

# The blood diamonds in sierra leone politics essay



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The purpose of this paper is to show individuals the truth behind the Blood Diamond industry that lies in West Africa, Sierra Leone. The Blood Diamond industry, best known in Sierra Leone, has been through numerous implications and struggles, which has made for an extremely intriguing and extensive analysis. Blood Diamonds, also referred to as “ Conflict Diamonds”, come from war zones in Africa, “ sold illegally in order to fund insurgent war efforts against legitimate and internationally recognized governments”(Wilson et al. 2009). Although many efforts and policies have been implemented to put a stop to the trafficking of Blood Diamonds, the effects of the 1999 Civil War left Sierra Leone in utter shambles; The Civil War, between the political government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), ultimately destroyed Sierra Leone for decades. The saying “ Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” has become more than a cliché marketing strategy; instead, it has a very symbolic and meaningful relation to my life. Given diamond earrings for my high school graduation has been an enduring tradition within my family; also, knowing where the diamonds come from is the most significant part of the gift. Upon opening the precious box, stored with sparkly diamonds, I was given a small card. This card was to show where these specific diamonds came from. My diamond earrings were from the North West Territories in Canada; knowing where your luxury diamonds come from is very valuable and meaningful. Researching more about the issues of Blood Diamonds simply reiterates why it is important to know the history of your diamonds. Secondly, my favourite movie entitled “ Blood Diamond” is based off of the 1999 Civil War and illustrates the struggles of the diamond industry within Sierra Leone. This movie gave me great insight into how harsh the lives of these people were. It also gave me a better

understanding of the cruel process of Blood Diamonds and their consequence. Throughout this essay individuals will engage in further knowledge regarding the implications which the Blood Diamonds imposed on Sierra Leone, socially, environmentally, politically and economically.

The Blood Diamonds in Sierra Leone sparked major social implications for its country and contributed to the downfall of Sierra Leone's social structure.

The RUF forced children and adults into the mining of diamonds and into the roles of child soldiers to protect its people against the government. The RUF captured children at extremely young ages, forced them to learn gun machinery and how to kill civilians. Eric Engle's article examines the idea in which "the problem of poverty presents the opportunity of labour exploitation. Opportunities to profit out of misery of others occur in a variety of trades"(Engle 2004). Engle's statement brings about an extremely valid and truthful argument. People living in Sierra Leone, a Third-World country, are extremely poor and live off of questionably little money and resources. Thus, for the RUF it appeared beneficial to be so cruel and take complete advantage over the civilians. The RUF purposely and willfully took charge of children and adults, no matter what the cost was, to ensure they would get ahead and gain total power and control. Individuals forced into labour exploitation by the RUF did not work for money, instead they complied with the rules set by the RUF in order to survive; had an individual not agreed, they were killed immediately. The social implication that is brought to attention here is very evident. Children forced into the roles of child soldiers, ordered to kill friends and family members are socially destructed; the amount of mental stress that comes with being a child soldier will,

ultimately, ruin their livelihoods forever. The Sierra Leone society has become socially destroyed due to the traumatic events the RUF forced upon children and adults; the constant worry of whether they will be able to live to see another day has mentally and physically exhausted the living of these civilians. Secondly, William P. Murphy's article examines the role and effect the RUF plays on child soldiers. Murphy continues to explain " Many of them were driven into dependency by exploitative adults who seemed to offer power, protection, and economic opportunity that their kin group, traditional community, or national government could no longer provide"(Murphy 2003). Murphy suggests that children look up to, and respect their parents or guardians; their main figureheads. When their parents or guardians are separated from their children, children will seek out for a new leader. Thus, in the events of Sierra Leone, children are taken away from their parents by the RUF and now look up to the leaders of the RUF as their own figureheads and mentors. Murphy also discusses another theory of his known as the " Four Models of Child Soldiers". It is a framework to explain the impact the Civil War had on child soldiers who were forced into their role.

" In all these models adults are viewed as having failed the children in Sierra Leone. According to the first model, youths are victimized by the cruel coercive practices of the commanders on the different fighting factions, including the national army. In the second and third models, youths respond in different ways to their marginalization and alienation from local and national infrastructures indifferent to their needs. All three models capture part of the truth of children's predicaments in the civil wars"(Murphy 2003).

Murphy's examination of three of the four models of child soldiers is veritably interesting. His research suggests that children in Sierra Leone are forced to participate in the production or protection of the Blood Diamond industry and their reactions to this have all been very different. Children of Sierra Leone are conflicted with the social pressures forced upon by the RUF. The social dynamic of Sierra Leone will be an extremely long and slow process to regain. Mentally and physically, civilians of Sierra Leone are exhausted due to the social implications brought on by the Blood Diamond industry.

Copious implications have arisen due to the Blood Diamond mining industry, environmentally. After an in depth analysis and understanding of how the mining of Conflict Diamonds has caused severe environmental impacts, individuals will be able to recognize the immeasurable amount of time it will take to bring this country back to a healthy state.

“ According to the 2003 Biodiversity Action Plan for Sierra Leone, the major threats to biodiversity in the country are from unsustainable practices of agriculture, livestock farming, forest exploitation, fishing, energy production, mining, infrastructure development, and waste disposal”(Fischer and Keili 2005).

The Environmental Report of 2005 written by USAID introduces an array of environmental concerns lingering in Sierra Leone. The Blood Diamond industry has led to a series of chain events which have drastically changed the environment and landscape of the West African country for a lifetime. Firstly, the mining activities that have taken place have inevitably destroyed the landscape of Sierra Leone. In Chris B. Squire's article presented by the

World Wildlife Fund, he suggests that due to the mining of these illicit diamonds a “ loss of plant resources and a loss of unique habitats for wildlife has been destroyed as the vegetation was removed”(Squire 2001). Squire comments on an interestingly insightful opinion; due to the impact and demand for diamonds, mining opportunities began to emerge and take over large areas of land. This meant that areas of land were to be dug up and degraded, along with the lush forestry areas. A great deal of land was being destroyed in order to meet the needs of the Blood Diamond industry. Sierra Leone’s agriculture has become an immense struggle to overcome. The use of “ Slash-and-burn” agriculture, also known as “ shifting cultivation”, is the process of cutting and burning forests or woodlands in order to create fields for livestock. This process is the main cause for unmeasurable deforestation. Due to the increase in deforestation and land degradation, it becomes very difficult to maintain high levels of active wildlife, without appropriate resources. Thus, there is a major concern towards wildlife extinction. Bush meat, an excellent source of protein, is a major part of the daily dietary measures of the population; the demand for the meat still remains high however, with considerable hunting, concerns are raised about threatening and endangering the species. Numerous animals have become extinct, on the verge of extinction, or undoubtedly threatened. USAID announces in their report that “ of eighteen antelope species, two are extinct and sixteen are remained threatened; not to mention the number of hippos, elephants, chimpanzees, leopards and many more wildlife which has been falling on a dramatic decline”(Fischer and Keili 2005). Furthermore, the result of Blood Diamond mining has caused traumatic events upon Sierra Leone’s environment. In Nikki Skuce’s scholarly article, she explains “

Diamond mining...the constant clearing and digging of land results in soil erosion, water contamination and silting of rivers and creeks. The excavation holes that remain after mining become breeding grounds for malaria”(Skuce 2002). Skuce discusses more prevalent environmental effects. The Blood Diamond mining has resulted in major water contamination areas all over Sierra Leone, leading to major health risks. Major zones of silting has caused rivers and creeks to dry up due to large amounts of sediments build up overtime. All of the major environmental impacts discussed above are results of too much Blood Diamond mining and very little care, or caution in order to preserve some of Sierra Leone’s land, resources, and wildlife. Sierra Leone’s physical geography and land resources is diminished due to mining, and it will take severe reconstruction to bring the environment back to life.

The Blood Diamond industry within Sierra Leone has caused severe unrest within the country. Here, individuals will examine the impact of the Sierra Leone Conflict Diamonds industry on the country’s political and economic structure. Blood Diamonds were sold illegally across borders into other parts of the world by the RUF. The profits conjured by the illegal export of Blood Diamonds was used to fund for arms and other weaponry for the RUF; this is what made the mining of diamonds so vital and valuable. This act performed by the RUF was politically unjust and disapproved by many neighbouring countries in the West. Firstly, individuals must examine the political background to this nature. The RUF was formed to overthrow the political government in power. Their slogan “ No more slaves. No more masters. Power and wealth to the people” was undoubtedly misleading. Through the RUF’s slogan, citizens trusted and engaged with the RUF, until they realized

their main incentive. John Bellows and Edward Miguel state “ profits from these Blood Diamonds represented an important incentive for armed groups to prolong the war”(Bellows and Miguel 2009). The RUF, simply, wanted to attain total power and wealth among the nation; there was no regard for the wants and needs of their people. It was reported by the Government Truth and Reconciliation Commission “...reports that RUF fighters committed over 70% of all human rights abuses...and 75% of all attacks and battles involved the RUF as the primary fighting force”(Bellows and Miguel 2009). Political unrest ran throughout the nation of Sierra Leone. Major political disputes between the political government in power and the RUF took place during the decade-long Civil War. Beginning with a false interpretation of the RUF’s intentions is what led Sierra Leone’s political structure to an ultimate collapse.

Secondly, the Blood Diamond industry had major impacts on Sierra Leone’s economy. Countries across the world found the diamond industry to be an excellent source for the economic build-up of a country, however, for Sierra Leone, it was quite the opposite. Unethical decisions were made by the RUF to sell the Blood Diamonds, not for economic advantage but for the use of gaining more weaponry. The Blood Diamond industry in Sierra Leone destroyed any hope of gaining a proper economic structure. Elizabeth J. A. Rodgers states in her article “ Sierra Leone’s war...was a war part of a continuous tale of escalating regional violence and terror driven largely by criminal economic interest”(Rodgers 2006). Rodgers examines how the RUF used the diamonds in order to get ahead, and what they thought, was helping them to achieve total power. The Blood Diamonds were seen as a



form of currency to the RUF; the more diamonds mined, resulted in more money to be placed toward the purchase of arms and weapons. Large sums of money that could have improved Sierra Leone's economic structure was ultimately destroyed by the RUF. The mining and selling of diamonds is seen as an extremely profitable agency and Sierra Leone had the potential to use their diamond mining industry to their economic advantage. With the loss, and upset of the RUF, they managed to displace large sums of money for Sierra Leone. Due to the unjust decisions the RUF made to fund for more arms and weaponry, the economic structure of Sierra Leone was quickly dismantled. Through the falsification by the RUF's motives, their unethical decisions, and constant debacles between the RUF and the government, Sierra Leone's political and economic structure's have been demolished; it will take a great deal of effort to bring this West African country out their struggles in order to maintain a healthy and well-off balance.

The Blood Diamond industry brought about numerous implications upon the country of Sierra Leone; notably, impacts on the social, environmental, political, and economic structure of this West African Country. The 1999 Civil War marked the most well known impacts that were forced upon the nation of Sierra Leone. Socially, adults and children separated from their kinship and forced to work for the RUF destroyed the civilians mental and physical character. Children at young ages, forced to kill friends and family members has caused major psychological damage. It will ultimately take decades for this nation to recover from the social impacts caused by the production and protection of the Blood Diamond industry. Environmentally, Sierra Leone's geographical, agricultural landscape has been destroyed. The overwhelming

amount of soil erosion, deforestation, and degradation for mining, the landscape is left in utter ruins. Due to the destruction of forestry, grass, and agricultural opportunities, Sierra Leone's unique wildlife has been threatened, with few species extinct. Lastly, the political and economic structure of Sierra Leone was manipulated. Through the unjust actions displayed by the RUF, the Blood Diamond industry caused major political debates among the country. The RUF wanted to maintain total control over all diamond mines, which stirred major conflict with the political government. Economically, the illegal selling and export of Blood Diamonds in order to fund arms for the RUF was a major economic disadvantage. All of the social, environmental, political, and economic implications brought about through the impact of the Blood Diamonds raises final arguments about development. Development, defined in this paper, is the act or process of improving. Sierra Leone has major stages of development to go through. By examining the social, environmental, political and economic implications, individuals can understand the amount of development that needs to take place in all of these aspects in order to maintain a civil, balanced society. Development studies has helped to frame the issue of Blood Diamonds in Sierra Leone and examine its struggles in order to regain itself. The relationship between Canada and the "Third World" here is very prevalent; having a symbolic relationship with diamonds, I find the history and impacts of the mining in Sierra Leone very difficult to hear. It is our duty in Canada to recognize the destruction that has gone on in Sierra Leone and find ways to eliminate Blood Diamonds being exported overseas. The Kimberly Process (KP) "is a joint governments, industry and civil society initiative to stem the flow of conflict diamonds..."(Kimberley Process). Canada has joined the KP in <https://assignbuster.com/the-blood-diamonds-in-sierra-leone-politics-essay/>

order to eliminate the illegal export of Blood Diamonds to our country.

Canada must continue to be apart of the process and do our share to help stop the mining and production of Blood Diamonds.