

NIAS-IPRI Brief

The 1999 Lome Peace Agreement

Issues and failed aspirations

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International actors, domestic intentions and power-sharing terms made the Lome peace accords possible but, failed to end the conflict. The brief assesses the nature of the Lome Agreement, the reasons for its failure and its aftermath. It positions the agreement in the reintegration and larger peace process in Sierra Leone.

Introduction

Apart from internal reasons such as poverty, underdevelopment, the illegal trade of diamonds, repression, and corrupt governments, a major factor behind the civil war in Sierra Leone was the conflict in the neighbouring country Liberia. A successful story of the famed rebel Charles Taylor and personal connections to his circles inspired the Foday Sankoh, the leader of the rebellious group named the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), to fight for 'a new and democratic Sierra Leone'. The civil war began in March 1991 when the RUF challenged the rule of President Momoh and claimed to establish democracy. With the support of the military campaign in Liberia, the RUF soon started attacking government officials and even the civilians. In the 11 years of war, Sierra Leone saw multiple political transitions. The All People's Congress which was the ruling party was ousted in 1992 by a group of officers from the Sierra Leone Army. The military junta called itself the National Provisional Ruling Council and pledged to return the power to an elected civilian government once the situation settled down. But, they did not succeed in ending the war. Elections were held in 1996 and the Sierra Leone People's Party won the elections paving the way for Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to be the president of the country. In 1996, the Abidjan Peace Agreement was signed between the government and the RUF, which was the first accord resulting from a series of negotiations. But, it collapsed in 1997 when Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a council of handful of military personnel, overtook the seat of power from President

Kabbah in coalition with the RUF. Despite signing the agreement, the RUF Chief Sankoh did not comply with disarmament and prevented the UN peacekeeping mission from entering the country as he still had control over a large part of the territory. The support to carry such plans came from AFRC. However in spite of the formation of the coalition government by the AFRC-RUF, resistance from domestic and international environment continued due to violent inhumane practices of the groups. This pressured the coalition into signing a second agreement in 1997, the Conarky Peace Plan with the Economic Community of West African States which provisioned for the restoration of the Kabbah government. The armed forces of ECOWAS or the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) expelled the coalition government in 1998 and reinstated President Kabbah as the head of the state. However, the war continued. Another attempt at negotiations and peace was made in July 1999 when the RUF signed the Lome Peace Accord with the government. Sankoh was offered the position of Vice-President and was also made the chairman of the Strategic Resources Commission. This marked a direct admission by the government of an appeasement policy towards the rebels to end the war. But, the RUF violated the agreement yet again. An attack on Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, served as the trigger for the collapse of the agreement. Although many believe that the RUF was behind the attacks, the RUF never formally claimed responsibility of the same. They did kidnap 500 UN peacekeepers and shot protestors in the capital. As an outcome, Sankoh and other members of the Front were arrested and their government titles were revoked. The UK and ECOMOG intervened with their professional troops and crushed the RUF. In the end, RUF could only exist as RUF or the political party of RUF. In January 2002, President Kabbah declared “di war don don” or the end of war.

Beyond the ceasefire: understanding the challenges within

From the attempts at peace in the case of Sierra Leone, it can be argued that the presence of a moderator or facilitator becomes absolutely necessary for the vision of durable and long lasting peace. It can also be observed that the presence of a committed facilitator for a short duration may result in progress better than an uncommitted facilitator. The lack of a capable and willing mediator may halt negotiations. Monitored parties that are blocked from violating the norms of the agreements increase the likelihood of a successful accord.¹ The mediation

¹ Anna Möller-Loswick, "Comparing Third-Party Management of Peace Spoilers In Liberia And Sierra Leone", *E-International Relations*, 2013

committee for the ceasefire and peace accords as signed in Togo consisted of international stakeholders in the conflict. It comprised representations from the United Nations, Organization of African Unity, ECOWAS, and was headed by the Togolese Foreign Minister. It was an uncommitted committee which did not impose appropriate checks and monitors on the actions of the involved parties. On the other hand, the British interference that justified its stake in the Commonwealth was a committed force and saw an end to the conflict through overboard but necessary (as deemed by the UK) means. The international facilitators of the Lome Accord lacked motives, intentions, and capabilities to manage and resolve the conflict. They couldn't address the problematic aftermath of the accord.

It can also be drawn that the quality of negotiations are an important key for peace agreements or ceasefires to last. Temporary provisions with barriers to implementation lead to short-lived agreements. Agreements that address the root cause of conflict are longer lasting than the ones which focus on short-term destabilising factors. But, as argued by Hampson in his book *"Nurturing Peace"*, a well-negotiated agreement may not guarantee peace since the underlying issues are open to a multitude of interpretations.² The negotiations for the Lome Peace Accord were planned and meetings were scheduled beforehand. But, the discussions or provisions of a ceasefire were absent from the table till as late as March 1999. President Kabbah and Sankoh agreed for the ceasefire unexpectedly. This does not provide a very strong foothold to the ceasefire from the beginning and can be one of the major reasons why the violence continued, prolonging the conflict despite the signatures on the accord.

Stedman differentiates between the peace process for an inter-state conflict and intra-state civil wars. In his analysis, the third-party involvement and nature of negotiations differ very much in the implementation period between inter-state and intra-state conflicts. This is so because the rivals in an intra-state civil war are threatened to remove their defences and are unable to maintain independent military forces. Since these forces consume their idea of security, the rivals often consider themselves vulnerable if the military is removed and talks continue. In such scenarios, the continuation of violence as a means of prolonging conflict seems more desirable. This leads to spoiling. 'Spoilers' are defined as "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power and use violence to

²Fen Osler Hampson, *"Nurturing Peace"*, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996

undermine attempts to achieve it.”³ The actions undertaken by total spoilers can arise from a plethora of reasons and be attempted through a wide variety of means but lead to jeopardising of the negotiation talks and any future possibility of a durable peace. In the case of Sierra Leone, the RUF was a total spoiler time and again as it did not agree to demobilise and disarm its force. The strong support to violence as the adopted path was evident from RUF in all the three agreements.⁴ The government, on the other hand, had resorted to the means of appeasement in order to achieve an end to the violence. President Kabbah did not spoil his end of the bargain while Sankoh had showcased a lack of will and commitment to the accords, spoiling the peace process.

Another important factor behind the failure of the ceasefire and, by extension, the accord was the disparities in power-sharing provisions of the document. It has been argued extensively, and notably by Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, that power-sharing provisions under such agreements should cover extensive bases of economic, political, military, and territorial dimensions. If not, the likelihood of returning to war increases manifold. It is also noted that any power-sharing document cannot hold back conflict if one of the involved parties is opposed to sharing power.⁵ This is a major fallout of the Lome Peace Accord since the basic tenant of the agreement rested on Sankoh being the Vice-President of Sierra Leone, along with other titles. And although the RUF posed itself as an ideologically driven political group, it was essentially a rebellious and violent group with the intentions of gaining power and control over the country. Hence, the official titles provided through the agreement did not do much to lure Sankoh and the RUF into peace. Also, the AFRC was entirely missed from the power-sharing provisions of the Accord. AFRC was only provided amnesty under the agreement which reduced its status to other small parties mentioned rather than giving it the share of a signatory and previous government of the country. Hence, the obstructions posed by AFRC in the ceasefire and the reluctance to disarm was a reaction to the uneven document. Although, in a later version of the peace process, the rebel leader of AFRC, Koroma, was provided the post of Chairman of the Committee for the Consolidation of Peace, which was upheld by great seriousness by him.

Additionally, the ceasefire was a strewed document from the very beginning which was not to

³ Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems In Peace Processes", *International Security* 22 (2), 1997

⁴ Katrine Steingrimsen, "Obstacles To Peace Agreements", *E-International Relations*, 2012

⁵ Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, "Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing And Post-Civil War Conflict Management", *American Journal Of Political Science* 47 (2), 2003

be gulped by the civilians. The complete disregard for civilian life and utter cruelty that the RUF and allied forces displayed during the 11 years was immeasurable. The provision of amnesty to all RUF top-tier officials and soldiers was the only available option to bring the rebels to a discussion table.⁶ But, it did not bore well with the civilians who viewed RUF as a demon organization with killer intentions. Hence, the amnesty provided was a fragile component with no civil support. It was bound to come to an end with civil unrest.

Impact of the ceasefire: So far, yet so close to Peace

As a direct outcome of the failure of the ceasefire, a chain of events transpired in Sierra Leone. The massive attack, which was the point where the ceasefire broke, called in international strong powers to intervene and end the rebellious forces at once. This further made way for the UN troops to enter Sierra Leone territory. Earlier, two-thirds of the territory was under the control of the RUF. That only left a portion of the country under the presence of UN monitoring. But, after the crushing of RUF, the peace process was started as a larger initiative in the country. Hence, the ceasefire functioned as the first step towards the peace process in Sierra Leone. Its failure was a cruel incident which led to one of the most successful peace processes in the world.

In most highly studied measures of disarmament, failure is seen as near future. But, programs like DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) have shown greater degrees of fulfilment of the objectives. With the history of Sierra Leone comprising of brutal colonization, slave trade, diamond trade, civil war, and corruption, it has emerged as a relatively stable political republic. The road to this success was not easy. But the efficient results of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) have created a wave of the 'Sierra Leone Mode' which was replicated in countries like Burundi, Liberia, and Haiti.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) is a process which aims to ensure security and provide a platform for development of the population and stability of the country can take place. Although such programs have been initiated in many countries, not all have succeeded. The Sierra Leone model of DDR has been globally termed as a success

⁶ Helga Malmin Binningsbo and Kendra Dupuy, "Using Power-Sharing To Win A War: The Implementation Of The Lomé Agreement In Sierra Leone", *Africa Spectrum* 44 (3), 2009.

because it disarmed nearly 80,000 combatants, demobilized 70,000 soldiers which included women and child soldiers as well, and 60,000 ex-combatants participated in the reintegration process. The end result of years of procedures was an elected government and increase in the progress made by population.⁷

Several factors led to this success such as the perseverance of UNAMSIL in persuading Sierra Leoneans to pursue a negotiated end to the war; the political will and commitment of the parties to the peace process; support and pressure from the international community outraged by the gruesome atrocities committed during the decade-long war; and, above all, a strong desire by war-weary Sierra Leoneans for peace.⁸

One of the most remarkable aspects of the peace process was the disarmament of RUF and Civil Defence Force (CDF) combatants. It is recorded that there are instances and districts where the process was completed without the firing of a single bullet. In January 2002, barely a year after it started, the programme was declared officially completed.

According to Quincy Wright, there are some prerequisites which need to be fulfilled in order to declare a disarmament process as success. These include termination of war, technological obsolescence of weapons, diversion of political rivalries, and a sense of security. In other works, moral disarmament has been noticed as an important criterion for the process to succeed. The 'Moral Disarmament' include Education of the population, rule of law, formulation of peaceful policies, utilization of power in demilitarize and denuclearize, and organization of ceasefire realities.⁹

Viewed through these lenses, Sierra Leone has followed through almost all of these criteria to establish itself as a successful example of disarmament. The example of Sierra Leone also agrees with the guidelines set but the UNGA's First Special Session on Disarmament (SSODI) in 1978 which mandates Peace Zones, Nuclear Free Zones, Freeze on development and production of arms, development of governmental and non-governmental educational

⁷ Victor Odame Asiedu, "From Combat to Community: a Study of how Community-based Approach to Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) can Contribute More Effectively to Peacebuilding: The Case of Sierra Leone", *PhD diss., University of York*, 2010

⁸ Sunil Thapa, "The peace process and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Nepal: with case studies of Liberia, Sierra Leone and South Africa", 2017

⁹ Quincy Wright, "Conditions for Successful Disarmament" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1963

institutions promoting disarmament and peace studies. Sierra Leone has not merely evaded conflict which is often understood as peace, but reached the closest to peace.

Although, while examining this success, it needs to be clearly defined as what is success. Since the position of ex-female combatants, child soldiers, and sex slaves during the period of conflict are yet to be provided with justice. As recent as 2020, the “bush wives” were yet to receive protection from the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). Therefore, even the larger disarmament programmes seem to be failing greatly, even the smaller programmes of disarmament have inherent gendered and classist flaws which need to be rectified in order to be called a “success”.

Conclusion

The ceasefire under the Lome Peace Accord was not a part of the larger peace process of the country. It aimed at providing a short-term pause on the conflict. It was signed by only two of the parties involved in the conflict, majorly missing on the other domestic actors which held heavy weight in their positions. Although it was witnessed by a group of invested international actors, it did not involve a strong hold by these actors. The committee set up to monitor the ceasefire was an uncommitted grouping. The accord can even be called a continuation of the peace process as started through the Abidjan Accord but, the ceasefire was an unexpected provision which was agreed upon by the two parties only after a few rounds of discussions, as opposed to long and increased planning out sessions. It did not discuss the engagement of military, bureaucracy, and civilians at length. The implementation of the ceasefire was equally flawed. It did not change the status-quo of the involved parties, although it aimed to achieve the very same. The implementation neither brought a stop to the violence nor did it dilute the conflict. But, the ceasefire was the beginning of a larger peace process in Sierra Leone. It served as a means and not an end to peace in the country.










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