

TWO DECADES ON: HOW EFFECTIVELY HAS NaCSA FULFILLED ITS TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MANDATES IN SIERRA LEONE

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For over two decades, victims of Sierra Leone's civil war have endured broken promises and neglect. Despite efforts like the 2008 NaCSA-led reparations program, many have been left without essential long-term support, including regular pensions, healthcare, and economic empowerment. The program, which was meant to provide redress for victims of human rights abuses, has fallen short of its promises.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) outlined clear guidance on reparations in its final report, specifically in Volume 4, Chapter 5, Sections 100–209 and pages 250–265. These sections emphasize the need for a well-rounded reparations program that includes medical care, financial support, housing provision, and vocational training for those who were severely affected by the war.

In its simplest form, reparations, defined as redress for victims of human rights abuses, can take forms such as rehabilitation, restitution, compensation, truth-telling, restoring dignity, and improving quality of life. The concept also includes ensuring “non-repetition” to prevent future harm. The Sierra Leone reparations program emphasizes rehabilitation through service packages and symbolic actions to acknowledge past wrongs, aiming to balance victims' needs with national development goals while avoiding further societal division. Rehabilitation focuses on providing medical and psychological care, addressing immediate needs, and supporting long-term recovery. Symbolic reparations, like memorial services and monuments, honour victims, preserve the memory of the conflict, and foster healing and reconciliation. (TRC Report, vol.2, chp4, sec.22-26, pgs232-234)

The Executive Director of Fambul Tok, John Caulker, highlighted that one of the major responsibilities of the NaCSA reparations program was to ensure kids as young as six months were taken care of until they completed their tertiary education. According to John Caulker, this responsibility, among many others, was treated as a project by the then NaCSA administration. He stated that he, along with Valnora Edwin, who was also a civil society activist, was part of the committee that wrote a proposal that led to raising \$30 million to start the reparations program. John Caulker said, “While they were focusing on treating it as a project, we were saying, No, this is not a project, this is a program that will outlive some of us.”

John Caulker expressed his disappointment with the program's implementation, stating that NaCSA did not complete 50% of its responsibilities. He believes the program should have lasted

for 30 to 40 years, rather than the 8 to 10 years it was given. He said, out of 100%, NaCSA did not complete 50% of its responsibilities, stating that they did about 10% to 20% of what he called an interim reparations program. He criticized the program's approach, saying, “While the program was an opportunity for war victims to reclaim their dignity, NaCSA made it look like the government was paying people for being amputated, sexually molested, and you give them \$200.” John Caulker called on the government to revisit the reparations program and find a better way to support victims.

Tamba Ngaujah, a retired military personnel, who was amputated during the war, shared his experience of being rejected by NaCSA during the reparations program. He was told that the program was for civilians and not for military personnel, which he believed was not in line with the TRC recommendations. He noted that some of the TRC recommendations are still not implemented, stating that this is why many amputated people are often seen begging on the streets of Sierra Leone. Ngaujah’s story highlights the need for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to reparations.

NaCSA was not readily available to comment on the matter at the time of filing this report.

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