

Authors

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Global Lens: Healing in Order to Rebuild

The drum beats in the distance grow louder and the warmth of the flames tickles my arms and face. Dancers around me shimmy at a moderate speed to the rhythm of their own drums awaiting the arrival of the parade of participants from the nearby village. As the two groups merge into one around the bonfire, the sound of the competing drums becomes deafening and the dancing reaches a frenzied pace.

As the evening goes on, I listen to the retelling of countless stories from the decade-long war in Sierra Leone. It's an intense experience—and it represents one of many approaches aiding the healing process of Sierra Leone's conflict-affected communities.

The IPA reconciliation project in Sierra Leone is looking at how a unique transitional justice program, Fambul Tok (meaning 'family talk' in the local Krio language), aids in post-war reconciliation. Fambul Tok assists communities in leading and organizing forgiveness bonfire ceremonies, like the one described above.

Through the use of a randomized evaluation, this project investigates the impact of community-based reconciliation, at the individual, inter-personal, and group levels. At an individual level, we look at forgiveness, ability to cope with war-related trauma, and attitudes towards violence. At an inter-personal level, we look at the strengthening and building of relationships. At a group level, we look at feelings of inclusion and provision of public goods.

We hypothesize that the deepening of trust and social ties in post-war communities will ultimately lead to increased economic activity and development, and that a lower tolerance for violence reduces the likelihood of a resurgence of war.

Of course, not all aspects of life in Sierra Leone are so heavy. The country is a land of warm and welcoming people and astounding natural beauty, boasting majestic mountain silhouettes, lush forests and breathtaking sunsets. Here, I see rainbows on a weekly basis (no exaggeration!).

Wood carrier at Boreh Beach near Freetown. Photo Credit: Jessica Creighton, IPA.

The beaches are particularly exquisite. Many have snow-white sand and green mountain views. This photo depicts one such beach, Boreh, a popular spot that is home to a small fishing community known to offer meals of fresh-caught barracuda and oysters to visitors.

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