Listen to the voices of the youth of Sierra Leone

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Preface:

After graduating high school eight years ago, I decided to go to South America to do voluntary work. After first having worked in the Amazon in Ecuador, helping local people with their daily tasks like plucking coffee beans, I went to Cusco, Peru, to work with street children. I worked at an 'after school' project, helping the few youths who went to school with their homework but mostly doing other activities with the youths who had walked hours to come to the project to get some food and be given some attention.

When I came home I knew what I wanted to do with my life. This experience impacted and changed my life so drastically that everything became clear to me. Even though before that I had always wanted to become a lawyer for the youth, so the change was not completely 180 degrees.

Then almost two years ago I started writing my bachelor's thesis on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers in five different countries in Africa. My interest in this subject became so intense that I felt I had to know what the situation was like in reality, I wanted to see it with my own eyes, to be able to evaluate it myself and not get all my information second hand. Knowing that I wanted to work with youth in developing countries it was amazing timing that during the writing of my bachelor's thesis, it was announced that the master Children's Rights would start for the first time the following year. This was the best scenario possible for me. When it became clear that we could do field research my mind was made up: I had to go to Sierra Leone. And even though my big dream was to work with former child soldiers and this was not possible at the short notice that I had, I decided to work with the youth on their future, knowing what a horrible past they have had.

The subject was easily chosen because my curiosity concerning the resilience of youth (an important subject in my bachelor's thesis) has always been very strong and getting to know how youth rebuild their life and what they think they need in this process is a subject close to my heart.

During the preparations I had many disappointments concerning my safety net that I thought I had created in Sierra Leone. Almost all my preparations fell through but I decided to risk it and find out what possibilities there were if I just left and tried to find my way once I would arrive. Not going was not an option. Knowing that I was going to a completely strange country where I had only a few contacts, I finally got on the plane to do something I knew I really wanted to do and off I was, on my way to the youth of Sierra Leone…

Content:

Abstract:

This thesis is about the view of the youth in Sierra Leone, on their future and the protective factors that they feel will get them from their present situation to their goals. A comparison of this view is made between the city Freetown and the village Magburaka, upcountry. In addition stakeholders in the lives of the youth are asked to give their view on the present situation of the lives of the youth and they are asked what they think the youth need to reach their goals in the future. The view of the stakeholders in Freetown and Magburaka will also be compared. And finally a comparison is made between the view of the youth and that of the stakeholders.

Because many of the youth lost their parents during the war, almost all the youth I have spoken with now live with relatives, friends of relatives or their own friends. These caregivers usually take care of the school fees for the youth and feed them if they can. Getting enough food is a very big problem for the youth, but the struggle to pay the school fees is even bigger. There are a few factors that are very important to the youth: education, family, peers, religion, money and support/help. Not necessarily in that order.
The youth are very focused on going to school so that they can go to college or university and find a job. They are very aware of the fact that finding a job is not easy because there are hardly any jobs and if there is a vacancy the job will probably go to someone else who has better connections. But they need to work to make money and get themselves out of their struggling life as well as their parents and other family members. To them education is the key to success. During this process, they say, they need their parents or other caregivers to take care of them; giving them what they need to proceed in education. For daily survival youth also depend greatly on their friends. They choose their friends carefully, making sure that they can trust them to share their food and encourage and support them through life.
Next to being encouraged by their environment, the youth get their faith from g'd. The youth believe it is extremely important to be grateful for what g'd has given you and believe that he will guide you through life.
In the end the goal is to get a good job and make money to be able to stop the suffering and take care of themselves, their family, their wife/husband and children. But they are very sure about the fact that to be able to achieve anything, they need support. They need someone to help them pay for the things they need and to encourage them to persevere.
There were no extreme differences found between the youth in Freetown and the youth in Magburaka, except for the youth in Magburaka being slightly more self reliant than the youth in Freetown. And the fact that the youth in Freetown seem to have a better overview on their possibilities for the future and have a more realistic view on their professional options than the youth in Magburaka do. Other differences were minor and not very significant to the content of the research.

The stakeholders see the suffering of the youth and think a few things drastically have to change. To start with the attitude of the youth. The stakeholders feel that the youth are idle, disobedient, disrespectful to their parents and other elders and are not aware of their options in life and the importance of education herein. The youth, according to the stakeholders, need to be sensitized about the importance of education and especially the need for vocational training. The reason of the need for vocational training is the fact that there will always be

work in vocational jobs when there are no other jobs anywhere else. Furthermore, the youth have to become more development minded, not only about themselves but also when it comes to their community and the whole society. Through everything the youth have to have faith in g'd and pray that he will help them and guide them through life and onto the right path.

And then, the youth, according to the stakeholders, need sensitization and guidance, from parents/ caregivers, the government and their community. These three need to be good role models and encourage the youth to work hard for their future. They need to be involved in the lives of the youth and create an enabling environment for them. At the end of the road there have to be jobs, something that the government needs to create.

There are hardly any differences between the stakeholders in Magburaka and the ones in Freetown. The differences present were participatory oriented and not related to the content of the research.

There were differences and similarities between the stakeholders and the youth of which a few will be discussed. One of the biggest differences is the fact that many of the youth I spoke with are very development orientated both concerning themselves and their community. While the stakeholders say that the youth are idle and not aware of their options in life and that they do not see the need for them to be involved in the development of the country. Secondly, the youth told me how focused they are on being able to take care of their parents and how hard their parents/caregivers are working for them to pay their school fees for which they want to repay them in the future. The stakeholders however, told me that the youth are not respectful and do not see their role in the development of the society. But the stakeholders and the youth *are* on the same wavelength about two among other things: the youth need to be sensitized about *how* to achieve their goals in life and whether these goals are feasible. Secondly, the stakeholders estimate the current position of the youth very well by saying that the youth need guidance and support from their caregivers, community and the government and that these three need to be good role models. The youth need to be given self confidence to reach for their goals and to strive for development of themselves and therewith the development of their community and the whole society.

1. <u>Introduction:</u>

After years of war the people of Sierra Leone are left with nothing. Their lives have been destructed and many lives are taken. Youth have lost their parents and the parents who are still alive are struggling to supply their children with their basic needs and to pay their school fees. If it is not the parents who do this, it is other caregivers or the youth themselves. Life is hard in Sierra Leone and the youth are suffering. Because of these circumstances one can wonder if there is even a chance for these youths to have a bright future and especially what would have to happen in the current situation to accomplish any goals.

That is what this thesis will focus on, along the following three main research questions:
A. How did the youth from former conflict/war area Sierra Leone experience their past and what expectations do they have for their future?
B. Which protective factors do they find important for the reconstruction of their lives?
C. What do stakeholders in these youths' lives think are important factors for the youth in order for them to rebuild their lives?

The importance of asking these questions lies in a few points: on a grand scale it is important to know how the youth think about their life and to know what they need. Because development programmes seem to work much better when the focus group is involved in the creational process. To be able to create a custom made programme, to optimize the feasibility, one needs to know the opinion of the focus group; in this case the youth.
To make the programme more versatile, and therewith give it even more viability, it is important to include opinions of third parties, in this case the stakeholders, but it could also be done with just the government for example. And this is not only important to create programmes, but also for the government to inform themselves on the current problems in society. Information coming from the source itself is usually better than coming from second hand.
Additionally, talking with the youth, giving them a voice when it comes to their own life, discussing their problems and together search for solutions, corresponds on a high level with how one would expect people to treat youth from the Children's Rights point of view. The right to participation, article 12 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a foundation for the method of interacting with youth concerning this research.
As one will be able to see in the research results, the youth are conscious of their surroundings and not hesitant to give their opinion. But researches like this one are also informative when it comes to seeing where improvement is necessary. For example, as will be shown, many of the youth do not know the steps they need to take to get to the job they want, this tells us they need to be guided and sensitized about the course of their future. And as will be shown, this is exactly what the stakeholders observe as well.

The research has been structured along the following chapters: first a problem analysis will be given in chapter 2, to see what the consequences of war are on youth in general and therewith get an idea of what the situation of the youth could be like, right now. This will be followed in chapter 3 by the research question, because knowing the problems at hand it is important to know how the research fits in to this problem framework. To give a better foundation to the research question the theoretical framework will be explained in the next

chapter. This theoretical framework, chapter 4, will elaborate on the research already done on topics concerning the research subject. By doing this my research is placed in a broader structure. After the theoretical framework, the research context is set out in chapter 5, to see in what situation the research question will be executed and in what situation the theoretical framework will be applied. Then the more practical part of the thesis starts by explaining the research design in chapter 6; what is the objective of the research and how was it implemented. And after that the methodology (chapter 7) specifies how the research was performed, concerning the methods used to obtain information from both the youth and the stakeholders.

The last part of the research concerns the research results. In chapter 8 the literal research results are structured both for the youth and the stakeholders after which in chapter 9 these results will be analyzed both for the youth and the stakeholders separately, but also the comparison between Magburaka and Freetown and between the youth and the stakeholders will be evaluated. The order of chapter 9 was carefully chosen, to maintain the structure of the whole thesis and not redirect the order of appearance of the subjects.

The last chapter (10) is the discussion in which it will become clear whether a satisfying and full answer to the research questions was found. And in this chapter the research results will both be placed back with the theoretical framework to see if this framework was a satisfying foundation for the research. Finally the chapter finishes with recommendations made for possible future research.

2. Problem analysis:

This chapter will discuss problems that the youth of Sierra Leone could and often do encounter during their attempts to reestablish their lives after the war.

"In a world full of conflict and wars, counterbalance is very important. Over the past 500 years there have been more wars in the world than there has been peace. Many if not most human beings involved in these wars are children (Pearn, 2003). Save the Children has calculated that 115 million children that are supposed to be in primary education are not. This is 18 percent of all the children that are supposed to be in primary school. At least 43 million, one third, of the children not in school, live in conflict affected areas (International Save the Children Alliance, 2006). However, impacts of wars on children are multiple. As the numbers and the frequency of the stressors increase, so do the impact and the damage (Wessells 1998). An International Save the Children Alliance report (2006) tells us that in the past decade 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict and three times more children have been seriously injured (International Save the Children Alliance, 2006). But the numbers of impact do not have to be high and severe for also a few moments of limited exposure can cause everlasting damage. "Children exposed to repeated trauma begin to prepare mentally for the next assault by employing defense mechanisms such as numbing and denial" (Sommers, 2003). Children in armed conflict "become separated from their families, displaced or abandoned, and are at risk of being recruited into armed forces" (International Save the Children Alliance, 2006).

As the National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone (2003) tells us there are many youths living on the streets. During the war about 700.000 of the displaced people were children and youths. Many of these youths were combatants during the war and fled to Freetown, now living/ making a life on the streets. A large part of these youths are illiterate and school dropouts which does not strengthen their position at all. An additional problem is that many of these youths are addicted to drugs and in a lack of job opportunities. They get involved in drug trading, petty theft and prostitution etc. (National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone, 2003).

The "We the Children" report of the UN informs us that "40% of the children in developing countries (that is about 600million children!) must attempt to survive on less than one dollar a day (Annan, 2001). This is even more worrying when a country like Sierra Leone has just come out of a war and does not have the means to meet the needs of these children and help them out. Besides the fact that many people do not have clean water, no sewers and hardly any food, the chance of reaching good quality education and rising to their full potential seems light-years away. Because when the first concern is to have food for the day then when does one have the chance to make money to pay for education?

The difficulty of rebuilding their future does not only lye in their destroyed environment but also in the economy that usually takes a fall during a war. In Sierra Leone the army took over during the war. People spent all their money on provision and had no possibilities to make any money. Land was destroyed and utilities were taken away by rebels (Information acquired from interviews).
So because children are reliant on their parents or when they have no more parents, on themselves, they have to be able to find other ways to make an income. But, if they have no schooling, and even if they had schooling, there are no jobs, it will be hard to earn an income. In complement, Sommers writes that during war large percentages of the national inhabitants of a country move to the (capital) cities and these become overpopulated. Consequences being that there are not enough houses to be occupied and furthermore there are not enough jobs (Sommers, 2003).
Wessells and Monteiro (2006) wrote that there are a few key elements that are to be considered when it comes to the reintegration of children that have gone through a war. These will be explained in the theoretical framework of this thesis, farther on in the text.
As Graca Machel (2001) tells us in her book "The impact of war on children", it is often the adolescents that are overlooked in the aftermath of war. In the time of war they were in the developing stage wherein they are supposed to develop a sense of self and identity. But because during the war the family often scatters and the adolescents often have to take over adult responsibilities that they might not be prepared for, they lose the time to discover themselves as a person and therewith their identity. Their psychosocial well being can further be worsened by the lack of education and proper healthy food. After the war is over this has several consequences. Their psychosocial and social well being has been damaged by the lack of opportunity to develop during the war and furthermore, and very important to my research; adolescents often lose their faith of having a useful place in the future. Because many lost their role models, like parents or other significant sources of guidance, they could fall into depression or may even commit suicide (Machel, 2001). I think especially this last point is very important for my research as the future prospects of the youth (adolescents) are at stake and therefore analyzed during this research. This point made by Machel is supported

by McIntyre and Thusi (2003) who point out in their article that even though the adolescents were recruited during the war as children they were rehabilitated as adults because during their time in the army they had grown up and were no longer considered children. But this brought along the fact that they would not be included in the psychosocial rehabilitation programmes for children either and were left to figure everything out on their own. But of course the whole time they were in the armed forces they were children and because of their activities and un-childlike behavior there, they were robbed of the chance to go through a healthy development as a 'normal' child/teenager would do. McIntyre and Thusi very clearly point out that it is because of this grey area that the youth become vulnerable both during the conflict and the peace processes and thereafter (McIntyre and Thusi, 2003).

The last problem discussed here, is that there does not seem to be a lot of information on the actual problems that the youth of Sierra Leone encounter. Nor or on the factors that the youth themselves find important in the reconstruction or simply the development of their lives. To add, there does not seem to be any information on what the practical options are for the youth in Sierra Leone, when it comes to future prospects in this post-war situation. Since the economy of the country has collapsed and the job opportunities have severely diminished, the youth need to regroup and find out what is important to them right now to be able to get through life and what they need to accomplish to get what they want in the future.

These problems that youth run into will be elaborated on in the theoretical framework.

3. Research question:

A. How did the youth from former conflict/war area Sierra Leone experience their past and what expectations do they have for their future?
B. Which protective factors do they find important for the reconstruction of their lives?
C. What do stakeholders in these youth's lives think are important factors for the youth in order for them to rebuild their lives?

Sub question: What in the lives of the youth has had the most influence on them in their past? (death of a family member/ having to flee/ being captured by rebels/ losing parents)
Sub question: What consequences do the past/war have for them in the present; personally, job-market, family and friends connected?
Sub question: What aspects in the youth's lives are important to build the future they want for themselves? (socially/professionally)
Sub question: What do the youth expect from their future when it comes to jobs and emotional well-being? What do they want to achieve?
Sub question: What do the stakeholders think of the present situation of the youth's lives (caregivers, teachers, community leaders)? (professionally/socially)
Sub question: What do the stakeholders think are important factors for the youth to (re)build a future? (socially/professionally)

4. <u>Theoretical framework:</u>

This research is extremely important for different reasons. First of all it is very important that the youth feel like someone is listening to them. During the research I noticed that the youths were very excited to be talking about what they want in life and also very happy that someone was helping them think about their future and what their options are. It seemed like no one ever had a talk with them about what they want to do with their life and, if these were realistic ideas, how they could be accomplished. Seeing that someone else has faith in you is a very important protective factor; it gives a person strength and confidence to pursue things. Furthermore, as McIntyre & Thusi (2003) say, it is very important to help the youth develop themselves because idle youth without future prospects are at high risk to rebel against their environment, which is what also happened before the former war (McIntyre & Thusi, 2003). Not helping the ones that should eventually create the future of a country is not the way to stimulate them to put energy in a future that is not beneficial to them. Since the youth (officially people 15-35, National Youth Policy 2003) account for at least half of the entire population, the government has to provide more opportunities for them to develop and learn a trade, and the youth have to be supported financially to be able to do this. The following text will underline the necessity hereof.

Children who have survived violent conflict periods have had to deal with many different sudden interventions in their lives. The problem is that after wars are over, these problems are not automatically resolved, as shown above. As can be read in the follow-up research of the Graca Machel Study of 2001 "The impact of war on children", "Will you listen?" (published in 2007 by UNICEF) children are confronted with a list of consequences they have dealt with during the war and after the war was over. During the war children have been separated from their parents by abduction, murder or "simple" displacement. They have had to survive on their own, sometimes taking care of younger siblings. Some children have been forced into armed groups, coerced to fight, forced to take drugs and kill other people. During the war it is usually not a possibility to get access to education, because of absence of teachers, school buildings, danger of attacks or because the children have to flee. After the war however, accessing education can be just as hard. Wars tear countries apart, leaving only devastation and disruption of the ordinary life. After a war people need to rebuild their lives, they usually have to find new places to live and new jobs to make money (the head of the household is often no longer with the family). Children have to participate in making money and taking care of siblings which could make them have to grow up faster than they otherwise would. Parents can be frustrated with the current situation, angry because of what has happened and feel helpless and hopeless; this often results in abuse of the children, for the frustration has to be vented. In the UNICEF research mentioned above, children explain that they do not have access to education because there are no schools, or because schools charge entrance fees, either in the form of uniforms or materials or actual fees for education. Children are surprised with requests for identification cards that seem to be needed to get access to education. They explain that they do not have them because they had to leave them behind when they fled from their houses. These strange admission-conditions exclude the children that often need it most. Both because of the many years of education they have missed and the fact that they need to rebuild their lives from nothing (UNICEF, 2007). In my opinion this is a very important piece of information when it comes to my research. Even

though it is not proved to be applicable to Sierra Leone, the fact that this happens in post war countries means that youths are being obstructed in their effort and attempts to rebuild their lives. In my research I try to find out what youths find important in their lives and which protective factors matter most to them when trying to succeed. One of them is education but when the government obstructs them in this area, then their efforts are pointless. And furthermore the government in that case does not abide by their own, to be discussed, drafted and signed rights and rules. Rejecting youth from going to school and therewith countering them in their effort to progress, is opposite to what should be happening both for the youth and the development of the national society as a whole. Also the amount of endeavor put into the development of the youth by the government sets an example for society as to how to treat the youth. And the way these children, that come from extreme war situations, are seen and cared for when the war is over, is extremely important when it comes to their further development into the future.

How children are seen in a society and how they behave and learn to behave is essential for the foundation laid for their future. To be able to understand the context a child grows up in and how children cope with consequences of war depends on how society perceives these children. When looking at the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child there is a clear undertone in what kind of childhood the Convention is trying to create for the children. It has a very strong western connotation. For example by emphasizing the individual strength of a child such as the right to privacy (art. 16) and the right to manifest one's own believes (art. 14.3). The individual empowerment of children that live in a community-based environment has its question marks. Of course children should be free to express themselves and develop themselves to their fullest potential but my point is that all children around the world are placed within the same framework of childhood conception, regardless of where they are growing up. Nevertheless, the Convention will be regarded as a framework of childhood and within this framework the situation of the youth in Sierra Leone will be approached, taking their social structure and cultural traditions into account. I have chosen to take the Convention as a framework for several reasons: first of all: the government of Sierra Leone has signed and ratified the Convention and therefore committed itself to abiding by the articles in the Convention. It therewith promises its people that the children will live by the standards of the articles. Second of all: the articles in the Convention give a foundation to build on when it comes to regulating the lives of children in general. So, if one child has the right to do something, then every child has this right. And therefore I think that it should be possible to apply the universal rights declaration to children in this country as well as any other. But with a very important note: the articles have to be considered from a cultural and social standpoint of the Sierra Leonean people.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also includes articles that should protect children who live in violent and dangerous areas and therefore need different basic rights than children living in peace. It is exactly because it is children we are talking about, that every aspect of protection, ranging from bodily and mental harm to developmental protection and every sort of violence, should be considered. The most essential articles (with regard to the research) are mentioned below.

Article 6 par.2:

"States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child."

Article 12:

"1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."

Article 29 par.1:

"1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment."

Article 39:

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Next to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict has been drawn up in 2000. This protocol entered into force on February 12th 2002.

The protocol contains supplementary articles to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, stating that it is "Convinced of the need to strengthen international cooperation in the implementation of the present Protocol, as well as the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who are victims of armed conflict and encouraging the participation of the community and, in particular, children and child victims in the dissemination of informational and educational programmes concerning the implementation of the Protocol" (Optional Protocol to Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 2000).

This research will focus on youths who live in the post conflict area of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The former was signed on the 13th of February 1990 and taken into force 2nd of September 1990, the latter was signed the 8th of September 2000 and taken into force the 15th of June 2002.
Next to these two declarations, Sierra Leone has also signed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on the 14th of April 1992 and ratified it 13th of May 2002.

Furthermore, the government of Sierra Leone has drafted its own National Youth Policy in 2003 and the Child Right Act in 2007.
The National Youth Policy drafted by the former government under president Kabbah was constituted to reposition the youth back in society. It was written to point parents, governmental organizations, other stakeholders and government officials to the responsibilities they have towards the youth and on the other hand to show the youth they have rights in society but also responsibilities towards their society. The point is to show the youth their potential and to create a patriotic feeling among the citizens to be able to build on that for a strong future.
The Policy mentions a few important rights when it comes to my research:
- " The right to Quality Education
- The right to participate in all the decision-making processes relating to the welfare of the youth
- The right to gainful employment either in the public or private sector on completion of formal, information or non-formal education
- The right to (…) and to live in a good and healthy environment" (National Youth Policy, 2003).

The Child Right Act (2007) is the Sierra Leone national equivalent of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). It is an addition to other conventions, protocols and charters signed by the government. Important to this research are the following articles written down in the Act:

Art. 23: "(1) Every child has the right to life and to survival and development to the
maximum extent possible.
(2) It shall be the primary responsibility of parents to provide support to their
children in the enjoyment of the right referred to in subsection (1) but they may
be assisted by the State in case of need."
.
Art. 31: " No person shall deprive a child capable of forming views the right to express an
opinion, to be listened to and to participate in decisions which affect his welfare,
the opinion of the child being given de weight in accordance with the age and the
maturity of the child."

The Act seems to be mostly concerned with basic rights, for example the right to education is
not explicitly mentioned. It is only listed in a line-up of things a child has rights to: "Every
child has the right to life, dignity, respect, leisure, liberty, health, including immunization
against diseases, education and shelter from his parents" (art. 26.2 Child Right Act, 2007). In
a country like Sierra Leone one would think to find education as a fundamental right in order
for the children of the country to grow and be able to provide a solid human capital in the
future. A right that I also missed, which *is* mentioned in the CRC, is the right to assistance in
social recovery after a traumatizing situation (art.39). Since practically all the children in the
country have gone through some kind of traumatizing experience during the war and the Act
was drafted right after the war, I would have expected the government to have considered the
need of a healthy recovery for the children, as they are the ones that have to become the
cornerstone of society in the future. However, the question is how useful it would be to put a
right in the Act of which the government is certain that it will not be able to provide.
Fact remains that there *is* a national version of the CRC and this is very important when it
comes to defining the position of the child in Sierra Leone society. Having the Act means
that the child becomes more important and is taken more seriously by the government. But,
this does not mean that citizens immediately change their view on the concept of the child.

It is important to mention the articles of the Convention, the Youth Policy and the Act to
demonstrate the social environment in which the children are brought up. Governments have
agreed upon these articles and therewith promised to abide by them. In light of these
agreements the children should be able to claim their rights. However, obviously this is an
idyllic picture and not all the rights neither in the Convention nor in the Youth Policy nor in
the Act will abided. There are simply no means to monitor the honoring of the rights stated in
these texts, by every citizen. Because even though Sierra Leone has ratified all of the above
declarations and charters, many children were still involved in the violent war. Children did
not only have an active relation to the war and fought but children were also confronted with
the war in a different way; losing their families through violence, losing their homes and
becoming refugees, with or without their families, etc. As Pearn (2003) says, children living
in violent conflict areas are often deliberately targeted victims getting killed, mutilated and
sexually violated in the worst forms. Children confronted with atrocities of war develop
protection mechanisms in response to their experiences. Besides the fact that through the
daily confrontation with violence they seem to learn that violence is the basis of human
interaction, it interferes with their ability to develop what Pearn calls "the most important
attribute of childhood ('and' included by author) … a sense of higher-order and morality and

ethics", namely the development of conscience. By developing conscience a child learns to understand the difference between right and wrong. However, the initiation of this development starts in early childhood. And when a child is exposed to an excessive amount of violence and cruelty during his/her childhood, this will counteract the development of conscience (Pearn, 2003).

As McIntyre and Thusi (2003) explain in their research, youths are a marginalized group within the Sierra Leone society and this needs to change if the government wants to avoid the same situation that initially started the previous war. The youth have to receive more support in their efforts to accomplish things and if they live on the streets and therefore have no means to start something like education, to create a future for themselves (and therewith for their country), they have to be pushed in the right direction and be supported financially and emotionally. Many, if not all, of the youths on the streets carry horrible memories with them from the war and they need to be guided by professionals in order become healthy, productive and successful (both personally and professionally) individuals in their community-based society.

The youth occupy a legal grey area as McIntyre and Thusi call it. This means that they are in an age category that is overlooked by both national and international legal systems. They are no longer protected under child rights but, for example, were demobilized after the war as adults and therewith overlooked in the trauma therapy, which they *did* need, for some of the soldiers joined armed forces as children but were discharged as legal adults. This lack of acknowledgement of the youth could scar them for life if the attention and attitude of society, nationally and internationally, does not change. Youth need to learn life skills and by giving them these life skills, both professionally and personally, you give them the capability to become a "complete citizen with psychological, intellectual and social skills that allow them to survive in society." Also rightfully brought up by McIntyre and Thusi is the fact that even people from the UN involved in the peacekeeping of Sierra Leone after the war expressed their concern on the situation and care given to the youth when it comes to their rehabilitation. The idle youth, they said, could form a threat to society if their needs for now and for the future are not taken care of. The vulnerability of youth has already been proved by the horrendously large amounts of youth that were targeted for enrollment into the armed forces during the war. Along the text McIntyre and Thusi explain that one of the reasons for youth, or any marginalized group, to resort to violence is "a lack of dialogue" (McIntyre & Thusi, 2003). Other reasons that the writers do not mention could be lack of food, water and other provisions. Or a bad labor market, undeveloped infrastructure and therewith lack of future prospective. Guyot (2005) informs us that youth with limited education and economic opportunities and who have not been assisted in their re-integration and rehabilitation back in society may still view violence as normal and are in far greater risk of relapsing into a cycle of violence. These youths need to be taken care of because "they may prove a vastly destabilizing force if ignored" (Guyot, 2005). To continue with McIntyre and Thusi's argument; if the government does not take the youth seriously and does not involve them in the decision making affecting their life then they will rebel and violence could become the way to be heard. After the war the government changed its tactics and formed a youth council and the youth radio so youth could deliberate about their needs and less easily become marginalized (McIntyre & Thusi, 2003).

To avoid this recurrence of the situation that initially instigated the war, the youth have to be guided in their rehabilitation after a cruel war. Wessells and Monteiro (2006) suggest that

there has to be a holistic approach when it comes to helping youth cope with the past and develop for the future. They say the following: "To assist war affected youth, proactive, holistic approaches are needed that protect youth, prevent violence, and enable sustainable community development." They suggest six key priorities when it comes to this approach:

1. **Social reintegration:** youth that have been separated from their (extended) family, have to be reunited with them for support and to prevent further harm. In addition, former child soldiers have to be guided in their reintegration with their family and community.
2. **Health support:** youth are very vulnerable to diseases like malaria and sexually transmitted diseases, so accessibility, peer support and health education need to increase.
3. **Economic assistance:** a lack of ways to make a living and a lack of food, money and jobs are the main stressors for youth. This is why they need economic support in the form of "small loans for income-generating activities" and small grants in order for them to buy basic utilities to be able to start making a living. Furthermore they need education and knowledge of basic skills (literacy) to help them earn a living.
4. **Positive social role:** in order for the youth to be handed a fair chance by their community, they have to acquire a positive social position and not be seen as destructive to their society.
5. **Peace education:** because of their habituation to violence during the war, youth have to learn the importance of handling conflict without violence, respect for and tolerance of others. This is especially necessary if these youths are to become promoters of peace and non-violence.
6. **Youth participation:** to let youth practice what they have learned. It is important to include them in the programmes that are designed to help their community. The importance lies in the need for them to get ownership over their newly acquired capacities, learn more skills and they can learn how to make the programmes sustainable (Wessells & Monteiro, 2006).

To help children recover from their experience, they have to be, as Gray (2002) explains it, reminded of what comprises 'normal' behavior, thought and lifestyle" (Gray, 2002). Because of the consistent violence children have lived in, their morals and values have developed according to survival in such an environment. To be able to break through this spiral of violence, building skills and values of nonviolence and capacities that the children can use as construction for their future, is very important (Wessells, 2005).
In addition to the key priorities of Wessells and Monteiro (2006) earlier mentioned, there are several protective factors that need to be reconstructed within and around the youth in order for them to build a future. One could think of cognitive factors like knowing how to constitute social interaction, knowing how to approach peers and adults and being able to assess ones environment. Further protective factors could be positive coping capacities, adult support, a positive outlook on the future; which intrinsically means providing (vocational) education and, above all, a safe and peaceful environment to live in (Rodrigues Pereira, 2007). For this research the protective factors that will be focused on concerning the youth are threefold: their social network, their cognitive development and education. The reason these three groups have been chosen is the fact that they represent three different aspects of a child's life that stimulate him/her as an individual (cognitive development), as an individual

in combination with his/her surroundings (social network) and education is the foundation for all of the above. This combination is needed to secure the prospects of a child for the future. Wessells (2006) supports this, explaining in his book that a combination of factors is needed to rehabilitate and re-integrate youth who have been affected by war, directly or indirectly. He writes about the importance of combining individual adaptation and acceptance by the community. He points out that even though one could easily only focus on what others can do for the youth, it may be even more negligent to overlook the accomplishments of the youths themselves. By creating a positive role for themselves in the community, they increase their own self confidence and gain trust from the community, herewith establishing "self transformation and social transformation" (Wessells, 2006). In one of his other articles Wessells writes about the importance of education when it comes to rehabilitation and re-integration of youth after a war situation (in his research he focuses on former child soldiers) (Wessells, 2005). With Wessells, many other researchers write about the importance of education in a post war situation in one form or the other. Some talk about the necessity of teaching according to formal education, and others emphasize the need of education on peaceful interaction and respect for others' opinions and thoughts in the same society among other subjects (=>peace education) (Ahlen, Davie and Winthrop et al in The Forced Migration Review, 2006 & Lowrey, Harder and Miller in And the Children Shall Lead Them, 2005). Education has also been chosen as a protective factor because children/youths living in post conflict areas have often missed large periods of education. They have fallen behind on their peers, but still need this education to build their life back up. Education is a corner stone in society nowadays. Without being able to read and write, the chances of finding a job are slim to none. This is not only true for western society but for society in general. Therefore, this research will pay attention to the aspect of education in a youth's life, because this will lay a foundation for finding work and therefore indirectly for rebuilding the youth's life.

Another explanation for the use of the three factors could be given as follows: the unity of a family and the security that a family brings, can give youth that have been chronically exposed to violence and danger a new sense of safety and it can give them an opportunity to readjust their perception of the world as they knew it. Furthermore, the unity and security that a family brings, usually have a positive influence on the self confidence of the youth and they can repair the image of adults that the youth created during the war (Hill & Langholtz, 2003 in Rodrigues Pereira, 2007). When one looks at the cultural context of Sierra Leone, one has to remember that social network is very important because African society functions within a community. And the existence of this social network is necessary for the youth to create a sense of a safety; therefore it is very important to recreate an environment that the youth are used to. As Honwana informs us, African societies are used to solving problems together within the community and the need for the existence of this community (social network) after a war situation could therefore be very important for youth to be able to create a safe environment and then be able to start a healthy development (Honwana, 2006). Hill & Langholtz (2003) in Rodrigues Pereira (2007) further explain that after the reunification with the family and the community, education and vocational training are essential. For the simple reason that these two factors can form a foundation for the future of the youth as well as for the re-integration into their social environment. Educational programmes give the youth an alternative to their existence during the war, it instills a sense

of self confidence and helps the youth cope with stress, which in its turn creates empowerment. Last but not least, it gives the youth a sense of identity and the opportunity to build relationships with peers (=>component of cognitive development) (Hill & Langholtz, 2003 in Rodrigues Pereira, 2007).

Research done by Masten et al in the War Child Holland report from 2005 shows that a strong relationship with an adult and a good cognitive development are the two most important factors for a healthy development of youth. From other research it appears that when these two factors are present, the youth have a greater chance of being able to cope with negative experiences. Furthermore, the researchers say that it shows that youth need their social environment, to be able to create protective factors (War Child Holland Report in Rodrigues Pereira, 2007). By creating consciousness of his/her surroundings and oneself, a youth is being supported in initiating relations with his/her environment. By initiating these relations and herewith realizing that they are competent in doing so, the youth becomes more confident, acquires a more positive image of him/herself and he/she becomes more confidant concerning his/her own capacities. All the capacities the youth discovers within oneself are each a protective factor (Rodrigues Pereira, 2007).

Again, especially in an African country like Sierra Leone it is very important that the individual aspects of reconstruction are combined with the environmental aspect, for African societies usually evolve around community-based living. It would however not be efficient to look at social networks alone, because the child actually has to develop as a person, become confidant and self-supportive to be able to mean something to his/her society. On the other hand, to only look at the individual, at the child's cognitive development without the social network, would not work either because if a society is community-based and therefore works in coherence, it would not make sense and therewith not be efficient to look at a person as an individual without its society. As Guyot (2005) tells us, a war affects not only the individual but the community as a whole. It affects the cohesions of the community, and therefore both the individual and the community need to be addressed when it comes to reconstruction and rebuilding society (Guyot, 2005). And because of the essentiality of the concept community in African society and in the healthy reconstruction hereof, the concept of an individual in western society does not work in African societies. Introducing individual rehabilitation and focusing on the reconstruction of the individual solely does not reach the goal set out to achieve.

In all the researches read until now, there is hardly any focus on the opinion of local societies and the actual subjects, namely the children and the youth. That is what this thesis sets out to formulate: the thoughts and opinions of the youth on what the important factors are when it comes to rebuilding their lives. What do the youth think are important aspects of life, personal behavior and capacities that they need to be able to (re)build their future? And furthermore, what do the stakeholders (f.e. caregivers, teachers and community) in these youth's lives think is important for the youth to learn, to be able to construct a foundation for their future? The reason I have chosen to portray both these aspects, both the thoughts of the youth and the thoughts of the stakeholders, is to see if there is an irregularity between what the youth expect of themselves and what the stakeholders expect for and of the youth. By asking the youth and the stakeholders about the same topics I hope to find out if 1) the stakeholders think the youth have realizable goals for themselves and 2) if the stakeholders

over/underestimate the youth or actually have a very good idea of the youth's needs. Next to this comparison I have performed the research both in the capital of the country, Freetown, and in a village upcountry called Magburaka. The intention of this comparison is to see if there is a difference between the future goals and the needs of youth in the capital and upcountry. This could be important when trying to help the youth in developing their lives, keeping in mind the context of their living arrangements.

4.1 Conceptual framework:

- youth
- Conflict
- Stakeholders
- Protective factors
- Cognitive development
- Social network
- Education
- Reconstruction of life
- Future prospects

4.2 Operationalization of major concepts:

Youth: Sierra Leoneans, male and female, between the age of 15-35 (National Youth Policy Sierra Leone, 2003). In my research when talking about the youth that cooperated in my research I will be talking about youth between the age of 15-25. I narrowed the age bracket down because I had to decrease my group of potential participants and since I am studying about children and adolescents in particular, it seemed more logical to stay on the low side of the bracket.

Conflict: When conflict and war are mentioned in this paper, I mean violent interaction between either the society amongst themselves on a national or local level or violence on an international level. If non violent conflict or war are referred to in an explanation then this will be explicitly mentioned.

Stakeholders: People in a child's life that hold an influential key position when it comes to regulating daily life. These are also the people that basically guide the child towards a certain direction in life and will provide the context in which the child grows up. In this research by stakeholders I specifically refer to any adult that has an influence on the child by profession or by personal relation, like: teachers, caregivers, spiritual leaders etc.

Protective factors: Theoretically: "Characteristics, variables and/or conditions present in individuals or groups that enhance resiliency, increase resistance to risk, and fortify against the development of a disorder or adverse outcome. Examples would be constitutional factors like attractiveness or engaging personality, and bonding to family, school, and other social institutions" (http://www.nccev.org).

In this research protective factors are defined in three different groups, namely: cognitive development, social network and education. I believe that these three groups are essential for a child to safely and securely grow up and develop. As Bandura (1989) explains; the factors are not all of equal influential strength and they do not influence at the same time. They have a reciprocal influence wherein one factor can instigate the other (Bandura, 1989).

Cognitive development: this means development of awareness of one's surroundings. To understand the way other people think and to be able to be aware of one's own thoughts. Also, the understanding of the process of thinking in general. And finally, realization of the child when it comes to what a child's position is concerning his/her surroundings and how social interaction works (Cole & Cole, 2001). Furthermore cognitive development means being able to understand the process of thinking and the way the mind can be used in different ways. And by being able to use the mind inventively, one creates the capability of problem solving, which is in its turn obviously something that's very useful in reconstructing and rebuilding a post war situation. This type of cognitive development also depends on being able to read and write, for these skills teach a child to become articulate and play with words, both verbally and in one's mind.
For this research by cognitive development I mean developing the capacity of social interaction and intellectual cognitive comprehension: being able to initiate a conversation, understanding social relations, being able to interpret the environment and many other things.

Social network: Human network attached to a child. Because of the cultural context it is very important that the social network is integrated into the category of protective factors. African society is community-based and therefore to be able to help a child or get to know something about a child one needs to know which people are closest to the child and influential when it comes to the child's actions and development. In this research social network is the community the child lives in, both direct and indirect. By this I mean the community that the child spends most his/her time with but also the community that the caregivers live in, which is sometimes a different community than the child spends his/her weekdays in. The community can be stakeholders, peers, siblings etc. The necessity of a social network in the form of a community has been emphasized by many researchers. As Hill and Langholtz (2003) write: community gives a sense of security and unity that in their turn give youth a sense of self worth. This self worth is important both for the child's functioning in the community but also in his/her attempts to create new connections like going back to school (Hill & Langholtz, 2003).
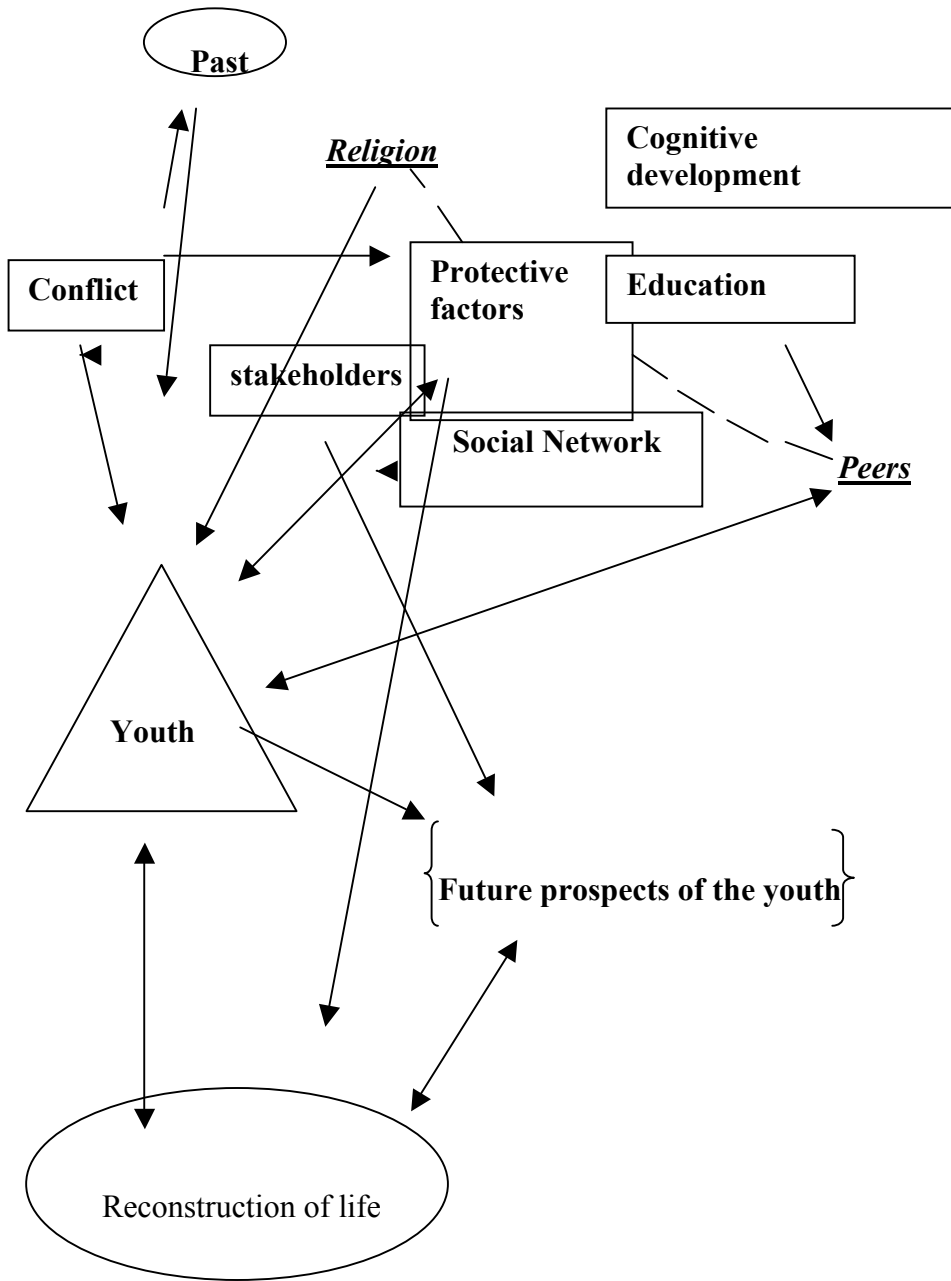
Education: Any form of (un)official schooling. Education in post conflict areas can appear in different forms: official and unofficial schooling but also in the form of peace education and peace building education (education on reconstructing a peaceful, non-violent and accepting society whether resp. top-down or bottom-up). As Wessells (2005) puts it: "education is important in post-war situations to (re)build capacities, to instruct youth on the values of non-violence and to create faith in a peaceful society" (Wessells, 2005). Hill and Langholtz (2003) back this up by saying that the acquirement of knowledge instills a sense of self confidence in youth and helps them to cope with stress, which creates empowerment. Furthermore, they say that it leads to a sense of identity which helps them in their attempts to build new social contacts (Hill & Langholtz, 2003). Which in its turn complements Bandura

(earlier quoted) saying that protective factors reciprocally influence each other in due order (Bandura, 1989). In this research I refer to elementary, secondary and vocational education, whether official or unofficial. Both can give a child the crucial basic knowledge it needs to posses.

Reconstruction of life: Rebuilding of livelihoods. Reestablishing a safe environment (protective factors) and building a foundation to be able to grow from into the future. It is basically all possible personal and environmental reconstruction together. This means cooperation within the community to help youth acquire a positive role inside the community. If youth fulfill a positive position within the community, this will help the youth find meaning and identity, and they will see that they are able to attain a positive role within society (Wessells, 2006). For the research this includes reconstruction of protective factors and everything that the youth find important for quality of (their) life.

Future prospects: it literally means a broad view of the future before the mind (Oxford's student's dictionary of current English, 1985). In this research the future prospects will refer to the thoughts and dreams of the youth and of the stakeholders for the youth.

4.3 <u>Conceptual scheme:</u> explaining influence of one concept on another.

Past

Religion

Cognitive development

Conflict

Protective factors

Education

stakeholders

Social Network

Peers

Youth

{**Future prospects of the youth**}

Reconstruction of life

<u>Explaining the scheme:</u>

The whole scheme revolves around the youth. Since the research will be about what the youth want from their future (within about 5 years) in relation to where they are today, it is important that the scheme portrays exactly this. That is why the youth are a triangular in the middle. The arrows are pointing from the concept that is of influence to another concept. On the top the only unexplained concept '**past**' is written down. The past entails everything that a youth has endured, whether positive or negative. Assumed will be that the war has the greatest influence on the memories of the youth concerning the past. Because the youth have

no reciprocal influence on the past, the arrow only points towards the youth and not the other way around. The concept '**conflict**' however, has had influence on the past and therefore there is an arrow going from conflict to past. Because the conflict didn't just have an influence on the past but also on the whole environment of the youth, which entails the stakeholders and all the protective factors, and on the youth themselves, there are arrows going in all three directions from the concept 'conflict'.

The constellation of **protective factors** has to be explained: as described in the theoretical framework, the research takes three different categories of protective factors into account; **social network, cognitive development** and **education**. Because **stakeholders** are part of the social network of youth they are therefore also part of their protective factors. Hence the connection between the corners of these three concepts (see scheme). The protective factors as a whole have (maybe the largest) influence on the youth, but the youth in their turn also have an influence on the protective factors. The amount of input and cooperativeness of the youth will influence the effectiveness of the protective factors. For example, if the youth choose to not attend school or do this on an irregular basis, the influence of education on their lives will decrease.

Then, there is an arrow going from the **stakeholders** to the **future prospects of the youth,** because it is partially dependant on the stakeholders what happens to the youth. It is the stakeholders that need to provide a stable and safe society (environment) in which the youth can grow up and in which they can prepare to live. There is however also a reciprocal arrow going from **future prospect of the youth** to **reconstruction of life**. This is because, in my opinion, the better (and by this is I mean realistic) the expectations of the youth are about their future, the higher the chances are for them to achieve optimal reconstruction of life. This also works in a negative way; if the expectations of the youth are very negative, chances are that this will not end up in a positive result for the reconstruction of their life. The arrow, as said before, also goes the other way around, which means that the more prosperous the **reconstruction of life** is turning out, the more thriving the **prospects for the future of the youth** will be. (and this again, of course also works the other way around).

And the last triangular reciprocal movement within the scheme that needs to be explained is the arrows going from **protective factors** to **youth** to **reconstruction of life** (and back). As already explained, the protective factors and the youth have a reciprocal influence on each other. The **youth**, clearly (and hopefully) have a very big influence on their own **reconstruction of life** for it depends on their hopes and dreams for themselves and their willingness to contribute to their own reconstruction of life what the outcome of the latter concept will be. The arrow also points back to the youth for I believe that the more prosperity the youth find in their reconstruction of life, the harder they are willing to fight and contribute to this reconstruction. Then last but not least, the arrow between the **protective factors** and the **reconstruction of life**. I believe that it is the setting of the former that sets the tone and creates the basis for a reconstruction of life to begin with. There has to be a basis to start from, this basis is the protective factors and the stakeholders.

Whether positive (protective factors) or negative (conflict), all the arrows pointing at the **youth** have an indirect influence on the youth's **reconstruction of life** through them (the youth). Also when there is a direct influence, as explained above concerning the protective factors, the attitude created by the factors influencing the youth always have an indirect influence on them as well. And because, in my opinion, the youth create their own reconstruction of life the arrows go through them and not directly at the reconstruction of life.

Reconstruction of life for the youth is the ultimate goal and therefore it is written at the end of the scheme.
Last detail concerning this topic: the arrow going from 'youth' to 'reconstruction of life' permeates into the balloon for the children *are* the essence of their own lives.

After the construction of this scheme two protective factors were added, namely '**peers**' and '**religion**'. These two factors were added because during the research the youth themselves came up with these factors, when asked what gives them strength in life and what they rely on. Because this is what a protective factor entails, I have added them both as being an influence on youth, but since peers have a reciprocal influence on youth in contrast to religion, the arrow between the former factor is going two ways, and that of the latter one way. Religion in its turn is not reciprocal because religion is an abstract institution that, according to me, will not be changed by the influence of youth. **Religion** however has an arrow going through the **stakeholders** before reaching **youth**, which means that religion has both a direct and an indirect influence on, which in its turn means that religion has both a direct and an indirect influence on youth. By this I mean that **religion** influences **stakeholders,** which forms the attitude of stakeholders towards youth, by for example demanding certain strictness from the youth, or other terms of behavior incented by religion. However, **religion** also has a direct influence on **youth**, which is instigated by youth interpreting religion in their own way.
The interrupted line between the two factors and the word 'protective factors' signifies its addition after the construction of the scheme.

5. Research context:

Sierra Leone is a country with approximately 6 million inhabitants. Different organizations give different numbers. The population growth has decreased for the last several years from 3.5% in 2005 to 2.1% in 2006. The population is divided in the following categories: *0-14 years:* 44.8% (male 1,349,878/female 1,400,297), *15-64 years:* 52% (male 1,531,763/female 1,664,996) and *65 years and over:* 3.2% (male 92,360/female 105,268) (2007 est.).
The capital of the country is Freetown. The most spoken languages are: English, Krio, Temne and Mende. And the largest part of the population is Muslim (60%), then there are 30% Christians and 10% animists (http://www.cia.gov).

Before the war Sierra Leone had been a colony of England for well over a hundred years, before it became independent of England on April 27th 1961, under the leadership of Sir Milton Margai for the Sierra Leone People's Party. In 1968 Dr. Siaka Stevens won a very disputed election with the All Peoples' Congress (APC). In 1978 he changed the constitution and made the APC the sole electable party. In 1985 General Joseph Momoh took over the power after an election for which he was the only candidate. The few years of stabilization that Sierra Leone had known, were overthrown by the leadership of the general.

Note: the information in chapter 5: Research context, was for the large part acquired from a previously written paper on Family Structures in Sierra Leone, by the writer of this thesis.

His governmental reign was colored by corruption and mismanagement. And in 1992 this government was overthrown in a military coup (http://www.ecowas.info).

Sierra Leone was involved in a civil war from 1991 until 2002. In 2002 the war was officially resolved with the help of the United Nations. Between 1991 and 2002 a lot happened. In 1996 Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, a civilian, became the first chosen president since 34 years. This had become possible because of domestic pressure. However, within a year, rebels forced the president to flee and they regained control over the country. In 1998 Kabbah regained power with the help of foreign mercenaries and ECOMOG: an armed intervention force sponsored by ECOWAS (Economic Organization of West African States). In 1999 there was a short violent intervention in the peace accords, after which the United Nations decided to send an armed peace keeping force (http://www.cryfreetown.org). The 7th of July that year the Lomé Peace Accord was signed between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone. November 10th 2000 there was an official 30-day cease fire accord signed between the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF (http://www.sierra-leone.org). In the summer of 2002 the Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone were established. The TRC was part of the Lomé Peace Accord and meant for victims and perpetrators of human rights violations in the war that they would get a chance to tell their story and make real reconciliation possible. The Special Court was created in agreement between the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone. The Court is supposed to try those who "bear the greatest responsibility for the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes and serious violations of international humanitarian law, as well as crimes under relevant Sierra Leonean law within the territory of Sierra Leone since November 30, 1996" (http://www.state.gov). In 2006 the former leader of Liberia, Charles Taylor, was taken out of exile to be tried by the Special Court of Sierra Leone. This trial is currently held at the High Courts of The Hague, the Netherlands (http://www.crin.org).
Although the intention to prosecute the people responsible for the war disasters is both highly appraisable and necessary, it does not exclude the fact that the country of Sierra Leone has been destroyed and left in pieces. The UN tells us that after the war ended, 543,000 displaced people returned to their homes. Next to this amount there are about 80-90.000 refugees in the country that fled from Liberia (www.un.org). The current situation is still at the bottom of development. The life expectancy of the Sierra Leonean people in general is 40.58 years, for men 38.36 years and women 42.97 years. Infant mortality is 158.27/1000, male 175.39/1000 and female 140.65/1000. When it comes to the economic development of the country, the GDP per capita was estimated on $800 in 2005. Income relies 49% on agriculture, 31% on industry and 21% on services (www.worldbank.org). As commonly known, the industry of Sierra Leone is for a large part dependant on diamond mining. Furthermore, the country is rich in bauxite and gold, but due to mismanagement, corruption and smuggling, the country sees little of its profit (http://www.everyculture.com).

In addition to the numbers above, one has to realize the fact that most of the roads have been destroyed, the infrastructure is mostly no longer existent and the land that used to be cultivated for agriculture is mostly no longer usable.
This is important to know when we talk about the future prospects of the children of Sierra Leone. A child raised in a shattered country will most likely have different prospects for

him/herself than a child living in a well structured safe country. And even though children might still want to become doctors or teachers or mothers and fathers, it is important to consider the economic, infrastructural and social state that the country is in. Raising and educating children in a war torn country asks for different factors to sustain the development than in peaceful situations.

In 2002 the first elections after the 10 year war were won by Ahmad Tejan Kabbah for the SLPP, who had been president of Sierra Leone before. Later in 2007 the general elections were won by Ernest Bai Koroma, who is currently president of Sierra Leone for the APC. The reason the political parties are so noticeably mentioned is the fact that clashes between supporters of both political parties are not uncommon. The current president is implementing his agenda on peace consolidation and economic recovery. The president focuses on six different topics: "energy and water supply; transportation by road, air and water; youth unemployment; economic growth sectors including agriculture, mining, fisheries and marine resources, and tourism; social services, including education, health care and housing; and capacity development in the public and private sectors, in local government and in the justice system" (sixth report of the secretary general on the united nations integrated office in Sierra Leone, 2008).
The economic situation in the country is still weak. When global food and gasoline prices increase, prices in Sierra Leone increase immediately too. Because Sierra Leone imports many elementary products like rice, everyday life becomes more expensive with every whim of the global market. Another very important project the government has been working on is the Bumbuna hydroelectric dam which has to eventually provide electricity throughout the country and is now providing electricity for Freetown (sixth report of the secretary general on the united nations integrated office in Sierra Leone, 2008). The World Bank reports that only two percent of the Sierra Leone population is able to access the electricity net, even when it is often very unreliable and people have to use very expensive and polluting generators to substitute the unreliable NPA (National Power Authority) (World Bank report on Emergency Power Meeting).

5.1 Education in Sierra Leone:

Sierra Leone was the first country of the Sub-Saharan countries that had a western type university; Fourah Bay College. Yet despite this fact the literacy rate is still remarkably low (Banya, 1993). In the 2004 Population and Housing Census for education and literacy in 2003-2004, numbers on education and literacy were the following: for people over 10 years old the literacy rate is still just 39%. There is also still a wide difference between the literacy for men and women: the national literacy rate for men is 49% while for women it's only 29%. This difference increases with age. One of the reasons why literacy is so low could be because large parts of the population do not attend school: 40% of Sierra Leoneans between 6 and 29 years old have never attended school or received formal education. And 29% of 6 to 11 year olds have never attended school. Interesting to know is that the school attendance for every major town is higher than that of Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital.
Looking at primary school enrollment, only approximately 6% of the enrolled children were 5 year olds, yet 33% were over 11 years of age and only 23% were of the official school entry age of 6. When looking at Senior Secondary (leaving aside junior secondary) only 18%

of all enrollments were of the official enrollment age of 12-14 years. The GER (Gross Enrollment Rate) was 22%. What might have been expected, but herewith also statistically confirmed, is the fact that the GER for the Urban Western Area is higher for every educational level than rural areas (2004 Population and Housing Census, 2006).

6. Research design:

As shown above, war brings a lot of torment and destruction to the environment it affects. And the fact that the aftermath of a war asks for reconstruction is also a known fact. Since my study is on Children's Rights and my country of choice was Sierra Leone, I wanted to know, after all the larger and smaller development organizations have shown us their programmes, what the youth of Sierra Leone and their stakeholders think about the current status of their own (the youth's) lives. This because, as many researchers have shown us, it is extremely important to build on the thoughts and needs of the local community (bottom up) to be able to reach the full potential of a reconstructional and developmental programme. And since I had the assumption that the lifestyle and way of living of people might be different in a city compared to a smaller town, I decided to do a comparison between Freetown (the capital) and Magburaka (a northern town). To make the research valid the research groups in both locations had to be fairly equal both qualitatively and quantitatively. This means that all the youth groups had to have both boys and girls, both school-goers and non-school-goers and both had to range in the same age-category. For the stakeholders this meant that the groups had to be fairly equal in quantity and they had to contain the same areas of expertise; caregivers, teachers, spiritual leaders etc. To make sure this would be accomplished I needed to find research assistants who were familiar with the local community I chose to work in.
Furthermore, concerning the research itself, I had to make sure that the questions asked and the workshops that were to be done, were comprehendible for the participants. Therefore I had to speak to someone who would have knowledge on the purpose of doing field research and at the same time knew the Sierra Leone society enough to be able to tell me what would or would not be functional and feasible to do.

The question in this research is which factors in the lives of the youth are important to them. What has had an influence on them in their lives and what are the consequences of these factors. My intention was to find out whether the consequences of the war, like becoming orphans (or losing one parent) or having to flee from their formerly safe and familiar environment to run into the bushes or to an unknown town for that matter, change the youth's outlook on their future. Does the absence of education during the war withhold their future prospects or are they able to pick up where they left off? Do they, the youth, think that the war has had any major influence on their lives, as it is right now, at all or is this just the imagination of the West? One could imagine that when a child or youth is living without his/her parents (in this case as a consequence of the war or premature death) and without a caring social network to sustain them in their livelihood, that their opportunities for the future diminish gravely. But do they actually feel that their lives are so different than before the war and what factors of the war did in fact make their lives so different now? Do they feel their lives are prospect-less and if so, what do the youth feel has to change to be able to bring back

some of that hope for a future? I needed to know what had happened to them during the war and what their lives look like now. In addition I had to ask them what their plans are for the future, how they see their future and how they think they can achieve this goal. The whole research is about cause and effect: what happened, what are the consequences hereof and what do they need to do to change this into how they actually want it to be.

As the stakeholders are part of the social network and probably have the most direct influence on the lives of the youths, their opinions matter. When looking at the future options of the youth I think it is important to consider the present state of mind of the people that form the social environment of these youths and therewith can enable or shut down the youths' social and employment opportunities. The current state of mind of the society the youths live in is important to know, because if the environment of the youth is not enabling their ideas for their future, none of their plans will be feasible.

In addition, I assumed that living circumstances might be different in a big city than those in a smaller town. Since there are more people in a city, one could feel more invisible and less supported than in a smaller town where people tend to know each other better and which therefore could create a tighter social network and therewith more support. Support (protective factor) needed by the youth to recreate and build a life for themselves. A city could also supply more jobs and speak more to the imagination of the youth when it comes to all the (job) opportunities present which they need to create their future. Therefore the youth in the city might have a broader view on their future and see more possibilities for themselves.

To be able to find out whether my suppositions were correct or totally off base, I had to make sure that my research was carried out in the best possible way, given the circumstances. Therefore I orchestrated and gave form to all of the above as follows:

Upon arrival in Freetown it was uncertain whether I would find an organization with which I could do my research. After meeting some local people and other westerners that were there to do voluntary work I came to the conclusion that the safety net of an organization might not even be necessary. Through one of the voluntary workers I came into contact with both my research group upcountry and my research group in Freetown. The research group in Freetown was further extended through contacts as well. The initial idea was to do the research in Freetown alone but after several discussions with people who were more up to date with the situation of the country I decided to try to make a comparison between a village upcountry (Magburaka) and the capital Freetown.

Since the local elections were coming up, and considering the fact that during the elections it is not always as safe for Westerners to be traveling outside the major cities, I decided to do the research upcountry first and thereafter the research in Freetown. I visited the village (officially a city of about 6000 people) Magburaka for a few days before I decided to actually do my research there. The first time I was there I spoke to Handbrake who eventually became my research assistant. Furthermore, I was introduced to Mr. Thullah, the man who I would be staying with during my stay in Magburaka. He lives with his wife, Kadiatu, and her two children and about ten other people in one house. After meeting everyone I went back to Freetown to arrange my research there. I met with the people from the Youth Dream Center in Lumley and made arrangements for when I would be back, because I wanted to be able to continue my research right after I would be back from Magburaka.

In Magburaka I started by forming my youth research group. I did this by informing my research assistant that I needed 20 people between the age of 15-25, both boys and girls and school going and non-school going. With this information he formed a group of 20 people that met the criteria. During the research with the youth I discussed with Mr. Thullah who I needed to speak with, profession-wise. Before the war Mr. Thullah worked for the ministry of agriculture and hence knows a lot of people and speaks English very well. We discussed what kind of people would be interesting for my research and came up with a list of names that he contacted in order to make appointments. I scheduled the research in such a way that I would be finished working with the youth before starting with the stakeholders.

After dividing the youth randomly into 3 groups (7,7,6), I started the research with history narratives that could be done both written and drawn. I left this up to the youth, because I did not want them to feel uncomfortable if they could not write. The following workshop constituted drawing a problem village. This means that everyone was to draw two villages with a road in between, telling me what they had to accomplish getting from village 1 (present) to village number 2 (future). These two workshops were mostly meant as a way for the youth to get to know me: to become introduced to the subjects we would be working on and the topics I would be asking them about. And it was a way for me to get to know them: it helped me see what the youth were used to think about and what subjects they had not thought about before. This information would help me with the readjusting of the interviews. Because after these two workshops I started the individual interviews. I did about three or four interviews a day, each one lasting between half an hour and an hour. When the interviews were done I started the group discussions, one each day. This was the last part of the research with the youth.

The research with the stakeholders went slightly different in the sense that I only did interviews with them and group discussions. At least, this was the initial plan. Later on during the research I decided to cancel the group discussions with the stakeholders, because it appeared to be too complicated to get them together in one place at the same time.

The interviews with the stakeholders were somewhat more complicated than the interviews with the youth because obviously most of the stakeholders worked during the day (as most of them were chosen by profession) and had to be visited in their work environment or their homes. Mr. Thullah drove me to all the appointments by motorcycle, one closer by than the other. When all the interviews were done I did one group discussion with a set of stakeholders (as a trial for its feasibility) which went very well, but the rest of the stakeholders could not be grouped together and therefore the remaining group discussions were cancelled.

When back in Freetown I started again with the youth. I had two groups: one group of seven boys at the Services Secondary School in Juba and a group of 12 young people at the Youth Dream Center at Grassfield Lumley. I basically went through the same process I went through in Magburaka. However, a big difference was that from all the youth that initially participated in Freetown a large part withdrew itself from the research. This was not the case in Magburaka. I think the reason was that they primarily did not understand the consequences of signing up for the research; which would be that they had to show up for every single workshop. But of course I do not know this for sure. I will further discuss this later on in the thesis.

The interviews with the stakeholders in Freetown took more time than in Magburaka because they worked farther apart and were less approachable because of the personal distance

between people in such a big city and they were therefore less accessible than the people in Magburaka. For this reason I spent about twice the time on the research in Freetown compared to the time I spent in Magburaka.

7. <u>Research methodology:</u>

Methods:
- Life history narrative
- Problem village
- Semi structured interviews
- Focus group discussions

I have chosen these four methods because they are non invasive manners for helping me find out the experiences of the youth and the thoughts of both the youth and the stakeholders. As mentioned in the research design: the first two methods were used as an introduction for the youth into the subject of the research and as a way to get to know each other. The last two methods were used to really gather information for the research.
Even though I know that African society is not as talkative about past events as western society might be, I still thought that doing interviews and focus group discussions would produce the most information, considering what kind of information I needed. And also because I thought that the interaction with westerners has probably had a big influence on African society and being able to share a (life)story might even be relieving. The life history narratives that I started with, with the youth, did not have to be done verbally. The youth were asked to draw cartoons of different periods in their lives or write a story down on paper. This way the start of the process of interaction between me and the youth were not too up close and personal, but initiated on a less invasive manner.

The order in which the research was held, is as follows:
I started with life history narratives to have the youth tell their life stories before I started asking questions. This was, in my opinion, the most effective way to go, because this way they might give me information on topics that I otherwise would not have asked about. In addition to the life history narratives I asked the youth to draw a problem village. Initially this 'problem village' was supposed to be a 'problem tree' but after careful consideration and after asking advice from Patrick, my contact who had been around for a while, I decided to change it. My reason for doing so, is that I thought a tree might not have the same symbolism of a growing living creature with a root and branches, as it does in the Netherlands. Therefore, having to explain the symbolism of the tree to the youth, might have taken me just as much time as the whole exercise itself. Therefore Patrick suggested something closer to home for the youth in the form of a village and a road.
After the first two workshops had been done, I was able to adjust my preconstructed interview and start taking the semi structured interviews with the youth. At first I thought it might be a good idea to do the interviews with two youths at a time, to make sure that the youth would be at ease and also to create the possibility for them to complement each other's answers. And they might have even helped each other to further intensify their answer. But I chose not to do this in the end because it could have also caused them to change their

answers or be less frank about things because there was a fourth person present (third person being the assistant).

The fact that the youths were selected on the age between 15-25 is that this would make it easier to hold interviews, because the younger children are, the harder it is to have them explain experiences, thoughts and feelings verbally. When a person is older, he/she has had more time to develop articulation and therefore he/she will be better and hopefully more comfortable expressing oneself in words.

After the interviews had been done, with both the youth and the stakeholders, and the answers had been shortly analyzed, focus group discussions were held. The subjects discussed in the focus group discussions were partly based on topics brought forward in the interviews and partly preconstructed. The focus group discussions were done with 6-10-pax groups, still keeping youth and adults separated. I thought mixing the two groups would not lead to completely open/frank answers with the youth for they might feel obliged to give socially correct answers. The focus group discussions supposed to be led by my research assistants, but in reality the groups were quite capable of managing themselves. Since I decided at the last moment to cancel the stakeholder's group discussions, there was only one group discussion with the stakeholders led by Mr. Thullah. I decided to have the research assistants lead the discussions because it had to be done by someone trustworthy from the community who the participants would feel comfortable around when they talked. This was to make sure that they would not feel compelled to say or not say certain things on my behalf. I was however present at the discussions and gave them different topics to talk about. My short interference for this purpose did not seem to matter when it came to the quality of the discussions. At first every group would start looking at me at the beginning of a discussion and direct their 'answers' to me, but after carefully explaining the meaning and the significance of the discussion they would start talking to each other and it was as if I wasn't there.

Practical content of research methods:
- Life history narrative
- Problem village
- Semi structured interview
- Focus group discussion

Life history narrative:

The children were asked to draw a cartoon or any other drawing, portraying their situation in the past (during the war), the present and the future within 5 years. They could also choose to write down their stories along the line of these three periods. The idea behind the assignment is that they give an impression of what their life has looked like until now and what their wishes are for the future. It does not matter if they know how to accomplish this, it is just about what they want.

In Magburaka the youth seemed to be more capable of turning their thoughts into words or into pictures. The concept of turning a story into something tangible seemed definitely more feasible for them than it was for others. In Freetown there was a clear difference between the

youth attending school and the youth attending the non-formal schooling in formulating, whether in words or in drawing, what they had in their heads.

Problem Village:

The problem village complements the life history narratives very well when it comes to first thinking of what you have been doing in your life, what has happened and where you want it to go, and then in the problem village the youth got to explain how they thought that had to be/ could be accomplished.

Initially, as mentioned above, the problem village was planned to be a problem tree. However, after careful consideration I decided to turn the exercise into something that would speak more to the imagination of the youth. Since we in the West have different symbolism that they would do in for example an African culture, it would make sense that what speak to our imagination does not necessarily speak to their imagination. And to avoid misusing time on explaining the symbolism of the tree that could be used on more profitable things, I decided to use two villages with a road. Something that probably did speak to their imagination.

The village was drawn along the line of the next steps:

Draw two villages. One on the left side and one on the right side. Then draw a road between the two villages, one that has space to write in. When you have done this think about your life right now. What does it look like? What do you do every day? Where do you do this and with who? This all has to be visible in the left village. The left village is your life right now. The right village is where you want to be in five years, or as far as you can think. What do you want to accomplish in your life? What are your dreams for the future? What kind of work do you want to do and where do you want to live and with who?

When you have written and drawn all of this down, then you start thinking about what exactly what it is that you need to do to accomplish all of this. What kind of job do you want? Do you have to study for this? Who is going to pay for college? Are you going to move away from your parents? Do you need other connections in life then? How are you going to find those?

The youth were asked to think about every step that they would have to take to get where they want to be in the space of time that they chose for the assignment. Even though this might not have been extremely important for my research, I thought it was important for the youth themselves to realize all the steps that you need to take to get what you want. On the other hand, it was important for my research to find out whether the youth thinks about their future, and if yes, how this works in their heads and how they think they accomplish the sometimes very ambitious goals that they have set out for themselves.

Semi structured interviews:

The interviews were always done with my assistant present for translation. Whether it seemed to be necessary or not. This applies to both the interviews with the youth as the ones with the stakeholders.

Every interview I did, whether with the youth or with the stakeholders, started the same. First I would ask if it was ok if I turned on my recorder. Then I would explain what my research is

about and tell the person in front of me that I would be asking questions about their life and their thoughts on certain things. I would always add that they could tell me anything they want and that if I wanted to know something else, I would in return ask. However, if I were to ask a question they did not want to answer, I emphasized that should never tell me anything they did not want to tell me.

After the interview I thanked the person in question for their time and their answers. The last question I asked was always if they wanted me to change their names when writing about them in my thesis. I explained that I was planning on giving my research results (thesis) to my university and some people in Sierra Leone and if the person in question did not want me to reveal them as my source, that I would change their names for them. I have all of their answers to this question on record as well.

Interview youth:

- Could you tell me something about yourself? Anything you want to tell me.
- (If not told in previous question) Who do you live with? (parents or other caregivers, brothers and/or sisters, other related family)
- How is your relationship with your family? Do you do things together or do you talk about your daily life with them?
- If you could change something in your relationship with your family, what would it be and why?
- Do you have (a lot of) friends?
- What do you do together? What do you talk about?
- If you could change something in your relationship with your friends, what would it be and why?
- What does your day look like?
- What did your life look like during the war?
- What do you think changed in your life because of the war?
- What do you think your life would have looked like if the war did not happen?
- What would you like your future to look like? (work, study, family)
- Does something have to change in your current life to get to this goal? If yes, what and why?
- How do you feel about your life right now?
- What makes you happy?
- What would make you even happier?

According to what the youth told me without asking, I fluctuated in the questions, sometimes not having to ask certain questions anymore, or using a different order.

Interview stakeholders:

- Could you tell me something about yourself? Anything you want to tell me.
- What does your life look like? What do you do during the day?
- Can you tell me what your life has looked like until now?
- How is your relationship with your children?
- How do you think the past (war) has influenced to the lives of your children?

- What do you think is important right now for your children to grow up to be a happy person?
- If you could change something about the lives of your children, what would it be and why?
- What does the perfect future of your child(ren) look like?
- What do you want your children to do with their life?
- What do you think of the lives of the youth in Sierra Leone right now?
- What do you think they need to make a better life for themselves?
- What do they need for their future? What would be a good future for them?

According to what the stakeholder told me I asked questions about their own children or went straight to youth in general. Also here, like with the youth, I responded to what the person in front of me was telling me. So sometimes questions were added or removed.

Focus group discussion:

As told before, I planned on doing the focus group discussions both with the youth and the stakeholders, but the latter group I decided to omit from this part of the research, because they were too difficult to assemble at the same time and at the same place.
The focus group discussions with the youth in Magburaka were supposed to be held in the same school I did my other workshops and the interviews. However, the day we arrived at the school for the group discussions, the school appeared to be closed (afterwards it turned out the former head master had passed away and everyone had gone to his funeral). But in any case, with no other alternative because of the heat and the size of the group, we decided to hold the discussion in the bedroom of my research assistant (Handbrake), most of the youth squeezed together on the bed, others on available chairs or the ground. In Freetown we did the discussion with the youth from the Services School in a classroom and the discussion with the youth from the Youth Dream Center in the office of the local mayor in the youth center.

The discussions were done with groups of 6-10 people, in Krio. Explaining to them what it meant to hold a discussion turned out to be more difficult than I thought it would be. The concept of a discussion seemed harder to grasp than I initially thought. I told the youth they were to talk among each other, not involving me in the discussion and not addressing me either. This last concept however, did not stick right away with any of the groups. Nevertheless, after a rocky start all groups got the idea and started talking about subjects that I gave them every so often. I would change a subject after I thought they finished talking about it (my Krio was good enough by then for me to be able to assess that) or when they indicated to be done with the subject. I decided to stay in the room during the discussions, not leading the discussions but just giving subjects now and then. I did not feel my presence was interfering with their sense of freedom to talk. As the discussions were the last part of the research and during the research I had been spending so much time with the youth, I felt comfortable with them and they felt as comfortable with me as could be expected.
The discussions lasted from one to two hours. I tried to let them speak as freely and as much as I could which sometimes resulted in the discussions lingering to related, significant or sometimes not so significant, topics.

After the discussions were finished, the research with that youth group would be done. At this point I started my own funding project that I set up for the youth that went to school (or the ones working in Magburaka). I specifically decided to bring up my wishes to help them out in this way after the research, to not create conflict of interest for them concerning their participation in the research.

Topics that were discussed:

According to how the discussion was going I decided to ask some deeper questions or more superficial questions or not ask certain questions at all. After having done the discussions in Magburaka I changed the topics a little for the groups in Freetown. The reason I decided to do this is because I had seen how the youth in Freetown reacted to certain questions in comparison to the youth in Magburaka and I decided to ask the questions differently but still with the same topics and answers in mind.

Magburaka:
- How do you feel about your life right now?
- What is important in your life?
- What makes you happy?
- Why do you need education?
- What else do you need in life?
- What do you want in the future?
- What do you need to do to get what you want in the future?

Topics the youth in Magburaka started to talk about by themselves are: poverty and problems in life.

Freetown:
- What in life gives you strength?
- What/ who makes you happy?
- What/ who is important in your life right now?
- What in your life do you want to change?
- What do you need in your life?
- What do you want to do in the future?
- How do you get what you want in the future?
- How do you feel about your life right now?

Topics the youth in Freetown (especially at the Services School) started to talk about by themselves are: morals and values, religion, general goals in life.

8. Research results:

During this chapter I will lay down all the results coming from the interviews and the workshops I did with the youth and the interviews I did with the stakeholders. I have decided to elaborate on the youth first before discussing the stakeholders, so that the differences and similarities between the youths themselves become clear first before including the second dimension of the stakeholders.

As for the youth, first I will give an overall impression of the answers found concerning all the youths, not making a difference between those living in Freetown and those in Magburaka. And right after that I will elaborate on the similarities and differences concerning the at hand topic. This I will do for every topic discussed during the interviews, using the workshops and group discussions for additional information.

8.1 Research results youth:

War:

Time definitions are usually not accurate but the overall story of the youth is clear. All of them, no exceptions, had to run from where they lived before the war to get away from the rebels. Some ran into the bush and others went to other villages, all of them having to run from place to place because either the rebels would arrive or the kamajores could find them and take them for rebels, giving them practically the same outlook as being caught by the rebels themselves. A large part of the youth I have spoken with, lost one or more relatives. Forcing them to find someone else to take care of them, taking care of themselves or to just move on with the relatives they had left.

When it comes to protective factors during the war, they were absent in every form, as one can expect. Except for the few youths who ran away with their parents and the rest of their family, the others have seen their whole social network and therewith their safety net disappear; houses were destroyed, relatives murdered, they had to run fearing for their lives, having to grow up within minutes where other youths take years. Some were even forced to join armed groups with all the consequences that brought to their lives.

In addition, education could not continue during the war for it was dangerous, as the youths say. As will be seen later, this is one of the worst things for them after the war in addition to losing their parents and other relatives (for which there is no comparison). Losing their parents of course brings emotional problems but for a large part the trouble resulting from losing parents is losing the people who provide for you, the people who send you to school and buy your food and clothes. Youth who did not lose their parents told me that the rebels took all their properties and left them empty. After the war even the people who had means to make a proper living for themselves and their families before the war, were left barehanded. Leaving them without anything to rebuild their lives.

"During the wartime the rebels attacked our village, Mabom village, they burned our village. We lived in the bush for three years. I lived there with my mother, my father, my two brothers and three sisters. At that time in the bush we were suffering for the chop (food) unless we plant some potato and go to Magburaka and sell it. After which we buy some bulgur and go back to the bush. You could not stay in the village because they burned our house. We decided to go back to our village and repair our house but then the rebels came

and killed my father and elder brother. They killed them. So we went back into the bush."
(Karim B. Gbla)

Even though many of the youths who now live in Freetown used to live in the villages before the war, they seem to have lost less close ones (6 out of 18) during the war than the youths who I interviewed in Magburaka (11 out of 20). This is as far as they told me, let that be clear. This is not to say that they did not have to flee, fear for their lives and go through horrible ordeals but as to actually losing family members that were part of their support group, they have been 'lucky' enough to not have to deal with that as well.
Looking at what the youth from Freetown told me compared to the stories of the youth of Magburaka, their stories on their activities during the war are less elaborated. Many of them lived in Freetown before the war or came to Freetown during the war. Since the rebels did not hit Freetown until 1999, the people living there could live in relative peace before that year.

Consequences of the war and if the war did not happen:

Besides the fact that the biggest consequence of the war to many of the youths is the fact that they lost their parent(s) and therewith their caregiver(s), the youths are intensely aware of the situation of their country.
Even though not all of the youths gave this as an answer, the horrification and negative output of the war has drenched all of their minds. The killing of people and the situation the war put their country in is something they are all fully aware of. Many of the youths mention the ruined infrastructure, the fact that so many people lost their belongings, do not have a place to stay anymore, can't get proper healthcare anymore, that food has become ridiculously expensive, and as the youths put it so clearly themselves: "the war made us loose so many opportunities"(Foday Conteh). Another boy says: "I would be done with school if not for the war. If there was work I would be able to pay for school and I would be in college. But all the people left the village because of the war. They are in the cities and they all want to find work"(anonymous). With these expressions the boys state a few of the biggest problems that the war caused. They lack years of schooling which many of them can't make up for anymore, because of a lack of finance. Which can be caused by deceased parents or lack of finance in the family in general.
Overall, when looking at both questions, most of the youths answer to either one or both of the questions that without the war they would be living with their parents or at least with one of their parents. The big difference is that their parents would be taking care of them and they feel they would not be struggling as much as they are now. Some say they would be able to go to school if their parents were still with them. Some say their parents used to have money before the war and therefore if the war did not happen they would have had a completely different life. Others say that their parents (despite of professions before the war) would give it their utter most effort to send their children to school if they could. Not as many, but still a few of the youths say that they would be happier now if they were living with their parents because their parents used to give them what they needed when it comes to care and especially food, clothing and education. The sense of belonging with your parents, even though not specifically mentioned, seems to be very strong and appears to be what the youth miss most.

One boy sticks out by telling me that his staying with the rebels turned him into 'a bad boy'. He says: "before the war I used to be a good guy.(…) I was following the rebels so I was always living close to them, so I always did what they were doing. (…) before the war I was very obedient to my father but now when my father asks me something I won't do it. Sometimes I just feel bad about myself..." (Tamba Benya)

Although the youths did not specifically mention it as such, some of them talked about being captured by the rebels and having to live with them for a while. Time spans ranging and not being very detailed. However, even though this paper does not focus on the results of child soldiering, one has to remember that living with the rebels and seeing their horrendous actions and being subdued to their lifestyle and rules, influences youth intensely and extensively. This has to be considered when looking at the youth today and the people they turned into.

There is a big difference in answers between the youth in Freetown and the youth in Magburaka when it comes to the question what the consequences of the war are to them. In Magburaka hardly any of the youths answered that the war kept them from going to school and that as a consequence of the war they are not as far in education as they would like to be. Most of them told me about the situation the war created; that they were afraid and that life is hard now after the war because of all the destruction and poverty that has spread itself over the country.
Being asked the question what their life would have looked like if the war did not happen, all except three answered that they would be either in college or working by now.
When one looks at the youth in Freetown however, these youths answered to the question of the consequences of war that they would have completed education by now and would have been working. However, many of them give the same answer when asked the second question.

Daily occupation:

There is not much difference between Freetown and Magburaka when it comes to what the youth does during the day. Most youths that go to school, either in the morning or in the afternoon, help their caregivers before or after that by cleaning the house, cook and do other household chores like getting water. Others help their caregivers bring commodities to or from the market and/or help them sell it. Before or after school, both the youths that go to school and the ones that do not, read books, talk about their studies with their friends, compare notes and do homework. The youths who do not go to school have jobs ranging from graining groundnuts and barbing (mostly in Magburaka) to being a mechanic, learning to be a driver or working in a guesthouse (in Freetown).
All the youths try to spend time with their friends when they are done studying and/or working.

Feelings on current life:

For all the youths, no exceptions, it is clear that every day is a struggle to get food and stay in school. Whether their parents pay for their school fees, the friend of an uncle or maybe they pay themselves, everyday life is tough and everyday they have to be inventive as to where they get their food from or as to how to make some money.

Because going to school does not mean that "the school fee problem" has been solved. On the contrary, having paid one semester in school only means that now the next semester has to be paid for, that you need more school materials and extra classes have to be followed.

Both in Freetown and in Magburaka the struggle for money, food and education is so evident and so alive that it is all the youths can think of. And their families are struggling. The feeling of duty to take care of your family is so obvious and penetrated into their feeling of righteousness that their lives are focused on achieving that as an ultimate goal; you need to go to school, get a job and make money so you can be somebody and eventually take care of your family.

Almost all the youths in Freetown told me that they are not happy. Many of them do not live with their families or maybe with an uncle or an auntie but not with their own parents, which creates a big part of their unhappiness. Also, most of the youths say that they need support to either help them go to school if they are not in school right now or help them go to college after high school. Other youths who are not in school at the moment, like Mohamed who works as a mechanic, want help in getting better at their job. He is going to the youth center for unofficial schooling and has learned to count and write, so he can write out receipts which has helped him in his work because now people can't cheat him out of his money anymore.

Typical for quite a few of the youths is that the first things they say is "I thank G'd but…" meaning that they are grateful to be alive but still their life is not a happy one.

Another very important subject coming up when asked about their life right now and what would make it better is education. Almost all of them answer that in spite of getting support or not to do it, education is what would make their life better now and in the future. Because education means being able to articulate your voice in society, getting a job and making money for yourself and your family.

In Magburaka the feeling of unhappiness is just as strong as in Freetown. The amount of youths having to pay for their own school fees and having to provide for their own food seems to be higher in Magburaka than in Freetown. Youths are very reliant on their friends to give them food during lunch break.

The big difference between the youth in Freetown and those in Magburaka seems to be that the youth in Freetown are more focused on going to school and being/living with their family/parents in comparison to the youth in Magburaka who are concerned about going to school/paying their school fees and their primary need: getting food even once a day. Both being focused on going to school but with different focus points, based on what they already have.

The confusing point is that both the youths in Freetown and those in Magburaka would answer me that their life is good, before realizing what the question actually meant, and then they tell me that their life is not good and that they can't live like this forever. Of course this does not apply to all the youths, some of them tell me they are unhappy right away and that they need help to get out of the situation they are in.

This 'problem' continues throughout the whole interview, during all the interviews. Some questions seem to be more understandable to some than to others. Maybe the questions are less understandable because they have not really thought about the topic yet or maybe they do not know how to express themselves, even in Krio, or maybe my formulation was just not comprehendible to them. Either way, most answers to most questions are an interpretation from my side and the result of further exploration into the subject at hand. Of course, this does not apply to all the answers, for most of the youths are very well aware of their lives and their surroundings.

Education:

Education seems to be the ticket out of poverty for everybody. In the eyes of the youth, if you are educated you are almost definitely sure to have a job. The pressure on attaining an education, and by education I mean at least high school but preferably also college or even university, is extremely high in a country where just working your way up on capacities alone seems to be an impossible task.

Paying school fees, as mentioned before, is a daily struggle. Many of the youths have trouble paying their school fees on time. It is no exception for them to be in the last semester of the year, not having paid their last two semesters. However, when they have not paid their terms they are often not allowed to take their final exams, getting them into trouble with the start of their next year. When they do not pay a term, they have to go talk to the principal and basically beg them to let them continue their classes. And from there on it is in the hands of the principal. (".. now I pay my fees myself. I push carts to make a living. I collect small tokens. Sometimes I don't pay a term, then I have to go to the principal and explain it to him" Foday Conteh.)

With two or three exceptions all the youth's school fees are paid by their caregivers. People work extremely hard just to be able to pay the school fees. To paint a picture of the amount that has to be paid per year, the amount of money they have to struggle so hard for: yearly school fees are between 75.000 and 105.000 Leones, depending on the school, which equals about 17 to 23.50euros. But to be able to enter school they have to be wearing school uniforms which cost approximately 15.000Le. for boys and 20.000Le for the girls. The necessary notebooks are between 1000-1500Le. But since that is the equivalent of about two meals, they usually use between one and four notebooks for all their classes. Of course this is not the end of school related costs because the youths also need school shoes, pens and actual books, the latter are an exception and are usually replaced by flyers as they call them; copies of book pages.

As will be later discussed under the topic 'family', all the youths, no exceptions, told me that education is the main thing they talk about with their caregivers and their parents when they go home for the weekend. When I ask them why education is so important they tell me: "If I have money I can help them (family). After education I can find work and then I can help them (my family). I can become a teacher. The salary I can give to my family."(Amara Kamara) Another tells me after being asked why it is important to go to school: "… because education is for yourself not for someone else. If you don't learn you don't know anything."(Isa Conteh) And to show the lengths of looking for help to be able to go to school one boy tells me: "… my parents did not have money to afford my education. Unless for my teacher.. I sat down at my father's house.. I saw the teacher and I told him to help me with

my school. Because in these days without education you are nothing. I told him and he accepted to help me."(Gibrilla Koloko)

As said before: the necessity of education is just as high in Freetown as it is in Magburaka. The youth is as aware of the importance of education in the city as they are upcountry. However, even though, and I have to say this explicitly, I do not have hard proof on what I am about to say, it feels as though the youth upcountry are more self-reliant and inventive when it comes to paying their school fees. I base this statement on the conversations I have had with all the youths, and on the observations I have made during my stay in Sierra Leone. However, this does not mean that not all the youths are extremely set on following education and learning to be able to get ahead in their society.

Family:

In Magburaka 12 out of 20 youths do not live with their parents. They live with grandmothers, uncles and aunties, brothers and/or sisters or with friends of the family. 6 out of 20 live with either one of their parents, usually because the other parent has been killed during the war or lives in the village or they simply do not know where the other parent is. And 2 out of the 20 youths live with both their parents.
In Freetown 11 out of the 18 youths live without their parents. They live with their grandmothers and/or brothers and sisters, with their uncles and aunties or with their friends or some of them do not really have a home and live on and off the streets. The latter concerns two boys, one of them used to live with his friends until they had to leave their residence and the other one used to live with his brother until the brother's wife kicked him out and now it is not really clear where he lives. One girl lives with her husband and her child.
6 Out of the 18 youths live with one parent and/or brothers and sisters. And 1 actually lives with both his parents and his brothers and sisters.

First things first, undeniably, family is the most important cornerstone in the Sierra Leone society. Youths are brought up with an immense sense of respect for their parents. Family is also the most important support that one can have, financially and for one's livelihood. Having lost parents and/or siblings during the war therefore does not only entail a very tragic experience emotionally but it means that the youths have lost their primary source of survival. Family is what one falls back on, they give you food, a roof over your head and everything in their power to get farther ahead in the future.
Families are usually very large in number. As all the youths have told me, this phenomenon of big families usually comes at a cost for one or more of the siblings. Because the parents (or other caregivers) usually do not make enough money to send all the children to school, one or a few are picked (why one or the other I have not been able to find out) to be the lucky ones to attend school while the others are 'homeschooled' by the siblings that are actually going to school.
Love and care as 'we' in the West claim to be essential in one's upbringing is not a commonly expressed feature or at least widely spoken about subject. When asked about the purpose of a family the youths hardly speak of the love or attention they want to receive or miss from their parents. This is of course not to say that they do not feel the lack hereof or just the opposite; that they actually *do* receive this love and care from their parents but maybe

they do not feel the need to talk about it or are not as used to talk about it as 'we' are. Therefore, even though it would be easy to assume that a family in Sierra Leone only counts as a financial security source, it does have other functions like being an emotional beacon for their children.[1]

Sometimes the youths have to live with their uncles and aunties, or other caregivers, instead of their parents, even though they do not want to. This is usually just because their parents are not able to provide for them or live too far away from the schools. Not once have I heard from the youths that their parents do not want to take care of them, but leaving the family home is often the only way to live a 'proper' life and to be able to go to school.

When I brought up the subject of the importance to live with one's parents instead of the people they live with now or what would be better with their parents than now, I would get the following answers:

"I'm not living with my parents but with my uncle. He is helping me with my fees. Sometimes I find it difficult that I don't live with my parents, when I encounter a problem. But I want to achieve something in life, so I have to cope with any situation I encounter." (Morlay Turay)

Another boy told me: " … If the war did not happen I would be living with my parents. My parents would have had sorrow for me. I now live with my uncle's friend and he shows more love for his children than he does to me. My parents would have loved me. They showed me much love when I saw them. They would visit me when I lived with my uncle. I played with them. (…)".(Isaac F. Jalloh)

And finally: "I would be more happy if I lived with my father. So I would be able to live with my brothers and sisters. I want to talk about our futures and get support for my school. (…) to get money and advice about my life. How to carry out my life affairs. Not to join bad behavior. They will advise me not to do that. I also want to show them I am living a good life. Not smoking, doing drugs … ."(Alhaji Sesay)

When asked what the purpose of a family is to them, the most frequent given answer is that a family has to take care of them. By their answers I conclude that they mean that a family should give them food and water and everything they need to go to school, like school fees, materials and clothes. Activities and conversations with the caregivers that they live with usually revolve around their school activities, work and their household chores. Of course there are a few exceptions of caregivers playing with their 'children' or talking about what the 'child' has done during the day and if they are feeling ok. But as I listened to the youths, it mostly seemed to be very practical; the youths asking their parents or other caregivers not to forget about their education, to ask relatives to help them with their school fees or ask for books or other materials.

When it comes to siblings, family has a strong sense of protection over each other. Not necessarily always in the physical way but when it comes to supporting each other and giving each other advise on the right paths to walk in life and the important aspects in life that should not be forgotten, like education. In addition, quite a few of the youths I talked to are

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[1] note: I felt the need to write this explanation down during this chapter and not to wait until the research analysis for I did not want to create false ideas on the view of necessity for emotional care in Sierra Leone society.

also being financially supported by their brother or sister, for example brothers or sisters paying their school fees or giving them some lunch money (a very important form of daily support).

As a result to the question whether they talk with their siblings or do things together the following answers give an overall idea of the content of their relationships:

"Yes we study together and we play. I talk to them, advice them. I tell them to stay out of trouble and I tell them to study. My sister I have to advice more than my brothers, because she is a woman. If she starts to follow boys, she will suffer. (meaning she will end up pregnant)".(anonymous)

"We eat together. (..) and I talk to them. I tell them about my education. We also play football or something else. And I tell them about school, to be serious. I talk about doing things for our family. I tell them to be serious about their books. Many people get good jobs because of education."(Abdul Sesay)

"When we see each other we discuss school. I ask them if they are trying at school.. we also play and laugh together. If there is food, we eat. We talk about what we want in the future. (…) Family is important for unity. You have to share knowledge."(Anthony Mansaray)

"I always talk to them. When they come out of school I take them to the garage and teach them how to do everything so they have the working experience. So they will know a job after they leave school, if there's no other job. (…) I always advise them that they have to be serious about what they are doing. We also play and make fun. (…) they always listen to me. I want them to learn and get a job so they can live for themselves."(Mohamed Kargbo)

One of the boys sums a few things up very clearly during the interview: "I tell him (little brother) to study, do things right. Going to school is the only way your life can improve. If you don't go to school you will always be lower than your colleagues. It's important to get a better job for your future and it will make your family happy. With a better job you can help your family. It is important to help your family to improve their life. (…) they (the family) will take care of each other and there will be love for each other and this will make the family stronger."(Barbar Conteh)

The youths living in Magburaka with someone other than their own parents often go home on the weekends. This seems to happen more with the youths in Magburaka than the ones living in Freetown. In Magburaka the parents usually live in villages not too far away, even though a half hour trip could cost the equivalent of two meals, and therefore does not happen too often. At home the youths usually help their parents out by working the land and they get some money or food for it in exchange.

However, as mentioned above, going home can be a very costly affair and as one boy in Freetown told me; he does not always have time and money to see his parents and brothers and sisters across town.

Finally, youths are very aware of the function of their family. They have a great sense of respect for their parents and are brought up with the idea that when they grow up they will have to take care of their own parents one day. Talking to the youths, whether this was in

Magburaka or in Freetown, they all told me that when they would have their jobs and make money some day, they would build their parents a house or at least take care of them like the parents are taking care of their children now. The sense of protection I talked about earlier comes back in this conception. Family takes care of each other. First the parents take care of the children the best they can, and after a while, after the children have grown up, they return the favor. It is the way the community works: family has to stick together and be each other's backbone during the struggling life they lead. Many youths told me their parents (whether these are their biological parents or not) are struggling to pay their school fees and that they (the youths) want to relieve this struggling and straining by taking care of them (the parents) in exchange for the sacrifices these parents have made for their education; namely by paying for their retirement with the money they will earn.

Peers:

Youths are very aware of the influence other youths have on them. They chose friends that they can trust to help and support them through life and they purposefully avoid people that might lead them onto the wrong path. This latter being a life where they steal, use drugs and alcohol, smoke and are idle. Because even being idle means to them that you are not doing something useful with your life and that you are not trying to actively change your destiny for the better by going to school, focusing steadily on your books and maybe working.
The youths in Freetown and Magburaka agree on the fact that they need their friends to survive. Friends are not only there to have fun with but as they told me en masse; friends are also there to study with and to support you in your daily survival. Of course friends are not only there to share food with but the youth also study together, they talk about their wishes for their future, they play football and other games together and just hang out as any other youths do.
For girls it seems to be even more crucial to choose the right friends. As I heard from both the boys and the girls, it is very easy for girls to be lured onto the wrong path. This time the wrong path being interaction with boys that will get them pregnant after which they usually end up getting 'stuck' with the baby, having to leave school (if they attended school in the first place) and having no one to support them. This turn of life is something that the girls I spoke with are very fearful of and that boys are very weary of when it comes to their sisters.

"After school I meet with my friends and we discuss class. I only do school affairs with them. I don't like to do other things with them because some friends are not good. Maybe they put you in a position you don't like. (…) Then I will do things that I don't like (means steeling when made jealous of her friends). Or for example girls go to the street to make money and then a man can get you pregnant. My future will be in a bad way. That's why I don't like to stay with friends that are not good for you."(Adamsay Conteh)

"Friends are not good because most of them get pregnant. My aunt keeps me away from them, she tells me she doesn't want me to join them."(Isata Dumbuya)

It does not seem to make a difference if the youths live upcountry or in the city for they all struggle to get daily meals and they all rely on their friends to get food. They all agree on the

fact that good friends will help you when you are in trouble and that they are part of your security for the future.

"… because friends influence each other positively. They tell me to go to church. They help me to strive to overcome the things that are not good."(Tamba Benya)

"I have friends but they all live in the streets. We talk and hang out. I don't talk to them about myself because there is no time for that, everybody is busy surviving."(Daniel S. Conteh)

".. we think about the future together. If you are discouraged your friend will encourage you. If you want to do something bad, your friend will not let you, he will tell you to compose yourself. (..) I tell my friends to pay attention to school. I encourage them because they have someone to support them, to pass through school. Maybe if they succeed, they will help me, that is friendship."(Abu Bakarr Conteh)

".. If you don't have any friends, you don't have any lunch."(Karim B. Gbla)

Religion:

Whether I speak to youths upcountry or in the city, all they say is drenched in faith in g'd. Being a Christian or a Muslim makes no difference when it comes to believing that g'd is the one you need to rely on in your life. When asked about their life right now, the first things they say is that they thank g'd that they are alive and that they survived the war. Not everyone is as religious or faithful as the other, but the overall impression is that they rely on g'd to give them a chance to make their life better. One boy told me he relies on g'd to send him someone to support him and that is what he is waiting for. Another boy told me when asked what would be a good life for him: "To pray every day. (…) After work I go to the river to wash and after that I go and pray."(Mohamed Kabbia)

Future:

Explaining how the youth talk about their future is confusing. It is hard to generalize their answers because some of the youths are very clear on what they want to be and even though others seem to be clear on it too, their answers disclose a certain type of ignorance when it comes to options for their future.
"I want to be someone admirable in the future. Like to be a president, because I want to advocate for my country. Or an ambassador or if I'm not in that position, I want to be a minister of foreign affairs to go to white man country." In response to the question what kind of study he then wants to do, he says: "Bachelor of art. I want to study law and become a lawyer, a magistrate. You need law for that. A magistrate judges people and for that you need law to stop violence in the country. (me: "So which profession do you want to do most?")
"President. When I'm president I want to help this country and advocate for this country. I see people strain and I want to make it better. Create hydroelectricity, create good water, stop corruption. Create more work so that young people can get jobs."(Isaac F. Jalloh)

The youth in Freetown responded with more seemingly down to earth professions than the youth in Magburaka did. In Freetown the following professions were given by one or more youths: lawyer, accountant, nurse, economist, soldier, politician, policeman, doctor, driver, engineer (a girl) and a mechanic. In Freetown they also seemed more focused on one profession instead of many.

In Magburaka they came up with the following professions, naming one or more per person: lawyer, bank manager, army cadet, president, prime minister, magistrate, football player, engineer, policeman, nurse, doctor, teacher, 'bomber' (rich person), tailor and a business man. In Magburaka 11 out of 20 youths named one thing they wanted to become next to 4 people who named two to five different aspired professions (the remaining five not giving any exclusive answers or mentioning a profession).

In Freetown 14 out of the 18 youths mention one profession they have chosen for themselves, not always knowing exactly which study they have to do to accomplish it, but also this often seems to be well considered.

However, the difference between the youth in Freetown saying they want to acquire two different professions and the ones in Magburaka, is that the ones in Magburaka do not say they want to be either… or…, but both. In Freetown however, two out of the three youths that mention two (never more) professions they want to become, give an answer that seems to be well thought through and backed up. "If I can't do law I want to do economics. I want to get a job with that in a bank."(Barbar Conteh) To me this shows a certain kind of consideration when it comes to feasible possibilities. Not choosing professions that are too far apart in capabilities and degree of difficulty.

Confusion on what they want to be and mentioning more professions than one is not very surprising when one considers that on the one hand they do think about their future, about what would be a good job to do and how they can contribute to their society. But on the other hand they do not seem to realize and know how things work in society and that if you do not succeed in becoming a lawyer, the chances of becoming the president of the country are very minor. Not to say that having high ideals and great goals for themselves in a tight job market, like the one in Sierra Leone, is not good, but feasibility of a plan is very important especially when it is so hard to find a (good) job.

Their reasons for acquiring a good job has a few very clear objectives: they want to make money and not have to strain anymore as they are doing right now, together with the relieve of their own straining, they want to take this hardship away for their families as well. But as many have told me who want to become a lawyer, a doctor, a policeman or a politician, they also want to contribute to their society. They want to change the situation Sierra Leone is in and at the same time help the people (their own family or people in general) with things that are so hard to find for now, like good and honest legal representation, good healthcare and non-corrupt politics.

"I want to be a lawyer. (…) I want to be a lawyer because I want to talk for those that are not able to talk. Right now at the police they only look at those who have money."(Josef Samai)

"If I can finish my school and be a lawyer there will be a comfortable life, with my own house and a car. I want my mother and sisters to have their own house, if I have the opportunity. My mother is struggling for us and she will try to pay for us for college. My

father will help too. I would also like to go to another country. I want my own family to be able to have a next generation."(Hassan Mansaray)

Next to having a job and making money to be able to take care of their families, almost all of the youths, both in Freetown and in Magburaka, say they want to get married, have children and build a house for themselves. Having children seem to be very important in the Sierra Leone society for they give a person status. Listening to the youths I began to understand that having children gives you a way to carry on your legacy after you pass on and of course it gives you social and financial security after you retire.
Furthermore, many told me that it is very important to them that the community will respect them in the future. That by having children or having a good job people will look up to you and respect you and that this is very important to them.

Striking to me was how aware some of the youths are of the attitude of their fellow Sierra Leoneans. How driven they are when it comes to rebuilding their country and how set they are on the fact that reconstruction needs hard work and education.
"I want to learn first. I have my intentions. I want to be a specialist in economics. (…) I want to help my family and I want to be a model in society. I want people to copy me. I want them to learn to strike harder, to go to university. I want people to be strong and work harder. At the end you will see the benefit. Further, I want to live with my parents and have my own family."(anonymous)

"I want to be a policeman. To help my people. I will have my own salary and with that I can help my family. I also want a big house for my family and take my mother from the village. (…) If I have the chance after doing the police work I want to go to another country. After five years. I have to study here in my country. First work here to have experience, then work there. In England, I don't know anything about the police there, that's why I have to know something here first."(Karim B. Gbla)

What to do before accomplishing the goals for the future:

One can be very short and clear on what the youth's idea is of what they need to get the jobs they want and achieve what they have in mind for themselves in the future.
They need to pursue education; finish high school and go to college or university. But to be able to achieve that, they need someone to help them. To help them pay for the school fees and other necessities and to encourage them to follow through in their plan.
This answer is unanimous for youths in Freetown and Magburaka, whether the youths are already going to school or in unofficial education. Only the two non-school-going boys in Magburaka did not mention education.
And last but not least, some of them stress the guidance they need from g'd.

Group discussions:

The group discussions have been written as if told by one of the youths. I did this on purpose to make the stories more lively and to narrow the distance between the reader and the stories of the youths. The results of the group discussions below are edited by me, but are, even though not literally quoted, really the youth's words, thoughts and ideas.
I have kept the group discussions of the youths separate to emphasize the differences between the groups. Both between each other within cities and between the city and upcountry. Therefore a difference in topics can be seen between the youths going to official schooling and the ones going to unofficial schooling, which I will further discuss in the next chapter of this thesis: the analysis of the research results.

Magburaka
Group 1:
The problem that rules our lives the most is the desire to pursue education. But knowing that our caregivers do not have enough money to let us go to college or university we are anxious about the future. For now our biggest problem is getting our daily bread. Not having any breakfast, not having any lunch at school and not having dinner sometimes. Going to school with a hungry stomach is straining.
For this reason we need someone to help us with our education, to pay our fees and to buy us lunch to be able to get good quality education. We need this education to be able to make something of our lives and we need to make something of our lives, because this means getting a job and making money and without money you can't do anything in this world. It is hard to get a fellow African to help you. Everybody is surviving for himself.
Obviously the war was a horrible time. Many of us lost members of our family, leaving us in fear and on the run for our own life. Everybody scattered, families were torn apart and it was all about survival. We can describe the aftermath of the war in three points: poverty, outbreak of deceases and destruction of life: People do not have the chance to do business anymore, there is a lack of medical facilities and many people died during the war and families scattered. The government does not take care of its people. Even though there are many minerals in the country that could bring a lot of money to the people, it is always the same people that run away with the money, leaving the poor people behind in poverty.
The policemen like to take bribes. For example if you have a problem with someone and you go to the police but the other person you have the problem with already gave a bribe then the other person will be believed.
The government is not able to help people with basic needs, job opportunities, electricity and enough schools to live in a comfortable manner. Or to provide food, shelter and proper education. There are not enough qualified teachers, medical facilities and transportation.
We do not know what the government is doing since it changed. The government will not help us the way we need them to help us.
What will make us happy from this moment on, is someone who will take care of us, who will pay our school fees, buy school materials and food and clothing. So we can learn to be somebody and take care of our families in the end. Maybe the government will give us a scholarship and we will be able to finish our education that way. But at least we will be able to make a better life for ourselves.

Group 2:
Important in our lives is education because it changes our lives. It makes us better people and it keeps us on the right path. For the people who do not get education it is important to have a job. But you can't be a student without having food, because you can't study while you're hungry. That is why we need to have someone to help us, to pay for us. The only way for us to make money now is by going to our villages in the weekend and help our parents work the land and in exchange they give us some money to pay for lunch, fees and materials. So that is what would make us happy, to have someone to help us through education and with that get a job so we can make a life for ourselves. The education will give us a free road for our lives. With that education we can find jobs and work hard but in Sierra Leone even if you work hard, you hardly make any money. But you still need that education to get a job and safe money and maybe build a house for yourself and your family. And that is our biggest problem, to pay the school fees. Some of us do not have any parents anymore because of the war, and that is why we live with other family members and with some of us, our parents suffer to be able to earn our school fees. So what we need is help, someone to be responsible for us, to pay our school fees, pay for our school materials and to buy us food.
Like we said, the war killed our parents and other family members. We strained during the war, we had to flee to the bush. The people we live with do not treat us the way our parents would have, and by losing our parents, we lost the ones who paid for us. But the good thing is, that the war is over and that we do not have to run anymore. We are healthy and we can go where we want to go. But now, after the war, the only way to make money is by agriculture, everything has become so expensive.
In the future we have to get a job, we want to get married and have children, because if you do not have children you do not have anyone to take care of you when you are old. You have to send your children to school because education is the light.

Freetown:
Services Secondary School:
We need very various things in our lives. It starts with good food. You need to eat healthy to stay healthy. But it is not all about food it is also about how you live your life, with what kind of attitude. It gives you strength if you achieve what you set out for yourself to achieve. And also, you have to be a decent human being. This, you have to learn from your parents or the ones that raise you. They have to teach you how to behave and to be tough in life. They will praise you and bless you, and you need to be blessed by your parents, just like you need to be blessed by g'd. You need to do as g'd says; have respect for elders and respect the ones that raised you, because if you don't do that, whatever goodness is coming your way, it will not reach you. You need to believe you can do things and work hard to achieve it and then g'd will help and support you. Religion will keep you strong, it will keep you from going astray. And you should know how to live in a community; value your friends. Some friends only come to you when you have something and others will always be there for you. But you have to know how to pick them and you have to know how to make decisions with other people and not alone. You should share your problems and not try to solve them alone. Whether it comes to jobs or health; you need to socialize and know how to use your contacts because you need your community's help in everything you do.
So your community is important, but what is important to us personally, is our moms. They do everything for us and for us who do not live with our moms, the other people who take

care of us are important. Next to that our education is very important to us because it holds our future. And furthermore prayer is very important and achievement as well because you can have all the support you want, if you do not achieve anything it's worth nothing. Even though there are many things important to us, there are also things we want to change. Our lives right now are not good and not bad. For some of us life is a bit better than the others because some of us have very heavy jobs. But life is more or less in balance, sometimes we eat and sometimes we do not eat. Besides food we lack things like school materials and money to pay for extra classes to be able to pass the WASCE examination. So what we want to change is to get help with our school fees, school materials and clothes. We would also like to eat more every day. Some of us eat once or twice a day and we would like that to become three times a day. And if we would have the chance, we would like to go to better schools, because education is the way we will get jobs and we need good jobs to be able to make money and create a better standard of living for ourselves and our families. Our job is our future and if we have a job we will not have to ask other people for help anymore. All these changes we are talking about will demand hard work from our side, but we also need the government to change its attitude towards its citizens. The government should reward the efforts of the people to work hard and helps us.

All of this should lead to our goals for the future: we all want good professions like being a lawyer, an accountant, a cadet, a football player or an economist. We want a good job to be able to build ourselves a house and take care of our families in the future. A job like a lawyer for example is not an easy one in Sierra Leone but we want to defend the poor because of the way we have suffered ourselves. The only way we can achieve what we want to achieve is by holding on to our education. We need to put a lot of effort into our learning and show patience to achieve our goals. We also need blessings and respect from others. And we also need help from influential people, because you can try and work hard all you want, if you do not know any people with influence your chances are low. And finally maybe we can get a scholarship but in order to get that you need to be an honest person and work hard.

Group 1 Youth Dream Center:
When it comes to what makes us strong in life we are divided. Some of us think that it is only food and exercise that will make you strong in life. However, some of us think that it is not only food that gives you strength, but also development. You need to develop and to achieve certain things in life to give you strength. I can eat three times a day but then I haven't developed yet because I haven't achieved what I want to achieve as a human. It is when I am developed and when I am not under parental care and I can do whatever I want to do on my own account, it is then that I am strong. In development education plays a great role. However, there are a lot of people who are rich and not educated. The only difference is that a person who is educated and wealthy can manage his money better than a person who is wealthy and not educated. So we do not totally agree on what makes us strong in life but we're also divided when it comes to what makes us happy. For many of us our families make us happy. Especially our moms. Family is very important to all of us. However, to many of us wealth is very important too, money. When you have money you can buy food. You just need money in life. We are all coming to the youth center and this is very important to us as well. Our classes are very important to us. And even though there many things we want to pursue in the future, our lives are good right now. We are all very grateful to g'd that we are alive and that we are healthy. Some of us go to church and we pursue g'dly things. But of

course there are things we want to change in our lives. Most of us have different things we want to change. To begin with some of us who want to change things about our characters. We are too hot tempered and we want to change that because we think it is not good for our interaction with other people. And it would be better if we could forgive people more easily. When it comes to our future we all want to do something different but we all agree that whatever we want to do, we need education first because without education we can't achieve anything. Some of the professions we want to pursue are: doctor, policeman, lawyer and accountant. And of course we also want families and children in our future.

We want to achieve all of this by hard work. Both in school and in general. If you do not persevere, focus and put effort in, you will not achieve anything. And you need the right type of influential people around you to help you otherwise you will not achieve what you want.

Group 2 Youth Dream Center:

What gives us strength in life is food, being healthy. But also not having any stress and not having to strain in life. And even though we do live a tough life, one even harder than the other, we also have things we are happy for and things that are important to us.

We all agree on the fact that we are very happy to be able to come to the Youth Dream Center. We all really want to go to school but none of us have the money to pay for school fees so we could not go to school before, but now we do have a place to learn. Next to our classes at the youth center, our parents and brothers and sisters are very important to us. They make us happy and they support us and take care of us. Another things that's very important to us is money because without money you can't do anything. But even though we have things that make us happy and most of us are supported by family, our lives are not easy. One of us is living in the streets right now because he lost both his parents. He does not have a place to stay, no one to buy him food or to take care of him. For the rest of us life in Sierra Leone is not easy either. Everything in the country is very expensive, like food and housing. Most of us are taken care of by our parents or other family members, but for most of the youths in Sierra Leone life is straining. Many girls who do not have any money go into prostitution to make some money. We all thank g'd that we are alive and healthy. G'd is feeding us and giving us strength to do everything we want. But sometimes we are not so happy, like when we see our friends go to school knowing we can't. Even though we really want to go to school, which is why we are so happy with the youth center. So there are many things we want to change in our lives. Like the suffering. We want to stop struggling for money. We need help to pay for our education and we need help from g'd to not do bad things because of the situation we are in.

If you ask us what we need in our life, it is education. We all need and want to go to school to get the chance to become what we want to become, like a nurse, a lawyer or an engineer. But to be able to follow education we need someone to help us. Most of us want to get married in the future and we want to have children and be able to send our children to school. And if we get the chance we want to travel overseas. In the mean time we need to be patient and pray and be obedient. We should be serious and hopefully g'd will send us someone to help us.

8.2 Research results stakeholders:

During the weeks that I have done my research in Magburaka and Freetown I have spoken with many different stakeholders. I spoke with different stakeholders in both places because I could not get people with exactly the same professions. In Magburaka I interviewed 15 people of whom I decided to leave out 4 interviews. The reason I chose to do this is that the deleted interviews were, in my opinion, not informative enough to be included in the research. The answers I got from these four stakeholders were either, in my opinion, too guided by the interpreter due to family relations, or not direct answers to the question but stories about other things that were not usable for the research results.
In Freetown I interviewed 16 people of whom I deleted 4 interviews as well. One of the interviews was in retrospect too noisy and the interview could not be sufficiently followed to be able to use the information. The other three people did not, like the ones in Magburaka, gives answers to the questions but told me a story that was not very informative for my research results. Therefore I decided to delete these interviews as well.

The interviews will be discussed as follows: first I will give an overall view of what the stakeholders as a group said, making no distinction between the stakeholders in Magburaka or those in Freetown. If there turn out to be differences or additional information from either Magburaka of Freetown, I will write this down after the common information.

I want to make clear that all the information written down in this chapter are the opinions of the stakeholders. Nowhere is my own opinion included.

Stakeholders on the present situation of the youth:

Whether you ask people in the city of Freetown or in Magburaka, there does not seem to be any misconception on what the stakeholders think of the lives of the youth nowadays or how they feel about the attitude of the youth. And where this attitude comes from is no question either.
Listening to the stakeholders, it becomes very clear that the war has had a great impact on the attitude of the youth. Although the country was never extremely wealthy, there seem to have been more jobs and more money around before the war than after. This aside, the problem right now is the attitude of the youth. All the stakeholders are in agreement that the youth have picked up some "un-African"-like rude, disobedient and idle behavior during the war. According to them this has its roots in the rebels spreading their bad and moral-less attitude on the once apparently much better behaved youth. Examples that came up are the smoking of the jamba (marihuana), the killing, the looting, the burning down of houses, the robbing and the promiscuity that lasted throughout the war. The fact that the rebels could take whatever they wanted because of the fear that they had instilled in the people, made them lazy. They could do whatever they wanted, when they wanted and how they wanted, all the while being high on drugs and living the rich lifestyle that they never had before. This attitude of laziness and thinking that everything comes for free seems to have not left the youth after the war. According to the stakeholders, youth do not want to work for their money (they are idle), they do not feel like going to school and they are disobedient to their parents and other elders. Furthermore several stakeholders told me about the many girls that

are working in prostitution to make money and other girls and boys having unprotected sex. This brings more problems than only the apparent diseases. The girls who get pregnant often get left by the man who impregnated them in the first place, leaving the girls to take care of another mouth to feed. The girls will often take care of the child until it can take care of itself or until it is expected to be able to take care of itself. Leaving yet another youth on the street without money, food and education.

On the other hand, it has to be said that education is too expensive. Parents often can't afford the fees and if there are no parents it gets even harder because then the youth have to scrape the fees together some other way, this often resulting in theft, according to the stakeholders. All the while knowing that the chances of getting a job after this hard fought for education are very slim. There are no jobs and there is hardly any trade to be done. But there *is* a need for middle man power, something that the youth need to be focusing on; vocational jobs. But these are not the jobs they want according to the stakeholders. As will become clear further along the text, youth have to be sensitized, guided and counseled when it comes to their options in life. People have to help them readjust to life after the war and prepare them for their future. This is not being done. Youth are mostly left to figure things out by themselves. The youth are suffering. Their situation is terrible. They are traumatized. And they need serious counseling.

These are some of the quotes from the stakeholders on the lives of the youth:

"The war changed the characters of our children. The war made the young people unruly, so much dishonourly. They need serious counseling. Talk to them, in mosques, in churches. Talk to them, tell them what to do for their future. I counsel by praying."(Mr. Kamara King)

"There's is a problem in our country, that is lack of education, lack of trade and lack of a job. When you are not educated and you do not have a trade and there's no job, you will feel bad. That will create evil. How do you live without all that. You will steel, because you are not occupied. When you have a job, you have a choice."(pastor Kamara)

"It is bad (the life of the youth right now). Because the majority are not employed and because the majority are illiterate, uneducated or half baked. It is bad because some of them do not have the necessary care and control they should have from the parents. Some have parents, some don't. In polygamous homes you have a lot of children, but they don't care about them. The child needs care. Up until the 18th year."(Honorable Tarawallie)

"The problems are there, like no schools, no water, no roads. Young men drinking or taking drugs. There are no jobs for them to do. They're frustrated and they see that the society does not help them. They think they're not being supported. Most of them drop out of school because of all the extra costs. They go into the wrong jobs."(Mr. Hottagua)

Another problem is that many parents whose children *do* go to school do not seem to care enough about the educational career of their children. The children are not being monitored by their parents, parents are not involved in school activities and everyone seems to know that children living with family other than their parents are often not being taken care of as well as the biological children are. The youths who *are* going to school often suffer for their fees. If the parents are able to pay the fees and let them go to school, there is often little food

to eat and the children will be sitting on their school chairs, hungry. As a consequence of a lack of money, many youths will drop out before finishing their secondary school, not having a diploma or something else to fall back on.

A positive point that was mentioned by about 4 or 5 people is the fact that now in comparison to before the war, more girls are going to school. The attitude towards the girl child being educated instead of staying at home all day has changed, because after the war people seem to have realized that everyone in society needs a degree to be able to go somewhere in life and not only the boys.

One point mentioned by three stakeholders in Magburaka is the fact that polygamous families often result in children that are not properly taken care of. Not to say that there is anything wrong with polygamous families, but when a man marries multiple wives and has children with all of them, he has to be able to take care of these children financially. Because this is often not the case, some of the children are neglected and their parents fail to send them to school.

One of the stakeholders in Freetown told me that many youths that actually graduate from university end up changing dollars on the streets. The problem is, as mentioned before, that there are not many jobs for youth graduating from university. Not only because there just are not many jobs for highly schooled people but also because of corruption. As many people have told me (in Magburaka as well as in Freetown), getting a substantially paid job is often a matter of knowing people. As one can imagine, the world of people that know each other is rather limited and very hard to penetrate. Consequence being that youths who apply for a job that they are qualified for and then have to compete with someone less qualified but with more connections, often see the job go to the other person. A lot of people go into the teaching field because there are not even close to enough properly schooled teachers and this is one of the only professions to go into. But because many teachers do not get paid the first one or two years that they work, many youths don't want to go into the teaching field. They choose to exchange dollars on the streets instead which in their eyes is a good alternative to going out to steel or beg.

One of the teachers gives a very clear overview on the current situation:
"It's a bad thing we're suffering from. The illiteracy is 80%. If it doesn't change, the youth will stay this way. The youth have unprotected sex and it results in unwanted pregnancy. And the guys leave the girls and the girl will be alone. The woman will take of the kid to a certain age and leave the child after that and then the child will have to take care of itself. The society does not take care of the child and the these youths (on the streets) are very indoctrinated. They can give you drugs and tell you it's good. The child has grown up alone and can do whatever they want. They hang around to thief people. You have other youth who come from university and think the environment is not good for them. They have decided to go to the street to exchange dollars, that's how they chose to earn a living. We have other youth who come to the city and come from villages but they think they can no longer listen to their parents and they want to live an independent life. (…) The government needs to sensitize the youth in this. When this is solved it will minimize the increase of youth in the streets. At least the youth in the street with the dollars chose to make their own money, not to beg or steel. Or they sell other things, but they're not all educated. Some are just brought up

by themselves. Some of their parents are gone, because of the war. Killed or disappeared. The war brought something to their mind, that the wickedness they went through gives them the idea they can do whatever they want. They think they should revenge their families being killed and now no one helps them."

So what *do* the youth need in their lives? What is lacking right now that would make their lives better?

Stakeholders on important factors in the youths' lives:

According to the stakeholders there are many things that the youth need, but up and foremost: Education, education, education. Learning is not only for the knowledge you will get from books but also the character that is formed by going to school and setting goals for yourself. It brings a different way of thinking and looking at society.
Also, there are two different types of education that are mentioned by the stakeholders. The regular education; primary, secondary and tertiary education. The latter can be either college or university and then there is vocational training. According to the stakeholders much more youths should be going into vocational training. There is a significant lack of middle man power. Youths should be training to be plumbers, carpenters, welders and mechanics and so on. This is where they can get their jobs, because, as the stakeholders explained; this area of work will always need employees. However, as they continue, this is also the area of work that youths do not actually want to work in. They want to make quick money and think that this is to be found in university level jobs. There is a problem in this vocational training area. There are not enough vocational institutes and the institutes that are there, are not properly equipped. Important herein is that the government steps in, to 1: encourage the youth to participate in vocational training and 2: finance vocational institutes. Not only to make sure that the youth have the capability to perform a job but also to keep them off the streets. Because, as the stakeholders say: An idle mind is the devil's playground. Making sure that the youth are off the streets doing something is making sure that they're not out on the streets getting in trouble.
As the stakeholders say:
"They (the youth) need to engage. There's a problem because the youth are idle, they have nothing to do so they end up committing crimes. If the government would grand scholarships there would be more youth in schools. Also youth and vocational training, not every youth is academic. They have to have something else to do. If they have basic skills they have something to do. Government can find means and ways to help them with building toilets for example. They can't do it on their own. Most of the youth going to governmental school lost their parents so they have to provide their fees themselves, but they can't pay it and drop out and they end up in the street just hanging around."(Mr. Hottagua)

"What I think is important for them is to go back to school or find a job. They have to keep themselves busy, not to have an idle mind. Because an idle minds thinks evil.
There are not enough jobs, it is better for them to join vocational training. They will learn a job there and they will be occupied. It depends on the government with the jobs. There is no money. That's why we need aid. There are a lot of problems in Sierra Leone. We need factories (institutes) to teach the children."(anonymous)

Another job that does not seem to be popular with the youth, but at least half the stakeholders see as an important investment in the development and therewith the future of the country, is agriculture. Agriculture is not only another way to give the youth jobs, but it also produces food therewith fighting hunger and, if possible, they can sell the products from the land which will fight poverty and help the development of the country.

The stakeholders also keep mentioning the importance of guidance by parents and other important people. Youth should get a sense of belonging from their parents. This sense of belonging is important for when they go out into the world, to give them confidence and to know they are supported by their family. And they should be provided care and basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. The youth need to be encouraged by their parents. Parents have to explain their children the difference between the right and the wrong path. And the youth have to learn proper, g'dly values and morals, to not have bad friends and think about their future and that of the society and always be grateful to g'd for what he has given you. Parents need to monitor their children to see if they are doing well in school, what their future plans are and if these plans are coherent with their educational capabilities. If not, parents need to guide their children in the direction that will give them the right education and the opportunity of a good job according to what the child likes and is good at.

Except for the parents' guidance they also need professional counseling. Someone that will guide them, knows their needs and can help them in the right direction and at the same time comforts them with their feelings, giving them a sense of confidence in themselves. Many stakeholders share the opinion that this sensitization and counseling should be done by both parents and by people from the government. Some parents do not have control over their children anymore, which can be for different reasons, for example poverty; parents not being able to give their children what they need and then the children will go and listen to the person that *can* give them what they need. This poverty also usually means that the parents are not educated and therefore have trouble making the children listen to them. This is where the government comes in with people who are trained to help these children and know how to talk to them.

"The first person the youth look for is a counselor. A counselor is someone from the government who is looking after the youth and knows their needs. The needs of the youth for the development of the country, is agriculture. A better agriculture in the country, if youth engage more in agriculture, they will work for their future. And the youth need institutions to learn something. And third, the youth need social life. People to help them to engage in this. Like to make football groups. That's important because if the youth have somewhere to group themselves for some time, they will forget other things. They will forget to do bad things. (…) And we need a group to sensitize the youth, especially for those who bother the girls. To sensitize is to avoid early pregnancy, that'll be better.
The government has a better role to play in that. The government has to train people to go around and advice youth to not do bad things. The role of parents is limited because the parents are not educated and poor. Most of the youth don't listen to them. (…) They listen to the one that gives them what they need."(Ibrahim Conteh)

And of course youth need money. That is where all of the above is leading to. To make money to create a life for themselves and to be able to help their family, their community and in the end the society of Sierra Leone. But they do not only need to make money after their education but they need it now. They need it to pay for their education and to pay for food and school materials so they will not have to go to school hungry and without supplies to actually learn.

Some literal opinions of the stakeholders on the subject:
"The most important thing is to learn to be independent. Because it's good, it pays to be independent. Independent is someone who can stand on their own. Financially and morally. Independent in behavior." (Miss. Tommy)

"My attention. They need that. I want them to trust me before they trust anybody else. I see it very important for them to listen to me and to trust me. They need education, their clothing and to take them to the hospital when they need it. (…) Train them very well. With good discipline. You have to make sure they know what to do and what not to do. That is what a good parent will do for their child. And g'dly discipline. I tell them things of g'd."(anonymous)

Another stakeholder says: "they should go to school and attain a very high standard of education. And get a professional qualification and then they will get a good job. They will be good people; that's a person who gets a very high standard of work and someone with a very good morality. You can be educated but if your attitude towards the country, life and other people is not good then you are not a good person. If your moral behavior is bad then you are not a good person. You have to participate in the development of the community. If you want to develop a nation you have to start with your own house and your chiefdom." (Ibrahim M. Kamara)

All of the above is what the youth need according to the stakeholders. But as could be read in the part on their current life, this is by far not what they have right now. So, what has to change for the youth to get what they need?

Changes needed in the life of the youth, according to the stakeholders:

The attitude has to change and by this the stakeholders are talking about the attitude of the youth, of the government and of the community.
Starting with the youth: youth have to change their behavior and their mindset; they have to become involved in the development of their community and their country. They have to be sensitized about the importance of education and be taken off the streets and taken away from violent behavior. To enable this, they have to be given accommodation and be supplied with free and compulsory (basic) education. The schools (often the government) have to lower their fees and if possible, mentioned by one of the stakeholders; no more uniforms. Through this education the youth have to be empowered.
The youth should learn that they have to work to accomplish something. They can't keep asking for things but they have to give up their idleness and be made aware of their possibilities for their future when it comes to education and work. According to the

stakeholders there is a need for many more vocationally schooled people in the society. This means hard work and the youth should become willing to do this line of work.

To make this possible, the government should create an enabling environment. They should build more vocational institutes, supply more scholarships, equip the institutes with machinery, give the youth food at school and create a positive outlook for when the youth graduate and have to start working. In other words, the government should create jobs for the youth.

Also, the government has to fight corruption. They have to set a good example for the youth, that if you work for something and you are the most qualified person to apply for a job, that you will get it. And the effort of the government put in rebuilding the society and supporting the youth by supplying the vocational institutes and the youth's basic needs will give the youth faith and show them a good role model when it comes to their own effort that they have to put into rebuilding their life. The government should instill the right values of hard work and show that punishable actions are actually being punished. This will keep the youth from going on the wrong path as well.

And this also involves the community. The community has to be a good role model for the youth. They should all be involved in the development of their society. They should support their children in their pursuit of education and guide them herein.

And whether this has to be instilled by the government or by the community, there is a desperate need for more teachers, well educated, properly paid and motivated teachers.

To quote some stakeholders:

"(We need) to equip school with computers for example. And now we do shift because there are not enough schools. And we need more teachers, you have to pay them well. Those are fundamental basics. They (the youth) need tech.voc., let them meet well equipped carpentry workshops etc. That will attract them, they need something to attract them. They need basic skill certificate for their future, to earn their living."(Mr. Joeque)

"(They need): one, from the side of the government and the community they have to be encouraged to have a self realization of themselves. To be able to know that nothing is free until they are willing to do some hard work. They want that within themselves. And an enabling environment has to be supplied by the community and the government and they will appreciate it. And they will become happy people. At 24,25 when they graduate and get degree and you get a qualification for work, that's the only time they get realization of life but until that time they have to see it in the community and they have to see it from the government. (…) Some families just don't care.(…) Like the government sitting now, the party should only oppose what is wrong, not what is right. The government misleads and that's not the way to bring the youth up. That's instilling wrong values. We have corruption. There should not be secret vows. When the youth become to see that these things are wrong and punishable, they will not do that. But when no examples are set, they won't care. (…) (The youth need) a lot of support. Some parents support their children in school. You have to sensitize the youth about good values. The government is making education free for primary school but a child can't go to school on an empty stomach, they don't get anything at home. They need food and free education, values. And they need in the future to get a job. Rome was not build in day."(Mr. Smollet Tholie)

And finally Mr Mansaray says: "Their conduct (has to change). Try to wipe away the idea of violence. They are very violent. It's because they saw wicked people in their youth go unpunished. Also the situation in their minds; the educational attitude. The educational outlook. The integrity. Management of the country's resources. Don't sleep. You should not steel. You should not be corrupt, that should change. There are definite instructions from the creator; though shall not steel and though shall not kill."

Now that we know what the youth needs according to the stakeholders and what has to happen according to them for the future to look brighter for the youth, the question is: what should the future of the youth look like?

Future expectations for the youth:

As can be expected this part of the research will not disclose very unexpected information. The stakeholders want the future of the youth to contain a few things: they have to finish their education and get a degree. Whether this is a degree from university, college or vocational training does not matter. After finishing a good education they have to find a job that suits their (the youth's) capabilities and interests and with which they can support themselves and their family. What the stakeholders want is for the youth to become independent, both socially and economically. Meaning that they should become able to take care of themselves and not rely on others to survive. They do however need to stay in close contact with the community because without the support of the community they will not succeed in life.
Furthermore, they should be somebody in life, this means that they should be close to their community; to care about other people and to help them. By doing this they help their community develop as well as themselves. This is very important. The stakeholders want the youth to become happy, healthy, self sustaining people. Because in this formation they will have a secure future. But their mind has to stay focused on the development of the community and on hard work and later on education for their own children in their future.

"I want them to be happy. A happy life is when you live in a good accommodation, a good house, you built a house for yourself, you're working, with children and a wife and you'll be able to take care of them. It's important, we expect them to have their own turn to have to take care of their family. They have to become someone important in society."(anonymous)

"He (my son) has to become someone useful. Somebody in the family. His attitude has to be good. If he can't live and provide for himself he is not someone useful."(pastor Kamara)

"It's in the hands of g'd. I guide them in the way I want them to go. I want them to go through the educational curriculum and become a good student and from there they should be someone who will deliver for the community and the society. Education is what you do with it for your community. The government is responsible for the overall planning of the education. Very few people who can cater for the private institutions."(Mr. Joeque)

About 3 or 4 of the stakeholders mention microcredit during the interview. The reason I did not mention this before is that microcredit is usually given to adults, meaning that the youth

could apply for microcredit when they are adults and are then able to do something productive with this money. This would be in their future.

Finally, it is interesting to see that the stakeholders who have children themselves, and most of the ones I spoke to do, tell me that youth should focus on vocational training and not on 'white man jobs', but when asked about the future of their own children at least 4 of the stakeholders came up with professions like nurse, accountant, lawyer and doctor. Not the vocational jobs they are aiming for when it comes to other youths.

9. Research analysis:

In this part of the thesis I will analyze the research results. First I will analyze the results of the youth all together, highlighting similarities but mostly differences between youth in Magburaka and Freetown, after which I will elaborate on the stakeholders as a group and then as with the youth, I will highlight the similarities and, again, mostly differences between the stakeholders in Magburaka and Freetown, if found. After both have been discussed I will show the similarities and differences between the youth and the stakeholders.
In this part of the thesis still only the opinion of the youth and the stakeholders are included in the text, not my own opinion, unless clearly stated.

9.1 Analysis of the youth:

After years of living in fear and having to run from place to place, seeing people get killed, losing family members, seeing houses burned down and losing all their properties, the war still has a tremendous influence on the lives of the youth. Not only because the country has been destroyed and poverty has hit the society, but also because many youths lost their family, which does not only bring emotional problems but also practical problems concerning survival, as will be later explained. Beside losing their parents the youth also lost years of education, years that they can't get back but still have to make up for, somehow. The people who took care of their education before the war, their parents, are often no longer there or can't pay for their education anymore because of the fact that all their properties have been looted and they no longer have means to make money. So except for having lost their parents and other family members, they now have to cope with the consequences of losing the providers of their basic needs.
The poverty that came as a consequence of the war therefore has a great impact on their lives. It makes life difficult in many ways, but two in particular: education brings them a daily struggle and after this struggle there are often no jobs to be fulfilled. The youth are fighting to pay their school fees. Many are supported by their parents or other caregivers but some have to pay the fees themselves. It brings a daily struggle, year in year out. But after the school fees have been paid, the struggle is not over. Many youths in Magburaka do not eat for a day or maybe multiple days in a row and also the youths in Freetown are struggling to get at least one meal a day. They all go to school hungry. Not to speak of the school uniforms and other materials that have to be bought in order to be allowed to attend education. It is a struggle that does not seem to end.
Besides the strain on education, the country economy has plummeted and there are hardly any jobs for the youth to fulfill after they finish school. If they finish school, because sometimes there are just no possibilities to get the money for the fees anymore and they have to drop out after often having failed to pay for several terms already.
But the youths who are going to school are very keen on finishing their education. They are very aware of how important their education is for their future and they will do anything, go through any hardship, to get that piece of paper that says they are ready to work. The ones I have spoken with in Magburaka who do not go to school are working to make a living for themselves and sometimes for their families as well. The ones I have spoken with in Freetown who are not going to official schooling, are going to the Youth Dream Center

where they get unofficial schooling. They too see the extensive importance of education but just can't afford to go to an official school.

More youth in Magburaka than in Freetown seem to be reliant on themselves to pay for their own food and/or for their own school fees than in Freetown. Which makes the pressure on supplying money to pay for it even higher for them. Not to say that they do not all struggle to pay their fees, whether through caregivers or by themselves.

As can be seen, education is one of the most important factors in the lives of the youth. It gives them a ticket to the future. It is what they bet all their stakes on. But going to school is not possible without a few other factors that clearly keep them alive. Because in Sierra Leone it is all about family. Family keeps the youth alive. Many youths lost their parents during the war. And as mentioned before; by losing their parents they did not only lose the people who loved and supported them in life, but they also lost the people who provided them their basic needs. Instead these youths now live with other relatives, friends of the family or their own friends. And even the youths who still have their parents, or at least one parent, often do not live with them because their parents live too far away from school or can't afford to take care of their children anymore. A lot of people lost their means of income during the war and are left with nothing. These are people that made money and had a relatively good life before the war, they were able to support their children's needs but now are not able to do this anymore. As a consequence many youths do not live with their parents any longer. And even though the people they live with now might pay for their school fees and give them food as regularly as they can, the youth can feel the difference between living with people other than their own parents by the care and concern their parents used to show them. In a family that is not their own, they are not taken care of as they would be by their own parents. This is usually explained by the youth as the care that is provided and consideration that is given to the biological children of the people they live with, which they do not receive.

According to the youth the most important thing that a family is for, is care. They say taking care of someone is to make sure that the fees are paid, that they get food, school materials and shelter. And even though this all sounds very practical, family is also about support and protection. Not necessarily the physical protection but when it comes to siblings for example the youth I have spoken with feel a great need to guide their siblings. To keep them on the right path, to tell them to focus on their books, be aware of their future and to share their knowledge with them. As they told me, family is important for unity, to keep each other strong in life. Youths are also very aware of another role of the family in society. This is when it comes to carrying the family into the future. Their role as children is to later in life take care of their own parents. Their (biological) parents are now struggling to send them to school, or at least take care of them as best they can, and when the youth have jobs and make money themselves, they should in return take care of their parents. That is the way community works; family has to stick together and be each other's backbone in the struggle through life. That is why the youth are very keen on creating their own family as well. To get married and have children, so their children will be able to take care of them when they retire. But having children is also part of a status that they want to create for themselves. People will have respect for you when you have children and when you have created a family that you take good care of. This will make you somebody in society, and that is what it is all about.

Next to their family who they need to survive, the youth are very reliant on their friends. As they told me during interviews: Friends are the ones they rely on to have lunch during the

day and they are the ones they rely on for support and connections in their future. They choose their friends carefully. As they say, they need friends that will support them, that will help them to stay on the right path, to discuss their education with, and who will encourage them to have faith and focus on their education: good friends. However, friends can have a good and a bad influence on one's life. The youths I have spoken with are very weary of bad friends; friends who get you in trouble and keep you away from school. For girls it is even more important to choose the right friends because wrong friends can lead them away from education and towards boys, which brings them in great risk of ending up pregnant and having to leave their education and take care of their child as a single parent.

Another way to be guided is by g'd. The youth in Sierra Leone are very religious. Whether they are Muslim or Christian does not matter. They trust in g'd to send them someone to help them out of their hardship and to keep them on the right path. They are also all very grateful to g'd that they are still alive, healthy and doing well considering the circumstances.

Talking to the youth about their future brought some problems. They did not quite seem to realize what creating and reaching their future entails. They have ideas about what they want to do in the future but this also sometimes seems to be more of an idealized wish than a grounded goal. It was confusing because some of the youths are very aware of the fact that becoming a lawyer for instance takes a lot of studying and which study they need to achieve it they know as well, but then there are youths who mentioned multiple professions they aspire that do not coincide with each other but of which they seems to think are interchangeable. The contrast between how aware the youth are of their current situation and the things they need in their life right now compared to the lack of knowledge they have when it comes to all the steps it takes to achieve something, is remarkable.

But when actually talking about their future some youths do have clear ideas about what they want to achieve and what it takes for them in broad lines to reach these goals.

The youth are very focused on higher (university) schooled jobs. Both in Magburaka and in Freetown they aim for the better paid jobs. However, in Freetown the youth seem to be a little more realistic in their possibilities and aim at one (or in exception two) job(s). They also aim for more approachable jobs like being a mechanic or a driver instead of a doctor, a lawyer or a politician. Professions they know they will have a higher chance of finding work in and therewith making money with. Of course this does not apply to all the youth but to the majority.

However, whichever job they aim for, the objective is the same. They all want to make money in the future. The purpose for this money is often the same as well: They do not want to strain anymore and they want to take the hardship away from their family. But they also want to contribute to society. They want to change the situation the country is in and help the people ameliorate their lives. Their idea is to, among other things, enhance the infrastructure in the country, to create better healthcare and non-corrupt politics. They know these things are necessary for the development of their country, but they also know that the people need to work very hard if they want to achieve this development. Even so, many youths seem to be very driven to rebuild their country, knowing that they have to work very hard to accomplish their goals and the importance their education plays herein.

Like I said, the youth know they have to work very hard, both to finish their education, whether this is secondary or tertiary education or vocational training and to find a job after that. But they also know they need help to do this. They need support, financial support. To

help them pay for school fees and other necessities, and to encourage them to reach for their goals. They need the help of people outside their family, someone with money and influence who can help them in the right direction.

9.2 Analysis of the stakeholders:

The opinion of the stakeholders is clear; the present situation of the youth is not a good one. But besides that, there is something terribly wrong with the attitude of the youth. The reason for this, as the stakeholders see it, is the impact that the war has had on the youth. During the war the youth saw the rebels steeling, killing people, burning down houses and taking everything they wanted without having to ask for it, which made them lazy. The rebels did everything they wanted to do and did not get punished for it. Now, years after the war, the youth still seem to think that this is how they can behave. They are idle, they hang out on the streets and they show no respect for their elders. According to the stakeholders they do not want to work for their money and they do not want to go to school. On the other side, the stakeholders do admit that education is too expensive. Parents often can't afford to send their children to school and if there are no parents it is even harder for the youth to get the money to pay their fees. But even if they do get their fees together they know that the outlook after the education they are working so hard for is not very optimistic. Because there are no jobs and there is hardly any trade to be done. That is why the stakeholders feel the youth should be focusing on vocational training. Because there will always be jobs for plumbers, carpenters and mechanics. The youth have to be sensitized and guided herein, to make them see their options in life and to prepare them for their future. But they are not guided by anyone, instead they are left to figure it out themselves.
And that is another point: The parents of the youth who *do* go to school, do not seem to care enough about their children to keep track of what they are doing. They are not aware of what their children do at school, what their capabilities are or how their grades are. They do not monitor them. This is even worse for youth who live with caregivers other than their own parents. Everybody seems to know that these youths are even less taken care of because the biological children come first.
Or in polygamous families where the man often marries more women and has more children than he can financially take care of, consequence being that some of the children are neglected and that their parents fail to send them to school. But even if the youth *do* go to school, they often do not have enough to eat which amounts in the youth sitting on their school chairs, hungry. This lack of money often results in youth dropping out with nothing to fall back on. The only positive point concerning education is that since the war there has been more focus on the development of the girl child and as a consequence there are more girls in school.
Youth that actually went to school and graduated have, as earlier mentioned, a very bad outlook on their future. Because there are hardly any jobs. And the jobs that are there are very hard to get due to corruption. So, as one of the stakeholders told me, many graduated youths choose to change dollars on the streets. To them this is a good alternative to steeling or begging or doing other things to get money. Another alternative would be to go into the teaching field but because most teachers do not get paid the first one or two years that they are working, this does not seem to be such a good alternative either. Even though there is a grave lack of qualified teachers in Sierra Leone. This lack of teachers is a great problem

since education is the most important thing the youth need, according to the stakeholders. The youth do not only need education to get their certificate but also for other things they learn in school like character building and setting goals for themselves. If it is up to the stakeholders, the youth need to graduate and this can be either from regular education like college or university (or at least high school) or vocational training. The stakeholders think there should be many more vocational institutes. Because as said before, there will always be jobs for carpenters, welders and mechanics. But this does not seem to be the area of employment the youth want to work in. According to the stakeholders, the youth want to make quick money and they do not want to work too hard for it. They want university level 'white man's' jobs. But even if they wanted to go to vocational institutes, there are simply not enough well equipped vocational institutes around. And this is where the government has to come in. They have to encourage the youth to participate in vocational training and they have to make sure that more well equipped vocational institutes are built. Not only to give the youth capabilities for the future but also to get them off the streets and actually doing something. Because an idle mind is the devil's playground. The youth need to be engaged in something.

Another job that according to the stakeholders is not popular with the youth but in fact would be profitable for them to do, is agriculture. By working the land the youth would be investing in the development of the country: agriculture creates jobs, supplies food for themselves and the community; fighting hunger, and on the long term might even be sold, which will fight poverty.

Next to the importance of education and engagement, the stakeholders talk about the importance of guidance and support by parents and other significant people. This guidance should serve as a way to give the youth a feeling of belonging. The youth should know they can count on their family and this should give them self confidence. Next to this they should be provided with their basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. And parents should teach their children morals and values, the difference between right and wrong, to choose the right friends who will keep them on the right path, to think about their own development but also about that of the society and to always be grateful to g'd for what he has given them. Furthermore, as mentioned before, parents should monitor their children in school and guide them in the right direction for their future, so that their children will focus on a job that is in line with their capabilities and with what they want to do. But apart from the parents, the youth also need professional guidance according to the stakeholders. Someone that is trained to guide them, knows their needs, helps them personally develop and prepare for their future. This sensitization should come from the government. The reason why the government has to step in is because some parents do not have any control over their children anymore. Their children do not listen to them because they can't provide their children what they need and therefore the children will go and listen to someone who *can* give them what they need.

And last but not least, the youth need money. They do not only need to make money in the future but they need to get money now. They need money to pay for their education and their basic needs. Because they can't study on an empty stomach.

For the youth to get all the things they need, many things need to happen. First of all the stakeholders tell me the attitude of the youth needs to change along with their mindset. They should get involved in the development of their community and their country. They should be taken off the streets and taken away from the bad behavior that surrounds them there. To be able to make this happen they have to be given accommodation and free (basic) education;

schools (the government) have to lower the school fees, give free lunch and if possible no more uniforms. Through this process youth should be empowered.

The change of attitude also entails the youth learning to work for something. They can't keep asking for what they want but they have to give up their idleness and work hard for the possibilities they are given. These possibilities have to come from the government. The government needs to create an enabling environment for the youth; they should build more (fully equipped) vocational institutes, supply more scholarships, give the youth food at school and create a positive outlook for the youth after they finish their education, or in other words, create jobs for them.

Part of this positive outlook that the government has to create, entails eliminating corruption. The government has to set a good example for the youth. They have to see that people get hired for their skills and not for their connections. And by showing that the government puts effort into rebuilding the society and developing the country, the government portrays a good role model and they instill the positive values in the youth of hard work and faith in the future. The community should also take on this position of a good role model. The community should be involved in the development of the society and encourage the youth in their pursuit of education.

All of the above should result in a future wherein the youth graduate from college, university or vocational institutes. After getting their degree they should be able to find a job that matches their capabilities and interests, so that they can begin to support themselves and their family. Furthermore, the stakeholders want the youth to become financially and socially independent. Meaning that the youth have to be able to take care of themselves financially and do not have to rely on others anymore but they should still stay in close contact with their community, care about them and help them. Because without the support of their community they will not succeed in life. Helping the community develop is very important because they are part of their future. The stakeholders want the youth to become happy, healthy and self sustaining people so that they will have a secure future wherein they stay focused on their own development as well as that of their community because the community holds the future of their own children in return.

And finally it is worth mentioning that although the stakeholders keep emphasizing vocational training as the one thing to focus on for the youth, when asked what a good future for their own children would be, at least 4 of them mentioned university orientated jobs likes being a doctor, a nurse or a lawyer. And not the vocational jobs that they think other youths should do.

9.3 Comparison between Magburaka and Freetown:

As can be seen above and in the results of the youth and the stakeholders there are not many differences between Freetown and Magburaka.

When asked about the war the youth in Freetown seemed to be more closed when it came to telling me about their life during this period. They were inclined to jump from beginning to end, not really telling me what had happened until I specifically asked them. The youth in Magburaka did not give me very long stories either but they did elaborate more on the subject. The reason for this could be that, as explained before, the war did not hit Freetown until 1999 and therefore the youth in Freetown have less to tell me than the youth in Magburaka. But of course this could also have many other reasons. But when the youth in

Magburaka answered the question about what the consequence of the war is to them, not many responded that the war kept them from going to school, instead they would talk about the situation the war created; about the destruction and the poverty that was left after the war. However, when asked what their life would have looked like if the war did not happen, they all, except for three, answered that they would have finished school and be in college or working by now.

The youth in Freetown answered both question the same: they would be in college or working by now. Next to these answers they also gave answers concerning the national situation of poverty and destruction, but they answered both questions more or less the same way. I do not have an explanation for this difference in answers.

Furthermore, the youths in Magburaka seem to be a little more self reliant than the youths in Freetown. The reason for this could be that most of them do not live with their family or they live with caregivers that do not make (much) money and they therefore have to make their own money. This also means they have to pay their fees themselves and make sure they get their own food. This of course does not apply to all the youths. But this does result in youths in Magburaka sometimes having no food for one or more days compared to the youth in Freetown who usually have at least one meal a day.

Another difference between youth in Magburaka and Freetown is their awareness of their possibilities for the future. More youth in Magburaka answered that they want to pursue multiple professions than with the youth in Freetown. The youth in Freetown seem to be more aware of the realistic possibilities they have for the future, mentioning professions which included driver or mechanic, jobs that youth in Magburaka did not bring up at all. The youth in Magburaka also often mentioned multiple professions that do not seem to be interchangeable. They seem to be random university required professions that are not combinable or easily replaceable when it comes to studies. Hence the youth in Freetown seem to be more realistic when it comes to choosing professions for themselves in the future. A reason for this could be that the youth in Freetown are better aware of how urban life works when it comes to jobs because they see many different jobs performed on a daily basis, which shows them what profession is profitable and which one is not. The youth in Magburaka live in a smaller community where there are less people with (higher educated) work and therefore less people who can explain to them what it takes to achieve a profession like that and what the possibilities are to switch between one profession and the other.

Now, leaving the results of the research content aside but looking at the attendance and perseverance in the research itself, there is a very clear difference between the youth in Magburaka and Freetown. In Magburaka I had no drop outs in the research at all. The youth were usually on time, with a few exceptions and when they were present they were very involved and dedicated. Whether this was during the first workshops, the interview or the group discussions.

With the youth in Freetown (originally 25) there was a dropout rate of 7 youths. This dropout rate was largest within the youth center. In the Senior Secondary School there were only two girls who dropped out, of whom one got sick and the other one I do not know what happened to. But one boy asked to participate so 1 youth got added again.

The boys in this school were also very dedicated and most of them were usually on time. In the Youth Dream Center the youths that participated initially but later dropped out did not seem to be interested or involved at all to begin with. At least half of the youths at the youth center were late at appointments for interviews and some did not show up at all. However, if

and when they arrived they seemed very involved and ready to participate. Their being late could be because they are not used to keeping time, because most of them do not have a lot to do during the day, or because they usually do not make a lot of appointments. They are used to being at the youth center at 16.00o'clock and are not used to having to be on time. It could also be because they usually do not have ways to keep track of time or because they simply forgot about the appointment for whichever reason. The reason why the youth in Magburaka usually *were* on time could be because of the fact that Magburaka is a smaller town where the social control is higher than in the big city. Also, my research assistant would remind the youth of their appointment in the morning so they would not forget, however I usually reminded the youths in Freetown a day ahead about their appointments, so that probably should not make a very big difference.

Though, if the youth in Magburaka did not show up on time we usually knew where they were and we could go find them, which was rather difficult to do in Freetown.

The youth who continued in the research in the youth center seemed to be very involved and interested despite their tardiness or the occasional 'no-show'. The reason for the high dropout rate in the youth center could be that the youth initially felt pressured to participate in the research because they were included by people from the staff. Or maybe they did not realize what it meant to have to continue in the research and to be on time every time the classes started (the workshops were done during youth center times). The youths that dropped out were mostly also the youths that did not come regularly every day to attend classes. Or maybe they just did not like the research. Of course there are many reason to be found but they are all speculations.

The differences between the stakeholders in Magburaka and Freetown are just as marginal as those with the youths. In the essence the stakeholders said the same things in Freetown as they did in Magburaka. The only difference is that the stakeholders in Magburaka mentioned the polygamous families where the men usually have more children than they can take care of which has a consequence that these youths are usually neglected to be send to school. Reason for this being mentioned in Magburaka and not in Freetown could be that there is more social control in a smaller town than in a big city, as we also saw with the youth. Because there is a lower amount of inhabitants people can keep better track of what others are doing.

When it comes to the participation of the stakeholders, the effort shown by all the stakeholders was very high. They all seemed very pleased to be participating in the research, stressing the importance of researches like the one I was doing.

There were no dropouts in either one of the research locations when it comes to the stakeholders. However, the one difference between Freetown and Magburaka is that in Freetown some of the stakeholders were rather late for the interviews whereas the stakeholders in Magburaka were all on time. The reason hereof could be that stakeholders in Magburaka were mostly visited and therefore it was up to me and my research assistant to be one time. On the other hand, I also visited stakeholders in Freetown who would sometime make me wait between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The reason for their tardiness could be that they were less personally involved than the stakeholders in Magburaka because the latter were approached by my research assistant who knew many of them personally. The people in Freetown who I approached through someone I knew personally were also less inclined to be late.

9.4 Comparison between the youth and the stakeholders:

Now, last but not last, the results of the similarities and the differences between the youth and the stakeholders. I have chosen to not specifically make separate parts with similarities and differences because this would become too confusing and not functional in its writing. Instead I have chosen to use two points of view; first I write from the viewpoint of the youth and explain where the stakeholders coincide or oppose what they say and after that I will explain from the viewpoint of the stakeholders where the youth agree with them or at least have the same ideas and where the youth do not agree or contradict what they say. I tried to not put in similarities or contradictions twice, so if I already mentioned something from the viewpoint of the youth, I did not mention it again in the next part of the stakeholders.

9.4.1 From the viewpoint of the youth:

When it comes to the attitude of the youth; most of the ones I have spoken with are very aware of the fact that there are many youths hanging around on the streets. This is exactly why they do not want to become involved with the wrong friends, as they say themselves. They see what the stakeholders are talking about; youth hanging around doing nothing, steeling, smoking 'jamba' and boys getting girls pregnant and then leaving them. The difference herein is that the youth do not specify the origin of this problem as the war which is what the stakeholders do, with one exception: one of the boys in Freetown tells me that he no longer always listens to his father and is not as obedient as he used to be before the war. He says that during the war he used to follow the rebels and imitated them in their behavior and that this changed him. This connects straight to what the stakeholders say, they see the actions of the rebels as an incentive for the youth to behave the same way they do now; hanging around, being disobedient and being idle. However, most youths are, in contrast to what the stakeholders say, ready and willing to work hard, go through education and help develop the country. Many of them see how much effort and hard work it will take for the country to be rebuilt but they want to participate and contribute to their society. And, again in contrast to what the stakeholders say, they have tremendous respect for their parents and the caregivers in their lives and they are very focused on taking care of them in the future. The stakeholders are of the opinion however, that the youth have no respect for their elders. This could only apply to the youth that are actually not being taken care of, while most of the youth that I spoke with still have someone to take care of them, one way or the other. Next to that, all the youth I spoke with are very aware of the importance of family. Also contrarily to what the stakeholders say, youth are often very aware of where they come from. But when it comes to the sense of belonging that parents would normally give them, the youth that do not live with their parents or are no longer in contact with them, tell me that they miss this most. This corresponds in a sense with what the stakeholders say, because according to them the youth need this sense of belonging to create confidence and to know that they are supported by their family. However, the stakeholders stretch it further by saying that youth living with their parents also lack this support and guidance because the parents fail to involve themselves in the lives of the children. And so, the stakeholders are right about the fact that some youths do not feel supported by their family. The youths told me that their parents or other caregivers talk to them about persevering in their education, but they do not monitor them, as the stakeholders say they should. They do not necessarily give their children a lot of

confidence or support. This applies mostly to the youths not living with family and those not going to official schooling.

The youth are very aware of what they need from their family and community and are also very conscious when it comes to the role model of the community. They know they need their community to get further ahead in their life. They also know and herein agree with the stakeholders, that they need the government to change in order to be a good role model. The government should provide jobs, fight corruption and create more possibilities for the youth to go to higher education. Both groups mention scholarships as a good way to start.

9.4.2 From the viewpoint of the stakeholders:

The stakeholders are very inclined to talk about the youth that do not want to do anything, whereas the youth that I spoke with are very dedicated to development. Of course not all of them but the majority and especially the ones who are a little further along in their education are very aware of the necessity of hard work and development of the country.

Another point the stakeholders mention is the fact that the youth need to be sensitized and guided. They need to be focused on the necessity of vocational jobs because the youth only want to do the 'white man's' jobs and not the jobs they have to work hard for, but wherein the youth will always be able to find work. The youth indeed hardly talk about wanting to be a plumber or a carpenter, they do not mention vocational jobs at all. Whether this is because they are not aware of the necessity of vocational work in their country or because they do not want to perform these jobs, I do not know. Fact furthermore is that, as the stakeholders say, the youth do need to be sensitized about how to accomplish things in the future, because as could be read in the text above, the youth usually do not know what it takes to reach their goals in the future.

The stakeholders are also right about the fact that agriculture is not an area of expertise that the youth aim for. Still, some of the youths, as earlier mentioned, are actually aiming for jobs like being a driver or a mechanic, but these youths are a minority within the group.

When it comes to education the stakeholders are right about the fact that the youth are suffering for their school fees. They know very well how hard it is for many youths to pay their school fees. But they also say that many youths drop out. This is because of a lack of money as they say. The youth did not talk to me about this, but since they also told me how hard they are struggling to pay their fees and how often they are behind in their payments, some already having had to drop out, the observation of the stakeholders seems correct. Of course, the youth could also drop out simply because they do not want to go to school anymore or because they have involved themselves with the bad friends that both the stakeholders and the youth are talking about.

Something that is not necessarily a similarity or a difference but more a confirmation of what the stakeholders said is the fact that education should not only be a source for book learning but also a way to teach youth to be more self conscious, to be aware of their environment and to set goals for themselves. It is a place to change your attitude. And this seems to be working for the youths who are going to school and are more advanced in classes. They seem to think on a more abstract level about their community and their role in the development of the society. This however also counts for the stakeholders themselves. As most of the stakeholders I spoke with are people with jobs, people who have finished their education sometimes up to university level, they also have a different way of looking at the society than

people without an education. Therefore it might be easier for them to say that the youth should not be idle, because they themselves are capable of sending their children to school, because of their own education. They also say that the youth who are not idle in the first place should be helped. Helped by the government and helped by the community. This is coherent with what the youths themselves say; the government should help them or maybe other people that have money, white people and people from organizations. But here is where a big difference occurs: all of the youths say they need help, but that is mostly where it ends. Some, the ones advanced in school, say they need to work hard too to be able to accomplish something in life. But they mostly just need help, someone to support them and they do not know what they could do themselves. The stakeholders say that the youth need help, but that they should also work hard themselves. That the youth should stop asking for help, but be empowered by the counsel and guidance that they should get. This is probably also part of the idleness (or laziness) that the stakeholders talk about. The youth need to be sensitized about their options for the future and this is how we get back to the vocational training that the stakeholders think the youth should be encouraged to do. So, not knowing how to change their own life and asking for other people's help is where the opinion of the stakeholders strikes a sensitive note. This is where the stakeholders and the youth cross each other when it comes to lack of knowledge and therefore need for sensitization, guidance and education opposite life experience, knowledge and the responsibility to pass these two things on. When it comes to the future, the stakeholders say the youth should become socially and economically independent. Of course this is a way for adults to speak and not for youths who are still in high school, but the youth do say that they want to be somebody, they want to make money and take care of their own family. Some of them also want to help the country with the professions that they have chosen for themselves, like becoming a lawyer or a doctor. Some of them are aware that they have to help their community too, in order for the country to develop. They also know they have to stay close to their community in order for themselves to succeed. This is also a criteria they select their friends on right now; they choose their friends believing that these are people that will help them in the future. That if their friends have connections that could help them, that they will do so. This shows a strong sense of knowing what they need in their future to succeed. They comprehend the importance of their community. So to come back to the sensitization that the stakeholders think the youth need, it has to be said that, looking at what the youth say, some youths are already quite knowledgeable when it comes to their role in society.

Discussion:

In this last part of the thesis I will reflect on the information that has turned up through my research. I will show whether or not I think the research gave me the answers I needed to clarify my research questions. Am I able to answer all my questions or is there need for more research and what kind of subjects should be researched in that case?

Questions that have come up during the research and recommendations concerning subjects that would be interesting or maybe even necessary for the for the future will be addressed as well.

First, I would like to start by repeating the research question to be clear on what I am referring to in the rest of the discussion.

Research questions and answers:
A. How did the youth from former conflict/war area Sierra Leone experience their past and what expectations do they have for their future?
B. Which protective factors do they find important for the reconstruction of their lives?
C. What do stakeholders in these youths' lives think are important factors for the youth in order for them to rebuild their lives?

Sub question: What in the lives of the youth has had the most influence on them in their past? (death of a family member/ having to flee/ being captured by rebels/ losing parents)
Sub question: What consequences do the past/war have for them in the present; personally, job-market, family and friends connected?
Sub question: What aspects in the youth's lives are important to build the future they want for themselves? (socially/professionally)
Sub question: What do the youth expect from their future when it comes to jobs and emotional well-being? What do they want to achieve?
Sub question: What do the stakeholders think of the present situation of the youth's lives (caregivers, teachers, community leaders)? (professionally/socially)
Sub question: What do the stakeholders think are important factors for the youth to build a future? (socially/professionally)

Reviewing all my research results I think all of the above questions have been answered. Especially the interviews have given me all the information I needed to answer my research questions:

Because I have given a very extended analysis of the research results in the above chapters I will show that I have gotten the answers to my research questions by just giving the literal answers, leaving the broad explanations aside. As the results show, the war has had great influence on the lives of the youth in Sierra Leone. Within this war they lost their houses because they were burned down, lost many family members or many lost their parents and one or more siblings. The consequences of the war might be even worse than the fleeing itself and many of the things that happened during the war have their impact on the lives of the youth right now: many of the youth lost their parents which is why they now live with other relatives or friends (of the family) and this also has its own consequences as can be read in the previous chapter. As another consequence of the war there is tremendous poverty in the country and the labor market has collapsed; there are hardly any jobs to be done.

The youth are very clear on what they find important in their life right now: education, family, friends, religion, money and support/help. These are the factors they say they need to be able to build a future for themselves (see chapter 8.1). This future has to contain a college or university trained job with which they can make a good living for themselves and their family because in the future they all want to take care of their family, meaning their caregivers/ parents and their siblings, and of course their newly acquired family; husband/wife and children. It is important for them to be able to make money not only for the obvious reasons, but also because they want to leave the struggling and the suffering behind and live a carefree life. And especially the government needs to create an enabling environment for the youth by, for example, building fully equipped vocational institutes.

The stakeholders are very aware of the present situation of the youth: they see the suffering that rules their lives and the way it influences their attitude and future prospects. The stakeholders think that the youth have to change their attitudes; they have to become more development minded, not only about themselves but also when it comes to their community and the whole society. That is one of the points that need to change right now; the youth's attitude. But the youth obviously need more to be able to establish a future for themselves; they need education, this is again the most important factor; the key to the future. Either by going to college, university or vocational training. But especially the latter is very important also for the future of the country. Furthermore the youth need, according to the stakeholders, sensitization and guidance, both from parents/ caregivers, the government and the community. These three need to be good role models and encourage the youth to work hard for their future.
And then the youth need money now and in the future and through all this, they need to hold on to their faith in g'd.

Thus far the answers to the research questions. Of course it is not all as short cut as I have written it down here, but the explanations have been given before and are therefore not written down again.

Research results compared to the theoretical framework:

Looking at the theoretical framework that I constructed before doing the research, it seems that the information build upon corresponds quite well with the information found.

The initial three factors to be researched were cognitive development, social network and education. The cognitive development mentioned in the theoretical framework can be found in everything the youth do and the way they work their way through life. They know how important it is to choose the right friends and they know what their position in society is. Not all, but many of the youth I have spoken with are also very conscious of what their role is in rebuilding the country. One could say that their cognitive development was put on hold during the war because, among other things, their education stopped and they were only busy surviving. But on the other hand surviving takes great perception capabilities. One has to be extremely aware of the environment, you have to be conscious when it comes to who to trust and who to avoid. Talking to people and being able to assess them by what they say is not a very orthodox way of cognitive development, and certainly not the most sought after manner,

but indeed a very direct method of forcing youth to grow up and develop their cognitive abilities. As Wessells (2006) tells us: "It is very important to combine both the individual adaptation and the acceptance by the community. Neither one can give a good result when executed solely." This also comes back in the research listening to the stakeholders who tell us that youth have to be encouraged and sensitized about their life and their possibilities for the future, but that they also need to be helped herein by their community, who the youth in their turn need to keep close as well because without the support of the community youth, according to both the stakeholders and the youth, can't succeed in life.

Secondly, the social network of the youth proves to be extremely important in their life. Both their family and their friends are their means to survival. But the previous protective factor and the social network enforce each other as well. This was explained by Bandura (1989); the factors are not of equal influential strength and do not influence at the same time. In this case meaning that the social network and the cognitive development do not always have the same influential strength and reciprocal influence but do influence (each other) in their own time. To come back to the family in the social network; in the theoretical framework I have written down that the family provides a sense of safety and that it can adjust the ideas that the youth have of the world as they know it. This turns out to be a very important factor that was highlighted by the stakeholders; the sense of belonging and the guidance and sensitization that the stakeholders but also the youth feel the youth should be getting from their parents/ caregivers.

Last factor, but not least important; education. As thought before, education plays a very important role in the lives of the youth. Not only as the Graca Machel research (2007) shows, because youth have lost so many years of education during the war and now need to make up for that lost time, but also because now that the whole world has become so focused on education, they see the need of acquiring their degree.

However, I have to admit that even though I had read a lot of information and also wrote a lot of things about education in the theoretical framework, I did not think every single youth I would talk to would be so focused on education. It turns out to be a national state of mind that education is the key to success. All the researchers quoted in the theoretical framework emphasize the importance of education. And also the vocational training that was mentioned proves to be something very significant in the minds of the stakeholders.

Moreover, one of the things that I did not expect, is the large role religion plays in the lives of the youth. Both the stakeholders and the youth are extremely focused on their faith. On the one hand this could be a very good thing in the sense that it brings them peace to believe in something and to give them patience in life. But on the other hand it could work against them. For example some of the youths told me that they are waiting for g'd to send them someone to help them. If this is the consequence of people believing that g'd can make everything happen it will create the idle youth that the stakeholders are talking about. On the other hand, there are also youths who told me that you have to work hard yourself and make an effort to proceed in your life in order to get help from g'd. So the extend of the help of g'd is probably in the eyes of the beholder.

In short, the research previously done by other researchers has proven to coincide with the ideas of the stakeholders and the youth in my research.

Considering the theoretical information above that I have carefully analyzed, I could not find other explicit information on factors that the youth have said that are important for them to rebuild their life. Also, to my knowledge, the factors: friends and religion, have not been so explicitly mentioned or appeared as a protective factor given by the youth concerning their own life. And this would be where my research contributes to the current information available on youth in post war countries and their opinion on the protective factors that will help them achieve their goals in the future. Taken into consideration that not all existing information on the subject is known to me and therefore reflecting on what I have read.

Finally, when it comes to the theoretical framework I would like to discuss the CRC articles mentioned in the theoretical framework that apply to the situation of the youth as found in Sierra Leone. I think that with the three articles I put in the framework I mentioned some of the most important rights applicable to the youth of Sierra Leone.

Article 6.2: "States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child" (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989). I think this is the most important right a child/youth could have in Sierra Leone for the simple reason that surviving is what they do there, day after day. I think the situation of the youth in Sierra Leone has been so extremely damaged by the war that they have to start over from nothing, making basic needs actually a need again. But also because there is such a focus on the basic needs people should not forget that together with basic needs one needs development. Because without the development of the child basic needs are all they will be asking for because they will not progress. Which is why, in my opinion, it is admirable that the youth and their caregivers with them, are working so hard to get the youth to school. It means development is very much alive in the mindset of the people, which gives the country hope. Therefore article 29 (the Right to Education) has proven to be an article that is extremely fitting in the Sierra Leone society. Not only looking at the youth but also considering the awareness of the stakeholders I have spoken with. Now that Education For All has gotten more girls to go to school as well, which the stakeholders all think is a very good development, education is spreading more and more among the communities and people become more and more aware of the necessity to give the youth the chance to be educated. Because as the stakeholders told me: Education is not only about what one can learn from books but also the chance to develop and to become more sighted and it gives people a chance to learn to understand each other.

And with this education the youth can put into practice the last article, being article 12: the Right to Participation. Taking into consideration the goal of my research; to give youth a voice, to listen to what they have to say and to make their words the prime subject, I think this article symbolizes the intrinsic meaning of this thesis. I think it is crucial to communicate with youth anywhere before trying to construct programmes in their name. Because what usually happens is that the programmes will be constructed for them and not with them, minimizing the effectiveness hereof. I think that if you want a programme to succeed you need to include multiple parties that are necessary for the programme to be effective.

Of course many more articles could be included, but to my opinion these three articles have proven to be very important in the lives of the youth and herewith shows the alignment between the theoretical framework and the field.

In conclusion, I think the theoretical framework has proved itself a good theoretical foundation for the field research.

<u>Random remarks about the research and recommendations:</u>

During the research I encountered some situations that stood out or were remarkable for whichever reason. They are not coherent or connected and are therefore mentioned by point.

<u>Concerning the youth:</u>
During the interviews I sometimes had trouble to make clear to the youth what I was trying to ask them. Whether this had to do with how I asked my questions; formulation or whether they had never thought about the subject of my question before, or they simply did not know how to express themselves, even in Krio, I do not know. Either way, sometimes interpretation from my side was necessary. I did this by further exploration into the subject at hand; by asking questions on the same subject but in different ways.
A remark on the content of the research is the differences between the way the youth in education think and the ones that are in unofficial education, or no education at all, think. Many of the ones that are in official education have a much broader way of thinking about life and their future. They think about the development that the country needs to go through and what the youth's role herein is. Especially the youth at the Senior Secondary School are very aware of the need for development and the fact that they have to work hard to achieve this. Many other youths were very engaged in their own life and what they needed themselves. Which is of course completely understandable considering the circumstances. It shows how influential education can be in the way of thinking. But it also gave me a good overview of difference in the state of mind of the youth.
Furthermore, many youths were very serious. They were more serious than any other youths I know. This could of course be because they experienced a war and have had to grow up in a rollercoaster-way that youth living in peaceful circumstances never have to. But it came to mind during the research that most youth that I talked with, in particularly the youth that are going to school, might 'use' the research and their conversations with me as a way to show me, and through me anyone I know, that they are very driven and focused and maybe therefore are right ones to be supported. It could be that they think if they tell me that they hang around or play too much, that I will think they are not serious about their lives and if I was even planning on it, I would not consider helping them anymore, or the people who are going to read about it will not help them because they seem to be fooling around in their lives. I am not saying this is the source of the development orientated answers but I am saying that the possibility is there.
Finally, I think it is important to mention this last fact; looking at the above remarks concerning the youth and their awareness of so many things in their lives, I have to say I was very surprised about their lack of knowledge when it comes to all the factors one needs to think about to be able to achieve something. Of course no one can think of everything they have to do to achieve a certain goal but some youths for example want to become a lawyer or a doctor, but they do not know which study they need to realize this profession, who is going to pay for their education after high school or how much studying even costs. And these are youths with one or two years left until college or university. In my view there is a big contrast in things they know and do not know and I think the stakeholders are very perceptive when it comes to the need for sensitization and guidance that the youth need according to them.

<u>Concerning the stakeholders:</u>
The stakeholders stressed on the fact that the youth do not have any respect for their parents and other elders. The reason why stakeholders stress on the youth not having any respect for their elders and their parents might not only be because it is African tradition to be respectful and helpful towards your elders as a youth but also because, as all the youth and stakeholders have made clear, the youth are supposed to take care of their elders when they grow up. But if the youth do not show any respect and consideration for their elders anymore, the chances of the youth taking care of them in ten years decline as well. This could be one of the reasons why the stakeholders want the youth to be sensitized about how to behave towards their elders because these youths are the future of this generation of elders.

In addition, in the research I have spoken with youths and with stakeholders, but during the research, evaluating the answers of the stakeholders and what I had already heard and seen form the youths themselves, I think there is a discrepancy when it comes to what kind of group of youth I have spoken with and what kind of group of youth the stakeholders are talking about. I have mostly spoken with youths who do go to school, except for the youth who go to the Youth Dream Center, which is still unofficial schooling. Most of these youths might not live with their parents but do have someone to take care of them one way or the other. They do not hang out on the streets, do not prostitute themselves, work very hard to accomplish something in life and are very aware of the wrong path in life that they do not want to end up on.

The stakeholders on the other hand are talking about youth who *are* hanging out on the streets, doing nothing, who probably do not know what to do with their life and do not have someone to take care of them. And as I walked on the streets of Freetown and other villages, there *are* so many people doing absolutely nothing, they sit out on the streets day in day out, not having anything to do. Whether these people do not want to find something to do or have already looked for work but they can't find it, I do not know. But the stakeholders' point makes sense and is applicable to incredibly many people in Sierra Leone.

But this is where the discrepancy could mislead in the research, because the group of youths that the stakeholders talk about are not really comparable to 'my' group of youths. And when the stakeholders say that the youth are steeling and being idle, this *could* have nothing to do with the group I have worked with.

What it does mean to me are a few things: Maybe I should have also talked with youth that are actually living on the streets without a place to go and who are not involved in education in any way. And maybe it might be a good research for the future to find out what kind of groups of youth exist in the Sierra Leone society. Because having these groups analyzed; written down in numbers and areas of the country and the major cities for example, might make it easier to concentrate on 'problem areas' and make it easier to know what actually has to be done and where.

This would also be functional and make it more feasible because the youth account for about 50% of the total society. To be able to handle and help such an immense amount of people, especially compared to the rest of the society, one has to have a clear plan and therefore a clear overview of where help is needed most.

This research could start to help by supplying the factors that the youth who are going to some sort of education find important to rebuild their life. It gives the government an idea of what is expected from them by their society, for the stakeholders make their voice heard

through this research as well. Herewith I represent both parts of the 50% of the society. This research could be a step in the right direction when it comes to hearing the people and helping them instigate development for the whole society.

Open questions and Recommendations:
I think it would be helpful to do research in cooperation with the government as to the attitude of the youth towards vocational training. Because whether the stakeholders think it would be good for the youth to go to vocational training, does not answer the question whether the youth actually want vocational training.

Another question is how the deficit in teachers will be resolved. Because now that the amount of students is increasing by the day, the principals told me that there is a great shortage in teachers. Therewith the fact that teachers do not get paid the first one or two years does not attract youth to become a teacher. It is not what they have worked so hard for during their school years. So maybe research, in cooperation with the government or without, concerning how to attract teachers and what would be feasibly (therefore in cooperation with…) for the government to execute.

Then, as mentioned before, there should be a clearer overview of the division within the youth group. It would be interesting to know where they live, if they go to school there and if not, why not. To be able to give practical help you have to know where and what you have to do.

Furthermore, given the fact that I had a certain amount of time for the field research I think my way of getting into contact with some local people who help you acquire your research participants is a good way to form a representative group. But if there would be more time it would be better to spread the participants over a bigger area to see if it creates more fluctuations in answers in the research.

And last but not least, during my research I found that stakeholders who had a proper job and could afford to send their children to school and feed them, had a tendency to tell me that they want their children to do well educated jobs. But all the stakeholders told me that the youth should focus on vocational training more. I think it would therefore be interesting to know what the difference is between (view on) future prospect of the youth answered by stakeholders who are educated and stakeholders who are not educated and then also by youth who are going to school and youth who live on the streets. This will give a good overview on what education does to the way of thinking and to the own view on future prospects of stakeholders for the youth and the youth for themselves. Because I could imagine that youth who live on the streets have a less optimistic prospect for themselves than youths who are already going to school do.

And of course there are many more things that would be interesting to research and I hope that Sierra Leone will be part of many more researches that will show how to ameliorate the situation of the people.

country of choice or my sometimes crazy decisions. Without your support it would have been a lonely ride and you got me through some very difficult moments, thank you with all my heart!

If I have forgotten anyone, rest assure that I did not do it on purpose. Unfortunately there is not enough time to thank everyone personally. But those who I did not mention, I did not forget you!

Last but not least I want to say that this has been an amazing journey. I have learned more than I hoped for. The youth and all the stakeholders I spoke with opened my eyes to so many things and have made me even more eager and confident of the fact that I have chosen the right path. Sierra Leone is a beautiful country with a lot of potential and people who know what the country needs. But they lack the finance and the means.
I know now that reading articles does not even come close to reality. Having seen the perseverance of the youth and the hunger they have to succeed in life gives hope. But realizing all the things that still need to be done, especially all the things involving the government, does not always put me in an optimistic mood. It is therefore even more incredibly important for the youth to keep their hope and will alive because they are the future and listening to them and their ideas is crucial in the development of their country. They are the ones who need to keep struggling and working hard to succeed in life, fighting the odds. And it is not only our job to listen to the youth, but even more that of their own government for they are for a large part the ones that need to enable the progress and success of their own youth. As I hope they will.

And for those who are interested in the amazing work of the Youth Dream Center:
http://youthdreamcentre.sl.googlepages.com. Take a look!

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