Idle youth: how does sport address the youth bulge in Sierra Leone,

and to what extent is it conflict preventative?

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There is a growing consensus that the prevalence of a large youth population is not conducive to peace and that such a ‘youth bulge’ can even increase the risk of civil conflict and political violence.¹ Richard Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy argue that such a youth bulge within the confines of fragile or failing states where economic opportunities are few and horizontal inequalities are numerous raises the potential for violence significantly. Indeed they discovered that about eighty-six percent of all countries that experienced a new outbreak of civil conflict between 1970 and 1999 had age structures with sixty percent or more of the population younger than thirty years of age (figure 1). They also found that of the countries without recent civil conflict, twenty-four percent of all states with more than sixty percent of their population under thirty years of age experienced at least one incident of civil conflict during the following decade. Among countries with less than sixty percent under thirty years of age, just seven percent experienced civil conflict. This led Cincotta and Leahy to conclude that a quarter of all non-conflict countries with young age structures are likely to experience a new civil conflict during the next decade.² This paper will therefore rest on the assumption that the quantifiable variable of population age structure ‘can be used to project risks of civil conflict a decade into the future.’³

![Figure 1: Number of Outbreaks of Civil Conflict by Age Structure, 1970-1999](image)

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³ Richard P. Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy, ibid, p.55.
Within an African context, and especially a sub-Saharan African context, this appears to be a worrying diagnosis to the conflict driven ills of many countries where youth populations can easily represent up to sixty percent of national totals. By 1990 more than half of all Africans were below the age of eighteen (hence classified as children) and growing up with world views that were radically different to their parents'. These children are now youths. With no experience of colonialism, their sole experience has been that of the African state itself, and as such if the youth wanted to engage in political opposition there was no foreign imperialist or exploiter to target—instead their antipathy was directed inwardly towards their own people and governments. Given their large numbers and prime physical state, this has led to violence with disastrous social, economic and political repercussions across the continent.

Yet to isolate this ‘youth bulge’ as something independently tangible and accountable for the violence is to fail to grasp the real breadth of the issue. The plight of youths in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in West Africa must be put within the wider context of ‘the socioeconomic and political breakdown of states in the subregion, the ensuing violent struggle over power and resources, and the spillover effects of conflicts into neighbouring states over the past decade.’ Decades of political exclusion and conflict mismanagement has led to severe poverty, economic failure, unemployment, and the erosion of state and social structures in West Africa. As a result, many states have lost their capacity to stimulate the economy, provide welfare support, create jobs, ‘and most important, to control, discipline or rehabilitate juveniles.’ With little or no access to education or paid employment, youths have long been excluded from their respective states in the region.

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4 What exactly constitutes ‘youth’ will be defined in due course, but loosely it is someone between eighteen and thirty years old. However this numerical classification will be challenged, for not only is its rigidity too exclusive of national variations on factors such as life expectancy, it also ignores the cultural attachments of what it means to be a youth. Furthermore, numerically in Sierra Leone a youth is in fact considered to be anyone between eighteen and thirty-five, not thirty.

5 Roel van der Veen, ‘What went wrong with Africa,’ p.255.


7 ‘Funmi Olonisakin, ibid, p.248.
Sierra Leone the war merely exacerbated this societal disconnect and the problems at its root, and crudely exposed the youth of Sierra Leone to a kind of nefarious violence that traumatized a generation. ‘Funmi Olonisakin makes an excellent point when she notes that the ‘situation of children is all the more pathetic given their lack of skills, resources, and maturity to cope with the negative consequences of conflicts,’ adding succinctly that, ‘war has the potential of stunting the development and growth of children.’ The most effective antidote to this disruption is to prevent conflict in the first place. This paper will attempt to show that sport for development programs in Sierra Leone are doing exactly that. In the wake of the political peace, sport has helped to provide a crucial service to the country’s youth population that has proved beneficial educationally, for their physical health and mental well-being, and for the wider goal of redeveloping civil society.

To understand the key to the apparent youth propensity towards violence it is necessary to place the work of Cincotta and Leahy next to that of Frances Stewart and Paul Collier in particular. Stewart is especially influential here in her conclusion that is not simply the existence of a youth bulge that heightens the potential for violence, but more exactly it is their marginalisation. Horizontal inequality and the lack of a meaningful social contract between the government and significant sections of its citizenry create a climate of disillusion with one’s political elite and resentment towards one’s supposed social peers. It is this social parochialism combined with the sheer number of youths that makes a youth bulge particularly potent. Therefore the challenge is to address this bulge, to engage and include youths in decision making processes, and to empower them in positive ways that serve to dissuade them from violence driven by disaffection. This paper will look to examine how sport is doing this in Sierra Leone. It will also take into account the implications of other

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8 ‘Funmi Olonisakin, ibid, p.248.
social and economic drivers of conflict such as growing up in ‘bad neighbourhoods’ affected by spill over of regional conflicts;\(^\text{10}\) the youth reaction to the legacy of past conflicts;\(^\text{11}\) and their propinquity to natural or primary resources whose scarcity in more fragile economies give them a significantly heightened value.\(^\text{12}\) By considering all of these together, this paper will concern itself with how sport can work towards solving Charles Tilly’s overarching conundrum: ‘how to prevent the emergence of large scale collective violence and sustain human progress.’\(^\text{13}\)

To reach this problematic balance requires mediation and other operational activities, and more crucially structural changes to address the roots of conflict. However ‘there is no single proved methodology for preventing violence and building peace’\(^\text{14}\) and indeed,

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\text{Given the reality of what we do not know, conflict prevention and peacebuilding evaluations in the coming years should be directed toward gathering evidence and learning from it, and on testing and challenging commonly held theories and assumptions about peace and conflict, rather than on establishing fixed universal indicators of peace/conflict. Clarity on indicators (and whether or not they can be generalised in a useful way) may emerge in the process, but the focus and approach at this time should avoid over-specification of anticipated indicators as benchmarks for evaluation. Upcoming conflict prevention and peacebuilding evaluations should focus on gathering experience and analysing it cumulatively and comparatively across contexts, to improve our collective learning.}\(^\text{15}\)
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\(^{10}\) Frances Stewart, \textit{ibid.}

\(^{11}\) Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘\textit{Greed and Grievance in Civil War.}’

\(^{12}\) Paul Collier, Lani Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, Nicholas Sambanis, ‘\textit{Breaking the Conflict Trap.}’

\(^{13}\) Charles Tilly, ‘\textit{The Politics of Collective Violence.}’


\(^{15}\) ‘\textit{Towards DAC Guidance,}’ \textit{ibid}, p.7.
As such this paper will look primarily to add some new ideas to the growing body of research into conflict prevention. However, whilst the need for originality is well understood, it would be negligent to ignore previous studies. With this in mind, the Utstein Palette is a helpful starting point in how it shows so clearly the scope of problems that need attention. Placing Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the centre, the palette consists of four overlapping sectors that require improvement in equal measure if conflict is to be averted. It calls for the provision of Security; the establishment of functioning Political Structures able to deliver effective policies; the establishment of Socio-economic Foundations for long-term peace; and the development of a Culture of Justice, Truth and Reconciliation. Within each of these four arms are more focused sub-categories, each of which demand attention (figure 2.).

Figure 2. The Utstein Palette.¹⁶

¹⁶ Utstein Group, Overview report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, ’Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together.’
The paper will therefore assess how after the protracted civil war, sport worked towards these considerable challenges. From a narrower angle it will also look into how sport for development non government organisations (NGO’s) have been integral to providing the expertise and creating the environments for men and women from varied backgrounds to interact and mend the social fabric of the nation. The importance of this repair work is evident in that it served a dual purpose. On the one hand sport for development programs in Sierra Leone have worked and continue to work towards post-conflict reconstruction by kick-starting civil society and plugging gaps in education and exercise. On the other, and of more interest to this study, they have a particularly important conflict preventative role to play in how they forge and maintain social understanding and community harmony.

Given this broad scope, and in the interest of clarity, I will divide this paper into more approachable chapters. The following chapter will briefly attempt to clarify exactly the terminology, aims, and underlying assumptions of this paper. The subsequent chapters will then each look at an individual aspect of sport’s developmental role in Sierra Leone: chapter three will provide a critique of the changing nature of warfare and discuss its relevance to Sierra Leone. It will then assess the bearing this change has on sport for development programs; chapter four will demonstrate how sport positively occupies the huge youth population in Sierra Leone, and further it will inspect how sport is benefiting the wider community as a whole; chapter five will look at the need for policy coherence in sport for development policy approaches if they are to be used to their maximum potential; chapter six will evoke the limitations of sports’ conflict preventative and developmental role; and the conclusion will tie all the ideas together and make some brief suggestions for better practice in Sierra Leone.
Chapter Two.

Terminology, Aims, and Assumptions:

To best answer this paper first requires some clear definitions: what exactly constitutes a youth is certainly in need of further explanation. In addition there are two assumptions underlying this paper that require clarification. The first assumes that war is to a certain extent imitative of sport, and that this gives it a special applicability to conflict and post-conflict zones. This is expanded upon in chapter four. The second assumption is that the whole youth experience in Sierra Leone can be explained within Albert O. Hirschmann’s ‘Exit, Voice and Loyalty’ paradigm, the intricacies of which I will attempt to explain in this chapter. Put concisely however, this triadic concept asserts that the real challenge facing Sierra Leone and its myriad NGOs and governmental ministries is how to encourage a generation to put faith in voice as the agent of social change rather than exit and the violence associated with it.

Youth is a complicated term that varies in its classification. The official UN definition of youth is someone between the ages of eighteen and thirty, whilst the Sierra Leonean government considers it to be ‘any Sierra Leonean (female and male) within the 18-35 age bracket. This does not exclude any young Sierra Leonean liable to youth related needs, concerns and influences.’\footnote{‘Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005, p.2.} The more flexible Sierra Leonean definition is better than the UN’s, for the latter’s tendency to regard youth as merely a demographic construct is to be guilty of reductionism. For not only does a finite age bracket disregard national fluctuations such as life expectancy– the like of which can render someone of thirty years old very much a senior
member of society in some poorer states– it also fails to consider youth as a cultural as well as a numerical description.

*Yovex 2* is the name of a recent study carried out by the *Conflict, Security and Development Group* at King’s College University, London. It sought to describe how ‘Youth in Africa is a cultural construct that helps to stratify societies and to structure power relationships, and as such, it is in tension with democratic assumptions of equality before the law as well as the open access to labour embedded in liberal economic policies. This can hinder political and economic reform given the rigidities associated with hierarchical entitlements and duties based on youth/non youth status.’

This polarisation in Sierra Leone has seen men and women of up to forty years old consider themselves youths not as a result of their demographic status, but owing to their economic and social standing. In particular, ‘those who are jobless may feel themselves as youths, regardless of age.’

Therefore youth is a pregnant term full of weighty connotations that transcend age boundaries. Typical responses to my question of ‘what do you connect to the term youth’ were that, ‘they are idle and prone to violence and drug abuse,’ and associated with ‘disobedience, violation of social norms, unemployment, ghettos, and crime.’

The significance of these perceptions are that in states characterised by low capacity and resilience such as Sierra Leone, negative conceptions of youth exacerbate their exclusion from the social, political and economic order that affects them. As a result this may rouse social unease and instability if youth suddenly engage in any sort of activities as they are invariably misconstrued as working to undermine the status quo in youth/non-youth power relations.

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19 Interview with Moses J. Johnson, Right To Play Project Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 29th 2008.
20 Interview with Abraham Foday-Kai, politician and son of a chief from Kono district, Freetown, Sierra Leone, June 1st 2008.
21 Interview with Dr. Prince Cummings, Right To Play Country Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, June 2nd 2008.
addressing the youth bulge is two fold. Firstly, occupying the youth in a productive and socially responsible way that gives them a voice and fair representation in the decision making processes that affect their lives is paramount. However, secondly and equally importantly, non-youth sections of society must change the predominantly negative way they perceive youth.

This paper will show that sport is helping in both of these areas. It is a visible medium through which older members of society can see youths participating in a positive and peaceful manner. Yet this must be regarded as a symbiotic relationship where not only can the youth be seen in a positive light, but also they can also use sport as a platform to make themselves seen and heard to sections of society that may not be initially looking or listening. Moses J. Johnson is the Sierra Leonean Project Manager for Right To Play, a sport for development NGO that uses sport and play to bring youths together for educational, social and health purposes, and concurrently trains local coaches who take ownership of the programs themselves. Last year the NGO worked with 48,000 children and youths and trained 6000 coaches. Speaking about the creativity and changing face of youth, Mr. Johnson commented that:

Youth is increasingly associated with ingenuity and development, politics, music and sport. As a social body they are quick to undertake their own activities and form their own groups. One such example is the ‘Marginalised Youth Association’ in Freetown who organise sports matches and music concerts to try to give youths a voice through which they can sensitise the population to their often ignored plight.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\) Interview with Moses J. Johnson, Right To Play Project Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 29\(^{\text{th}}\) 2008.
Furthermore, approximately seventy-eight percent of Right To Play trained youth leaders in Makeni and seventy-nine percent in Freetown noted that sport activities provided a distraction from negative activity amongst the youth.\textsuperscript{24} This NGO opinion is reflected by those of the participants’ parents who almost unequivocally felt involvement with Right To Play programs enabled some children to interact better with their peers, and that troublesome and violent behaviour diminished.\textsuperscript{25} To complete the circle of endorsement, the participants themselves also appeared to grasp the positive outcomes of their involvement: Richmond Thorley, the Secretary and President of the Sierra Leone Teacher’s Union (SLTU) attested that from his own research in Makeni, ‘ninety percent of youths see sport as a worthwhile educational and social activity.’\textsuperscript{26}

This brings me tidily to my second underlying assumption, namely that it is possible to place all of the negative and positive examples of youth activities and development priorities mentioned above within one uniting framework afforded to us by Albert Hirschmann’s broad ‘Exit, Voice, and Loyalty’ trinity. This paradigm understands youth to react to their environments in three distinct ways:

- Through \textit{exiting} the state – either through emigration or an outright rejection of the social contract and appropriation of violence.
- Through the exercise of \textit{voice} in an attempt to alter their terms of recognition and effect the course of social, political and economic development.
- Through \textit{loyalty}: in sustaining their confidence in the current economic and social order and remaining engaged in formal institutional processes despite the imperfections associated with the status quo.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Right To Play Progress Report 2008, ‘\textit{Results},’ p.10.
\textsuperscript{25} Right To Play Progress Report 2008, ‘\textit{Results},’ p.10.
\textsuperscript{26} Interview with Richmond Thorley, Secretary and President of the Sierra Leone Teacher’s Union (SLTU), Makeni, Sierra Leone, June 4\textsuperscript{th} 2008.
\textsuperscript{27} Quoting Yovex 2.
Both voice and exit are mechanisms of recuperation, and therefore the challenge for Sierra Leone is to cultivate the social conditions that afford citizens the chance to force change peacefully through the former rather than the latter. As the National Youth Policy states:

The Government, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, must create the ideal enabling environment to tackle unemployment, drug-abuse, homelessness, and create, a positive working culture in the minds of our young women and men if we are to lay to rest the rather nihilistic notion that puts premium on violence as an agent of social change.  

The preference of voice over exit is obvious on the one hand in that exit is more likely to precede or even accompany violence. Yet on the other, and in addition to this clear advantage of being more peaceful, the strength of voice above exit as an agent of change lies in its chance-like nature. Exit is binary: you are either within or without the state system and as such exit must be regarded as a mechanism for collapse if large enough numbers participate. It is as Hirschmann says, ‘a certain and dysfunctional response to declines in state performance’ for ‘once you have exited you have lost the opportunity to use voice.’ As such exit tends to manifest itself as conflict. Oppositely voice can overcome state fragility and put pressure on the political elite through the threat of exit. In this way it is confrontational rather than binary, chance rather than certainty, and can be seen as ‘political action par excellence’ or ‘an art, constantly evolving.’ This evolution of voice depends upon the presence of both influential and deferential participants who are able to work together to push for change but temper the progression to violence. Within a youth

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30 Albert O. Hirschmann, ibid, p.37.
31 Albert O. Hirschmann, ibid, p.16
context inside Sierra Leone, achieving this balance is a must, especially when one considers
exit is the direct approach that will tend to be favoured over the more uncertain voice
option by a restless mass. For without doubt exit is a powerful agent—by inflicting revenue
or power losses on poor managements, exit beckons a quick managerial response in the way
voice may not.

Therefore preventing youth exit is a necessary yet neglected area of conflict prevention
initiatives. Doing so rests upon a vast array of factors. Barriers in political, economic, legal
and social life must be lifted and be supported with progressive taxation and pro-poor
initiatives that convince the populace that the government is including them enough to
encourage the use of voice to push for change rather than exit. However without either the
organisations in place to safeguard social equality or the public spaces available for voices to
be heard, states are unable to fulfil their minimum governmental requirements and remain
susceptible to violent exit strategies. This all points to an apparent shift in the nature of
warfare that has increasingly placed society itself at the centre of conflict. As a result, society
must be at the centre of conflict prevention efforts too. Therefore the next chapter will
show how sport for development initiatives are focussing primarily to address societal ills by
providing both public spaces and interactive opportunities necessary for voice to work as a
potent agent of change rooted in articulation rather than desertion.
Chapter Three.


Carl von Clausewitz’s most basic analogy of war is rooted in sport. His depiction of two wrestlers struggling for control is the purest representation of combat he presented. Yet the traditionally symmetric nature of warfare symbolised in the wrestlers and parodied on a larger scale by uniformed armies fighting for territory and resources has been supplanted by a more diverse conflict paradigm where inter-state warfare is a rarity and intra-state conflicts the norm. These so called ‘New Wars’ are usually fought by a multitude of actors both internal and foreign who represent both the public and private sectors. At the intersection of these sectors where public and private, political and economic interests collide, new wars occur, driven by external factors and actors, and sensitive to regional developments. In addition, their asymmetry, the distorting presence of valuable resources, and the relative ease of acquiring weapons has seen more recent conflicts being fought by the people and amongst the people so that civilian populations have increasingly borne the brunt of casualties. Not only are these new wars more decimating to entire societies rather than just their military personnel and infrastructure, there complexity means they are also more cyclical and likely to relapse; indeed it has been found that over fifty percent of wars restart within five years and seventy-five percent of all countries with recent conflict will likely experience conflict again in the next decade.

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Mary Kaldor, ‘On New Wars.’
Given these high stakes and new conditions, conflict resolution and subsequent rebuilding and prevention policies must therefore cater for the now prevailing *societal* aspects of those said conflicts. Conflict resolution, immediate relief efforts, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) policies, and development initiatives must all initially place *conflict prevention* as their primary target, and strive to fully engage all sections of the societies in question in a ‘bottom up’ approach. Yet for real results, the target must be to prevent this bottom up approach from being mutually exclusive to the more traditional ‘top-down’ variety. The current perception that NGOs address issues at grass-roots level, and that multi and bilateral donors and other conventional development actors offer official development assistance (ODA) at the national level must be challenged. Instead the aforementioned societal aspect of contemporary African conflicts necessitates a new more inclusive, more socially sensitive and most importantly more coherent approach that links development initiatives from above and below. This makes sense from every angle. The simple fact that both NGOs and the government share the same long term aim of inducing sustainable development is reason enough to coordinate their efforts, but also from an economic perspective the potential benefit of joined up policies preventing program duplication and resource waste should not be ignored. As such, strategies that link the bottom up NGO and top-down ODA methods in a more holistic manner must be given more support in the conflict prevention field. As this paper will demonstrate, using the convening power of sport is one such low cost, high impact method that works both to bind post-conflict societies at the general populace level and also include nascent governments in the post war restructuring process. This latter’s inclusion is obviously of particular importance with regards to building a sense of trust amongst the people in the emerging political systems and its representatives; and certainly in the interest of conflict prevention it is the youths within
society that must be made to trust in the national leadership most of all. Indeed Ismail Rashid underlines this requirement well:

> Central to ensuring the stability of democratic regimes and promoting good governance practices in West Africa is the challenge represented by the region’s youth...the challenge of youth transcends their involvement in violence. It also includes their use as sex objects, forced labourers, couriers and consumers of illegal drugs, and victims of infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS.\(^\text{36}\)

Hence we can see here that the youth related challenges in the region are not just related directly to violence, but in fact the problems are much deeper and incorporate a host of illegal activities that are all precursors to, or drivers of, violence in their own right. What links them all is their prominence in places where states fail to provide for their youth populace. Such paucity of governmental control allows for illegal and insalubrious activities to flourish. This gives weighty credence to Rashid’s deduction that addressing the youth bulge is the central challenge to the overall stability of the region’s governments.

It was Rashid again who asserted that ‘youths are victims of war, poverty and disease but they must also be considered conscious agents and full citizens.’\(^\text{37}\) They have a vital role to play in working towards sustainable growth, political development and stability. Indeed ‘the interests of children and youths must be reflected in the political agenda, economic development, and resource allocation in national and regional budgets.’\(^\text{38}\) This advocates the aforementioned necessity of peace building efforts from above working in concurrence with more hands-on bottom up methodologies. Sierra Leone’s government too is beginning to


\(^{37}\) Ismail Rashid, ibid, p.390.

\(^{38}\) Ismail Rashid, ibid, p.389.
recognise this. Regionally the ball was started rolling in 1999 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Security Mechanism aimed at launching regional dialogue on the problems of child soldiers and war orphans. This was reinforced by the Accra Declaration in 2000 which ensured that ECOWAS had a permanent Child Protection Unit in its secretariat. The trickle down effect of these initiatives saw Sierra Leone create a National Commission for War Affected Children in 2002. This seemed to be a response to the challenge of engaging with a youth that ‘felt alienated, abused, discouraged, and abandoned.' These feelings were to a large extent hangovers from the war itself. The RUF had been established by young people in Freetown, the majority of whom were students. They were ‘disheartened by the lack of prospects and angered by the governments negative role.’ It could even be argued that their predicament was made more dangerous by an engrained propensity towards violence born from the legacy of the brutal Siaka Stevens.

Indeed Cyril Foray, formerly Stevens’ foreign minister, concluded:

The idealisation of violence by Mr. Stevens and his political cohorts produced a belief among a whole generation of young Sierra Leoneans that violence pays, that it is or can be a way of life and that it is the shortest and most effective route to achievement and success. Therefore much of the RUF was imbued with a deep-rooted belief in the legitimacy of aggression and revelled in the fear-preying power it inevitably brought. Lacking education and job opportunities, with no visible path to take, and in the absence of traditional schooling and the associated receipt of awards, praise, success and advice, many young Sierra Leoneans were drawn towards the RUF in pursuit of the respect and recognition

40 Roel van der Veen, *What went wrong with Africa,* p.159.
missing from their lives. Consequently, after the war the government were faced with the serious task of not only providing the youth with this sense of value, but also altering the mentality a generation raised on the virtues of violence. This certainly fell within the bracket of new, societal based challenges that required deeper, more sensitive responses.

However recognising and addressing these new societal problems does not mean pursuing traditional economic growth can be ignored; indeed there is a strong case linking conflict directly to poor or slow economic development. It appears low growth rates and GDP are synonymous with conflict, and conflict is almost invariably a precursor to economic stagnation. Paul Collier’s research is especially enlightening on this subject. He found that:

- If income per person doubles, the risk of conflict is halved.
- If there is a 20-25% primary resource dependence, conflict is five times more likely.
- Conflict economies grow 1-2% slower than peace economies.
- Countries with an annual income of 4000 USD per capita are three times less likely than those with an annual income of 1000 USD.
- When an economy shrinks 6%, conflict becomes twice as likely as when an economy increases 6%.  

Thus it would appear that to a large extent traditional growth orientated prescriptions are antidotes to conflict. These results also link conflict firmly to poverty. This confirms the need to integrate conflict prevention into development strategies, security considerations, and aid polices in order to address the aforementioned social drivers of bad neighbourhoods, horizontal inequalities, natural or primary resource dependency, the legacies of past conflicts, and of course demographic youth bulges.

\[42\] Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War.’
Inverting Collier’s logic and statistical results, it would appear sage to deduce there is also a profound correlation between sound development and conflict prevention. Yet Collier’s research rests on the understanding of the term ‘development’ as in fact economic development measured in terms of GNP. There are three things missing from a purely economic and national measurement of development: A sense of spatial differentiation, for example between the inevitably distinct urban and rural data; differences of scale—by lumping all citizens together the potential for gauging individual, local or regional development is lost; and finally, numerical conclusions ‘fail to see inequalities’ within societies that may in fact be hindering development. Furthermore quantitative analysis tends to ‘exclude feelings, experiences, and opinions of individuals and groups… [and] reinforces outsiders’ ideas about development rather than what local people feel it is or should be.’ Sport for development efforts in Sierra Leone are instead working towards qualitative results. These can be loosely linked to the International Labour Order (ILO) and World Bank approach under Robert McNamara who pushed the concept of ‘basic needs’ having grasped that the intended trickle down of top-down policies ‘were limited in their success at reducing poverty.’ If we are to continue along Collier’s line of argument that poverty is inseparably linked to conflict, we must also conclude that in failing to address the former, trickle down policies also failed in their efforts to prevent the latter. The ‘Basic Needs Approach’ (BNA) outlined four necessary conditions that must be provided:

1. The basics of personal consumption—food, shelter, clothing.
2. Access to essential services—clean water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and transport.
3. Access to paid employment.

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44 Katie Willis, ibid, p.13.
4. Qualitative needs– the provision of healthy and safe environments and ability to partake in the decision making process.\textsuperscript{45}

Sport projects in Sierra Leone very much fit into the fourth category, but also provide aspects of the second such as education. And although the Basic Needs Approach is considered dated now, I argue that by going some way to provide these needs sport for development projects in Sierra Leone augment the chances of participants securing access to paid employment by ‘improving the skills and education of the population [which] has the concomitant potential for contributing to greater economic growth.’\textsuperscript{46}

Thus in essence, sport programs provide the social, physical and educational tools necessary to improve the individual potential of young Sierra Leoneans. Collectively, this can induce what might be coined a Sport for Development ‘multiplier effect.’

\textbf{Figure 3. Keynes’ Multiplier Effect.}

\textsuperscript{45} The Basic Needs Approach, quoted in Katie Willis, \textit{ibid}, p.93.

\textsuperscript{46} Interview with Emmanuel M. Conteh, War Child, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2\textsuperscript{nd} June 2008.
As opposed to Keynes’ cycle that depends upon governmental or private investment to create jobs and kick-start capital flows (Figure.3), this relies upon indirect job creation through the provision of better education and life-skills in a setting where uninhibited social interaction facilitates the sharing of ideas and entrepreneurship (Figure.4).

Figure.4. Sport for Development Multiplier Effect.

Whilst Keynes’s Multiplier Effect may have had its day at the forefront of development thinking by the time of the debt crisis in the seventies, and whilst current emphasis seems to
be on the notion of sustainability, it would be myopic to assume that it is a case of choosing one or the other. Rather these two approaches must be galvanised. As such these two multiplier effects work in synergy at the micro and macro levels. The micro Sport for Development multiplier effect demonstrates how sport programs are directly beneficial to ‘non-material aspects of development, in particular empowerment, participation, and democratisation.’ These skills endow the participants with the qualities needed to enter into the macro Keynesian cycle more easily. Furthermore, better educated, skilled, and healthy youths will not only make this transition more seamlessly, they will also offer a better standard of participation in the national economic cycle once they are there. This in turn will attract more investment and continue to drive the Keynesian cycle at a higher rate.

This cycle also fits within the current trend to see successful conflict prevention as dependent upon pushing for deeper structural reform that addresses the roots of conflict. In Sierra Leone the roots were, as I have shown, a combination of youth marginalisation, economic stagnation, and a belief in the value of violence as the principal agent of social change. However youths engaging in sport for development programs have the opportunity to eradicate these social ills. From a youth perspective it is a case of being part of program that can change their fortunes and offer them a platform. From a governmental point of view, supporting youth sport for development projects works primarily to rebuild a social contract by appearing to place the citizen rather than the state at the centre of its policy initiatives. This human security approach encourages incorporation of youths into programs regardless of ethnicity, ability or gender, and is in keeping with new conflict preventative measures that are directed at reducing structural horizontal inequalities at the local level.

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When local investments of time and money in youth schemes are undertaken correctly, project ownership can be given to local community members— and as Save the Children, War Child and Right To Play have found, local ownership of projects renders them locally accountable and more likely to succeed. As such the community members with whom they work have more say, and their participation can lead to a ‘stronger civil society and contribute to the democratic process’\textsuperscript{48} by familiarising those involved with political values.

To sum up, the two flow diagrams in this chapter concerning micro and macro development must be merged to better understand how to approach the new societal challenges arising from the changing nature of warfare. It would therefore also make sense to merge the thinking of Paul Collier and David Keen. The former’s heavy reliance upon data and economic rationality renders his judgements often quite impersonal. Greed, as he asserts was a huge factor in prolonging the war in Sierra Leone, but so too was the lack of respect and recognition shown to a violent minded and disaffected youth highlighted by Keen. Disillusionment and shame fuelled the conflict as in the absence of channels of communication violence became a means of raising grievances. As the next chapter will show, using sport to open such channels so as to prevent the populace resorting to violence has been a crucial and transferable lesson from Sierra Leone. By highlighting and addressing the root causes of the civil war within society, sport can endow to a generation the skills needed for societal and community progress as the micro-economic level, which at the same time work to induce structural improvements required for long term macro-economic growth.

\textsuperscript{48}Katie Willis, ‘ibid,’ p.99.
Chapter Four.

Sport as a Transferable Medium of Engagement Suitable for Fractious Social Environments:

I will divide this chapter into distinct sections. Firstly, I will endeavour to fully clarify the first assumption underlying this paper, namely how sport can replicate war to a certain degree and therefore both ease the reintroduction of combatants into the weave of the social fabric and simultaneously reinvigorate civil society. Secondly I will demonstrate the benefits of social inclusivity that sport encourages. Thirdly I will highlight how sport can and has served as a tool in its own right to plug the gaps in the Sierra Leone’s fledgling government’s schooling system and provide both health and education services that afford it a special status as promoting truly holistic development.

Colin McInnes has argued that the west has become physically removed from modern warfare. The increasingly localised and intra-state nature of war, especially in Africa, has rendered the richest and most powerful nations detached from their realities and largely unable to settle their outcomes as they had done with relative ease until the 1960s. This has reduced the west to the role of bystander within the complicated triadic nexus of bystander, executioner, and victim. This has various impacting consequences. Negatively, the consequence of this new and largely passive role is that the West finds itself unable to significantly engage with fragile and failing states and as such is able to prevent conflicts relapsing within five years only fifty percent of the time. The wider regional and global impact of these new wars makes the need to engage with failed, failing, or fragile states of absolutely the highest importance, with Mark Duffield correctly remarking that the mantra

49 Colin McInnes, ‘Spectator Sport War– the West and Contemporary Conflict,’ p.75.
50 See footnote 35.
of 'letting them fight it out amongst themselves' is no longer a viable option from 'either an altruistic or realistic perspective.' However doing so in an unobtrusive, economical and yet meaningful way is not easy.

I have already mentioned the disconnect between bottom up and top-down policies and will not repeat them here, but in addition to these there is a troubling gap between aid policy and practice that hinders the transition from short-term emergency relief to genuine long-term development. Better policy directives and implementation guidelines must dictate aid allocation and methods of distribution. Perhaps the first principle should be Mary Anderson's 'Do no Harm': Aid misuse has wide reaching negative social and economic impacts, and the primary concern should be at the very least not make things worse. Yet by-products of aid such as embezzlement or horizontal inequality show that this concern is not considered enough. Therefore from a wider viewpoint, ensuring four dimensionary policy coherence within the internal departments of each aid agency (internal); across the different aid agencies (harmonisation); between donor and recipient governments (alignment); and from those recipient central governments out to their more rural and disparate provinces (whole of government) will not only 'do no harm', but will in fact augment the efficacy of aid in general. It is a question of designing the right policies and establishing the right channels of dialogue to facilitate more impacting results.

Sport fits within these engagement requirements. It is a low cost, high impact and transferable medium of engagement that allows for unobtrusive western involvement and encourages safe interaction of people who may have previously felt enmity towards each

52 Mary Anderson, ‘Do no harm: How aid can support peace—or war.’
53 For deeper analysis of how multi-donor and government agencies in Sierra Leone are trying to harmonise and align their policies, please see chapter 5.
other. Far from doing no harm, it actually provides a solid social framework that parodies war closely enough to resonate with communities recently affected by it. Indeed the similarities between war and sport seem to go deeper than the obvious correlations of opposing sides, victors, supporters, uniforms, and rules. Moreover it is the sense of brotherhood between the competitors, and the feeling of belonging and shared fate that gives sport real relevance in post and pre-conflict settings. In Sierra Leone, in addition to this fraternal bond there was a pervasive feeling of patrimonialism between child soldiers and their Revolutionary United Front (RUF) commanders during the civil war that ‘was founded upon something way outside the fighting group, [something] within Sierra Leonean society,’ and Ononisakin notes how ‘Foday Sankoh, the head of the RUF, was fondly called “Papay” by his juvenile followers.’ However, as Peace Commissioner Dennis Bright dejectedly summed up in 2001, these bonds were afforded the space to form because ‘the only parents [these children] have now are their bush commanders.’ Yet this notion of patrimonialism in the field is one that mirrors the idea of a sports coach on the pitch and hence provides a hierarchical structure that is easily understandable for former combatants. Therefore just as RUF commanders supplanted the biological fathers of many Sierra Leonean children during the war, so too can inspirational teachers and coaches during peace. Better still, these familial replications can be positively channelled towards improving tolerance and harmony within society for the greater good of the country as a whole.

Martin van Creveld is certain in his deduction that ‘in so far as war, before it is anything else, consists of fighting— in other words, a voluntary coping of danger— it is the continuation not

of politics, but of sport.  

57 If we were to reverse this logic that war is the violent continuation of sport, then it would appear fair to assume that, by replicating war, sport can be the medium to encourage its peaceful discontinuation or prevention. It is so effective for four reasons.

Firstly, because sport, like war, is governed by norms that reflect society’s expectations about how it should be conducted, ‘the behaviour of combatants or sports competitors cannot be divorced from the society they represent.’  

58 As a result sport provides a viable medium through which to alter societal perceptions that can in turn permeate and improve behavioural patterns. Hence in sport projects in Sierra Leone, enormous emphasis has been placed on encouraging tolerance and fair-play amongst the youth that transcend the sports pitch and in fact pervade society itself.

Secondly, sport is closely attached to the notions of loyalty, community, and national identity. Spectators become involved by identifying with participants and vicariously experiencing their emotions. But individual spectators also identify with larger bodies of spectators which ‘provides a communal experience that transcends other social barriers.’  

59 Such collective behaviour supports Jean Michel Faure’s conclusion that sport is a ‘ritual representation of confrontation’ which, if played within the rules and expectations set by the society in question (as described in point one), can diffuse social tensions and foster unity en masse.

The third point concerns itself with the difficulty of engaging in development practices highlighted by McInnes. The changing nature of war and what is actually expected from the

57 Martin van Creveld, ‘The Transformation of War: the most radical reinterpretation of armed conflict since Clausewitz,’ p.191.
58 Colin McInnes, ‘Spectator Sport War– the West and Contemporary Conflict,’ p.149.
West means its methods of engagement have to adapt accordingly. These expectations hinge on what is really understood by the word ‘development.’ It is a contested and flexible term that has embodied a number of conflicting practices since its real entry into the global lexicon after the Second World War. The raw pursuit of ‘economic development’ seen in the thirty or so years after 1945 can largely be said to have been synonymous with the belief in the remedial qualities of pursuing ‘modernity.’ The relative failure of this approach has resulted in the current prevalence of a more encompassing definition of development that is considered ‘more than just economic progress measured on a national scale.’

The term ‘development’ now incorporates social and environmental betterment, and improvements with regards to the protection of human rights, the provision of education, and the rule of law. Consequently, as the scope of what exactly is meant by development increases, and with it too the respective expectations of Western assistance, so too does the need for new approaches both in the field and in policy making. I argue that owing to the suitability of sport defined in points one and two, sport for development programs can bridge this engagement gap and provide the medium for impacting initiatives that work towards improving all of these different facets of development in Sierra Leone. More importantly, the popularity of sport programs in Sierra Leone mean they easily occupy and placate the bulging and potentially dangerous youth. Right To Play’s Program Manager, Moses J. Johnson, spelled out one such positive intention and result of sport programs amongst the youth: ‘Sport leagues encourage community spirit through local competitions between local youths that are supported by their respective friends. Prizes are awarded by local elders, and this interaction of course serves to build respect between the old and young sections of society.’

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62 Interview with Moses J. Johnson, Right To Play Project Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 29th 2008.
Yet away from this more competitive side of sport is the fourth reason why sport can wean post-war societies off of violence or dissuade potentially opposing forces from fighting: sheer *inclusion* promotes social harmony. McInnes may have deduced that ‘participation in sport is often associated with professionalism, physical and mental prowess, and an idealised manly virtue,’ and Lincoln Allison may have added that, sport and war are *gendered* activities where the virtues expressed in both are essentially masculine, but Right To Play and other development NGOs in Sierra Leone harness the power of sport in a much more encompassing way and realise that *participation* brings more people directly into either the peace or conflict prevention process. In Sierra Leone sport for development initiatives have created young stakeholders in a society that, as we know, was suffering from youth marginalisation. The importance of this cannot be underestimated, and it is worth remembering Eric Hobsbawm who sagely noted that ‘where you see little stake in a system, you may be tempted to destroy it.’

Given this urgency of creating stakeholders, it is perhaps sensible to look at this fourth point in more detail. Sierra Leone has an enormous youth population, yet the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that sixty-seven percent of children do not receive even a primary school education. There is a complete lack of sport in schools, which is detrimental not only to the holistic development of children but also to the general level of attendance. Increasing school attendance is a crucial area sport can work towards in Sierra Leone and indeed it has worked well elsewhere: in Azerbaijan school principles reported an increase in attendance by fifteen to twenty percent when sport was added to the curriculum; parents in western Tanzania noted Right To Play sport programs had resulted in a reduction in school dropouts; and head teachers in Dar Es Salaam reported attendance in

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63 Colin McInnes, ‘Spectator Sport War,’ p.148.
65 Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* p.10
school is higher on days when Right To Play activities are offered.\(^6^7\) Drawing on their experiences globally, Right To Play have therefore made a concerted effort to work with schools in Sierra Leone to use sport to entice more children into classrooms. The astonishing level of youth fanaticism for sport makes this particularly successful in getting the children through the school gates, if not entirely guaranteeing their commitment to study: ‘The new mind opium,’ writes Minister of Youth and Sports, Dennis Bright, ‘is the regular viewing of European soccer on satellite TV. Nearly every other youth in urban Sierra Leone is an avid fan of one European Football Club, with school going youth devoting very little time for studies.’\(^6^8\) Whilst this may indicate that sport can in fact be detrimental to the amount of time left for study, it also indicates that sport can mobilise the youth to actually attend school better than perhaps anything else. Furthermore the alternatives to school attendance, regardless of whether the attendees are studying or not, are certainly not preferable: many of Sierra Leone’s youth are,  

Illiterate, school dropouts eking a living from petty trading, narcotic drug peddling, prostitution and theft...There is a causal linkage between the desire for a daily fix and the proliferation of petty crime and theft. Narcotic drug abuse and slow economic growth are a lighted fuse on a ticking time bomb...Another problem of concern is the increasing number of disadvantaged and disabled young people [who are] disproportionately affected because they are more susceptible to social, cultural, economic and political upheavals.\(^6^9\)

With regards to the inclusion of ‘disadvantaged and disabled young people’, sport can again fulfil a unique role. Outside of conventional schools, Right To Play is working in places such as Cheshire House and the SOS Children’s Village, both in Freetown, which specifically cater

\(^6^8\) ‘Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005. p.5.  
for children and youths with physical and mental disabilities. Their sport for development programs are specially designed to encourage self-belief and promote tolerance and inclusivity amongst the most marginalised in the community. For these programs not only significantly contribute to improving their physical health (which in itself works towards bettering the mobility, confidence and independence of the participants) but also sport and play act as distinct educational tools in their own right. To deliver this service, Right To Play have developed a four day 'Abilities First' training program for youth leaders on knowledge, skills, and attitudes for reducing social barriers imposed on people living with disabilities. Particular emphasis on all games and activities is placed on addressing stigma and discrimination. In addition these activities are pregnant with educational messages such as increasing HIV/AIDS awareness which serve to help plug the knowledge gaps sadly inherent in Sierra Leone’s youth. These lessons are pivotal to the development of these often neglected youths and equip them with the skills necessary to facilitate a smoother entry into mainstream society. In this way sport can be seen to work to cut across the physical barriers between the mainstream and marginalised sections of youth in Sierra Leone. This contributes not just to the development of Sierra Leone’s youth but also the country as a whole.

With holistic development in mind Right To Play also recently teamed up with Insight, a media for development NGO, to make a short documentary about these two remarkably successful schools. Both sport and media empower these youths in a way that is not usually possible in their difficult environs. Crucially this makes them stakeholders in their own development programs, which is in line with the governmental objective of ‘reducing the number of marginal and increasing the number of mainstream youth.’ The same can be said of the diverse work of Save the Children in Sierra Leone. Emmay Mah, their Freetown

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project manager, told me how ‘sport can provide a protective environment, and through interaction encourage independent expression— and this expression improves their chances in the future of securing better human rights.’\(^7\) As with Right To Play, these sporting initiatives are bolstered by theatrical programs. By dramatising sensitive issues it is easier for children to understand and approach them, and, especially in the case of Save the Children, such dramatics act as an indispensable medium for raising youth awareness of *advocacy* issues. The power of sport and dramatics lies in their ability to engage the most neglected and vulnerable sections of society— this familiarises average, able bodied citizens with those who are less able, which resultantly encourages tolerance, compassion, and furthermore multiplies the self-confidence in traditionally marginalised or peripheral members of Sierra Leone’s citizenry. Hence sport and dramatics are inextricably involved in the new, more rounded attempts at development that aim for much more than merely economic advancement.

These four determinants set sport apart as conflict preventative in its own right. If we accept that violence occurs where youths feel abandoned,\(^7\) then we must also acknowledge that as sport for development programs in Sierra Leone are vehicles for inclusivity, they are conflict preventative; and given that we know from Mary Kaldor that violence frequently occurs where no civil society apparatuses are in place to provide forums for non-violent conflict mediation,\(^7\) sport should be regarded as conflict aversive not only because it affords society these interactive forums, but more crucially because it teaches the volatile youth the invaluable skills needed to use these forums peacefully. Right To Play’s innovative ‘Live Safe Play Safe’ program is evidence enough of this. Specially created games carry educational and

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\(^{71}\) Interview with Emmay Mah, Save the Children Project Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30\(^{th}\) May 2008.

\(^{72}\) Frances Stewart, ‘*Horizontal inequalities: a neglected dimension of development.*’

\(^{73}\) Mary Kaldor, ‘*On New Wars.*’ This concludes that the creation of public space ‘for policy debate is a critical element of conflict prevention’ and that these public spaces serve as arenas of mediation that act as ‘incubators of peaceful change and social innovation.’
life-relevant messages that serve both to sensitize the participating youths and children to
delicate issues such as HIV and AIDS, and also instil in them qualities such as the confidence
to resist peer pressure; the sense to rise above prejudices based on ethnicity or gender; and
the enjoyment of life to envision hope in the future. Ruth M. Davies, the Right To Play
project assistant in Freetown, grasped this fully, saying, ‘sport is fun, but sport for
development aims at much more than that. There are specific messages in sport that are the
really important things.’

Perhaps given its post conflict setting, the most critical message for Sierra Leonean youths
surrounds the importance of acceptance. This has a much more impacting effect than just
promoting fair-play on the sport’s field. In many places sport is both the medium for
interaction and the vehicle for the moral and practical education for Sierra Leone’s youths.
For example Emmanuel M. Conteh from War Child adds that, ‘the wider impact of the
lessons of fair play, humility and magnanimity in defeat are transferable to elsewhere, for
instance accepting political decisions peacefully and with tolerance.’

Indeed already after only six or so years of peace the improvements in society resulting form
sports projects are evident. Moses F. S. Kargbo is currently Senior Sports Officer in Charge of
Football, and the senior representative for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the
Northern Province of Sierra Leone. He is an ex-national team player, and formerly head
coach of both the men’s and women’s national teams. Speaking frankly on the importance
of gender inclusion, he iterated the dangers of neglecting youths, and the tendency to
violent exit strategies that spawn from marginalisation. ‘Hence,’ he commented, ‘new
programs are more aimed at creating harmony, and engaging youths in communal,
meaningful activities.’ He also spoke of the huge gains made in recent years:

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74 Interview with Emmanuel M. Conteh, War Child, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2nd June 2008.
Results are encouraging. There are many women’s and disabled teams throughout Sierra Leone, especially in the Northern Province. Interestingly enough the quality of these teams increases the further one goes from the city because there is less to do as you radiate out. Sport allows boys and girls to do things in common. Given the recent history of sexual violence during the civil war, this is an important measure on its own with regards to narrowing the gender divide and reducing stigma. Plus when these sport activities have adjoining educational lessons such as sexual health education, this can only be a good thing: Children learning about taboos together sensitises each child to each others’ differences be they religious, physical, ethnic, linguistic, or gender based.75

Yet it has not always been easy to include girls in this process. In the immediate post-war years there was taboo about girls playing sport, it being commonly perceived that it ‘emasculated them.’76 This was made more problematic in the Islamic communities of Sierra Leone which were bound by the decree that women and girls should not bare their legs. Whilst this may not immediately appear a significant factor, this serves to visibly differentiate children along religious lines which is counterproductive to the notion of inclusivity and equality. From a solely physical point of view, restrictive clothes hinder the efficacy of meaningful exercise in a country with an average temperature of twenty seven degrees Celsius.77 That being said, there is a strong argument here that having to strike a balance between sport participation and Sierra Leone’s religions and customs teaches the children and youths more than a modicum of cultural and religious respect and understanding. Either way, the growing acceptance of girls and women playing sport both

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75 Interview with Moses F. S. Kargbo, the Senior Sports Officer in Charge of Football, and senior representative for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the Northern Province. Makeni, Sierra Leone, June 4th 2008.
76 Interview with Moses F. S. Kargbo.
77 http://www.africaguide.com/country/sleone/info.htm
locally and nationally is a sign that, for the current youth generation, gender taboos are less prevalent and notions of equality are increasing prevailing.

Therefore the applicability of sport in both a conflict preventative and post-conflict setting must be seen as three pronged. Firstly, sport’s ability to replicate elements of battle and parody some of the experiences found in war is a crucial factor as to why sport resonates so profoundly in post-conflict areas. This blurring of sport and war experiences make the former an ideal surrogate to war itself for the more competitive masculine ex-combatants in particular. Secondly sport can concurrently promote gender and social equality through mass participation which serves to include a broad spectrum of society in either the respective conflict prevention or post-conflict rebuilding processes. Thirdly, in Sierra Leone just as everywhere, not all children are academically minded, but sport can reach these children and youth where the classroom is not always able to. It engages them in a beneficial way and provides them with education, health and life skills that they would otherwise not have received. Most tellingly, if we place these three prongs within the ‘Exit, Voice and Loyalty’ paradigm, all can be said to promote belief in the value of voice above exit as the principal agent of social change. The next very short chapter will show how continuing and sustaining these evident improvements depends upon better planned and executed policies.

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Aid is a problematic issue with regards to development. Misappropriation, over-pledging, restricted aid, ‘sticky’ aid, and over-dependence on aid are just a few factors that are detrimental to the developmental potential of aid in their own right. However this is not to say that aid is negative, but instead supposes that aid on its own does not always provide the right platform for a country to move from crises prevention to genuine economic and social development. Therefore capacity building is what is needed if the transition from aid dependency to economic stability is to be meaningfully made. This rests not so much on aid but rather a concerted effort to improve the levels of education and belief needed in society to start-up and continue ventures across the whole social and entrepreneurial spectrum.

Building capacity also hinges upon creating an environment conducive to easy transfer of knowledge and ideas both horizontally and vertically through society. In Sierra Leone students said they were able to transfer knowledge they gained from sport for development programs to friends, parents and other community members. In both Makeni and Freetown, Sierra Leonean parents reported that children spoke about and advised them on issues related to HIV and AIDS that they learned through Right To Play games and activities.78

Whilst conflict prevention and peace building techniques must be geared towards providing society with the means to improve their own capacity, they must also be sustainable: following bitter conflicts, sustainable peace is really only available on the basis of a sustained effort lasting many years. This does not mean that all peace building projects have to be

sustained for so long, but that the overall strategy builds enough regenerative and sustaining capacity to see the process through.

This is by no means simple. Multi-dimensional policies are required to take on the complex task of encouraging war-torn and war-threatened societies to develop peaceful relations. This emphasis on a broad range of activities is supported by the conclusions of the aforementioned academic research into conflict causation by Stewart, Leahy, Collier and others. This approach to policy necessitates ‘multi-level cooperation between ministries and departments with different institutional cultures.’ In other words, policy coherence is required if multi-donor and government efforts are to be successfully pooled. In a tidy summation, this means ‘different policy communities working together in ways that result in more powerful tools for all concerned. It means devising strategies and filling gaps so as to meet shared objectives.’

As mentioned briefly earlier, there are four dimensions to policy coherence: within the internal departments of each aid agency (internal); across the different aid agencies (harmonisation); between donor and recipient governments (alignment); and from those recipient central governments out to their more rural and disparate provinces (whole of government). Fulfilling these is required if coherence amongst objectives, aims, actors, and instruments is to ensue. In Sierra Leone institutions are increasingly in place to facilitate this joined up approach. The Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO) is an umbrella institution that works to bring all operational NGOs into close and regular contact with not only each other, but also both local and national government arms. SLANGO prioritises common welfare above individual NGOs and (with regards to sport for

80 Development Assistance Committee (DAC), ‘Journal of Development Cooperation.’
development) helps coordinate play days, radio shows and sports festivals to promote collaboration between community-based organisations, NGOs, and other agencies so that these groups can better reach shared development goals. In addition, the ‘Physical Education Teacher’s Council’ (PETC) is a national organisation that provides a forum for teachers to share teaching techniques and devise new ways to encourage both more teachers and students to participate in physical education. This community group network has created pioneering child protection and gender violence protection programs which use sport to transmit invaluable information to children and youths regarding their rights.

Such improved commitment to policy coherence and cooperation has allowed intensive decentralisation of programs. Local staff of War Child, Save the Children, Oxfam, Right To Play and others are equipped to identify and sustain strong partnerships with other community-based organisations and local NGOs, as well as national ministries, international NGOs and UN agencies. This allows for better transfer of aid and knowledge to more remote areas. This builds capacity in otherwise neglected regions by diminishing the chance of horizontal inequalities arising from geographical remoteness. It also decreases reliance upon a central office and induces a much higher degree of project sustainability.

Therefore policy coherence enables the design of conflict prevention schemes that are locally sensitive yet still firmly connected to the larger national and regional agendas. Through inter-organisation mechanisms such as SLANGO and the PETC, Sierra Leone is raising it own bureaucratic capacity to deliver more impacting sport for development projects at a cheaper cost thanks to better channels of cooperation that dampen the possibility of aid duplication. Therefore to a certain degree the situation looks encouraging. In addition to SLANGO, most NGOs are striving for alignment individually– for example Save the Children has a full time Technical Advisor who works with the Sierra Leonean government. In addition the national youth policy is clear in its intent to work with all
concerned parties ‘so as to lay the foundation for the emergence of a responsible citizenry in the service of a one and indivisible Sierra Leone’:\footnote{Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005, p.3.}

The National Youth Policy is anchored on the twin notion of youth empowerment and the creation of a responsible citizenry. To achieve this, this revised policy seeks to strengthen collaboration between Youth Organisation/Youth serving Agencies, NGO’s, and all line Ministries that have youth related activities.\footnote{Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005, p.3.}

This cooperation it is hoped will continue to create mechanisms in the Ministry of Youth and Sports wherein effective state policy on youths can be ever better designed and implemented through ‘reliable and efficient networks’ across the public, private, and charitable sectors. It is hoped this will create a ‘level playing field for youths to actualise their fullest potentials, be competitive nationally and globally, and to contribute as good, responsible citizens to the development of their country.’\footnote{Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005, p.3.}

However there is by no means complete policy coherence in Sierra Leone. The next chapter will outline this amongst other short-comings of sport for development programs.

\footnote{Sierra Leone National Youth Policy,’ 2005, p.3.}
Chapter Six.

The Short-Comings of Sport for Development Programs:

Having previously demonstrated the positive effects sport for development initiatives have on Sierra Leone’s youth, this chapter will attempt to highlight some of their limitations and assess how these limitations hinder its conflict-preventative potential. It will also look at negative by-products of sport such as rivalry and its prospective violence.

Having already linked war to sport, Martin van Creveld adds that as well as the latter’s more positive attributes mentioned thus far, sport can in fact potentially cultivate a culture of violence and societal division. He argues that war (and by association sport) is fundamentally *enjoyable*, noting that its inherent danger ‘calls forth qualities such as boldness, pride, loyalty and determination. The joy of fighting,’ he concludes, ‘[is] that it permits participants and spectators alike to forget themselves and transcend reality.’ This is an interesting argument that, true to the entire book the quotation is taken from, is intentionally sensationalist. However it is difficult to agree with his assertion that war is enjoyable. Such a claim fails to recognise the moderating effects of society on war and the disinclination of ordinary people to murder even in extreme situations. We can look to Hobbes to support this. He deduces that civilised men are inclined to avoid sources of pain and death that are close. If the preservation of self and *not* the murder of your foe is the ultimate goal for everyone, fear of death and an unwillingness to take it is a major reason for peace in Hobbes’s *state of nature*, and also proof enough of the societal limitations on

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84 See footnote 58.
absolute conduct of war. However van Creveld’s conclusion that sport on a professional level can incite an almost ethereal fanaticism amongst spectators than can potentially turn violent is built upon firmer ground. Especially in urban areas, fights can erupt on Saturday afternoons after televised Premiership football matches as the bars dedicated to particular teams that pock the major cities spill-out. These peculiar conflicts of identity serve to divide communities along lines of loyalty to teams thousands of miles away.

This potential for division is but one example of sport’s negative side-effects. It shows that sport must not be over-relied upon to be the vehicle best equipped to alleviate poverty and temper social tensions. It is but one vehicle in a viable socio-economic cavalcade which must move steadily and in unison for greatest effect. Indeed Dr. Cummings of Right To Play commented that ‘sport can easily bridge gaps in post-conflict societies, but to ensure this gap is not artificially spanned other things are needed. Sport on its own will not create the necessary environment for assisting children and youths to realise their goals.’ For example, in a meeting with students in Freetown sport was largely seen as just a past-time. Yet despite failing to attach any sort of greater meaning to sport, this is still positive in that sport is a past-time that is both safe and healthy. However on a more worrying note there were quite a significant number of youths who saw sport as merely an exit strategy. This is especially true with regards to football. The coruscating wealth of European football is enticing to a youth population still under-cared for and highlights the enormous disparity with Sierra Leone’s own national league. This is not helped by the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA) which is considered to be ‘poorly run and corrupt [with] leaders elected because of wealth and cronyism rather than their ability to do the job well. As such the level of national football is falling. There is no youth system. This leads to political and

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86 Thomas Hobbes, ‘Leviathan.’
87 Interview with Dr. Prince Cummings, Right To Play Country Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, June 2nd 2008.
institutional disillusion, anger, and frustration which, I argue, manifests itself in abandonment or exit of the national league by players and spectators alike in favour of foreign set-ups. This supports David Taylor of Insight.org and formerly of Oxfam’s view that ‘sport for a lot of youths with nothing becomes not a social mobiliser, but a personal vehicle for exiting the state in search of riches.’

To give a further example of this outward focus, I asked ten school children in Freetown to name three Sierra Leonean football players– nine out of the ten could not, but all ten could name five or more Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal, or Barcelona players.

Therefore it could be argued that in some respects sport is in fact a hindrance to national development given that the unavoidable outward focus of players and fans ‘reinforces dejection and the idea that Sierra Leone is not good at anything’ and encourages state exit. This begs the question of whether implementing sport programs should be a governmental priority. Indeed Moses F. S. Kargbo asserted that the biggest problems in need of swift governmental attention in Sierra Leone are:

- Education.
- Poverty.
- The lack of jobs.
- The lack of institutions for vocational learning.

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88 Interview with Moses F. S. Kargbo, the Senior Sports Officer in Charge of Football, and senior representative for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the Northern Province, Makeni, Sierra Leone, June 4th 2008.
89 Interview with David Taylor, Insight.org Project Manager, Freetown, Sierra Leone, June 8th 2008.
90 Interview with David Taylor.
91 Mr. Kargbo estimated as much as 80% of the population is illiterate, although the figure is much more in the region of 71.4% for adults and 61.8% amongst the youth. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/06/africa_getting_an_education_in_sierra_leone/html/2.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/06/africa_getting_an_education_in_sierra_leone/html/2.stm)
However Mr. Kargbo also added that ‘sport can help improve these by twinning its mass appeal with academic or vocational messages. Sport must supplement education, especially of women and girls.’ It seems wise therefore to add his sentiments to those of Dr. Cummings and conclude that to get the best out of children and youths, and to guarantee maximised vocational opportunities, sport must work in unison with more academic education techniques.

Yet the potentially serious shortfall here lies in sport’s inability to solve Mr. Kargbo’s third pressing issue, the ‘lack of jobs.’ Sport can provide the right environment to prepare youths for smoother and more profitable entry into employment, and it can maintain positivity, fitness and regular interaction, but it rarely leads directly to paid work. This is of particular concern to the country’s worryingly idle youth. Twenty one year old Ernest Gborie from Bo is a high school graduate and has a diploma in information technology from an institute in the USA. However he is unemployed apart from occasionally working at a children’s rehabilitation centre. In an interview with the BBC World Service he revealed that:

What concerns me is the lack of jobs, especially for us youth. I really want a permanent job. I want to work for my country, to bring development. Education is good, all we need are jobs.

Therefore sport for development projects can only really mobilise and improve society at the pre-employment or between-employment stage, just as the micro-economic Sport for Development multiplier effect (see figure.4) depicts. After this it is up to the government to utilise this better skilled and educated youth by creating work that links them firmly into Keynes’ macro multiplier effect (see figure.3). It can only be hoped that the presence of a

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92 Interview with Moses F. S. Kargbo, the Senior Sports Officer in Charge of Football, and senior representative for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the Northern Province. Makeni, Sierra Leone, June 4th 2008.
93 See footnote 88.
94 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6933315.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6933315.stm)
more knowledgeable, healthy and trained workforce will both attract more foreign investment and stimulate more business entrepreneurship needed to invigorate the country’s economy.

Twinned to this it must be recognised that if the government is to create these jobs, the area that really requires the most work is policy coherence. Sadly this is perhaps the area where sport for development initiatives can do very little. Despite highlighting the positive strides made in this area in the previous chapter, serious discrepancies in the efficacy of the relationships between the government and NGO sectors remain. Truly strong, well-funded governance is missing. This in turn hinders alignment, and with it impedes the possibility of the general populace directly linking the work of NGOs to the government itself. For example in Kroo Bay, the most impoverished area in Freetown, Save the Children, Concern, the YMCA, UNICEF and Right To Play work to improve the lives of locals. To cut costs and increase the impact of their work these NGOs have formed the ‘Slum Partners Development Coalition.’ This coalition coordinates efforts to clear space for safe play areas away from the septic and often swollen Crocodile River; establish football leagues to occupy the most abandoned and poorest children and youths in the country; provide maternity care and pre-natal clinics; and set up temporary schools and vocational centres. Whilst this is a great example of policy harmonisation, it is sadly void of genuine governmental alignment. This is disastrous with regards to forging a meaningful social contract between the government and its people, as the later look not to the government for help, but to the visibly busy NGO sector.

Much of what Sierra Leone’s plethora of NGOs and governmental departments are working towards today is derived from the 2002 Monterrey Consensus and the 2005 Paris Declaration, both of which are concerned with poverty reduction, national ownership, and
results orientation. However sport for development initiatives cannot hope to force alignment, harmonisation or dictate a coherent ‘whole of government’ approach alone. For whilst the government may be using sport and its associated positives as a cheap cure for many of its social ailments, it also appears that certain governmental departments are instead pursuing antithetical policies such as arms trading or embezzlement that undermine a truly whole of government approach. There is also the problem of widespread governmental corruption. Indeed whilst the government’s anti-corruption campaign features a man kicking a ball above the slogan ‘kick out corruption,’ (a quick reminder of sport’s ability to grab peoples’ attention) a new report commissioned by President Koroma has unearthed ‘grave inadequacies in key areas such as health care, tax collection and the security services.’ The report shows that in one ministry alone, five hundred thousand dollars of foreign aid vanished in 2007. Such profligacy led President Koroma to say that ‘corruption is the greatest impediment to the country’s development.’ Furthermore, Education Minister Dr. Minkailu Bah says he has discovered dozens of non-existent ‘ghost teachers’ invented by officials to embezzle money. ‘Many of the 33,000 teachers receiving salaries existed only on paper,’ said Dr. Bah, and the lost revenue will realistically ‘amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars.’

95 The 2002 Monterrey Consensus identifies six leading actions in support of financing for development (http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/Monterrey_Consensus.htm). The Consensus sets out a number of commitments on issues ranging from improving development strategies to promoting the use of ODA to leverage additional financing for development. These commitments acknowledge that actions by recipient and donor countries, as well as international institutions, are necessary to make ODA more effective. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf) is slightly different. It is a global consensus for reforming the delivery and management of aid to improve its impact. It commits 90 partner countries, 30 donor countries and 30 development agencies, including the United Nations and the World Bank to the principles of: Advancing country ownership; Harmonization of donors and creditors; Alignment with country-led strategies; Managing for development results; and Mutual accountability for the use of aid.


Sport is arguably not the medium needed to address this ‘very serious threat to our peace and stability.’ Instead, sport’s real influence lies at the micro level, working directly with communities to promote social harmony and provide education and democratic experience that can empower the future generation of society leaders with the faith to act more transparently.

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Conclusion:

Whilst this paper is chiefly concerned with how to prevent conflict through the relatively cheap medium of sport, it is in fact only touching on a much deeper challenge of how to make structural adjustments that can satisfactorily occupy a youth bulge which evidence shows us is prone to violence. Furthermore it is impossible to talk about rebuilding and repairing the structural deficiencies without placing these ills within the context of the post cold-war insecurities. In the first ten years after the world shifted from a bipolar to uni-polar system, there was an apparent ‘tendency towards disintegration’ in West Africa that increased the risk of violence. The spiralling cruelty in the region forced first the conflict resolving and second the conflict preventative hands of the west who grasped that ‘an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure.’ It is now accepted that the longer the delay in intervening, the higher the cost in terms of human life and damage to property. Moreover, the more violence escalates, the more difficult it becomes to resolve a conflict.

Therefore as a precursor to more reaching political intervention and reform, sport must be viewed as transitional medium of engagement that can ease social tensions and increase the populace’s susceptibility to further conflict preventative measures.

At its most basic level sport can convene youths– perhaps to an unmatched level in Sierra Leone. Where possible, sport should be integrated as part of the curriculum to entice children to school, to maintain their concentration levels once they are there, and to offer diversity of opportunity for children. Away from schools, sport can supplement other forms of education or vocational training and provide a more holistic syllabus that improves one’s social skill-set and employability.

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100 Roel van der Veen, ibid, p.200.
However sport for development programs do not create many jobs directly. Furthermore, the outward, exiting gaze of talented sportsmen and women, not to mention fans, has left the national sports system in tatters. More worryingly, dreams of exit do not appear to be solely reserved to those with sporting ability: George Bah, a seventeen year old youth whom I interviewed in Lumley, Freetown, is one of the brightest at his school just off Babadori Road. He believes ‘education, not sport, is the vehicle to improve your life, and that focussing on languages is what will open doors for you.’ However, like those youths harbouring dreams of playing in the European football leagues, George sees his academic ability as a ticket to exit Sierra Leone and earn a living abroad, ‘hopefully the US.’

Indeed of the many youths I spoke to, an alarming proportion saw exiting the state as the best way to improve their lives. This dejection is in part caused by the divide between youths and adults that is as much cultural as it is numerical. ‘Whilst we consider ourselves productive, creative, and energetic in the community,’ said Henrose Vandi, a Fourah Bay College Poverty & Conflict student, ‘adults think we are troublemakers. Divisions exist at social gatherings, clubs, the sports fields, community events, the churches or mosques, and at the beach.’ Tellingly, Miss. Vandi identified this social schism as the root of Sierra Leone’s underdevelopment and looked outside of her country for the answers. ‘The Europeans treated their youths correctly,’ she said; ‘They empower youths and develop whilst Africa does not.’

What therefore appears to be needed are certain balances: Firstly, sport must be offered both within the curriculum and in youth organisations outside of schools, but by no means must sport and its known benefits supplant the education system. Secondly, there must be a

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101 Interview with George Bah, Freetown, Sierra Leone, June 6th 2008.
102 Interview with Henrose Vandi, Makeni, Sierra Leone, June 10th, 2008.
governmental premium placed on education, but at the same time if it is to persuade the most talented of an ever restless youth to stay in the country it must improve the national conditions and available economic opportunities for youths once they leave the education system. Thirdly, to force these changes, we should look to my original prognosis that attitudinal change and a belief in the recuperative power of voice above exit is what is needed if Sierra Leone’s brightest and fittest youths are to remain in the country and contribute to its future.

Yet this negative view ignores the potential of having such a huge youth population. Youths have a lot of energy and potential that Sierra Leone can harness for development, but this can only be realised in an environment where the youth question is at the very top of the agenda. A comprehensive national strategy with coordinated targeting of key socio-economic groups could mobilise the youth and reinvigorate the economy. Sport can form part of the solution. It prepares the youth for responsible leadership and educates them about their rights, responsibilities, and what society expects of them as law abiding citizens. Appropriately, it also involves youths in decision making processes and makes them accountable stakeholders in their own futures.

Realising this potential will depend upon four dimensional coherence at the policy level. This will ensure the right policies are formulated and will establish the relevant channels of dialogue to implement them with more impacting results. Internationally, this policy formation emanates from The United Nations Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG). The SDP IWG looks to engage national governments, UN agencies and civil society in the development of realistic recommendations for the integration of Sport for Development and Peace initiatives into domestic and international development policies. In short, the SDP IWG is a functioning
testimony to the conflict preventative role sport has to play in the field. Its mandate is as follows:

To articulate and promote the adoption of policy recommendations to national governments for the integration of sport and physical activity into their national and international development strategies and programs. Sport for Development and Peace evolved from a growing body of evidence showing that well-designed sport-based initiatives incorporating the best values of sport can be powerful, practical and cost-effective tools to achieve development and peace objectives. Sport is now recognized by many international experts in the fields of development, education, health, sport, economics and conflict resolution as a simple, low cost, and effective means of achieving a diverse range of development goals.¹⁰³

Furthermore the SDP IWG recognises sport’s potential to contribute to ‘attaining the Millennium Development Goals and related development objectives in the areas of: child & youth development and education; health; the inclusion and wellbeing of people with disabilities; gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls; and conflict prevention and peace-building.’¹⁰⁴ I would argue that part of sport’s ability to be so useful across these various areas must be attributed to the not insignificant mimicry between sport and war. For example Right To Play’s network of coaches and trainers act as guides for the children and youths in a multi-functioning role that in many ways is parental and as such is reminiscent of how the RUF treated children during the civil war.¹⁰⁵ Therefore sport programs provide a familiar hierarchical structure of education and guidance that maximises the effect of the programs and allows the right balance of room for expression and quality of direction.

¹⁰⁵ See the work of David Keen and the comments of Dennis Bright in footnotes 55 and 57 respectively.
Conflict prevention is not a science, but instead reliant upon educated assumptions based on extensive research and the lessons of experience. What is certain is that, economically speaking, a youth bulge has the potential to be a tremendous boon to any nation that handles it correctly and manages to include all its members in a functioning and supportive society. It is seemingly a matter of incorporating everyone in decision making processes and ensuring the right balance between economic and human development. This will go some way to forging a meaningful social contract between the government and the youth that provides a powerful disincentive for the latter to use exit over voice as the primary agent of social change.

As I said in my introduction, it was not my intention to make sweeping policy recommendations, rather to ‘merely add some new ideas to the growing body of research into conflict prevention.’ During this study certain factors have come to the fore that I hope may contribute to this body. Some are specific to Sierra Leone and are products of its civil war, its political history and structures, and its economic predicament, and they shall not be listed here. However the following recommendations are perhaps born of more general and transferable lessons of how to avert conflict resulting from demographic pressures:

- Introduce sport for development programs at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Include the use of sport for development programs in the national curriculum.
- Integrate sport for development techniques into international assistance and national development frameworks and strategies.
- Ensure full policy coherence and cooperation across the various sectors to enable sport to fulfil its development potential and to minimise expense.
• Raise awareness of this potential and encourage full participation, striving in particular for unhindered inclusion of girls and women, people with disabilities, children and youth, and other marginal groups.

• Decentralise projects to mitigate the traditionally urban bias of aid allocation and development programs.

• At the earliest possible moment hand over project ownership to locals.

• Do not over-play the role of sport for development programs. They are adept at occupying and improving the skills and behaviour of the youth, but they are not particularly useful at creating direct employment.
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