

The Unfinished Business of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report

By Alfred Koroma



According to the TRC, majority of the war combatants were young people

When the war ended in 2002, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to investigate the war. The Commission's report, backed by testimonies offered a path forward with dozens of recommendations.

Twenty years later, some of those recommendations remain unfulfilled.

"I feel like the country just moved on and left us behind," Catco Sesay, a 34-year-old war amputee in Waterloo told Concord Times in an interview early this year.

Catco lost his right arm at the age of six in Old Port Loko, a village along the Freetown Road in Port Loko District, during the eleven-year civil war, a conflict that claimed over 50,000 lives and displaced thousands more.

“They called us survivors, but surviving is not living. We didn’t get much support during peacekeeping,” he said. “More support was given to the perpetrators of the war than to us. We were supposed to get more, but now we get nothing.”

Catco is not alone. Sierra Leoneans who suffered during the 11-year conflict still believe the support and reform the TRC promised has not been fully realized.

Some progress has been made. Laws such as the Sexual Offences Act, the Child Rights Act, the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act have been passed, along with and the Abolition of the Death Penalty in 2021. A Peace Museum has been opened to preserve stories, artifacts, and civic lessons from the war, and an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion is now in existence.

But several other political and legal reforms promised after the conflict are still pending. For instance, the TRC advised separating the Attorney General’s office from the Ministry of Justice, to prevent political interference in legal matters. Successive governments have ignored the recommendation. Also, efforts to overhaul the Constitution another major postwar goal have stalled for years.

The Youth

According to the TRC, a significant portion of the combatants in the war were young people who felt abandoned by the state. Years of neglect, lack of education, and unemployment left youth vulnerable to manipulation by warlords. The report emphasized the need for meaningful opportunities for young people, including access to education and employment, to prevent future unrest.

Today, while data from [UNFPA](#) shows greater percentage of the country’s population is young, with eight out of ten people being under 35 years old, their presence in governance is still negligible. They remain highly unemployed.

“We were told ‘never again,’ but we still face the same old problems, unemployment, corruption, lack of opportunities,” says Mohamed Bangura a university graduate.

In its report, the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) estimates structural youth unemployment rate to be as high as 70%, highlighting that a significant portion of young people are forced into informal, unstable, or underpaid work.

The [Special Investigative Committee](#) that examined the violent August 10, 2022, protests also pointed to youth unemployment as one of the main socio-economic triggers of the brutal unrest.

As the nation moves forward, citizens like Catco hope that the lessons of the past won't be lost. He holds a Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC) and has taught for nearly a decade without pay.

"I forgave, because I had to," he says. "But forgiveness, without action, feels empty. We deserve more than promises."

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