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Taylor 2003).

Given the extent to which violence had permeated Sierra Leoneans' lives, the post-conflict government established a set of new institutions in 2002 in an attempt to address the long-term impact of the war and to promote greater political transparency and accountability.¹ Pre-existing institutions such as the judiciary and the police force were strengthened, as were the National Electoral Commission and the Law Reform Commission, to better promote good governance and the rule of law (Abdullah 2010, 2012). As part of this process, a reparations programme was established to address the specific needs of SGBV survivors. However, despite these attempts to provide support and reparation to survivors, the overall failure of the government to prosecute those responsible for committing human rights abuses during the war has signalled a perception that these crimes do not constitute a serious violation. Research indicates that this has entrenched a climate of impunity linked to SGBV (Barnes *et al.* 2007; Abdullah, Ibrahim and King 2010; Archibald and Richards 2002; Bellows and Miguel 2006; Cohen 2007).

Therefore, men and women continue to deal with the consequences of the violent sexual and other forms of assault experienced during the conflict. These include enduring psychological

¹ These institutions included the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Legal Ombudsman and the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC).

and physical trauma, health impacts such as fistula, economic vulnerability, and being ostracised by their family and community (as a result of being raped or being associated with armed factions, whether forced or otherwise).

In post-conflict Sierra Leone, prevailing forms of SGBV include domestic violence, sexual assault (including rape of adults and minors and rape within marriage) and school-related sexual abuse affecting all genders (Ojukutu-Macauley 2013). For women, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) are also prevalent, but they are highly complex and difficult to measure and address (Bjälkander, Bangura, Leigh, Berggren, Bergström and Almroth 2012; Coulter 2005). Early and forced marriage, and subsequent withdrawal from school, compounds the low literacy levels of women (estimated at 29 per cent), who are largely employed in the informal economy (Abdullah 2012; Ojukutu-Macauley 2013). The existence of plural legal systems – Muslim law, customary law and formal law processes that all inherently discriminate against women – presents particular challenges for addressing prevention as well as the response to SGBV (Maru 2006).

As noted earlier, an important but perhaps less visible outcome of the war is the emergence of a network of actors – including individuals and organisations – that have formed a coalition spanning urban and rural areas to collectively address gender inequality and violence. During the war, women and men came together to advocate for peace, democracy and good governance (Abdullah 2012). In post-war campaigns, women in particular called for greater respect and protection of women's rights, for prosecution of offenders, and for law reform to restore the dignity of women. Subsequently, there has been a marked increase in the reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual and domestic violence in the country; the media regularly report incidences of such violence, particularly against minors (*ibid.*).

Despite some positive moves to institutionalise support mechanisms for SGBV survivors following the war, a number of additional challenges remain for Sierra Leone's long-term development. They include corruption, youth unemployment and entrenched poverty (Barnes *et al.* 2007). These challenges also differ across the country, in different contexts. For example, men and women have very different access to social, political and economic opportunities depending on whether they live in an urban area such as Freetown, or in the provinces, away from the capital and the Western Area. We discuss these context-specific challenges to equitable access to resources (and recourse) in the findings below.

2.2 International and national policy responses to promote gender equality

The work of human rights movements calling for reparations and institutional measures to promote gender equality is linked to the country's post-conflict ratification of key international conventions (see below); it is also linked to the development of national legislative and policy frameworks to address the legacy of violence, and particularly of SGBV.

At an international level, Sierra Leone has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR is particularly important, as it sets out concrete international human rights obligations for promoting gender equality and addressing SGBV.

These international ratifications have some traction through national measures. Three of the most relevant are: (1) the National Policy on the Advancement of Women, developed in 2002 to '[discourage] traditional practices and concepts which are harmful to the health and wellbeing of women and girls' (Swaine 2013); (2) Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Agenda for Change, which recognises 'violence against women' as a significant issue

requiring a focused response; and (3) the National Action Plan, which is perhaps the most salient policy related to SGBV, with an overarching aim to ‘combat GBV through a holistic and strategic approach’ (MSWGCA 2012: 5).² The National Action Plan was developed in response to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325; as the first UN resolution to specifically mention women, it acknowledges the disproportionate and unique impact of conflict on women and girls, and calls for the adoption of a gender perspective in numerous areas, including post-conflict reconstruction (United Nations Security Council 2000).

Through the National Action Plan, the Sierra Leone government adopted three acts in 2007 that provide a legislative framework to address gender inequality, discrimination against women and SGBV. These are: (1) the Domestic Violence Act, which criminalises domestic violence and adopts a broad definition of domestic abuse that includes sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and economic violence perpetrated against an individual in a domestic setting; (2) the Devolution of Estates Act, which addresses women’s inheritance rights by, for instance, protecting widows from being denied access to the property of their deceased spouse, guaranteeing the right of children ‘born in and out of wedlock’ to own their deceased father’s property, and ensuring proportionate distribution of property between men and women; and (3) the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, which raises the legal age of marriage and legalises all marriages under customary, Muslim, Christian and civil laws. A Child Rights Act was also passed in 2007, affording protection from violence and abuse. In 2012, the Sierra Leone government passed the Sexual Offences Act, which addresses various types of sexual assault and covers married women, children and people with disabilities. It also prohibits forced sex in marital relationships and protects children from being abused by teachers as well as traditional and religious leaders.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA), which aims to protect and promote the rights of women and children, also coordinates the National Committee on Gender-based Violence (NACGBV). The committee brings together a range of different actors, including government ministries, UN agencies, and local and international non-government organisations (NGOs) working on SGBV, with the aim of providing a more holistic response to SGBV, and particularly sexual exploitation and abuse (Swaine 2013). Despite the plethora of laws and apparent institutional commitment to address SGBV, the committee remains limited in its ability to effectively coordinate activities, largely due to lack of funding. It is also detached from key governance networks, including district coordinating bodies and ministries responsible for addressing SGBV (MSWGCA 2012).

The laws and policies outlined above are crucial, as they provide a foundation and framework for implementing sustainable and structural equality. This study, however, indicates two significant limitations that require redress in order to ensure these policies gain traction. First, without the resources and political will to implement these policies, they will continue to remain hollow. Second, the language in the policies currently reflects an unhelpful ‘victim/perpetrator’ binary in which men are cast as perpetrators and women as victims. The very complex nature of violence and conflict in Sierra Leone disrupts this binary. This study foregrounds the importance of shifting away from this conception of sexual and gender-based violence in order to meaningfully unpick the knotty structures of power that intersect around age, ethnicity, geographic location, class and gender. In doing so, it highlights some of the limitations to the prevailing policy and legal discourse on SGBV and suggests ways in which men and women’s experiences of SGBV and their collective responses to violence can be better supported through practical engagement and policy implementation.

² This strategic approach includes: building a strong cooperative network among institutions and relevant sectors working on GBV-related issues; enacting and enforcing laws against GBV; creating a massive public awareness programme on GBV; and the provision of preventive, curative and rehabilitative measures.

2.3 Gender in conflict and post-conflict contexts

Research on gender and violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts reflects a gendered bifurcation: on the one hand, young men, experiencing multiple forms of exclusion, are viewed as ‘troublemakers’, more likely to engage in insurgent activities, fuel violence and undermine state-building. This argument is reflected in studies that theorise ‘youth bulges’ as a catalyst of conflict in African countries (Cincotta 2008; Urdal 2004, 2006; Ricardo and Barker 2005). Other studies, however, find that men – including youth – can also be ‘catalysts of change’ (Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014; Chigunta 2002; Durham 2000; Mattes and Richmond 2014). This gendered dyad, in which young men are either viewed as catalysts of conflict or agents of positive social change, is muddled when the gendered dynamics of conflict are viewed in light of structural violence and inequality, including endemic poverty and political repression. In Sierra Leone, as well as Zimbabwe, for example, men’s engagement in violence during conflict has been understood in light of rapid economic change and political upheaval (Perry 2005; Hoffman 2004; Campbell 2003; Hammar, McGregor and Landau 2010).

Analysts have also problematised literature on gender and conflict that conflates masculinity with violence, arguing that this demonises men and fails to account for the fact that, globally, women make up between 10 per cent and 40 per cent of armed forces and insurgent groups (Hilker and Fraser 2009). In other contexts, such as Palestine, for example, women’s engagement in violence during conflict constitutes an effort on their part to reconfigure harmful gender norms that limit their political and economic opportunities (Berko and Erez 2008; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Bloom 2007).

The extent to which men and women navigate highly unequal lives and livelihoods alongside violence and crisis points to what can be characterised as ‘constrained agency’. For instance, while many women in Sierra Leone experienced SGBV during the war, those affiliated with the fighting forces were sometimes able to use their position to gain a certain degree of security for themselves and other vulnerable people around them (Coulter 2008; Abdullah 2012; Abdullah and Fofana-Ibrahim 2010). Recent studies on gender and conflict have challenged ‘the over-determination of women as powerless victims’ (Marks 2014: 67) and have called for ‘a corrective, agency-oriented examination of women as both perpetrators and victims who contribute to war’ (*ibid.*: 68).

More recent studies have found that people do not necessarily take violent action when faced with conditions of violence or limited democratic space. Instead, they may engage in entrepreneurial and voluntary activities (Sommers 2011; Raeymaekers 2011; Honwana 2011), and in NGO-led participatory governance activities (McGee and Greenhalf 2011). As illustrated in this report, MAGE-SL was formed as a ‘neighbourhood group’ in a refugee camp by a man who wanted to address the negative ways in which men had come to be thought of, and related to – especially by women.

This study therefore engages with men and women to understand not only their response to SGBV but also their own experiences of it. Our research suggests that a narrow focus on women and girls as the main subjects of SGBV during conflict fails to recognise the subtle ways in which men and women strategically navigate highly gendered structures of power that are disadvantageous in different ways. In doing so, men and women in Sierra Leone illustrate their capacity for resilience during conflict, and in post-crisis contexts like the recent Ebola outbreak. We recognise, too, that while multidimensional inequality and violence is experienced and embodied by individuals, substantive transformation to promote resilience and gender equality requires meaningful policies that are underpinned by national and international political will, and reinforced by resources to promote law enforcement and policy implementation at a local level.

3 Methodology

Between June 2014 and January 2015, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the Men's Association for Gender Equality-Sierra Leone (MAGE-SL) undertook qualitative research with those actors working to address SGBV and achieve gender equality in Sierra Leone. The research had four aims: (1) to understand the nature and causes of SGBV as experienced by participants in Moyamba and Freetown; (2) to explore the key actors working collectively, across the country, to foster greater gender equality and to address SGBV; (3) to identify key strategies through which these actors work – collectively and with men and boys – to effect positive change; and (4) to understand and document some of the key challenges these actors face in their work, and to develop a set of recommendations based on these local-level insights.

The research draws on a range of data collected through 25 key informant interviews, two stakeholder mapping workshops and 60 structured interviews (in Freetown and Moyamba), as well as two validation workshops and 13 follow-up interviews, also in Freetown and Moyamba. As the two stakeholder mapping workshops have been discussed in detail in a previous report (see Nesbitt-Ahmed, Mills and Diggins 2015), this section focuses on the three-stage interview process.

3.1 A three-stage data collection process

In the first stage, based on information gleaned from the stakeholder mapping workshops in June 2014, we identified six questions that would help us explore the issues raised:

1. What kind of work does your organisation do to tackle SGBV?
2. How did you become interested in trying to address SGBV?
3. How do you work with men?
4. Which actors does your organisation work with to engage men?
5. What are some of the difficulties you face in your work?
6. What is the way forward?

These questions were asked across a range of different actors working in different sectors in Sierra Leone, including women's rights organisations, men's organisations, the police, and religious leaders. In total, 25 key informant interviews were conducted (10 in Freetown and 15 in Moyamba) using the same six questions, which were adapted slightly based on the respondent, and used probing questions where appropriate. Interviews were conducted with a team of four researchers in Freetown and five in Moyamba. Our sample of respondents was drawn from the participants of the two workshops in June 2014, and included police officials, members of civil society organisations (CSOs), and community and religious leaders. The second stage involved in-depth interviews in October 2014 with six members of MAGE-SL, including the Founder and Executive Director, to obtain insights into why MAGE-SL was set up and what it does, given that it is one of the leading organisations engaging with men to end SGBV.

The third stage involved a validation workshop with a smaller sub-set of participants who attended the workshop in June 2014. There were also 13 follow-up interviews conducted (six in Freetown and seven in Moyamba) in January 2015. A more detailed topic guide was developed for the final stage. It included questions on how men and women experience violence, any important moments that contributed to activists' engagement with the issue of SGBV in Sierra Leone, the most significant interventions or processes addressing SGBV in

the country, and strategies to engage men in addressing SGBV. The full topic guide can be found in Annex 1.

All interviews were conducted in English or Krio, as all respondents were fluent in either or both of these languages.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Participation in the interviews was on a strictly voluntary basis. Before each interview, the interviewer obtained written consent from the participants (see Annex 2). Those respondents who were confident reading English were asked to read the informed consent form, and to discuss any queries with the interviewer. Prior to each interview or workshop, the interviewers and facilitators explained the research, its purpose and objectives, questions to be asked, approximate duration, and asked participants their preferred recording technique (audio tape recording and/or note taking). All interviewers made it clear at the start that participants could leave at any point, that they had the right not to participate, and could refuse to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with.

3.3 Data analysis

All interviews and notes were in English (or Krio) and interviews were digitally recorded, unless respondents requested otherwise, in which case they were handwritten. Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1994; Corbin and Strauss 1990), the data were categorised into five broad themes that were identified at the stakeholder mapping workshops in June 2014, reflecting discussions across IDS and MAGE-SL. These were: (1) the civil war as a catalyst for critical awareness; (2) the economic basis of inequality in households; (3) law and policy reform; (4) inadequate support for those engaged in work to address SGBV; and (5) knowledge sharing.

3.4 Study limitations

We aimed to gain an understanding of the landscape of SGBV in Sierra Leone by situating our study in the capital (Freetown) and a rural region (Moyamba) and conducting interviews with civil society activists, representatives of ministries, religious leaders and the media. Nonetheless, as a qualitative study with a small number of respondents, this study does not claim to be representative of the work being done in all districts of Sierra Leone on gender equality and SGBV.

Other study limitations include bias on the part of participants, who have their own personal and institutional interests with respect to gender equality and addressing SGBV. To mitigate this, we included as diverse a range of participants as possible within the time available to us, so that we would be able to incorporate a wide variety of voices and perspectives. It is also important to note that, because MAGE is such a leading actor in Sierra Leone in the field of working with men and boys to address SGBV, their prominent role as co-facilitators of the research programme may have influenced interactions within workshops and interviews.

A further limitation is our own positionality as researchers, which could lead to privileging certain narratives or perspectives. To mitigate this, research teams were given the same set of questions to ask during the interview process, and data were analysed based on key themes that were developed jointly by the research team.

The Ebola crisis emerged at the same time as we began this study and played a role in limiting the researchers' ability to reach participants for follow-up interviews in the initial time frame. During the course of our study, travel to and within Sierra Leone was severely limited and public gatherings were forbidden as a safety measure. The researchers were able to complete the various components of the study, but in a slightly longer time frame than

anticipated. All preliminary findings have been communicated and checked with participants. This report reflects amendments to the findings that were raised during the validation workshops held by MAGE-SL in Freetown and Moyamba following data analysis in 2015.

4 Key findings

In Section 4.1 below, we trace the roots of violence in Sierra Leone and the emergence of a coalition of actors seeking to respond to SGBV, focusing on our primary research partner, MAGE-SL. Section 4.2 outlines practical actions and limitations faced by these collective actors in their work to catalyse transformation to end SGBV and promote gender equality.

4.1 Tracing the roots of violence

We open the discussion of the study's findings with the story of how MAGE-SL was formed – an organisation whose creation stems from the lengthy civil war – and the motivations of MAGE and other activists we interviewed. MAGE-SL's history reflects the continuity of conflict during the war and post-war period. It also provides a contextually grounded analysis of the multiple ways in which men and women are affected by harmful gender constructions that lead to SGBV across these linked eras.

4.1.1 During the war: the creation of a movement of men for gender equality

It was during the war in Sierra Leone that we had to fly to look for sheltering and protecting in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea. And in the process almost everybody was abused, you know, violated by... by... by the warring factions.
(Interview with Mr Mackieu, Founder and Director of MAGE, 2014)

In our conversations with MAGE-SL, we learnt that the organisation's founder, David Mackieu, had fled to Guinea during the war with his wife and their children. Soon after they settled in a refugee camp, a group of rebel soldiers from Sierra Leone infiltrated the camp. Upon their arrival, levels of violence, particularly against women, soared. Because these violent newcomers spoke the same language as the legitimate refugees – a dialect also shared by many of the surrounding Guinean population – they were almost impossible to identify. This prompted Mr Mackieu and his wife to leave the camp, walking almost 300km with other refugees in search of safety.

After settling in the new camp, Mr Mackieu and a couple of men began sharing their frustrations that, as a result of the war, *all* men had come to be perceived as violent and damaging. Mr Mackieu initiated community meetings to share ideas about how to meet people's needs in the camps. These meetings resulted in women (rather than men) being allocated key resources such as food and water.

When the war ended, Mr Mackieu said the government turned to three main priorities. The first was a blanket amnesty and reintegration of rebels: 'Everyone had a son, or nephew or uncle who was a rebel or somehow involved – it affected us all', he said. The second was bringing all Sierra Leoneans back into the country. The third was improving the health system because, as Mr Mackieu noted, 'You can't ask people to come back from camps where everything is provided to them, to a place where nothing works. It's asking them to take a u-turn.' With time, and as he became more and more involved with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR's), he felt increasingly compelled to continue this gender activism in post-conflict Sierra Leone. This prompted the creation of the Men's Association for Gender Equality (MAGE).

MAGE was thus formed as a response to the ubiquity of violence, stemming from the determination by some men to show that not all men would harm women (or other men).

As one man in a workshop in Freetown said, 'They call me warrior! I am known to fight for women's rights.'

Mr Mackieu explained the origins of his organisation:

It was not [all] men that were abusing. There were also other men who were equally suffering... from the hands of the warring factions. But [in the] camp settlement, women started looking at men and boys as enemies, and it became difficult for us to harmonise and to make things work. So, it was at that juncture that I started thinking that there is a need for us really to get together... giving civic education to our colleagues in the camp. I just felt it was like a house-to-house, neighbourhood campaign group, you know...

What started out as a 'neighbourhood campaign group' is today a network of organisations working to promote gender equality across the country. Echoing Mr Mackieu's experiences, many key informants explained that they had first been driven to address SGBV as a direct result of witnessing heightened forms of gender violence during the war. Participants (particularly in the workshops) also emphasised the direct and indirect gender violence they had been exposed to throughout their daily lives in times of 'peace', and stressed that this ongoing 'mundane' pattern of violation had been equally important in motivating them to strive for gender equality. Similarly, one interviewee called Sylvanus, a social worker and human rights activist who works for a disability rights NGO in Moyamba, explained how violence, both at home and during the war, affected his thinking:

Women are very disadvantaged in this society. In my childhood days, I saw my dad beating my mum mercilessly. The blood of my mum sprinkled on the wall... Then, during the war, I saw women raped. I saw women horrendously abused. I don't even want to think about those things... But now, things are starting to get better. Women now have the rights to own property. They don't have to be afraid to leave their man because they can be independent.

This suggests that one result of the conflict was to increase people's awareness of the endemic violence that already existed within Sierra Leonean society, and to shift attitudes about the acceptability of SGBV.

Yahyah, a young photographer who has been working with MAGE for two years, made this argument very strongly:

Before the war, people were not aware of violence. But just after the war, there were people around, [who] explained human rights, you know? In Sierra Leone at that time, we were... thinking [human rights] it's just for women. But now they know that this is not just for women: it is for both men and women. [This is] because of the human rights organisations activists here, we are doing our work.
(Interview with Yahyah, activist in MAGE-SL, 2014)

4.1.2 After the war: 'People will say, "Act like a man!"'

In recounting why they had joined MAGE-SL or other organisations working towards gender equality, a number of activists explained that they had experienced violence in their own lives and this had motivated their decision to join a movement to change gender norms. These forms of violence, as experienced by men, fell into three categories: (1) some men described how men committed violent crimes against other men; (2) men spoke about violent crimes (often sexual violence) committed against women in their lives; (3) respondents discussed the violence of certain gendered expectations in which men were told to conform to certain

ways of 'being a man'. To illustrate these three areas, we draw on the experiences of Martin and Ambrose, both of whom work for MAGE.

Martin is a facilitator who has worked for MAGE for eight years. In his interview, he captures the expectations that run alongside normative 'bad' ways of talking about 'acting like a man':

If you are quarrelling with somebody, they will tell you to act like a man. That means you have to react, to fight... [Use] abusive language or you even take something to wound that person just to act like a man... [When I facilitate workshops with men] I tell the people that to 'act like a man' [in this way] is very bad because... it hampers [disturbs] us, it disturbs our relationship with women.

Ambrose, who is based in the town of Bo and works with MAGE as a workshop facilitator, explained that he was attacked by a group of men who were looking for money. He was fortunate to escape on an *okada* (a commercial motorcycle), but his experience prompted him to join MAGE to address gender-based violence, as experienced by men and women. He explained that shortly after this ordeal he met the Director of MAGE, Mr Mackieu, and decided to start advocating for gender equality because, 'I'm a victim of the circumstance and I think we can do something about it'.

Martin joined Ambrose and Mr Mackieu in facilitating the workshops for this study. In one 'energiser' exercise, he led participants in a rousing round of 'A man is a ...?'. The group would respond with a label, like 'breadwinner'. After a couple of rounds, the participants realised that they were replicating the very gendered assumptions of men and women's work and roles that they had been criticising in their own work and, indeed, in the workshop. The 'energiser' was a powerful reminder that, in gender work, we need to be conscious of our own actions and assumptions.

This exercise resonated with Martin's own story, as he navigated two worlds, and eventually chose to focus his energy on creating a new paradigm for engaging men in a world that reframed normative assumptions of what it means to 'act like a man'. His story encapsulates the extent to which men too are violated, and bear witness to violence:

I was victim of the violence, because men violate men. I was violated by men. According to the cultural setting in our country here, people will say, 'Act like a man'; even if you are violated. No matter whether the man is physically stronger than you. And my mother, too, was violated by men during the war, which really I can say was one of the factors for her death.

When he began working with MAGE, Martin explained how he realised that his 'acting like a man' was not consistent with the role model he wanted to be in his community.

After I joined MAGE, I started to think that if people see me fighting [it] would not be a good example. I said [took] this thing to my heart, relationship... my wife, my business and my family. And people were copying this from me. In fact, I had a colleague that called me his role model.

Martin went on to explain that he decided to commit to modelling a new way of 'acting like a man':

Everywhere we go, I see the people, yes, are changing, people try to be like [me]. [I] set a good example in the community. So most guys... they do not beat their wife... because we taught them.

While our research was unable to draw out a detailed understanding of how particular forms of masculinity circulated during the war and were reinforced and threaded into social relations after the war, the damaging legacy of the conflict was evident throughout our conversations with MAGE activists, and across the interviews. Notably, as we discuss below, these accounts by the people with whom we worked, and who we interviewed, point to the ubiquity of violence and the extent to which gender norms and inequalities permeate the lives of men as well as women.

4.1.3 Conflict(ing) masculinities

One little step forward is for us men to develop the willingness to really see that violence should not be perpetrated against women. We have to demonstrate this willingness at all levels: at the home, in our different institutions, and in the community. Let us remember that we have our younger brothers coming after us, and we all want a constructive Sierra Leone. We adult men should start to demonstrate the idea of seeing women as human beings, we have to understand and apply the principles of human rights: equality, respect and human dignity.
(Moyamba workshop participant)

I want to speak to the men in this room, because it is men who are the perpetrators of gender-based violence. If we are going to be honest: are you just going to come to this workshop, have breakfast, have lunch, and go home? Is that where this is going to end? If I see one of the men who was here, abusing or intimidating a woman, I am going to say to you: 'Were you not at that workshop?'
(Moyamba workshop participant)

The workshops and interviews highlighted a paradox for engaging with men, through collective action, to address SGBV that has surfaced in similar studies (Mills *et al.* 2015). On the one hand, the participants in the present study emphasised the harmful nature of gender inequality for men and for women; they explained that men did not want the kind of responsibilities that were placed on them – for example, as primary breadwinner. During the workshops, men said they also wanted to be able to have more time to spend with their family, and care for their children.

Women participants explained that they too would like to be able to take up opportunities for education and employment, and expressed a strong desire to have their partners play a greater role in caring for their children and the home. Men and women alike commiserated with each other, acknowledging how gender norms had infiltrated the roles and responsibilities that were expected of them. On the other hand, however, despite a cursory recognition in some of the interviews and workshop sessions that men were harmed by gender inequalities, women's experiences of violence were unambiguously located at the hands of men.

The two quotes at the start of this subsection highlight the active role that men should play in advocating for women to be viewed as 'human beings' with 'human rights'. The notion that men should be advocates of women's rights at times reflected a belief that women did not have sufficient power or agency to advocate for their own rights in customary courts, or in their interpersonal relationships; and conversely, it followed a logic that men had power that could be used to harm, or to protect, women. The second quote highlights this paradox, and the view held by some women participants that men can use their power in an opportunistic and instrumental way, without being overtly violent but still being detrimental to women's wellbeing. While this was evidently many people's experience, the second quote also draws attention to the flip side of men's agency and the fact that women sometimes experienced

men's power in negative ways – even in spaces where women's equality was the centre of discussion.

MAGE-SL facilitators explained the nuances of masculinities in their interviews with IDS. Alex, who has been working with MAGE for five years, explained that, while '[some] men feel that, since they are men, they should be in charge of everything. They should be in control of finances... Everything...', for many men, particularly in remote rural villages, this pressure to 'be in charge of everything' sits uncomfortably with their lived experience of marginalisation and disempowerment:

The thing we have in this part of the world is poverty. Because people are poor, they feel they are not even fit to live, but we tell them 'no, God did not make you not to live. He made you to live. And everybody is alive because that person has a purpose on earth'.

(Ambrose, MAGE-SL facilitator)

The conflict in Sierra Leone has been attributed to many factors, including as an outcome of the extreme marginalisation experienced by young men and women (Richards 2005). An important dimension of MAGE's work with men is therefore concerned not only with rebuilding equitable gender relations, but also with fostering hope and building self-esteem among men and women.

So we give them words of courage and we let them know that they are important. When people know they are important, they see the reason why they should live... We... dialogue with these people, and these dialogues actually come out very successfully.

(Ambrose)

During the training itself... we say, 'We are all equal'. We give respect to everyone equally. Even if there are differences between the older men and the younger men, within the training we are all equal. In the training, everything is by respect...

(Alex)

In Moyamba, some women's rights activists spoke of the war as a catalyst, not only precipitating high levels of gender violence but also – perhaps as a result of this violence – calling for citizens to take action to promote greater gender equality and better governance. For instance, one of the most prominent political leaders in the Moyamba region said:

Before the war, we had a lot of Constitutions that came just after independence. [There were] many but they didn't talk about women's rights issues... After the war we had knowledge and training and we could see many gaps in the Constitution, and we were able to feed into the review process. The culture speaks of male domination, and the culture also shows where this is in the law. And the gap between the Constitution and the culture means that there was misuse of women, women were treated as second-class citizens, they did not have their own rights.

(Moyamba workshop, 2015)

While the different forms of violence (from the civil war and beyond) provided the catalyst for respondents in our research to join the movement for gender equality and to address SGBV, the law plays a crucial role in these efforts to address SGBV. Yet, as indicated in our interviews, there are limits to what the law can achieve.

4.1.4 Spatiality and limits to the law

The government must put measures in place. If they put a law, they must make sure that this law is enforced. Some of these laws that have been made, they are not being implemented. So I am recommending that the government do so!
(Steven, Moyamba, 2014)

Despite the raft of new legislation represented in the three Acts dealing with gender issues (in 2007) and the 2012 Sexual Offences Act, our study found a striking disconnect in accounts of gender inequality and violence between people in Freetown and those in Moyamba. Respondents in Freetown emphasised the struggles faced by those in rural areas, like Moyamba, and explained that this was a result of tradition, which hampered the effective implementation of more progressive laws. In contrast, the respondents in Moyamba explained that the actors passing laws in Freetown were doing so without conferring sufficient resources on law enforcement agencies to ensure these laws were implemented. The key informant interviews and discussions conducted after the two stakeholder workshops were able to draw out a fuller understanding of these different perceptions of the limits to the law; participants' responses revealed a slightly more textured picture.

A key finding centred on the asymmetry of legal and policy information dissemination, with far greater 'legal literacy' in urban areas compared with rural areas. Participants in Moyamba, for instance, spoke in straightforward terms of the importance of funding for legal and advocacy organisations to disseminate legal information – around rights to access resources in the case of sexual assault, for example. Interviews in Moyamba revealed that women, especially those in remoter parts of the chiefdom, were not aware of the provisions made in the new raft of gender laws. During our workshop in Moyamba, when Mr Mackieu asked how many activists in the room knew about the Sexual Offences Act (2012) for example, very few people raised their hands.

Those working in gender rights organisations in Freetown also recognised the importance of ensuring that people in the more remote parts of the country have access to information about changes in the law, particularly changes that affect women's rights and their ability to access state resources should they – or indeed other men – be subject to SGBV. For instance, the managing editor of a high-profile newspaper in Freetown said:

After the war, civil society activism [led to] so much happening in Freetown: the issues [were] publicised so people knew the realities [about gender violence]. [People in] the remote parts don't understand or even know what you are talking about.

This issue was also raised by one of the groups in the Moyamba workshop, when drawing a 'tree of violence' in which participants sketched out its causes (as roots) and manifestations (as branches and leaves).

The tree of violence in rural areas will have more roots and will be large because awareness-raising opportunities are low-key and up to now the culture of silence is deeply rooted. It is in the village that GBV is highly rooted.

This more deep-rooted violence in rural communities was also raised by the managing editor we interviewed in Freetown in June 2014:

The people in the rural communities are the most affected. They don't know their rights; they don't know their responsibilities. They don't have access to information. So if you tell them this is their right, what do you say if they are gang raped, and you tell them to go to the police; but often there is no police. Or if they are forced to have

sex, then the women goes to the chief, and they will say the wife must do what her husband wants in marriage.

Participants at the Freetown workshop echoed this argument, and explained that different types of violence occur in different parts of the country. For instance, in rural areas, there is greater prevalence of FGM and forced and early marriage compared with urban areas. In urban areas, the participants recounted everyday forms of SGBV like street harassment and abuse on public transport, but these forms of violence are not addressed in public policy.

In addition to the variation in types of violence reported in different parts of the country, participants in both Moyamba and Freetown spoke about the difficulties encountered by people in remote areas when they attempted to report cases of SGBV and access support services. The relative absence of the state, through law enforcement mechanisms and support structures (like the FSUs), might account for the high number of civil society actors working in Moyamba, in contrast with those working in Freetown. Our interviews revealed that in Freetown, most actions around SGBV are led by the Ministry; discussions take place in official committees, but the public often do not know who is represented on these committees or what they do. In Moyamba, on the other hand, CSOs play a much more active role, as indicated in this quote from one of the participants in the Moyamba workshop:

They [CSOs] have organised themselves into networks, which are much more open and inclusive than the Freetown committees. They are knocking on doors: working village to village, person to person, door to door.

Across both sites, the research participants emphasised the role of history, bound up in formal and traditional institutions. These institutions reflect decades, centuries even, of a complex social and political history that elides easy analysis or attributions of blame in perpetuating violence.

While enormously complex, Sierra Leone's social and political history was a strong feature of the discussions and interviews. Participants discussed the role of state and non-state actors in their own and others' experiences of gender violence. For instance, a woman in a discussion group in Moyamba described the extent to which 'culture' limits women's opportunities, in contrast with men, particularly in rural (interior) areas:

We have a culture where sometimes women aren't given a chance to talk. Women aren't given a chance to study, or do anything. If you go to the interiors now, and we do this training, we see this ourselves. In most religions, we see men marrying more wives, but women aren't allowed to marry more men.

Culture was cited in Moyamba, in particular, as one of the most significant barriers to effective implementation of the three gender Acts; in this case, it was a culture in which men shielded one another from being held accountable – in courts, to police officers – for the violent crimes they had committed against other men and women. One participant at the Moyamba workshop pointed out the hypocrisy of shielding men from being held accountable, in contrast with blaming women for their experiences of violence at the hands of men:

When someone does wrong, men support men and forget about women. If I commit violence against women, the forefathers will come around and tell the woman, 'You must always obey your husband'.

For Alex, a staff member at MAGE, it was his frustration at witnessing women's voices being silenced – particularly in discussions about violence – that initially prompted him to become a gender activist:

Back in my village up-country... whenever community meetings are called, most women are asked to go to the back, where they have no opportunities to talk. One case I witnessed [involved] a woman who was attacked by a man. When the case came to the chief, he said, 'He is a man. Because he is a man he has the right to do that.' I intervened. In fact, I was also there during the fight. I was there... I stopped it... I talked to the man... I stopped him and talked to the chief. He 'gave the woman right' [judged in the woman's favour]. That gave me the idea that I should do this kind of work.

Sometimes traditional political structures work to exclude women from discussions about SGBV in even more explicit ways. One of the most distinctive features of social and political life in rural Sierra Leone is the vital role played by gendered initiation societies. Almost all young women are initiated into the Bundu society, while most young men join the Poro society. Despite their very large memberships, these institutions are sometimes referred to in English as 'secret societies', since their most important activities take place hidden within the confines of carefully segregated spaces beyond the village, which non-members are strictly forbidden from entering. Although they were reluctant to discuss this topic in depth in the presence of a foreign researcher, participants agreed that, in rural parts of Moyamba district, it remains common for criminal cases to be discussed and settled within the Poro bush. The women in the village – even the victim of the crime herself – will never know what happened or what was agreed by the men.

In larger towns and cities in Sierra Leone, the Poro society no longer wields the power it once did: but membership of other kinds of political groups may afford certain men a similar level of impunity:

Everything about Sierra Leone is political: 'I belong to this house. I belong to this society, or that tribe.' Very often, a politician, or a big man can call up and say, 'I have an interest in this matter', and that is the end of it. It does not go any further.
(Workshop participant, Moyamba)

4.2 Catalysts of transformation: action for equality

Turning from the previous subsection's focus on the root causes of violence, this subsection explores some of the factors that have prompted activists and organisations to take collective action and address SGBV. It also explores the challenges these collective actors have encountered in politico-judicial, social and economic spheres.

4.2.1 Making the law user-friendly

Research participants in Moyamba emphasised the importance of removing barriers to women's political participation at the national and local levels. Integrating women into political structures requires overcoming a series of hurdles, including practical barriers (knowing and using the law in local dialects), and customary barriers that prevent women from becoming paramount chiefs. In Freetown and Moyamba, there was also emphasis on 'revisiting, reviewing and amending' the by-laws, especially in marriage, to ensure that adequate provisions are made to protect women's rights. The enactment of the laws, and by-laws, was also seriously affected by the limited number of judges available to adjudicate cases in rural areas like Moyamba.

What we are advocating for now is to have high court judges, because in some cases the perpetrator is set free because without a high court judge, it's not possible to prosecute sexual violence cases.
(Moyamba workshop participant, 2014)

Describing the range of new laws recently introduced in Sierra Leone, Mr Mackieu said they were ‘very big success stories to boast of’. A priority for organisations like MAGE-SL now is to ensure that these laws reach people. In order to do this, they need to ‘popularise’ the law, to make the complex terms of the law accessible to people in their own languages, and in appropriate formats (for example, written information is not generally accessible to illiterate people).

Chidteh Gbetwa, an activist and volunteer from ActionAid in Moyamba, explained:

[S]ome clauses in the policies are not easy to translate. We need to translate [them] in our own language so that our people know that [SGBV] is bad... So that civil society can interpret these three gender Acts to the common people in the community.

The value of popularising the laws was a key theme in the interviews and workshops held in Moyamba as well as Freetown. For instance, a women’s rights organisation, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), works with the government to ensure that policies to promote girls’ education are enacted. The FAWE representative at the Moyamba workshop recommended that the government do more to ensure that the Sexual Offences Act is popularised in communities:

My recommendation would be to popularise the Sexual [Offences] Act. Most of these cases [of SGBV] are coming from the villages because they don’t know about these Acts. We say everything in Krio. English, they don’t understand! We need to make [the law] user-friendly.

4.2.2 ‘They [tap] palm wine, they discuss’: collective action as community-owned ideas

There should be better collaboration; men and boys and women and girls need to work together. If we all work together and come together, then the violence will stop.
(Moyamba workshop participant, June 2014)

The value of working collectively to transform the structures and institutions that enable inequality to persist in Sierra Leone was a key finding from our research, with ‘the formation of networks’ said to be vital:

If individual groups just talk, that’s not enough, but when other networks come together and having a big network, like what we’ve done with Access for Justice, we formed a network of civil society organisations dealing with problems of justice. So we all come together when matters of justice are at play, so when they see a large group, they create fear in the perpetrator. So if all agencies come together to make sure the correct measures are taken, and support is given to police and to civil society, then that will start having an impact on sexual and gender-based violence.
(Moyamba workshop participant)

Working for more than a decade to promote gender equality, MAGE-SL and its network of partner organisations across the country have found that the most effective way of creating change is to ensure that ideas and actions are driven by community members themselves. Therefore, MAGE-SL works iteratively, and very closely, with community leaders; it also commits to spending a great deal of time in each community, sometimes up to two months at a time, in order to accommodate the enormous pressures placed on people (particularly in rural areas) at crop planting and harvest times.

In Moyamba it was clear that, for the men in the group, training workshops and meetings played an important role in reorienting their thinking about SGBV. Several activists were interviewed in Moyamba:

From 2004, I attended several workshops and meetings on GBV. I attended other workshops by MAGE, and I also attended one with Bundu leaders about FGM; where the Bundu leaders agreed that they would not initiate any girls before the age of 18. Because it should be a choice for them.

(Interview, ActionAid employee, Moyamba, June 2014)

As important as training workshops are, MAGE-SL's founder and director stressed how important it is to follow up with participants sometime after each training session, in order to trace the impact of their work.

As soon as the women in community see us, they [tell us], 'Oh you have redeemed us, you have done very good job for us, we are in healthy relationship with our... husbands, children and we are being better'. And most of the men told us that if this type of training had been brought into communities just after the war, they would have been better today.

(Interview with Mr Mackieu, MAGE-SL, 2014)

In Mr Mackieu's view, the value of training for creating 'healthy relationships' far outweighed any material benefits provided by other organisations with more funding.

Compared to the bulgur [grain] and other materials given to them by other NGOs, they told us all that [has] gone, but the training is always with them... And they will always remain practising that for them to be having good relationship with their partners and their relationships in their communities.

The value of 'thought' over 'bulgar' or other material goods was emphasised across the interviews and in the workshops, as people spoke about the work needed to 'demilitarise' people's minds. However, this process is a complex one. It requires close relationships with community leaders and careful adjustments of idioms to reflect local practices.

One of the main training modalities that MAGE-SL uses involves Men's Dialogue Groups. Mr Mackieu explained that,

We call it the 'Dialogue Group' because [it is] not like a training per se... It's like exchanging ideas, where they contribute [and explain] why they behave the way they behave, and [discuss] what we think is the better way of doing things. [This] suits their cultural background... We will work with them for 16 weeks and after that, they in turn go back to the communities and talk to their community.

The Men's Dialogue Group modality was formed in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee in 2011. The groups were formed on the condition that men joined voluntarily, under no duress, and committed to non-violence for the course of their work in the group, usually for two weeks. The group runs for two to three hours each week, to enable the men in the group to continue to work during the day. The emphasis in these groups is very much on dialogue, rather than on a one-way form of communication in which the trainers talk and the men listen.

When we start mobilisation, especially the 16-module training... when I first arrive it will be challenging!... But after a week or two, they will begin to be more interested in how they can change their lives – from the bad things that they have been doing, to the better side. They will become interested. In fact, they will become eager!
(Interview with Alex, 2014)

[When] it becomes community-led, community-owned and community-directed, then automatically people will listen because even if you are not there the people who have benefited from the... men's dialogue... they in turn talk to their colleagues wherever they go. They go to tapping palm wine, they discuss. They go to farm work, they discuss. They go to harvesting, they go for plantation work, they discuss.
(Interview with Mr Mackieu, 2014)

As significant as it is, working with allies is not straightforward. Mr Mackieu explains that, 'there are people who accept from the first, but there are others who are on the fence. There are others with a resistance.' For Mr Mackieu, working collectively with allies requires knowing the context in which you work:

It you live in a society, you are born and bred there, you understand the society, then definitely you will not find much of a resistance, because we all belong to the same cross-cultural background. We all have different ways of thinking... by region, by ethnic group. Then, there is socio-cultural background. These are some of the things you take into consideration. And once you go there... you use the onion method... talking to people who matter, who first have to be convinced. Because once the authorities, those allies, are convinced, then it will be very easy for them to talk to the beneficiaries, the community people.

As he goes on to explain, these allies are important because 'we speak to one, they speak to ten, and each ten speak more.'

4.2.3 'Seeds of continuity': approaches to long-term donor engagement

As already discussed, the members of MAGE-SL emphasised the importance of 'mental disarmament', and the training modules they developed focused on supporting men to reintegrate into their communities and to reconfigure harmful expectations linked to 'acting like a man'. This approach entailed slow, careful work with individuals and with communities to reconfigure gender norms and to shift harmful practices that lead to SGBV.

Mr Mackieu explained that approaches to post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone carry the risk that change is expected to happen too quickly, without really fostering cooperation and 'mental disarmament' among men and women.

Remember, it's not only about peace, it's also about development, because until people are united, they think alike, they have one focus, look at one direction, it will be difficult for them to develop. Once people start to see themselves as brothers and sisters in society, then definitely, cooperation is, is being triggered up. And you will be able to do mighty things through smaller ways.

Further, given that much of the work of MAGE-SL and its partner organisations entails transformation towards gender equality, Mr Mackieu also criticised development agencies and their expectation that gender equality can be 'resolved today'.

Many donor agencies, many international NGOs fail to understand that the issue about gender, development and women's empowerment is an issue as old as creation. You don't come today and expect to resolve and have everything effective in

the same day. Development is a process: it's not an event. It has to take stages. For most of the developed countries we see today, they started 30, 40, 50 years ago. They lay the foundation, they inform the growing generation. The [young people] become part of [the process of change]. [Then] they transfer it to the other generation yet to come, then the society keeps changing... So the best thing we can do is talk to the incoming generation, plant the seed of gender equality, and women's empowerment, equal right and opportunities.

5 Discussion

Over the past decade, anthropologists have suggested that the extreme marginalisation experienced by poor rural men was an important factor underlying Sierra Leone's collapse into civil war (Peters 2011; Richards 1996, 2005). The fighting factions were dominated by the poorest of young farmers – frustrated youths who, according to this argument, felt they had nothing to lose by participating in brutal violence. This 'crisis of youth' (Peters 2011) stands as a stark reminder of the ways in which violence may emerge from the frustration of young men who feel socially, politically and economically excluded and powerless – ignored by the state and bypassed by the promises of 'modernity' (Richards 1996).

This discourse is also strongly reminiscent of the 'crisis of masculinity' literature (Perry 2005) in which the gendered identity of men – writ large – encounters a catalyst that prompts reflection and reconfiguration of masculinity (Perry 2005; McDowell 2000). However, since this term was introduced in the 1990s, studies have shown the limits to conceiving of a single 'masculinity' that can be mapped onto cisgendered men (Edström *et al.* 2014; Connell 1994), or even a single 'hegemonic masculinity' that applies to men in power (Morrell *et al.* 2013; Hearn and Morrell 2012).

More recently, scholars have criticised international policy responses to violence and conflict that reproduce a gendered 'victim/perpetrator' binary without exploring men's experiences of violence (Dolan 2014). Like this report, studies in Sierra Leone point to a variety of ways – beyond the narratives of the crisis of 'masculinity' or of 'youth' – in which men and women are tied into a network of structural inequalities that call on local, national and international actors to be accountable for their role in entrenching inequality. The studies indicate that the war itself was not simply a conflict between factions within the boundaries of the state but one that drew in a global network of actors that fuelled the violence – sometimes extracting resources by using conflict, or engaging in misinformed attempts to mitigate it (Bellows and Miguel 2006; Ross 2004; Richards 1996). These studies expose the intersecting fault lines of structural inequality that run along the seams of social, economic and political exclusion.

Not only has Sierra Leone implemented a raft of gender policies to address SGBV, but national and international policies have increasingly recognised these inequalities and the importance of tackling exclusion by distributing economic, social and political resources. For instance, the joint European Commission/DFID Country Strategy for Sierra Leone (2007–12) worked to increase the voice and participation of youth in governance structures, and developed a set of initiatives to reduce unemployment (measured at 60 per cent in 2007) (Hilker and Fraser 2009).

The legacy of civil war for SGBV in Sierra Leone is multifaceted: as reported in post-conflict settings elsewhere, studies suggest that levels of SGBV are notably higher in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the war than they were before it, as large numbers of fighters were reintegrated back into 'peacetime' society (Nowrojee 2005; Pruitt 2012). However, our discussions with activists suggest that the post-war context also provided a uniquely fertile space in which to begin to deconstruct models of masculinity that perpetuated violence and were destructive for men as well as women.

Our research suggests that national policy and the proliferation of workshops and training courses by civil society actors over the past 15 years have contributed to a shift in the public discourse around gender equality and SGBV in Sierra Leone. However, as Mr Mackieu notes, the work to foster meaningful gender transformation needs long-term investment and

support by international actors who recognise the structures underpinning inequality in post-conflict contexts.

At a national level, the government's laws and policy reforms to address SGBV have provided some opportunities for progress towards gender equality. Between 2004 and 2012, it produced a Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, enacted three gender Acts, a Sexual Offences Act, and set up Family Support Units (FSUs) and other mechanisms to implement these laws. A network of national and local SGBV-related initiatives also surfaced in the wake of the war. While there are national and international actors working to address the factors that exacerbate the incidence of SGBV in Sierra Leone, the research highlighted the initiatives of local actors and the challenges they face in their work to promote gender equality.

At a local level, the study outlines how the war itself was an important catalyst of transformation, with the emergence of organisations working to promote gender justice, like MAGE-SL, and the increased and sustained activism of women's organisations advocating for peace, democracy and good governance. During and after the war, women's organisations responded to the disruption of social services and community-based structures by developing networks and alternative coping strategies to deal with problems such as food scarcity, sexual violence, and shortfalls in health and education provision. However, these organisations continue to draw on very limited resources to sustain implementation of projects in the long term, making donor support critical to their ongoing activities. Further, as much of this work is carried out at the community level, it is often 'invisible' to national policymakers and international donors.

This study has identified some of these important community-based initiatives and organisations, particularly those that are primary sources of support for SGBV survivors living in rural areas. The recommendations outlined below seek to highlight some of these less visible initiatives by men and women to address the legacy of conflict, in their interpersonal relationships and in their communities.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

In the long term, political and economic developments at a national level will hopefully lead to greater inclusion, and improved life possibilities for individuals living in poor, remote communities. In the more immediate term, the success of MAGE's Men's Dialogue Groups reveal what a transformative experience joining such a group can be. They enable members of communities too long 'considered of no account' (Richards 1996: 149) to be engaged with respectfully and over an extended period, in discussions about their gendered identity and experiences. They can discuss their aspirations for a life defined by healthy relationships, and have the opportunity to be respected as a positive role model by other men. MAGE's 16-week programme of 'dialogues' recognises that working to shift gender norms is a long-term process. It requires patience, sensitivity, and highly skilled local facilitators.

This is especially true in a post-conflict context such as Sierra Leone, where many people have been traumatised as a result of the violence they suffered, bore witness to, or participated in, during the war. Given the extent to which the country's decade-long war and people's experiences of SGBV remain present in everyday life, it follows that work to foster social transformation will also need to be conducted through careful long-term engagement. This requires collective action, not only among 'local' actors like MAGE-SL and its partners working in a sustained and contextually specific way with communities across Sierra Leone; but it requires long-term transnational collective action that is sustained and sensitive, linking international development actors with local organisations to collectively 'sow the seeds of change'.

Drawing on the views of the people and organisations we worked with in Freetown and Moyamba, as well as an analysis of the findings of the research, we present a set of recommendations for the way forward in addressing SGBV and transforming gender relations in Sierra Leone. These recommendations have been developed for international actors (including donors and multilateral and bilateral agencies) and national actors (including government and non-governmental agencies and civil society organisations).

1. **Support local networks of civil society organisations (CSOs) to disseminate knowledge on key legislation relating to SGBV**

Our research suggests that very few people in Sierra Leone are aware of the laws around SGBV. This problem is especially acute in hard-to-reach rural communities, where levels of literacy are low, and people are less likely to speak English or Krio. Essential activities include:

- i. translating the laws into simple, reader-friendly English versions and/or local dialects;
- ii. producing posters and audio recordings in order to reach illiterate populations;
- iii. using community radio stations to broadcast discussions of SGBV in local dialects, involving community leaders like pastors, imams and *mamiqueens* (female chiefs);
- iv. support to enable organisations to travel to villages in remote parts of the country, to speak with local leaders and call community meetings to discuss the laws and their implications;
- v. continued support for the facilitation of workshop sessions on SGBV and gender equality to sensitise more communities to these issues.

2. Support the Family Support Unit (FSU/SLP) to enforce SGBV laws

While the Sierra Leonean government should be lauded for its progress in passing legislation to protect women's rights, the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police (FSU/SLP) needs much more support to be able to enforce these laws. Crucial support includes:

- i. resources to employ more trained police officers, including training to sensitise them and promote a deeper understanding of SGBV;
- ii. resources to provide counselling and safe accommodation for victims and witnesses in SGBV cases;
- iii. motorbikes to enable officers to travel to remote communities to investigate reported crimes;
- iv. increased support for communities to access FSU/SLP services in remote areas.

3. Disseminate Men's Dialogue Groups as an example of best practice

There is growing awareness of the need to involve men and boys in CSO activities to address SGBV and, as revealed in this study, one way of achieving major strides in this area is through dialogues with men. Fundamental support to ensure this includes:

- i. resources to provide ongoing training of facilitators
- ii. maintaining and sustaining men's motivation and active engagement by finding and fostering local male activists who not only understand the issues, but are also passionate about spreading the value of gender equality among other men and boys.

4. Foster a more holistic understanding of SGBV

Our research revealed that while certain forms of sexual violence, such as rape, were addressed by the legislation, other forms of SGBV (such as abuse on public transport, in market places, or at other centres of public service delivery) remained invisible. There is also a need to acknowledge the impact of SGBV on different members of the community by:

- i. sensitising communities to understand the many different forms that SGBV takes, including rape, forced marriage, marital rape (which remains a very controversial issue), and sexual harassment;
- ii. taking an intersectional approach to ensure that SGBV is addressed comprehensively, and that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind (e.g. people with disabilities, people with HIV, or those who have survived Ebola).

5. Work collectively to transform the structures and institutions that enable inequality to persist

Our study found that social transformation for gender equality truly takes place when different groups work together. However, the study also indicated that working with allies to address SGBV is not straightforward. Activities to sustain collective action include:

- i. engaging community leaders to establish a strong foundation for men's involvement;
- ii. engaging with religious leaders who have a large outreach and strategic platform via churches and mosques;
- iii. encouraging different stakeholders to come together in the process;
- iv. activists allowing community leaders to take ownership and lead the process. When initiatives are community-owned, community-led and community-driven, they are more durable and sustainable;

- v. further in-depth research is required to understand why and how Sierra Leone's south-east region was able to involve women in community leadership as paramount chiefs, town chiefs, etc., at a time when there was no evidence of inputs such as training or sensitisation on gender equality.

Annex 1 Key informant interview schedule

MAGE-SL and IDS case study on the role of men and boys, and collective action, in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Tell us about yourself, the work that you do and why you do it?

Questions and prompts for the five key thematic areas:

1. Socioeconomic basis of inequality within households

This thematic area will look at the underlying causes of SGBV in Sierra Leone and focus on the structural causes of SGBV in the country, such as men are expected to be the breadwinners, which legitimises demands for sex or forces women to tolerate violence because they cannot survive without their husbands for support.

1.1 Can you explain how men and women experience violence?

- a) What shapes and forms does this violence come in?
- b) How do different attitudes and behaviours affect violence?
- c) Are there specific groups that are more affected by violence than others?
- d) What is specific to the rural/urban context?

1.2 What drives the violence that men and women experience in Sierra Leone?

2. The civil war: catalyst for critical awareness

This thematic area will look at the role the civil war played in raising awareness of SGBV in Sierra Leone. While violations were happening before the war, they were not as amplified as during the war. However, during the war, every family was exposed to the reality of violence. The war became a big catalyst in getting people to see the problems of violation and how it affected people.

2.1 Can you tell us about any important moments that contribute to your engagement with the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone?

- a) How do these moments relate to you personally?

3. Law and policy reform

This thematic area explores the ongoing processes of law and policy reform in Sierra Leone and the roles they can play in addressing SGBV and the impunity that comes with it. This theme will also look at what is being done to popularise existing laws to handle the issues properly.

3.1. What are the most significant interventions or processes addressing sexual and gender-based violence?

- a) Who is benefiting?
- b) Who is being reached? Who is not?
- c) How are attitudes and behaviours being engaged to address sexual and gender-based violence?
- d) How are the rights of those who experience SGBV being fulfilled? Are people aware of their rights, and are they claiming them?

- 3.2. What change have you seen as a result of these interventions?
- 3.3. Who do you think is responsible for addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone and why do you think this?
 - a) What is the role of government? What can the government do differently?
- 3.4. What are the key policies (or policy areas) that you feel have influenced or hindered this response?

Men and boys

- 3.5. What is the role of men and boys in addressing SGBV?
- 3.6. What factors have influenced men's involvement in addressing SGBV issues?
- 3.7. What kinds of strategies have been developed or employed to engage men in addressing SGBV?
 - a) What has worked well? Why?
 - b) What has worked less well? Why?
 - c) Who were the people, groups or organisations involved in this process?
 - d) What has changed?
- 3.8. Where have men engaged collectively (in alliances/movements) to address SGBV? What has/has not worked in this strategy? Why?
 - a) How can this be strengthened?
- 3.9. What's being done in your organisation/community (as applicable) to address gender-based violence?
- 3.10. Who are the key partners that have worked with you and your organisation to address these kinds of violence?

4. Inadequate support

Law and policy reform is not enough. What support and resources are available to support survivors/victims, as well as existing organisations working on SGBV?

5. Knowledge sharing

The war ignited concerns about women's issues (including SGBV), and exposure to information, consolidated the efforts, but how is this information being shared and does it trickle down from the national to the local and community level? This thematic area explores the role of education, training and programmes (e.g. Men's Dialogue Groups) and packaging the information in getting people to understand what the issues are.

6. Current and future priorities for working with men and boys to address SGBV

- 6.1. What is your vision for change in addressing sexual and gender-based violence?
- 6.2. What will contribute to this being realised?
- 6.3. What is the role of collective action in this vision?
- 6.4. What would you advise the government to do differently to realise this vision?

Annex 2 Lessons from male engagement in addressing SGBV in Sierra Leone

Consent form to participate in the study

This learning and documentation study aims to explore – through an in-depth case study – where men play or have played significant roles in relation to SGBV in Sierra Leone. In turn, this is intended to help improve information access and to inform strategies of relevant actors (incl. activists and policymakers) addressing this issue, with meaningful male involvement, and to facilitate the forging and strengthening of strategic alliances for gender justice and ending SGBV. Having met in a workshop in June 2014 to establish an overview of different movements, issues and actors in Sierra Leone, we are now aiming to deepen our understanding of where and how men make a significant impact on responses to SGBV, in order to suggest avenues for strengthening the contributions of men in the response. In addition to Sierra Leone, similar projects are or will be conducted in five other countries, incl. Egypt, Uganda, India, and others.

In all countries the work is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The project is conducted by Institute of Development Studies (IDS) UK and Men's Association for Gender Equality (MAGE) in Sierra Leone.

We are not employed by DFID or any other government or funding organisation.

We are asking: *“Would you agree to participate in this research by answering some questions in an individual interview or in a group discussion?”*

- You are under *no obligation to agree* or to give up your time.
- You are also *free to stop* answering the questions and (/ask us) to leave at any point.
- If you are agreeable, you can *decide whether you want what you say to be kept anonymous* (the latter case in which we would not link your name to your comments in the study report).
- If you do not mind letting us link your name to your statements, you can choose for us to use just your first name or your full name.
- All documentation *notes are kept confidential*. (i.e. we keep the notes and papers documenting the learning safely and nobody else has access to them).
- If you are HIV positive or a victim of violence and you choose to tell us of your status, this information will be kept strictly confidential, unless you expressly indicate otherwise.

Please ask us/me for more explanation now if there are any points that you are unsure about.

I agree to participate in the study:

Signature/thumbprint:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

Tick as appropriate:

- I do not mind if my first name and surname are linked to my comments
- I do not mind if my first name is linked to my comments
- I wish what I say to remain anonymous
- Other – please tell us how you would like to be quoted/referred to _____
- _____
- _____

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