

**Diaries From Countries in Crisis: Staff share their impressions about both the challenges and opportunities facing people affected by crisis.**

## Addressing sexual violence in Sierra Leone

### A quest for justice

By Shibani Malhotra, Justice and Security Sector Reform Specialist, BCPR

Although it has been six years since the official end of hostilities, Sierra Leone's image still remains tainted by the brutality of the decade-long civil war characterized by cutting off the hands of helpless civilians. Today, Sierra Leone is on the long road to recovery.

However, peace has come at a high price, especially for women and girls. Violence against women and girls is astonishing—all the more so because redress is rarely available. Statistics speak for themselves. In the past six months, there were 625 reported sexual assaults on women and girls in just three districts in Sierra Leone. More than ▶



**Girls in Sierra Leone wait for family members returning from refugee camps in Liberia.**

SOURCE: UN/ERIC KANALSTEIN

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## Snapshots of Somalia

### Two faces, one country

By Katrine Siig Kristensen, Programme Analyst, Mine Action and Small Arms, BCPR

From images of hunger to Black Hawk Down, my preconceptions of Somalia stemmed from my childhood. It was a great opportunity to challenge these ideas when I and Sara Sekkenes, Senior Programme and Development Advisor, visited Somalia (Hargeisa and Baidoa) in July to review the UNDP-supported Mine Action Programme, which has been ongoing for almost a decade.

Hargeisa was in many ways the opposite of what I expected: The town was well developed, with roads and a functioning market. I did not see a single person carrying a weapon. This image masks decades of armed conflict, which included the use of landmines. Thanks to UNDP's support, the Mine Action Centre is operational and National Police Bomb Disposal Teams are working effectively. Together with partners, the teams have cleared 157,792,937 square metres of contaminated land and destroyed 524,186 mines and unexploded ordnance, opening up access to agriculture. ▶

## A quest for justice (cont)

50 percent of the victims were between the ages of 11 and 15, while 7 percent were under the age of five. Of these 625 women and girls, 296 sought legal redress but only four cases were successfully prosecuted (1 percent). Most sentences ran between one and 12 years.

These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg, as rape is systematically underreported. What about the other districts in the country where such statistics are not available?

Behind each statistic, there are individual stories that turned my stomach. For instance, the 11-year-old girl who was brutally raped by her stepfather and then died due to the lack of money to pay for medical care.

Rape is not easily recognized by society. The same is true for domestic violence.

In an attempt to help survivors of sexual violence, the Sierra Leone Police has established Family Support Units. However, the journey to the Family Support Units is an

***"There were 625 reported sexual assaults on women and girls in just three districts in Sierra Leone."***

arduous one, and survivors often have no money for the trip and, thus, no choice but to abandon their quest for justice before it has even begun. For the lucky few who can make it to the Family Support Units, they have to get a certificate from a medical doctor regarding their injuries, which costs more money.

Once that is done, the Family Support Units prepare and send the case to the Magistrates Court where a judge presides. More often than not, the judge decides to arbitrarily adjourn the case. The survivor is left with two choices: find a place to stay in the city until the judge decides to hear the case again or go back to her village. Since most do not have the means to pay for accommodation while waiting for the hearing, they return to their village and the case is dropped.

There are civil society groups, including women's organizations, that are endeavouring to change the system. They are creating shelters, providing free medical assistance and counselling, and helping with legal fees. Sierra Leone also has several women in empowered positions, such as the Chief Justice, who are pushing for change, including more female Magistrates, lawyers and judges.

Building on these efforts, UNDP is developing a programme to assist survivors of sexual violence and get convictions. I intend to return to Sierra Leone in the coming months to help mobilize resources, both financial and physical, to ensure that UNDP's support has a sustainable impact in making justice for sexual violence the rule rather than the exception. My hope is that, through our joint efforts, peace will be more than just an empty word for women and girls in Sierra Leone. **CPR**

## Snapshots of Somalia (cont)

Baidoa, our next stop, is the temporary base of the Transitional Federal Government. Armed groups are operating just a few kilometres outside the town, so the security situation is very fragile. This quickly became apparent when I was picked up from the airstrip in armoured vehicles with armed guards. On every corner I saw men—young and old—with their AK-47s. Very few women or children were on the streets.

***"The country is much more than the one-dimensional image in the media."***

The mine action programme in Baidoa is quite different from the one in Hargeisa. Although training of Bomb Disposal Teams, including female officers, and Mine Risk Education teams has started, their ability to conduct operations is very limited due to the security situation. No one really knows the level of contamination in the region, its impact on communities and the deaths and injuries being caused. The security risk UNDP faces in South Central Somalia is very real. The day after we left Baidoa, two UNDP staff members were abducted; the week after, the Head of UNDP in Mogadishu was assassinated; and two weeks later, armed groups attacked Baidoa.

Visiting Somalia has opened my eyes. The country is much more than the one-dimensional image in the media. While the situation in South Central is currently alarming, the progress in Somaliland highlights the dividends that peace can bring. UNDP's support to the Mine Action Programme will continue and I hope that, sooner rather than later, it can be extended throughout the country. **CPR**



**A displaced woman passes Somali police guarding the food supply.** SOURCE: IRIN/MANOOCHEER DEGHATI

## One month in Myanmar

By Katrin Park, Internal Communications Officer, UNDP

In Bogale, one of the five most cyclone-damaged townships in the delta region, people bathed and washed clothes in the muddy river. The tap water was brown, and there was an outbreak of scabies. There was no Internet connection. UNDP staff used satellite phones to call the Yangon office.

As part of UNDP's immediate crisis response team, I travelled to the delta part of the country. After two hours on a boat, we arrived at one of the pilot villages. UNDP would conduct a community meeting here in a monastery near the river. I climbed up a makeshift ladder and got to the top of the monastery where the villagers had put up tarpaulin sheets using bamboo sticks. The roof was gone. Approximately 200 villagers had come to attend the meeting, and with assistance from the UNDP staff, they spent several hours selecting the early recovery committee members and identifying the most vulnerable families that would receive cash grants to rebuild their livelihoods. Flies clung to me, as I took notes.

During a break, I spoke with one of the women. Thin Thin Aye (pictured below) was 31 and had red stains in all corners of her teeth. She had lost her father, a brother and one of her five children in the storm. She used to cut and sell firewood, but her hand tools had washed away with her house. The family was living on rice rations from the World Food Programme. She said she wanted a fishing net and a boat, so she could catch fish to feed the family. She also explained how the bodies that had once floated in the river had decomposed and sunk to the bottom.

I later asked one of the staff how much a fishing net and boat would cost. A net, he said, usually costs \$5; a boat, \$30. I left Bogale four days later, knowing that Thin Thin Aye's family was selected as one of the 30 most vulnerable households, making her eligible to receive a \$40 cash grant. [CPR](#)



**Thin Thin Aye, a beneficiary of the UNDP small grants programme.** SOURCE: UNDP MYANMAR

## Voices From Countries in Crisis

### Rebuilding Livelihoods in Liberia

By Elisabeth Diaz, External Relations Officer, BCPR

Martha lost her husband during the civil war that tore Liberia apart and left 75 percent of the population in extreme poverty. A mother of two, Martha did not have any formal training. She could not send her children to school as she was not able to pay their school fees.

Since Martha became a beneficiary of the UNDP Microfinance Initiative, her life has changed for the better. With support from the Japan Women in Development Fund and the Government of Denmark, UNDP is implementing this initiative in three counties in Liberia—providing funds to women cooperatives so they can offer members loans to help them start businesses. Women represent 80 percent of the informal sector in Liberia's economy and are the principal targets of the Microfinance Initiative.

As a member of one of the cooperatives, Martha received a loan that she uses to buy palm oil that she then resells at the local market. With the income she earns, she is repaying her loan and caring for her family. Her children are back in school as she is now able to pay for their school fees, uniforms and books. She can also afford their medical bills. Martha is thinking about asking for a second loan from the cooperative to expand her business.

Masaneh Bayo, the manager of this initiative, visits Martha every three months along with many other beneficiaries to see how she is doing and the impact this programme is having. "I did not realize I was making a difference in her life," he says. He hopes that, with additional funding, this project can be expanded to help more people in more counties in Liberia.

 Visit [www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters](http://www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters) for audio from this story.



**A woman in the interior town of Bong Mines.**

SOURCE: UNICEF/GIACOMO PIROZZI

# Spotlight on Staff

*Recognizing staff who contribute to crisis prevention and recovery efforts*



**Madeleine Oka**  
Programme Advisor and Gender  
Focal Point, UNDP Cote d'Ivoire

Madeleine has been the Programme Advisor on decentralization and local governance for UNDP Côte d'Ivoire for the past seven years. She is also the


Gender Focal Point for the country office. Since the 2002 political crisis, Madeleine has supported the formulation and implementation of the UNDP-supported programme 'Women in Peace and Reconciliation' to empower Ivorian women and ensure gender aspects are addressed in the current national context. Madeleine also works with civil society organizations to fight against sexual violence through, for instance, a Women's Resource Center for women and girls based in Man in West Côte d'Ivoire, a region particularly affected by the conflict. This center is one of the few in Africa to provide psychological, health and economic services to women and girls affected by the conflict. Madeleine joined UNDP 12 years ago to set up the communication unit in UNDP Côte d'Ivoire and has 20 years of experience in programme support and management. She has a post graduate degree in Business and Administration from France.



**John Lewis**  
Peace and Development  
Advisor, UNDP, Kyrgyzstan

John has been the Peace and Development Advisor in Kyrgyzstan since 2006. In this capacity, he facilitated the development of a four-year conflict prevention initiative

known as 'the Peace and Development Programme' to help national actors address the root causes of conflicts in the country. John has also helped the UNDP staff in Kyrgyzstan include conflict prevention into other UNDP programme areas, and has provided policy advice and guidance to government counterparts and civil society organizations on issues related to conflict prevention. Before Kyrgyzstan, John worked for UNDP Georgia as the Programme Manager of the Abkhazia Livelihood Improvement and Recovery Programme, where he facilitated the development of an integrated recovery programme to help the return of internally displaced people and assisted in the recovery of local communities. Prior to joining UNDP, John worked for several non-governmental organizations in the former Soviet Union. John has a Masters degree in Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University in Washington D.C.

 Visit [www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters](http://www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters) for audio from this story.

## Staff diaries continued...

### Laying the groundwork for peace in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

By Valeria Izzi, Programme Specialist, Conflict Prevention, BCPR

Recently, I spent three months in North Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) helping support the newly established local government body, the Provincial Peacebuilding Unit. There, in conjunction with facilitators from the Unit staff and local experts (including several women), I helped facilitate a conflict analysis and planning exercise with the aim of developing a peace and development strategy for the region.

Through a series of three-day workshops (one in each of the territories of North Kivu), we brought together a wide array of people encompassing representatives of the territorial administration, traditional and religious groups, grassroots communities, civil society (including women's and youth's organizations) and the media. For many people, this was the first time that they had a chance to talk directly with representatives of the government about their problems and vision for the future. During the workshops, participants identified key challenges to peace in their territory, reflected on how past attempts at peace have addressed these challenges, and prioritized recommendations for future peacebuilding and development programmes.

From the outset, we were aware of the fact that women's participation was going to be particularly difficult given strong cultural and practical obstacles. Therefore, we paid particular attention to ensure women were fully included in the consultations. In addition to having women facilitators on the team and inviting women to the consultations, it became clear that we needed a separate space for women to be able to fully express their views. Women met one day before each consultation to discuss their views freely, and this proved to be a very powerful way to ensure that their perspective was reflected in the consultations.

This work shed light on the complexity of the conflict in North Kivu and some of the limitations in current peacebuilding interventions. Next up, the Provincial Peacebuilding Unit will validate the findings of the workshops through a province-wide consultation in late August, with the eventual aim of UNDP and donors supporting implementation of an action plan for peace in North Kivu.

 Visit [www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters](http://www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters) for audio from this story.

To submit feedback, a news item or an event to the CPR Newsletter, contact: [elisabeth.diaz@undp.org](mailto:elisabeth.diaz@undp.org).