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# **Conflicts, Rural Development and Food Security in West Africa**

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**Conflicts, Rural Development and Food Security  
in West Africa<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines food security in the context of conflict in West Africa. The analysis developed in the paper recognises the importance of defining conflict type and the trends in conflict so that conflict and post-conflict policies may be implemented. The relationship between food security and conflict is analysed. Whilst conflict exacerbates food security, food insecurity can itself fuel conflict. Strategies designed to assist in post-war rehabilitation need to address key dimensions of food security: availability, access and stability. It is argued in this paper, that consideration of these three dimensions are necessary joint conditions in moving towards a reduction in the numbers of hungry. The cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia are examined to consider the nature of conflict and how food security is being addressed and the necessary policy implications after prolonged violent conflict. Ghana is examined as an analytical contrast to show that the absence of conflict is not a sufficient condition for growth and reduced hunger.

**Key Words:** West Africa; Conflict; Food Security, Crisis, Hunger

**JEL:** N47; N57; O13; O18

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## I. Introduction

Agriculture dominates the economies of most West African countries, being the key employer and major source of income and exports. Exploitation of high value mineral resources has become an increasing economic activity in various countries. The majority of the poor are concentrated in rural areas. While it is the sub-region in Africa with the lowest prevalence of undernourishment (15%), two countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone, are amongst those with the highest rate of undernourishment. Both countries have suffered long-lasting conflicts that have undermined the wellbeing of their people and the economy. Unfortunately, they are not the only countries that have gone through civil strife. Two years ago only a few out of the sixteen countries in the region were considered living in peace.<sup>2</sup>

Conflict and food insecurity are closely related. The proportion of food emergencies that can be considered human-made has increased over time. Indeed, conflict and economic problems were cited as the main cause of more than 35 percent of food emergencies between 1992 and 2003, as compared to around 15 percent in the period from 1986 to 1991 (FAO, SOFA 2003). More than half of the countries where undernourishment is most prevalent experienced conflict during the 1990s (FAO, SOFI 2003). As of early September 2003, the number of countries facing serious food shortages requiring international assistance in the world stood at 38. Twenty-two of these were in Africa. Although adverse weather conditions are behind many of the emergency situations, human-caused disasters are also a major factor. Civil strife or the existence of internally displaced people or refugees are among the reasons for more than half of the reported food emergencies in Africa. In West Africa, the emerging picture of food insecurity is more complex and arises from the interaction of *both* human and natural disasters.

Conflict is a complex subject that has attracted much attention in the development literature. Causes of war within West Africa range from a diverse mix of environmental, social, political and cultural factors. In 2002, Guinea-Bissau suffered a coup d'état, Côte d'Ivoire (1999, 2002), Sierra Leone (1991- 2002) and Liberia (1989- 1997, 2003) experienced state collapse and violent conflict; Guinea and Togo faced conflict arising from disputed governance. During the 1980s the increased vulnerability in rural areas as a result of drought in the Sahel region resulted in increased numbers of people seeking asylum in Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso. After, the nature of conflict altered with more of a political and ethnic basis. Conflict in Senegal and Mauritania has arisen from access rights to water. In Senegal, the conflict situation in the Casamance region is the result of an ongoing rebellion. Religious as well as ethnic tensions have been the driving force behind conflict in Nigeria. All in all, conflict in West Africa stems from a variety of factors. There are similarities across countries but also quite distinct problems unique to specific countries. As a result, conflict constitutes the major explanatory factor for famine, hunger and malnutrition, affecting the entire region given the complex nature of the humanitarian crisis that results from conflict. Importantly though, conflict while the major cause for food insecurity, is not the *only* cause. Poverty, natural disasters and gender discrimination result in food insecurity and when combined with conflict tend to exacerbate further the extent of the humanitarian crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> West Africa covers Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

A major difficulty that arises from internal conflict is that hunger is more often than not used to target both the armed groups and civilians (Messer, 1998). Consequently, hunger persists long-after the end of war. That conflict has severe negative economic and social consequences is not under dispute, but analyzing the extent of this is problematic given the lack of reliable data at the micro-economic level (see Mohammed, 1999).

The need to secure the food and nutrition requirements of the population suffering the conflict becomes a necessary condition for recovery. In the absence of adequate food security, the conflict/post-conflict scenarios of mass migration, starvation, sectoral collapse and death due to hunger and disease (as opposed to combat-induced death) become more likely. The economic cost links closely to the social cost. The reduction in human capital as well as physical and social capital, has strong implications for food security. An understanding of the effects and dynamics of conflict on the engines that drive human welfare are essential in order to face appropriate mechanisms for post conflict recovery and conflict prevention. Clearly, conflict is disruptive and has strong implications for rural and agricultural development and growth. The short term emergency responses to address the needs of people suffering the consequences of the conflict need to be located in a broader long term perspective of food policy framework aimed at improving people's and food system resilience.

This paper will proceed as follows. Section II will consider an overview of conflict, and why understanding the type of conflict is important for food policy during and after the conflict. Section III will examine the impact of conflict on some key variables for the region as a whole. An analysis of the impact of conflict principally rests on examining the effects on agricultural growth, rural development, food and nutritional security. This list is by no means exhaustive. However, the effects of conflict on these variables are direct but also indirect given the interlinkages within economies.

Securing adequate access to food requires putting into place mechanisms that, even when disrupted by conflict, can adapt more quickly to the post-conflict environment. This is particularly important when there is any kind of cyclical nature to conflict. The immediate emergency response and the long-term path to development must be such that trends pre-conflict are at least matched after a lag and begin to move upwards. Given the diversity of the region, the section will focus on Sierra Leone and Liberia as examples of countries under conflict in the West Africa region. As a useful analytical contrast we focus on recent development in Ghana. This may serve to highlight some common themes on conflict. Section IV will thus examine policy implications arising from the analysis of the three countries.

## **II. Overview of conflict**

West African countries have at one stage or another experienced some form of conflict in the last 50 years. Essentially, conflict within West Africa tends to be localized or regional in nature spilling in a few cases across borders. This is not to say that there is not an international dimension to conflict. Often there is through the provision of arms or other collateral support. Recent international wars have tended to occur primarily between military forces with the aim of minimizing civilian casualties and the establishment of corridors for humanitarian aid. There are, of course, notable exceptions such as the Iran-Iraq war in the 1990s. Indeed, History has shown that the deliberate targeting of civilians is seen as essential in strategies designed to weaken the opponent. While protecting civilians may seem important in current military thinking, in practice the nature of wars are such that collateral damage is

difficult to avoid and as such the operation of corridors becomes virtually impossible. In West Africa conflict has resulted in substantial losses in human life and displaced and refugee people. In Liberia for example, the number of war related deaths have been put at a conservative estimate of 150,000 people representing 5% of the total population (see Gnisci, 2003). Additionally, hundreds of thousand people were injured and displaced (more than one million in Côte d'Ivoire and three million in Sierra Leone).

Conflict in West Africa is multi-dimensional in nature and the policy responses need to be alert to this. Moreover, conflict may be limited to a specific region or it may occur on a national level. Thus when defining a policy of food security, it is essential that the policy recognizes who is being affected by a conflict, why and how. The design of policy needs to be such to avoid creating a gulf between perceived winners and losers of the policy, before, during and after a conflict. Note that a food security policy will be all-encompassing in nature recognizing the need to achieve structural stability and growth. The success of such a policy is, in effect, a function of the institutional capacity present within the country to implement the policy. A big challenge for the economic and political actors involved in conflict-prone regions, as conflict is usually associated to weak state institutions.

An initial review by Gnisci (2003) identified some major trends in conflict and instability in West Africa. The trends pinpoint the degree to which conflict may be seen as a more temporary phenomenon or longer term in nature and if there seems to be a move from the area directly affected to a wider region. It might be expected that regional/sub-regional concentration of conflicts will remain static, mainly in the Mano river area; multiple conflicts at local, national and border level might result in political instability at the national level and thus having important repercussions for the entire region (e.g. Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire); long term conflicts between neighboring countries over common access and usage of shared resources may vary in intensity and may spill from a border dispute between local populations to a full state confrontation; and problems of migrants/refugees linked to pressure on natural resources, unclear or disputed property rights and access may rise.

The multi-dimensional nature of conflicts, their diversity and trends has serious consequences for structural stability long-term. The capacity of the ruling authority to carry out essential functions becomes increasingly difficult and weakens their legitimate basis. Related to this is the issue of governance. Conflict impedes the state machinery to effectively negotiate increased political security and economic activity. Marginalization of vulnerable groups in regions characterized by protracted crisis is aggravated by the lack of investment and the malfunction of markets. This basket of consequences has serious effects for food security. Dealing with conflict (before, during and after) requires understanding the nature of the conflict, who is affected and then devising strategies that incorporate this information. Moreover, if food security is not tackled as a priority, the dimensions of conflict may become more entrenched creating an inescapable low level equilibrium poverty trap.

### **III. Food Security: the relationship to conflict**

The World Food Summit stated that food security exists when “*all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*” (FAO, World Food Summit Plan of Action, 1996). The analysis of food security covers three dimensions: availability, access and stability. Availability is related to domestic production, import capacity, food aid and stocks. Access is influenced by level of income, employment, wage rates, food prices, income

distribution, access to assets such as land and finance, the efficiency of markets, the provision of safety nets and infrastructure capacity. The utilization of food might be considered as a component of access, that is, how each individual is able to benefit from food intake –linked to health, sanitation conditions, the nutrient component of the diet, and the quality of food. Stability of food security refers to factor affecting variability in supply and access: as price and weather variability and political environment. All three dimensions are jointly necessary conditions for increased food security.

In general, countries subject to conflict and complex emergencies are characterized by weakness or absence of government functions, poorly performing institutions, authorities which lack legitimacy, and a tendency for any transition from violent conflict to peace to be protracted, uncertain and prone to reversal. (FAO, Tivoli, 2003) Profound and multiple impacts on farmer livelihoods and food security often result from complex and highly context-specific interactions involving such factors as environmental hazards, resource scarcity and degradation, political and socioeconomic marginalization, lack of basic services, crime and the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as direct war impacts such as insecurity and displacement.

International responses to complex emergencies concentrate largely on emergency relief, in particular food aid, and short-term agricultural assistance. The relief may extend to the adequate provision of health and water alongside infrastructure rehabilitation. Information systems and activities in support of these interventions focus on quantifying relief needs, beneficiary targeting and logistical aspects. Yet complex emergencies may, in their own distinctive ways, persist for many years in a state somewhere between all-out war and peace within which conditions may vary widely over space and time.

While the link between conflict and structural stability seems readily identifiable, an analysis needs to be made on the interface between food insecurity and conflict, and on the complex relationship between the humanitarian and the long-term food security perspectives.

i) Food availability. The information on food output for West Africa corroborates the dichotomy in the experiences vis-à-vis food security between those countries with and without conflict. In a study (Teodosijevic, 2003), using a sample of 38 countries experiencing conflict between 1961 and 2000, it was shown that agricultural and food production levels in per-capita terms are on average about 10% lower during conflict and in the five years after conflict than in the five years before conflict. The study showed that the impact of conflict on food production translates significantly into a lower daily energy supply (DES – calories). In general, it is food aid that tends to partially offset lost production. However, the study concludes that DES falls on average by 7%. For West Africa these results are certainly confirmed (as shown in Table 1). Sierra Leone and Liberia show significant reductions in daily calorie supply, but Benin, Burkina Faso and Guinea have shown improvements.

Evolution of DES is linked with agricultural sector performance. As shown in Table 2, in the last 30 years variability has characterized growth of agricultural production in the region, with generally very low yields<sup>3</sup> and wide differences among countries (see Graphic below). FAO has estimated losses of US\$52 billion in agricultural output through conflict in sub-Saharan Africa between 1970 and 1997, that is, 30% of the agricultural value added. (FAO, SOFA

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<sup>3</sup> Cereal yield varies from 401 kg/ha in Niger and Mauritania (429), to 1309 -1312 in Ghana, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. (FAOSTAT).

2000). It should be noted that average losses of US\$4.3 billion per year in agricultural value added for all conflict-affected developing countries exceeds the amount of food aid bill.

On the other hand, global resources from external assistance directed to agriculture (ODA at 1995 prices) increased up to 1990, when the global policy environment changed dramatically. The nineties have witnessed a decrease in development oriented resources. The low level of resources directed to agriculture (US dollar per agricultural worker) might have had an impact on the level of food supply in West Africa. Even though, there is still a need for a deeper analysis linking the assistance received, to the use of the resources, the agricultural performance and the persistence of conflict.

**Table 1. Food availability: daily energy supply**

	Kcal per person				ODA (\$US)/ agric.Worker/yr	
	1969-71	1979-81	1990-92	1999-01	Dif 1970/2000	1998-00
<b>Benin</b>	1995	2044	2334	2481	24.4%	36
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	1763	1683	2335	2464	39.8%	19
<b>Cape Verde</b>	1721	2545	3087	3295	91.5%	n.a.
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	2512	2826	2457	2586	2.9%	21
<b>Gambia</b>	2180	1804	2379	2283	4.7%	52
<b>Ghana</b>	2286	1707	2097	2622	14.7%	24
<b>Guinea</b>	2203	2216	2094	2328	5.7%	18
<b>Guinea Bissau</b>	1882	2095	2486	2441	29.7%	n.a.
<b>Liberia</b>	2387	2543	2222	<b>2076</b>	-13.0%	3
<b>Mali</b>	2004	1753	2296	2371	18.3%	30
<b>Mauritania</b>	1938	2124	2607	2734	41.1%	83
<b>Niger</b>	2039	2129	2004	2127	4.3%	10
<b>Nigeria</b>	2238	2031	2561	2767	23.6%	2
<b>Senegal</b>	2282	2274	2282	2275	-0.3%	37
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	2236	2108	1996	<b>1928</b>	-13.8%	8
<b>Togo</b>	2216	2194	2152	2314	4.4%	7

Source: FAO, SOFI 2003

**Table 2: Net Agriculture Production: Average Annual Growth Rates for West Africa**

	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-02
<b>Agriculture</b>	-0.33	-0.12	1.43	4.68	4.05	3.52	0.67
<b>Cereals</b>	2.98	-1.83	3.27	5.82	2.73	1.99	1.93
<b>Crops</b>	-0.22	-1.35	1.39	5.98	4.46	3.78	0.67
<b>Food</b>	-0.15	-0.20	1.62	4.65	4.36	3.34	0.53
<b>Livestock</b>	-0.88	4.95	1.58	-0.11	2.14	2.19	0.64

Source: FAOSTAT

Food imports improve food availability. Specific country conditions define when there is a risk of dependency. The import capacity is linked to the level and diversification of exports, as well as to the commitments for servicing external debt. For countries where one commodity provides more than 20% of total export earning, food security is heavily dependant on international market prices. That is the case of Guinea-Bissau (cashew nuts,



97% of total exports); Benin (cotton, 36%); Burkina Faso (cotton, 35%); Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (cocoa beans, 23% and 21%). The situation worsens when conflict contributes to destruction of plantations and/or access to markets.

ii) Food access. In West Africa the incidence of undernourishment is declining but individual country inspection reveals a story of contrasts. The prevalence of hunger is high and increasing in countries suffering prolonged conflict. This is particularly the case for Liberia and Sierra Leone. In stark contrast for the same period, 1990-2001, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Mali displayed quite remarkable reductions in the numbers of undernourished. Ghana particularly stands out with a reduction from 5.5 million in the numbers of undernourished to 2.4 million, a reduction of 23 percentage points (see FAO, SOFI 2003). Table 3 below shows some of the trends occurring within West Africa. The tables shows food insecurity problems in peaceful countries as well as conflict zones. Niger has a high incidence of food insecurity, almost double that of West Africa but above that of Sub-Saharan Africa. Interestingly, Senegal shows an increase in the number of food insecure even though it is not a high-intensity conflict zone.

**Table 3a: Prevalence of Undernourishment in West Africa**

	Number of people Undernourished (millions)				Proportion of undernourished in total population (%)			
	1969-71	1979-81	1990-92	1999-01	1969-71	1979-81	1990-92	1999-01
SUB SAHARAN AFRICA	91.9	125.4	165.5	198.4	36	36	35	33
WEST AFRICA	28.7	50.7	36.2	32.7	30	40	21	15
<b>Benin</b>	1.1	1.3	1.0	1.0	41	37	20	16
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	3.2	4.5	2.0	1.9	59	64	22	17
<b>Cape Verde</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	0.9	0.7	2.4	2.4	16	8	18	15
<b>Gambia</b>	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.4	32	58	22	27
<b>Ghana</b>	2.0	7.1	5.5	2.4	24	64	35	12
<b>Guinea</b>	1.3	1.5	2.5	2.3	33	32	40	28
<b>Guinea Bissau</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Liberia</b>	0.4	0.4	0.7	1.2	27	22	33	42
<b>Mali</b>	2.3	4.1	2.2	2.4	42	60	25	21
<b>Mauritania</b>	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.3	48	35	14	10
<b>Niger</b>	1.7	1.9	3.3	3.7	40	34	42	34
<b>Nigeria</b>	12.7	25.2	11.2	9.1	26	39	13	8
<b>Senegal</b>	1.0	1.3	1.7	2.3	23	23	23	24
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	0.9	1.3	1.9	2.2	34	40	46	50
<b>Togo</b>	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.1	24	26	33	25

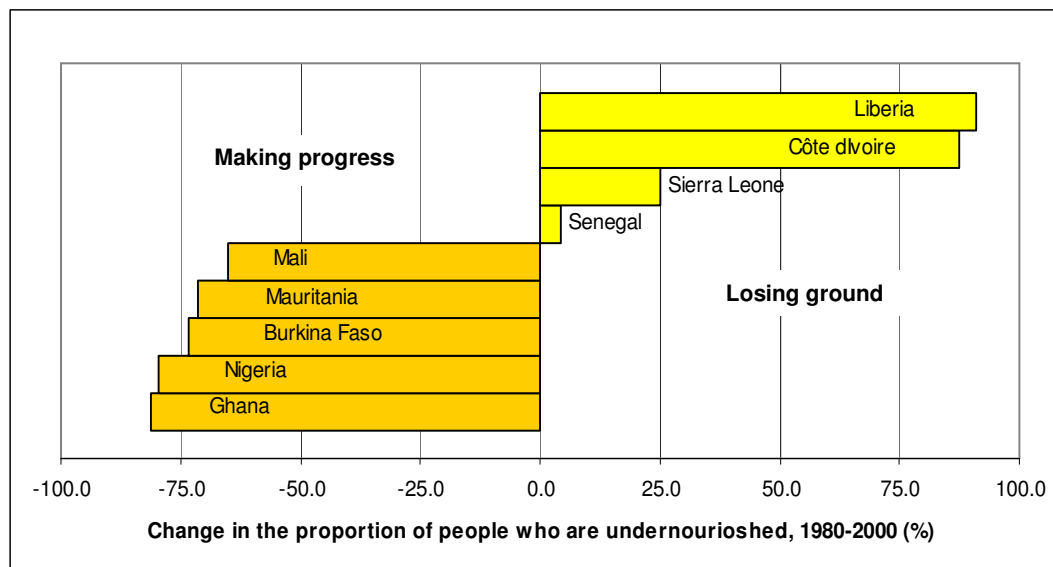
Source: FAO, SOFI 2003

Alternatively, we may consider using the HDI as a proxy for food access and more precisely, as a measure of losses and gains in livelihood capital. The correlation coefficient tends to be high between HDI and poverty and food insecurity. Once again, the evidence if we use different measures of poverty provides some compelling evidence that food security is adversely affected for a prolonged period by conflict.

A word of caution is needed here about the effect of conflict on poverty and food security in general. While civil war and violent conflict may be highly disruptive this is not to say that in the absence of conflict, food security and agricultural development would have seen impressive improvements. It is perhaps all too tempting to say that were it not for the war

things would be better. This of course, depends on the state of the systems in place prior to the conflict. Conflict alone does not account for the inherent structural weaknesses that were present before the conflict resulting in slow growth and worsening food security. Simply, the presence of conflict cannot always account for the worsening poverty exhibited in many West African countries. The challenging question is how to increase the numbers of food secure during the conflict and in the aftermath of civil war, as a means to prevent the re-emergence of a conflict.

**Table 3b: Reductions and increases in undernourishment in West Africa, 1980-2000**



Source: FAO, SOFI 2003

**Table 4: Human development Indicator**

HDI rank	Country	HDI value
100	Cape Verde	0.715
129	Ghana	0.548
141	Togo	0.493
148	Nigeria	0.462
152	Mauritania	0.438
154	Senegal	0.431
156	Côte d'Ivoire	0.428
158	Benin	0.420
159	Guinea	0.414
160	Gambia	0.405
164	Mali	0.386
167	Guinea-Bissau	0.349
169	Burkina Faso	0.325
172	Niger	0.277
173	Sierra Leone	0.275
Not listed	Liberia	

Source: UNDP, Human Development Indicators, 2002

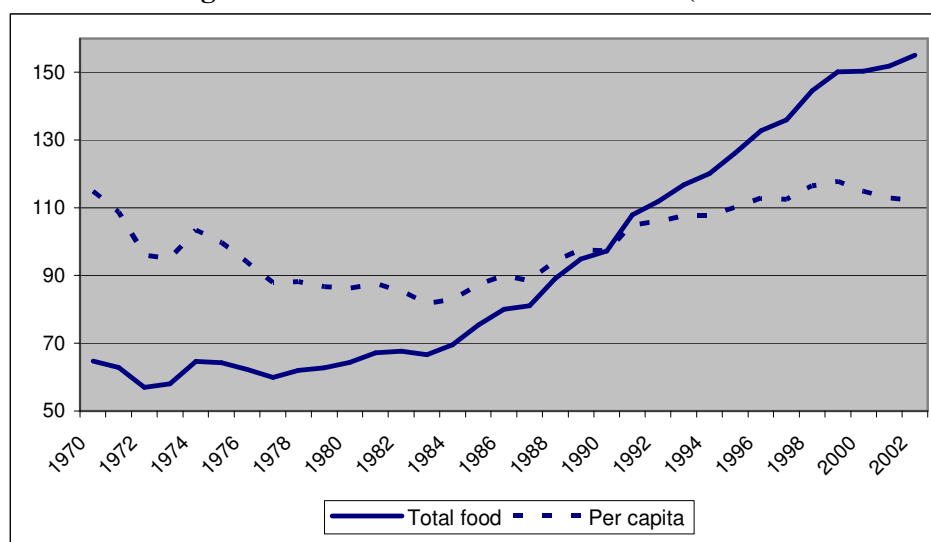
The results from the previous tables are not perhaps surprising given the extent of conflict within this region and the spill over of conflicts across the region. The key point here is to consider how conflict disrupts the underlying forces that drive food security. And what happens to agriculture under conflict and consequently to the pace of rural development.

iii) Stability of food security under conflict situation: The effect of conflict on agriculture depends on the nature of the conflict itself. If it is confined to a specific geographic region, then agricultural losses are to some extent minimized. This was true for developing countries where conflict was localized enough so that the decline in production (and exports) could be contained. The conflict afflicted area, by contrast, suffers serious economic decline.

Production ceases almost immediately but the loss in output may be hampered long-term if economic structures are specifically targeted with the intention of reducing the economic capabilities of the opponent. Moreover, in order to secure food, farmers and agricultural laborers are forced to move away from the fighting. Displaced persons lose access to their food entitlements; persons trapped in conflict zones are cut-off from market links and relief food; people lose their employment and income as a result of fighting. Informal taxation adds to economic decline. Additionally, the use of land-mines makes the land unusable. The post-conflict unit of the World Bank estimates that over 100 million landmines are deployed every year worldwide claiming 25,000 casualties. This figure does not include the numbers seriously maimed as a result and consequently unfit for physical labor. Where agriculture accounts for a significant proportion of GDP as it does in West Africa, economic growth suffers a sharp decline. Agriculture value added in Sierra Leone accounts for between 45 and 50 percent of GDP, in Ghana the figure stands at 35% and in Guinea-Bissau at a staggering 60%. (See Table A1 in the appendix).

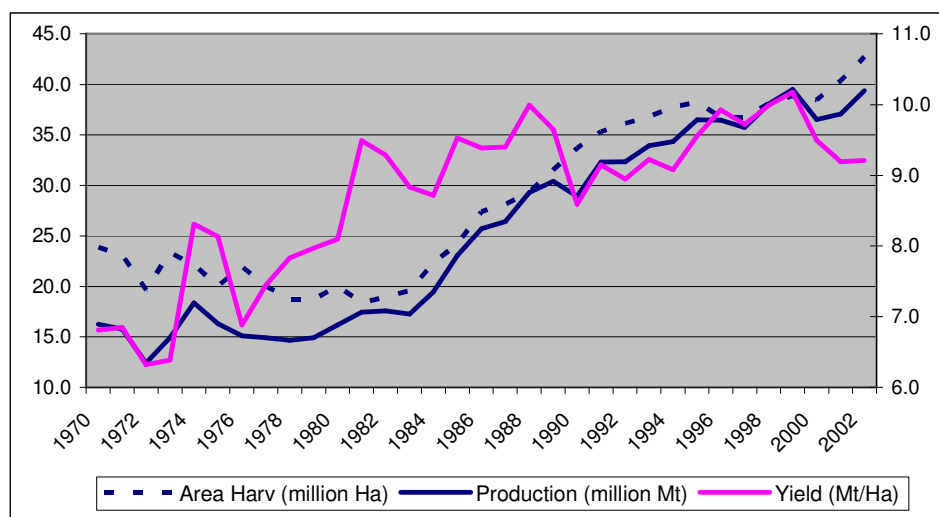
A regional perspective on food production points to, at least, two key issues: the stagnation in food per capita production and second, the limits of growth related to cereal production, with very low yields for the whole region.

**Figure 1: West Africa Food Production (Index 1998-91 = 100)**



Source: FAOSTAT

**Figure 2: Low yields / high variability of yields (cereals only)**



Source: FAOSTAT

Not surprisingly given the large share of agriculture, and the indirect effects of agricultural production on the rest of the economy, growth rates for GDP are markedly poor in areas of conflict and significantly begin to pick up at conflict end. Collier (1999) found that during civil war GDP per capita tends to decline at a rate of 2.2% annually. In Table A2, (see appendix) Sierra Leone showed negative growth rates from the mid-1980's to 1999 and GDP growth has only just started to rise. Volatility of growth appears in areas of conflict compared to more steady rates of growth in countries with less conflict. Ghana's GDP growth has been steady since mid-1980 with the exception of 2000 where it dipped below 4%, whereas Nigeria has suffered more instability in growth.

What the figures do not readily indicate is the geographic distribution of food access. In Nigeria - where some ethnic and religious tensions have affected some areas - calorie consumption has increased by 36% since 1980. However, this average conceals the more important story of the marked poverty difference between the wealthy north of the country and the substantially poorer south.

Another important dimension to conflict and food security stems from the deliberate use of hunger as a weapon; the so-called scorched earth tactics and through what are termed "attacks by omission" where food aid, for example, fails to reach the most vulnerable groups, affecting the fragile stability of food access. De Soysa et al (1999) finds that attacks to undermine the productive capacity of agriculture occur in the very countries whose economies are highly dependent on agriculture but do not have the means to increase land productivity. Moreover, the active disruption of mechanisms that facilitate access to food such as well-functioning markets, reasonably usable roads, absence of road blocks and sieges, and unrestricted movement all contribute to increased numbers of hungry.

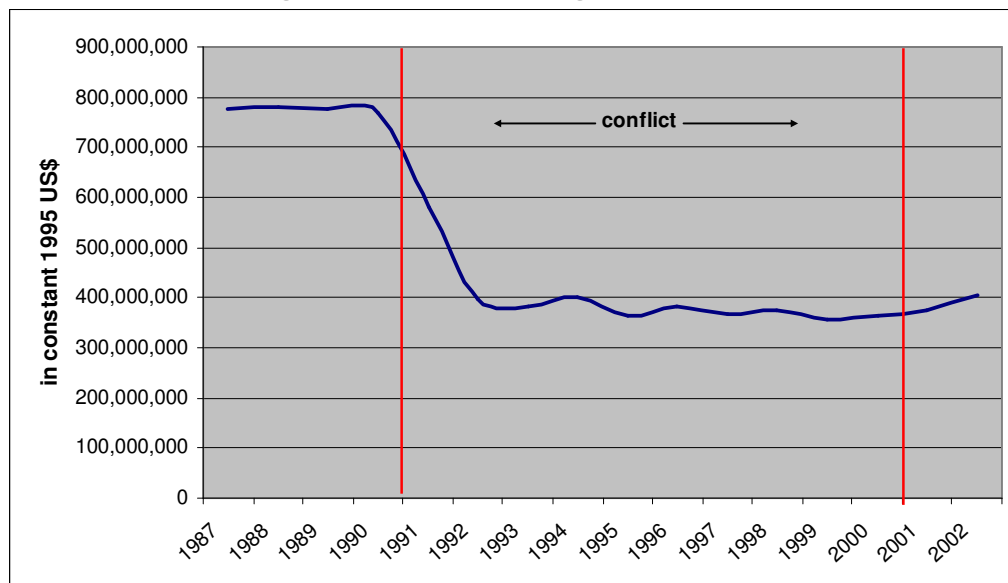
#### IV. Conflict and protracted crisis: policy implications for improved food security

Populations living in the midst of chronic but fluctuating conflict strive to protect their livelihoods and food security as best they can, whether in receipt of emergency humanitarian assistance or not. Within the limits of a short-term planning horizon, emergency agricultural support programmes address these needs in increasingly diverse and imaginative ways, some with significant capacity-building effects. The question arises as to whether these short-term responses can be located within a broader and longer-term food security policy framework aimed at improving people's resilience, preparing to take advantage of lulls in conflict or the prospect of a more sustained peace, and helping prevent further disasters. (FAO, Tivoli workshop, 2003).

Recent experiences of Sierra Leone and Liberia, both at different stages of transition from conflict to peace-building, give interesting elements on the policy initiatives post conflict. As a contrast, the experience of Ghana may highlight long-term policy aims.

i) Sierra Leone achieved independence in the 1960's. The economy grew at a rate of roughly 4% per annum but fell sharply in the next two decades. Agriculture's share in GDP moved from 31% at the onset of independence to approximately half by the start of the war. In the eighties, GDP growth fell to just under 1%. By the end of the decade, the institutional and policy environment resulted in a serious slow down of economic activity. In real terms, GDP growth rates were negative at 7%. Civil war gripped the country in 1991. During this period of conflict the economy contracted by 4.6% per annum with per capita income falling by 47% (Government of Sierra Leone, 2001). The combination of falling agricultural income and low growth led to a severe upturn in poverty that was especially marked in rural areas.

**Figure 3: Sierra Leone Agriculture, Value Added**



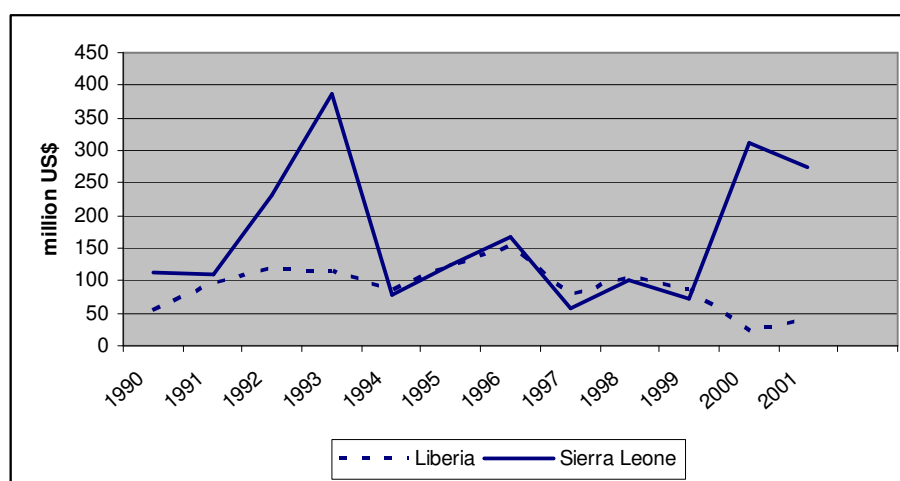
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank

Figure 3 indicates well the drastic consequences of conflict on agriculture and, given its importance to the whole economy, the repercussions for Sierra Leone as a whole. Interestingly, the figure shows that for Sierra Leone, after the initial downward impact of

conflict agricultural value-added remained at a plateau. Whether in Sierra Leone this slow growth will persist remains to be seen and depends in part on the measure of post conflict policy.

Figure 4 below for ODA assistance shows a similar story. Periods of conflict marked a significant downturn in this type of aid. Sierra Leone witnessed a sharp decline in ODA for the duration of the conflict but at conflicts end the trend reverted with substantial inflow of ODA. In other words, ODA responses to the non-conflict situation are significant and substantial. For Liberia ODA has remained low and relatively static as a consequence of the ongoing instability. As expected, emergency assistance too is highly responsive to the post-conflict environment and follows a similar pattern for Sierra Leone (and indeed for Liberia, see Figure A4 in appendix).

**Figure 4: Official development assistance, concessional commitments, Liberia and Sierra Leone**



Source: OECD

Following conflict, Sierra Leone has set about implementing a fairly prescriptive rehabilitation program. Central to this is the recognition that long-term sustained economic growth and significant poverty reduction hinges on promoting the agricultural sector. Agriculture's share of GDP stands at about 45% and it is by far the largest employer, so development of this sector has positive growth implications for other sectors too. Sectoral information clearly illustrates the strategic importance of agriculture in the long-term economic recovery of Sierra Leone. Notably, the crop sub-sector with rice as the major crop contributed about 75% of agricultural GDP in 1993/4 but fell to 66% by the end of the war.

In terms of imports –including food–, Sierra Leone faced a trade sanction during the war and the import bill fell substantially. With peace and the lifting of the embargo, imports swiftly rose with food imports accounting for 27% of total imports. Given the comparative advantage of Sierra Leone in rice production, increased production of this crop would go some way to reducing the import bill. Practically, this would require increased investment in technology. Indeed, there has been some success in riverine rice production. However, the level of technology used by small-scale farmers is still limited. In addition, other key crops such as

cocoa, groundnut and cassava need also to be developed for the export market. This requires a directed agricultural policy that encourages production.<sup>4</sup>

But while development of agriculture is essential for moving towards increased food security it is by no means a sufficient condition. Productivity increases in food crops should represent only part of a broader range of agricultural strategies designed to reduce the numbers of hungry. Specifically, those most vulnerable under conflict must have access to mechanisms that guarantee adequate food consumption either through income/consumption-smoothing policies or through the provision of safety nets. Moreover, the longer-term strategy must be to diversify sources of rural income if sustainable food security is to be achieved. As yet, in Sierra Leone little progress has been made to actively put into place mechanisms that would permit diversification but there is evidence of the need to increase access to credit markets. Given that agriculture tends to be dominated by small farms, future policies need to focus on the education and training of the rural population, especially women, in developing the rural community, access to credit and land reform. In particular, attention needs to focus on incentives to raise female nutrition especially for women of child-bearing age. The role of women in the agricultural sector of Sierra Leone is one that, there is a need to promote their rights to the ownership of assets.

In the post-conflict era, there is evidence that some of these policies are beginning to take shape and that in other areas, the dialogue is beginning. It is too early in transition to say what the effects of these reforms on food security and agricultural development will be following a ten year war, but the evidence is that there is a real commitment on the part of the government through the “Operation Feed the Nation”.

ii) Liberia was a relatively calm country until 1980, when its’ then president was overthrown after food price riots. While the coup marked the end of dominance by the minority Americo-Liberians, it marked the start of a chronic period of instability.

By the late 1980s, arbitrary rule and economic collapse culminated in civil war. Characteristic of the conflict was the number of rebel groups, each with a distinct ethnic allegiance. The war became more complex as a result. Extreme brutality, violence against civilians and the use of children as soldiers, and workers in military camps culminated in the death of over 150,000 people. Up to two million people were forced to flee. Health, education and social welfare services were devastated, the economy collapsed, and many features of traditional life and the social structure were destroyed. As a consequence Liberia during the 1980s was one of the largest aid-recipients in Africa. A peace accord was signed in August 1996, which eventually led to elections in July 1997. In spite of the peace accord conflict continued.

To compound the problems of conflict further, Liberia is also heavily affected by the current crisis in Côte d’Ivoire. Intensified fighting has cut off humanitarian access to huge numbers of displaced people in western Liberia. The influx of Ivorian refugees, third country nationals (mainly Burkinabes, Malians and Nigerians) and Liberian returnees has also worsened the living conditions of local communities along the border, themselves recovering from the effects of Liberia's civil conflict. Prices of staple food commodities like rice and cassava have more than doubled. The cost of fuel has raised dramatically making transport difficult if not impossible. The increasing numbers of displaced have put extra pressure on already limited resources and is jeopardizing people’s resilience.

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<sup>4</sup> See forthcoming document “Consultation on the Sierra Leone Agricultural Sector” prepared by TCA/FAO. For further information please contact TCA Division.

The number of Liberians relying on humanitarian assistance has continued to rise since the beginning of 2002. According to the consolidated inter-agency appeal for Liberia for 2003, 80% of the population lives below the poverty line of US\$1/day with severe poverty estimated at 52%. Large numbers of displaced people are living in miserable conditions with few, if any amenities. Many children and their families are once again at risk of malnutrition, disease and separation. Issues of access and availability are pressing problems in the transition phase. Political stability is far from secure with increased pressure on resources from displaced persons. Difficulty in accessing markets, poor infrastructure and the lack of income earning opportunities are the main barriers to food security in Liberia currently. Insecurity makes it hard for people to farm or trade. Continued fighting has resulted in large-scale displacement. As people turn to short-term solutions for their food security and livelihoods, there is large scale over-exploitation of natural resources.

In the years preceding the civil war, Liberia had a buoyant economy with coffee, rubber, and cocoa as major income-earning export crops. Liberia also has large deposits of iron ore, diamonds and gold. It is estimated that between 1990 and 1994 diamond, rubber and timber export income averaged \$380 million annually. Most of value of exports was spent on weapons. The wealth base has been heavily plundered during conflict resulting in an almost total economic collapse prevailing. Poverty, inflation and unemployment are high with little prospects for the poor. Aid, especially food aid, could go some way for the relief of the most needy, but relations with donors have been poor since 1997. In May 2002, the UN Security Council voted to renew sanctions on Liberia for another 12 months due to his support for rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone. The situation changed in 2003 when Liberia's President Taylor was granted asylum in a neighboring country.

The result of such protracted political instability has been profound. Agriculture has been particularly badly affected as displacement has forced many people to abandon their farms. The deterioration in the economy in Liberia is quite striking as figure A4 indicates. Moreover, "...conflicts affect the capacity and credibility of states to allocate, legislate and regulate towards growth, education and improved living standards. The state becomes impoverished, skilled civil servants may flee, and in some cases the state nearly disappears completely. Intact institutional structures are crucial for a rapid recovery after the conflict is over" (WIDER, 2003). For Liberia, institutional reconstruction seems necessary as a prerequisite to support agricultural development. In 1999, the government launched a 'back to farming' campaign in an attempt to make Liberia self-sufficient in food production and to enable agriculture to form the backbone of economic recovery.

Difficulty in accessing markets, poor infrastructure and the lack of income earning opportunities, rather than a land shortage or a shortage of food, are effectively the main barriers to food security in Liberia and general agricultural development and growth. The urgency of the problem is evident. Displaced people staying in camps face serious food shortages. Not only is availability of food affected by sanctions, inadequate structures for long-term food production as a result of a weakened agricultural sector, but access is seriously distorted through a politically motivated policy to weaken opposition groups. The crisis of food security and agricultural decline is set to continue in Liberia unless there is a wide-scale concerted effort to address the complex nature of the conflict. Macro-economic stability is key but a necessary condition prior to this is the need to rebuild communities and trust so that the poor invest in their own future.



iii) In contrast, Ghana is a case frequently cited as the success story of West Africa achieving a reduction in the number of undernourished from 64% to an extraordinary 12% between 1979 and 2000. Although income distribution remained unchanged, the success is almost entirely explained by increased food availability. Expansion of maize, yam, cassava and plantain production accounted for most of the increase in DES. An improved economic environment and increased market access for farmers resulted in the increase of the amount of land under cultivation. Alongside improved varieties for maize and yam, it was increased cassava yields and production that was the main driving force behind the reduction. A significant development because cassava has the highest calorie to price ratio in the country and because consumption of cassava and yam products reaches a peak in the “hunger season” just before harvest time. The increased food security was driven by economic growth with export farmers particularly benefiting from the macro-economic climate.

Ghana’s experience with increasing food production highlights the importance of investments in developing more productive staple food technologies and taking those new techniques to producers. FAO’s measure of welfare suggests strongly that food availability is no longer the key constraint to hunger reduction in Ghana: access to food is a key constraint.

Economic growth has improved the food security prospects of many Ghanaians. In the future, policy makers will increasingly have to address the issue of how to make markets work better and improve access to food in those regions and for those households yet to benefit. Targeted policies to address this inequality are necessary through the implementation of pro-poor policies. Finally, as the data on under-nutrition of children under 5 years old suggests, although food availability and access are necessary, other efforts, including targeting mother’s education and nutrition, are also important and necessary activities to eradicate hunger. (FAO, SOFA for Africa, 2003); (see Croppenstedt et al, 2003 for a fuller examination).

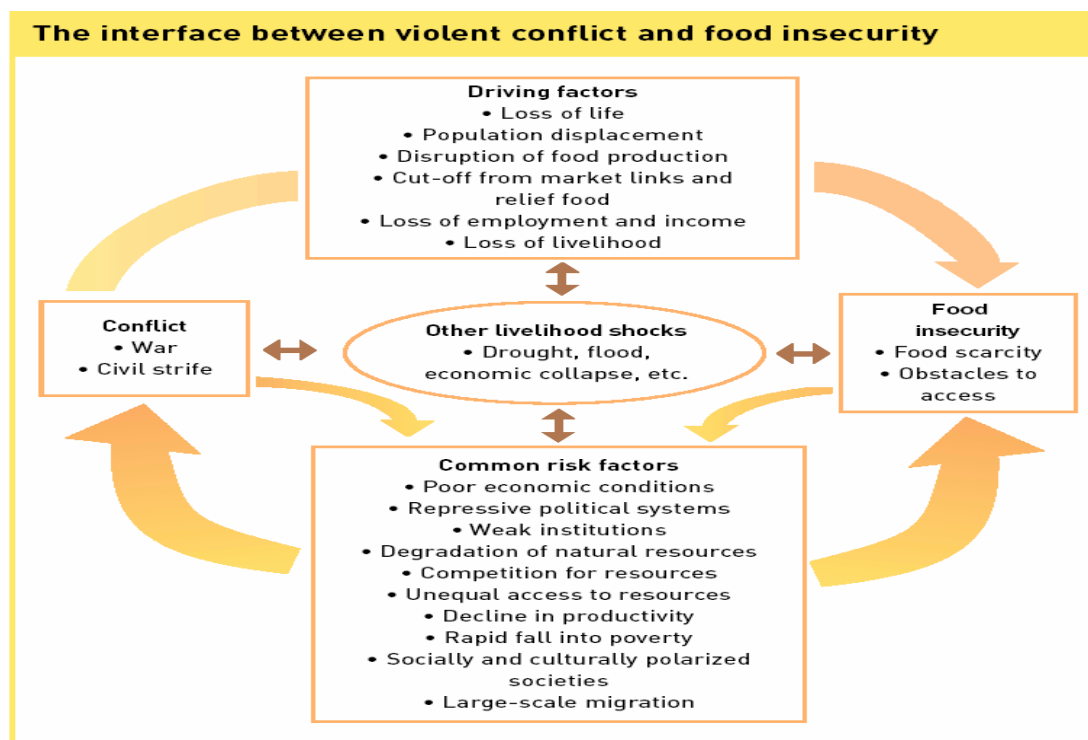
## **V. Concluding remarks**

Policy formulation to address causes and consequences of complex emergencies derived from conflict is a challenge for national and international development institutions. As food security emergencies linked to conflict have risen in the last decade, food aid interventions have increased while aid for development has reduced. While humanitarian relief and food aid address immediate human suffering and survival under conflict –and immediate post conflict situations-, these are limited in addressing the root causes of the crises themselves. Sustainable food security requires longer term policies and interventions, establishing an adequate link between short and long-term perspectives. There is a need for a deeper understanding of social, political and economic factors that generate a crisis and its impact in food security. And more importantly, identify conditions determining the resilience of food systems in order to design policy frameworks in which short-term responses are one component of a diverse spectrum of action aimed at supporting that resilience.

Recovery from conflict and its effects is not only about raising agricultural production and productivity -availability of food –but also about increased access to food. It requires rebuilding government institutions and social capital. Food security access is complex in nature requiring recognition of entitlements of people more affected by conflict (displaced, refugees, returnees), as their access to assets. Priority is to be given to investment in education –as has already been proposed in Sierra Leone-, technology –highly positive results in Ghana-, protecting vulnerable groups alongside essential infrastructure as well as policy of redistributing incomes.

The Figure below, (FAO, SOFI 2002), intends to provide a broader vision of the interaction between conflict and food security, and its potential role in the peace building process and conflict prevention. A further discussion is needed, not only on the interface factors, but also an applied analysis to local, national and regional conditions in West Africa.

**Figure 5: The interface between violent conflict and food security**



Source: FAO, SOFI 2002

## ANNEX

**Table A1: Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)**

	<b>70-79</b>	<b>80 - 89</b>	<b>90 -99</b>	<b>2000 -02</b>
<b>Benin</b>	33.5	33.8	36.1	35.8
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	35.4	33.2	36.3	38.5
<b>Cape Verde</b>	n.a.	16.6	12.9	11.4
<b>Cote d'Ivoire</b>	27.8	27.1	28.5	23.8
<b>Gambia, The</b>	34.4	34.0	28.8	37.8
<b>Ghana</b>	51.3	51.9	39.5	35.3
<b>Guinea</b>	n.a.	24.0	23.0	24.0
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	47.2	48.2	56.5	57.7
<b>Liberia</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Mali</b>	60.7	44.4	46.7	39.5
<b>Mauritania</b>	30.6	30.4	26.6	21.2
<b>Niger</b>	56.7	38.6	39.4	39.4
<b>Nigeria</b>	33.6	33.4	31.1	31.7
<b>Senegal</b>	24.6	20.1	19.1	18.1
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	34.0	40.8	41.4	49.8
<b>Togo</b>	29.7	31.8	38.2	39.1

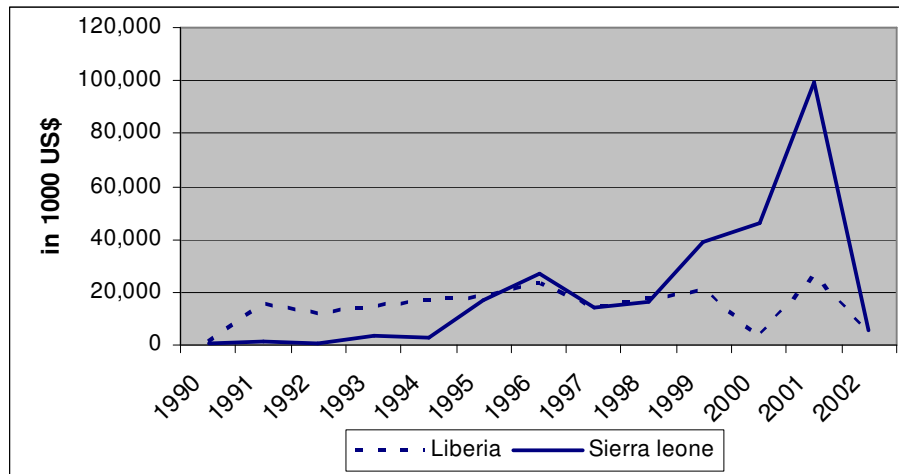
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank

**Table A2: Real GDP (Annual percentage change)**

	<b>1985-94</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Africa</b>	1.9	3.0	5.6	3.0	3.3	2.6	2.8	3.6	3.4
<b>Benin</b>	2.5	4.6	5.9	5.8	4.6	4.7	5.8	5.0	5.8
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	4.3	4.5	7.5	4.8	6.4	6.3	-1.6	5.6	5.2
<b>Cape Verde</b>	4.7	7.5	6.7	7.2	8.0	8.9	6.6	4.0	4.6
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	1.2	7.1	7.7	5.7	4.8	1.6	-2.3	0.1	0.5
<b>Gambia, the</b>	3.7	-3.4	6.1	4.9	3.5	6.4	5.5	5.9	4.7
<b>Ghana</b>	4.9	4.0	4.6	4.2	4.7	4.4	3.7	4.2	4.5
<b>Guinea</b>	4.1	4.7	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.6	2.1	3.6	4.2
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	3.0	4.4	4.6	5.5	-28.1	8.0	9.5	0.2	-4.2
<b>Liberia</b>	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
<b>Mali</b>	2.5	7.0	4.3	6.7	4.9	6.7	3.7	1.5	9.6
<b>Mauritania</b>	2.9	4.6	5.5	3.2	3.7	4.1	6.3	4.6	4.2
<b>Niger</b>	2.1	2.6	3.4	2.8	10.4	-0.6	-1.4	7.1	3.0
<b>Nigeria</b>	3.9	2.4	6.5	3.1	1.6	1.0	3.9	2.8	0.5
<b>Senegal</b>	2.1	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.7	5.0	5.6	5.6	2.4
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	-1.1	-10.0	-24.8	-17.6	-0.8	-8.1	3.8	5.4	6.6
<b>Togo</b>	1.1	6.9	9.7	4.3	-2.1	2.9	-1.9	2.7	2.6

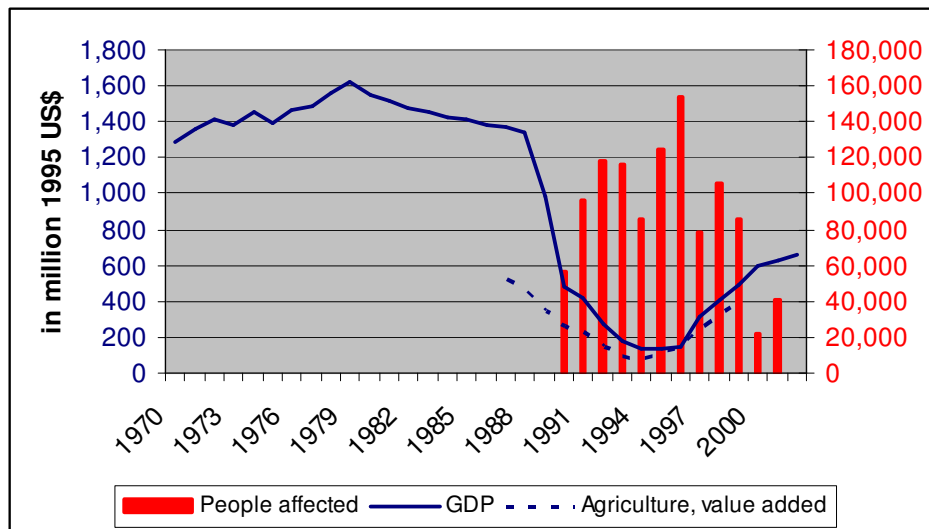
Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook, April 2003

**Figure A3: Emergency assistance**



Source: OECD

**Figure A4: Liberia: Development shift after crisis**



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank and CRED

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