

Morten Bøås and Anne Hatløy

# Alcohol and Drug Consumption in Post War Sierra Leone – an Exploration





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© Fafo 2005

ISBN 82-7422-501-5

ISSN 0801-6143

Cover page: Fafo Information Office

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Printed in Norway by: Allkopi AS

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## Foreword

This report, *Alcohol and Drug Consumption in Post-war Sierra Leone – an Exploration*, is the result of an assignment from FORUT to Fafo – Institute for Applied International Studies. It is part of the FORUT project Alcohol, Drugs and Development (ADD) supported by Norad.

FORUT appreciates the sound research that is behind this report. It is our goal to contribute to establishing knowledge about the alcohol and drug situation in our partner countries and in developing countries in general. This is important in order to be able to contribute to a reduction in the human, social and economic costs resulting from the use of these substances.

This report will contribute to building that knowledge like other reports sponsored by FORUT and our partners. Other research projects have earlier been completed in Senegal, Nepal and Sri Lanka. FORUT has also published a book on “Strategies to Address Alcohol Problems”. All together we hope that this body of work will be useful tools for those who are interested in integrating the aspects of substance abuse in their development work.

We are very grateful to the researchers for the good work they have done. In Sierra Leone we want to thank FORUT, IOGT, Statistics Sierra Leone and the research assistants for their contributions to making this report a reality. Thanks also to Norad for supporting the ADD project and to Øystein Bakke who has coordinated the work.

Morten Lønstad  
Secretary General  
FORUT, Campaign for Development and Solidarity

Gjøvik, 3 October 2005

## Other FORUT-sponsored studies

- Eide, Arne H., Ibou Diallo, Ibrahima Thioub and Lajla Blom: *Drug use among secondary school students in Senegal*, NIS Health Services Research, SINTEF Unimed, Oslo, 1999
- Dithal, Rupa et. al.: *Alcohol and Drug Use in Nepal, With Reference to Children*, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN), Kathmandu, 2001
- Dithal Rupa et. al.: *Alcohol and Drug Use among Street Children in Nepal, A Study in Six Urban Centres*, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN), Kathmandu, 2002 and
- Rai, Abinash, Keshab Prashad Ghimire, Pooja Shresth and Sumnima Tuladhar: *Glue Sniffing among Street Children in the Kathmandu Valley*, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN), Kathmandu, 2002
- Baklien, Bergljot and Diyanath Samarasinghe: *Alcohol and Poverty in Sri Lanka*, FORUT/NIBR, Colombo, 2003
- Samarasinghe, Diyanath: *Strategies to Address Alcohol Problems*, FORUT, Colombo, 2005

# 1 Introduction

Alcohol and drug consumption in Sierra Leone is under-studied, as it is in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. This report represents one small attempt to understand the reason why people drink, what they drink, where they drink, and, not least, who drinks and how many they are. We believe that this information will be useful in the effort to rebuild Sierra Leone. High consumption levels of alcohol and drugs may abet violence and criminality that undermine peace and development efforts. Furthermore, ex-combatants dependent on drugs and alcohol may be more resistant to reintegration into society – a critical task in facilitating and sustaining the transition from war to peace. Currently, little detailed information exists about either the general level of drug and alcohol use in the population, or the situation among former combatants and underemployed youths. Nevertheless, the alcohol and drug consumption is often described as increasing.<sup>1</sup> A rising level of alcohol and drug use would clearly be counterproductive to reconciliation and development efforts in Sierra Leone. However, it is difficult for the government and other stakeholders to address this problem without sound knowledge about:

1. Consumption patterns – who drinks alcohol and who uses drugs; and
2. Existing perceptions about alcohol and drug.

The establishment of a proper knowledge base about these two elements of alcohol and drug use in Sierra Leone will enable stakeholders to formulate both general information campaigns and targeted policy interventions.

After more than a decade of civil war, Sierra Leone is now peaceful, and the process of rebuilding, healing, and reconciliation has begun. Elections were conducted in May 2002, but the scars from the civil war are still very much present. Many people are still internally displaced and either unwilling or unable to return to their home communities. Unemployment is high, particularly among the younger generations, and corruption remains rampant. Although the majority of the population is pleased that the war ended, they also realise that their current socio-economic situation is not very much different from the one that prevailed in the country before the war started (Bøås 2002).

<sup>1</sup> This view is not substantiated in much writing or scholarly work, but as a general belief it is shared by many national and international stakeholders.

The civil war in Sierra Leone was brutal and destructive. What may have started as an uprising against a kleptocratic and repressive state ended in an orgy of violence, destruction, and human suffering. Many gruesome tales of human rights abuses committed by drunk and drugged rebels and soldiers have been related by journalists and other observers. Although the war was not started by drug and alcohol consumption, it did facilitate the more invidious aspects of those drugs: during the war hard chemical drugs such as heroin ('brown-brown') and crack cocaine were introduced on a much larger scale than previously (Richards 1996; Musah 2000), and there is also little doubt that alcohol and drugs fuelled some of the terrible human rights abuses committed by rebel forces, militias loyal to the government, and the West African ECOMOG force (Richards 1996; Abdullah 1998; Bøås 2001).

## **Sierra Leone: people, history, and society<sup>2</sup>**

The contemporary state of Sierra Leone traces its roots back to May, 1787, when an expedition arrived from London and purchased land from a local Temne chief. Freetown was subsequently established as a settlement for former black soldiers who had fought for the UK in the American War of Independence, and other freed slaves who wanted to return to Africa. Freetown was supposed to provide a 'haven' for freed slaves, but it remained under the rule of the British-owned Sierra Leone Company.

During the period 1808 to 1864, the original group of black settlers fused with a far greater number of Africans rescued from slave ships to form a 70,000-strong group known as the Krio. The black settlers developed a social identity of their own as Krios. They developed their own language – Krio<sup>3</sup> – built up Freetown, and established themselves in some of the most important positions in the new society (Jalloh 1999). During the first 90 years of the colony, they constituted the political and economic elite. The civil society of the Krios consisted of a tightly woven fabric of socio-economic networks maintained through social institutions such as marriage and membership in secret societies, such as the Masons (Riley 1996).

Although the Krios dominated Freetown, the hinterland was more diversely populated with competing societies and political entities. Large parts of southern Sierra Leone continue to be populated by Mende communities whose cultures and languages are part of the Mande group; in the northern part of the country, the

<sup>2</sup> This section draws on Bøås (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Krio is today the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, but it is originally the 'mother tongue' of the Krios. It is based on a Pidgin English core with essentially an African syntax and words borrowed from English, Portuguese, French, Spanish, and several African languages.

Temne is the dominant group. Mende society has a strong unifying agency in their principal male secret society, the Poro,<sup>4</sup> and the female secret society, the Sande,<sup>5</sup> while traditional Temne society is constructed around the belief that they share a common ancestor, originating from the Fouta Jallon.<sup>6</sup> In addition to Temne and the Mende, which each comprise about one-third of the population, there are approximately 13 other smaller indigenous ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. These include the Limba and the Koranko in the north, the Kissi in the east, the Sherbro of the southwest, the Mandingo (Malinke) in the southeast, and the Fula (Peul) in the northeast. The Krios, most of whom still live in Freetown, now constitute less than two percent of the total population. Sierra Leone also has rather large communities of Lebanese origin, Liberians, Nigerians, and South Asians (mainly Indians). Roughly 60 percent of the population is Muslim, 30 percent Christians, and the remaining 10 percent adhere to various indigenous beliefs. Ethnicity is a political issue in Sierra Leone; religion is not. Muslims and Christians freely mix, and inter-religious marriages are common.

In the 1930s, the economy of Sierra Leone was transformed from dependence on forest products (e.g. palm oil, coffee, and cocoa) to a mineral and mining economy. By the 1960s, the major export commodities were diamonds, iron ore, bauxite, and rutile. Much of the new mineral wealth was discovered in areas that were previously politically and economically marginalized. In the mining areas, a new type of provincial politics emerged from trade unionism. One of the trade union leaders was Siaka Stevens, who in 1960 established the All People's Congress (APC) as an opposition party to the Mende-dominated Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). In the early days of its existence, the APC was a catch-all movement appealing to a wide range of dissidents and, in particular, to the young people marginalized by the competition between the Krio-elite and the Mende chiefdom-elite. This appeal was potent because many people in the northern parts of the country, experienced that political and economic life was dominated either by the Krio-elite based in Freetown, or the Mende-elite from the southern part of the country, in particular Bo and the chiefdoms around Bo. Under the leadership of Stevens, and through a combined strategy of political violence and voting irregularities, the APC became the dominant political party in the country. From 1978 to 1991, Sierra Leone was a one-party state ruled by Stevens, who became the personification of a neopatrimonial ruler. Stevens was 'Pa Siaka': the Father of the Nation.

<sup>4</sup> One of the main functions of the Poro is to ensure uniformity of social customs throughout the various Mende communities. For further details see Little (1967) and Ferme (2001).

<sup>5</sup> The Sande society is an institution that is central to the community, exerting spiritual, economic, social and political power. For further details see Boone (1986)

<sup>6</sup> Fouta Jallon is in Guinea. For further details see Dorjahn (1959).

There is little doubt that Stevens's rule corrupted most societal institutions. The APC leadership deliberately weakened important sectors of civil society in their attempts to preserve their rule. However, the most harmful legacy of Stevens's rule was the internalisation in Sierra Leone of corruption as 'the order of things'. Corruption became the main rule for socio-economic interaction among people at all levels of society, from ministries and parastatals to junior bureaucrats and teachers. In order to get any kind of work or service conducted, a bribe must be paid. The civil war in Sierra Leone was clearly a product of years of carelessness, ruthlessness, and mindlessness: the war, and the political economy of plunder that followed, represent the final spasms of state collapse that started with Stevens's rule.

The civil war started in 1991 and lasted for approximately ten years, bringing with it immense levels of destruction and human suffering. Because this study is not about the war, as such, we will not here give a detailed account of it here.<sup>7</sup> However, some key points bear mention.

First, it is important to understand the way in which the marginalisation of radical student activists during the 1970s and 1980s led to a sort of amalgamation between some student activists and 'the lumpen proletariat' (Abdullah 1998). The meeting between radical student activists and the *rarray man dem* (i.e. young unemployed men involved in petty crime) took place in the *potes* (a physical area – e.g. street corner, gas station, palm wine shack, etc.) – where the young men met to drink palm wine, omoly,<sup>8</sup> and beer, smoke marijuana, listen to music, and discuss politics, society, music, and women, – in Freetown and also in around the country (see Richards 1996; Abdullah 1998; Abdullah and Muana 1998; Musah 2000; Bøås 2002). Many groups were formed, splintered, and then regrouped in these encounters, but there is little doubt that the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was one by-product of this amalgamation.

Second, we must root and attempt to understand the war that the RUF initiated, and the brutal behaviour of all (state, non-state, and supra-state) armed actors that followed in the social, economic and historical context of this country. We must therefore try to understand how experiences related to corruption, violence (political and economic), and deep poverty inform the imaginary of generations of young people over time. The people who fought in the war share a common memory of brutalisation, abuse, and marginalisation. This means that there exists a shared background between, for example, the RUF, the Kamajoi (the Mende militia), and the

<sup>7</sup> For studies of the Sierra Leone war we refer to Richards (1996), Abdullah (1998), Musah (2000), Bøås (2001) and Keen (2005).

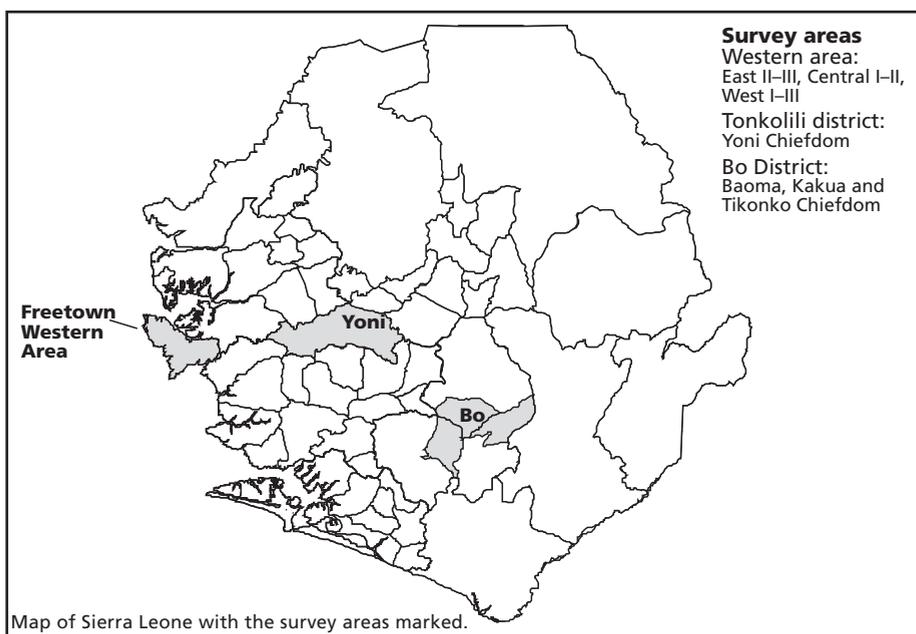
<sup>8</sup> Omoly is locally produced gin, see further explanation later in the report.

Westside Boys.<sup>9</sup> The real tragedy is the historical heritage that led young men (and women) to a lifestyle of war and looting built on a common cosmology of social exclusion.

This brief history provides an important backdrop to our research findings. Most of the qualitative fieldwork was conducted in the *potes*, and many of those interviewed had a background or experiences from the war; one group that was interviewed were former Westside Boys members. In attempting to understand the alcohol and drugs situation in a country such as Sierra Leone, it is important to take into account the contours of history and its legacy.

## Fieldwork and methodology

In the fieldwork, we combined quantitative survey work with ethnographic life history and focus group approaches. Data was collected in Freetown, rural communities around Mile 91 (in Yoni chiefdom in Tonkolili district), and in urban and rural communities in Bo (in Kakua, Tikonko, and Baoma Chiefdom). At each fieldwork site, we drew a sample in order to carry out a survey of user patterns.



<sup>9</sup> The Kamajoi was a Mende militia fighting for the government against RUF. The Westside Boys was a militia formed by former soldiers. As we interviewed several ex-Westside Boys, this group will be presented more thoroughly later in the report.

The sample was drawn as a random sample in each location, in order to give a distribution of the use of alcohol and drugs by age, gender, and ethnic affiliation. The sample was based on the master sample by the Statistical Office in Sierra Leone. The sample was drawn in order to get an urban and rural representation of the population in selected areas. In order to do this, 25 clusters were drawn: 11 clusters out of the total number of clusters in Freetown were randomly selected, all 4 clusters in Yoni Chiefdom in Tonkolili District were included, and, in Bo District, the clusters from Kakua (urban and rural), Tikonko (rural), and Baoma (rural) Chiefdoms were included. In each cluster, one location was randomly selected. This location was mapped and re-listed. From the new household lists, compact clusters of 17 households were drawn. In each of the selected households, one person was interviewed for the household information and household roster. From the roster, one man and one woman aged 15 years or above were selected for individual questionnaires. The theoretical sample size is thus 425 households and 850 individuals. Table 1.1 shows that the total sample turned out to be 429 households and 778 individuals, of which 387 were men and 391 women. The higher than expected number of households occurred because, after mapping and listing of the locations, groups of approximately 17 households were made, and one group randomly selected. In some households, there were not both adult men and adult women; however, all of the selected households had at least one adult person. None of the selected households refused to participate in the survey.

Each cluster was mapped and listed in one day, and appointments were made with the selected households for interviewing the following day. A team of two fieldworkers conducted all the interviews in one cluster during one day.

For the data analysis, the data were weighted by the new household lists compared to the previous one (from 2001) in each location. The individuals were weighted by the total number of adult men and women in the households, and the household weight.

A short questionnaire was developed and addressed to the population above 15 years of age (see appendix I). The sample does not pretend to give accurate data for

Table 1.1 Overview of the sample

	Freetown	Yoni	Bo		Total
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
Clusters	11	4	4	6	25
Households	189	70	56	114	429
Male	169	65	50	103	387
Female	173	67	52	99	391
Total Adults	342	132	102	202	778

the whole country, but it is representative for the areas studied and sufficiently large to give a good indication of the situation in Sierra Leone.

At each fieldwork site, qualitative case studies of perceptions of alcohol and drug use were carried out, and interviews were conducted with suppliers of alcohol and drugs. In the individual 'life history' interviews and focus group sessions, the point of departure was the informants' location when the session was taking place. In other words, the actual physical site of the encounter provided the starting point, and from this site the interviewer and informants tracked the life of the informants backwards. The aim was to establish the chain of events that led the informant(s) to the particular place where the session was occurring. These informants were not randomly selected, but were picked to cover underemployed youths, former combatants, hard drug users, and people spending most of their days in informal drinking places (where drugs were also used) in urban and semi-urban localities. Places frequented by typical users of alcohol and drugs were visited. After initial presentations had been made, appointments were arranged for individual interviews and for larger focus groups. It turned out to be quite easy to get people in Freetown to talk freely about both alcohol and drugs; it was, however, much more difficult to visit places in Bo where people use drugs, as the drug scene in Bo is more 'underground' than in Freetown. We believe that this is due to the much higher level of social control in the traditional Mende communities in Bo than exists in multicultural, cosmopolitan Freetown. The interview sessions were conducted in Freetown (Magazine, Sawa Grounds in Victoria Park, and in small shacks around Lumley Street and Regent Street) and in a number of informal palm wine bars in and around Bo.

The approach to the interviews and focus groups with producers and sellers of alcohol and drugs was the same as with the users, but these sessions also focused on establishing a commodity chain analysis of how alcohol (non-industrial produced) and drugs reached the consumer. We were able to interview producers and sellers of traditional palm wine ('from God to Man'), fermented palm wine, homemade spirits (e.g. Omoly, the locally produced gin, and marijuana. Due to the timeframe of this study, we were unable to develop the level of trust with informers that would have enabled us to conduct similar sessions with suppliers and sellers of hard drugs like 'brown-brown' and crack cocaine. However, we were able to interview some users of hard drugs and some former drug addicts, which provided valuable information about the commodity chain, including where hard drugs are sold and at what prices.

It is important to remember that traditionally produced alcohol, such as the palm wine referred to as 'from God to Man', has been produced and consumed in Sierra Leone for centuries, and other forms of alcohol were introduced during the colonial period. Marijuana is a much later phenomenon, not until the late 1960s and early 1970s did it become a part of youth culture in Sierra Leone. Hard drugs were also

used in Sierra Leone prior to the civil war, but only marginally. 'Brown-brown', crack cocaine, and the abuse of medical drugs were first introduced to a broader spectrum of youth during the war.

## 2 Who are the drinkers and who are the non-drinkers: a profile

The contrast between drinkers and non-drinkers is the simplest and most fundamental expression of difference in people's relationship to alcohol (Partanen 1988). The ratio of drinkers to non-drinkers, and their distribution among the Sierra Leone population, is most indicative of how alcohol is viewed in society. In African societies, women drink less than men, and the number of women who do not drink at all are consistently higher than among men. Social sanctions against women drinking too much – or drinking at all – are widespread (Bryceson 2002). In most African societies, there is also a significant contrast between drinkers and teetotallers. By and large, African societies tend to be quite sober, but most also have a smaller segment of the population that drinks quite substantially. One important objective of this report is to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the drinkers and the non-drinkers in Sierra Leone. We will also attempt to ascertain the extent to which our findings from Sierra Leone fit into a larger African pattern of drinkers and non-drinkers.

### Alcohol use and non-use

Drinking alcohol is not very common among the Sierra Leonean population. As Table 2.1 shows, 72 percent of the population above 15 years of age claims that they have never tasted alcohol. *Tasted alcohol* is here defined as at least one small sip of alcohol that has passed the lips once during the lifetime, whether it is home-brew or industrialized does not matter. Only one in ten claims to have tasted alcohol during the preceding year ('current user'), the remaining 18 percent have tasted alcohol, but not during the previous 12 months ('former user'). This roughly according to the level of 'ever' users of alcohol found in a 2002 survey carried out in Kambia (Northern region) and Kissy (Freetown), in which 14 percent reported having ever used alcohol, and 5 percent claimed to drink daily (see Jensen 2002).

Men are more likely to drink alcohol than women: 14 percent of men report drinking during the preceding year, as opposed to 6 percent of women.

Table 2.1 Alcohol consumers in percent by gender, age, and marital status

		Alcohol consumer*			Total	n
		Never	Former	Current		
<b>Sex</b>						
Male		66	20	14	100	387
Female		78	16	6	100	391
<b>Age</b>						
15–24		87	7	6	100	230
25–39		70	18	12	100	315
40–87		57	33	11	100	233
<b>Marital status</b>						
Single		80	8	12	100	213
Married		69	21	9	100	509
Widowed, divorced, separated		59	36	5	100	52
Total		72	18	10		778

\*Never=never tasted alcohol; Former=Have tasted alcohol, but not consumed any during last 12 months; Current=Have used alcohol during last 12 months

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, current users drink frequently – as many as 50 percent of men and 30 percent of women among current users claim to have been drinking during the previous three days.

Younger people, considered to be those less than 25 years old, seem to drink more rarely than elder ones. The most ‘former’ users are found in the population above 40 years of age; the frequency of current users is approximately the same among this group and the group aged 25–39 years.

Marital status also seems linked to the consumption patterns of alcohol. The highest frequency of current users is found among those who are single; this seems

Table 2.2 Alcohol consumers in percent by site of living

		Alcohol consumer*			Total	n
		Never	Former	Current		
<b>Area</b>						
Freetown	Urban	72	18	10	100	342
Bo	Urban	80	17	3	100	102
Bo	Rural**	55	27	18	100	202
Yoni	Rural	85	9	6	100	132
Total		72	18	10		778

Never=never tasted alcohol; Former=Have tasted alcohol, but not consumed any during last 12 months; Current=Have used alcohol during last 12 months

\*\*Kakua, Baoma and Tikonko Chiefdom

Table 2.3 Alcohol consumers in percent by religious affiliation and ethnic group

	Alcohol consumer*			Total	n
	Never	Former	Current		
<b>Religion</b>					
Muslim	79	15	6	100	554
Christian	53	28	19	100	218
<b>Ethnic group</b>					
Mende	65	21	14	100	253
Temne	82	13	6	100	262
Other	67	22	11	100	263
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>778</b>

\*Never=never tasted alcohol; Former=Have tasted alcohol, but not consumed any during last 12 months; Current=Have used alcohol during last 12 months

contradictory to the findings that young people drink less frequently than older people, as the 'single' as a group is younger than the majority of those married. As many as 27 percent of the single respondents in the age group 25-39 are current users of alcohol, compared to only 9 percent of the married respondents in the same age group.

The prevalence of alcohol use in Sierra Leone is not just linked to personal characteristics like age, sex, and marital status. Table 2.2 shows a clear difference in the consumption patterns in the four sites where the survey was conducted. In the rural community around Bo, 18 percent are current users, while this is true of only 3 percent in the city of Bo. In the villages in Yoni, the situation was similar to the low level in the city of Bo. Among the adult population in Freetown, the use was exactly the same as the total survey population – that is, less prevalent than in Bo rural communities but more prevalent than in the city of Bo or in Yoni.

The differences between the rural areas in Bo and Yoni are significant. In Yoni, the population are mainly Temne, while the rural areas around Bo are the mainly Mende. Table 2.3 indicates that more Mende than Temne drink. The difference in consumption between the two ethnic groups nearly mirrors as the difference between the rural areas in Yoni and Bo.

Seventy percent of the respondents were Muslims as of which only 6 percent reported using alcohol the preceding year, compared with 19 percent of Christian respondents. However, it is notable that the survey was conducted during Ramadan, which may have caused some degree of underreporting among the Muslim population.

Table 2.4 Alcohol consumers in percent by highest achieved education

	Alcohol consumer*				Total	n
	Never	Former	Current			
<b>Highest completed education</b>						
Never attended school	74	19	6		100	330
Not completed primary	75	18	7		100	96
Primary completed	74	19	7		100	94
Junior secondary completed	73	20	7		100	125
Senior secondary completed or higher	62	14	24		100	127
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>			<b>772</b>

\*Never=never tasted alcohol; Former=Have tasted alcohol, but not consumed any during last 12 months; Current=Have used alcohol during last 12 months

As many as 24 percent of the population with higher education – meaning completed senior secondary school or some higher education – are current consumers of alcohol, as shown in Table 2.4. Our results show that it is approximately four times more likely for a person in the highest education bracket to drink alcohol than for someone with lower or no education.

Table 2.5 compare people’s activity the previous month with their use of alcohol. Although the highest frequency of current users is found among those who had paid work the preceding month, the relationship between employment status and use of alcohol is not very clear.

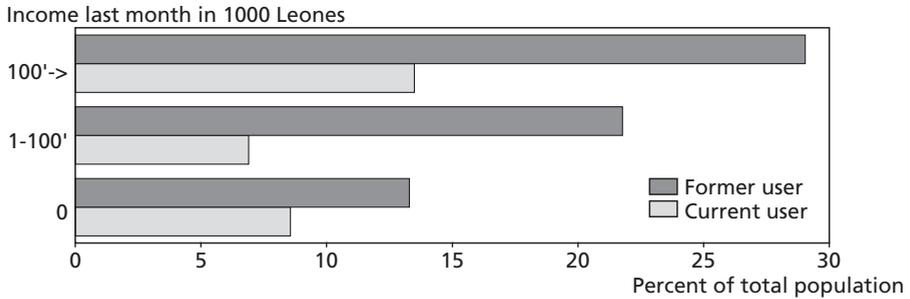
Respondents also reported their income for their previous month; it is important to note that the figure does not represent the household income, but rather the individual’s own income. As Figure 2.1 shows, there is a clear tendency that both current and former alcohol use is higher among people with the highest reported income. This finding seems to fit with the previous finding that alcohol use is more prevalent among highly educated people.

Table 2.5 Alcohol consumers in percent by activities reported last month

	Alcohol consumer*				Total	n
	Never	Former	Current			
<b>Employment or work last month</b>						
None	76	14	10		100	152
Unpaid activities	81	7	12		100	182
Self-employed	67	26	7		100	328
Paid employment/activities	65	20	14		100	116
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>			<b>778</b>

\*Never=never tasted alcohol; Former=Have tasted alcohol, but not consumed any during last 12 months; Current=Have used alcohol during last 12 months

Figure 2.1 Frequency of current and former use of alcohol by income group. N=778 adults in Freetown, Bo and Yoni. 100,000 Leone = 36 US\$ (October 2004)



The profile of alcohol consumers, former consumers, and non-consumers in Sierra Leone as depicted in Table 2.1 and Table 2.5, is quite complex. Figure 2.2 combines all the information. In the plot, characteristics that are related have a short separating distances, while characteristics that are not linked are spread apart. The plot places the people that have never tasted alcohol in the upper right quadrant. Attributes

Figure.2.2 Relationship between consumption of alcohol and demographic and socio-economic factors. Multivariate correspondence analysis. N=778 adults in Freetown, Bo and Yoni, October 2004. (Eigenvalue – Dimension 1: 0.268 and Dimension 2: 0.238)

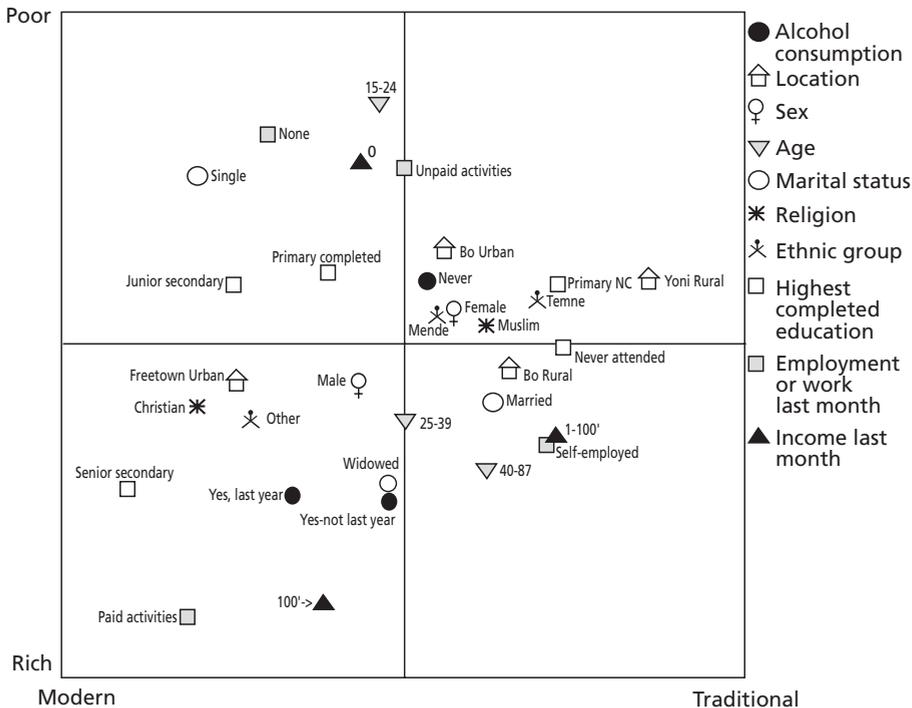
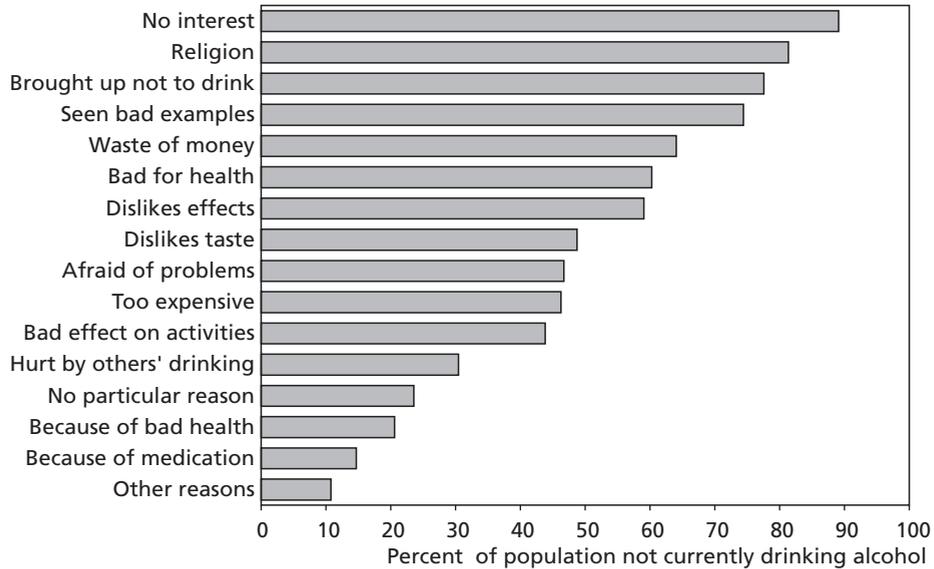


Figure 2.3 Reasons for not drinking alcohol among the population that are not currently drinking alcohol, n=692 adults in Freetown, Yoni and Bo.



clustered nearby include being poor and living in traditional communities, being a woman, living in the town of Bo or in the villages in Yoni, being Muslim and having little or no education. Conversely, the current users of alcohol, situated in the lower left quadrant are richer and seem to live in a more western way. These are people with high education, doing paid work, with high income, they are more likely to be Christian, live in Freetown, and are mainly men and older people.

As we have seen, most of the respondents do not drink alcohol: 72 percent claim to have never tasted alcohol and an additional 18 percent have not used it during the past 12 months. People do not drink because of different reasons, as seen in Figure 2.3. Most non-drinkers say that they have no interest in drinking. Another major reason for non-use is religion: as many as 89 percent of the Muslim respondents cite this as a reason, as well as 62 percent of Christians. The third major reason given is that they were brought up not to drink. At the top of the list of reasons for not drinking are factors linked to sociality and social control, while at the bottom of the list, and thus of less importance, are reasons more related to personal issues, such as health, or bad feelings caused by another other person's drinking.



*We believe that the most important reason for the low level of alcohol use in these areas is the social sanctions that still prevail in traditional village society against alcohol and drugs*

## **Why people in traditional villages do not drink very much – reflections from Mile 91**

Our findings indicate that people living in traditional villages in rural areas do not drink much at all. Although it is difficult to give precise accounts of why people drink or do not drink – as the reasons are complex and both personal and communal – we believe that the most important reason for the low level of alcohol use in these areas is the social sanctions that still prevail in traditional village society against alcohol and drugs. There has been a tendency to believe that a civil war such as the one experienced in Sierra Leone will disrupt traditional society and lead to new patterns of drinking and drug taking. Our findings contradict this view.

The fieldwork we carried out in rural villages in Yoni around Mile 91 is illustrative. The area around Mile 91 and the area from Masiaka Junction to Mile 91 suffered heavily during the war. In the period between 1994 and 2000, in particular, this area saw a lot of combat, and the RUF had several bases in the area; it was not

without reason that the road between Masiaka Junction and Mile 91 was known as the 'death zone'. Thus, if the argument is correct that people who are exposed to combat and rebel activities for a considerable amount of time drink more and partake in or cultivate drugs (e.g. marijuana), one would expect to find these patterns in the villages around Mile 91. This is clearly not the case, as can be seen in the village of Makondu.

This village lies in the Makondu Hills off the highway between Masiaka Junction and Mile 91, at the end of a dirt road that starts at Malako. The village is relatively isolated. In the dry season, a lorry with supplies and goods visits the village once a week; in the rainy season, the village is even more isolated. By car, it takes approximately 45 minutes to reach the village from the highway, and on foot it takes about two hours.

During the war, a major RUF bush camp was established in the Makondu Hills, no more than 20 minutes walk from Makondu. This bush camp was called camp 'four-four' (i.e. RUF bush camp 44), and it was active between 1994 and 1997. Rebels from this camp attacked Makondu in 1995, burning down the entire village and stuffing the village well – the only source of clean water near the village – with the bodies of villagers killed in the attack. Those who were not killed had to flee the area, mostly to Freetown, where they ended up in IDP camps. The village of Makondu first rebuilt in 2000 by Care Sierra Leone. The villagers returned to Makondu between 2000 and 2002. Today the only physical reminders of the civil war in the area are a few ruins of old houses and the village well, which the villagers filled with earth upon their return. Apart from these remnants, the village is just like any other poor village in Africa. People go about their daily business: they tend to their farms and livestock, and a few have established fishing nets in the river that passes through the village. The community is firmly knitted together by a common religion – Islam – but also by the traditional values of Temne society.

Drinking and making alcohol (palm wine and omoly), or smoking and cultivating marijuana, is simply something that the Makondu villagers do not do. It is unheard of in this society. Of itself, this is not necessarily remarkable. What is interesting, however, is the degree to which the traditional values of Temne life survived not only the experiences of war, but also the exposure to modernity that life in the urban environment of the IDP camps in Freetown entailed. This is a community that experienced immense social stress during the war, but the returnees very swiftly reverted to the traditional way of life.

The strength of traditional society as a barrier to alcohol and drug use is not unique to Makondu. There are many similar villages in Sierra Leone, where life continues in accordance with tradition. Of course, some people – especially youth – leave these villages in search of opportunities elsewhere and some of them do end up in places like Magazine and Sawa Grounds (see below). For those that remain,

Table 2.6 Drug use in percent by gender, age, and marital status

	Marijuana ever tried	Marijuana, last year	Heroin or cocaine ever	n
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	11	2.5	0.6	387
Female	1	0.0	0.1	391
<b>Age</b>				
15–24	5	1.7	0.7	230
25–39	5	0.5	0.1	315
40–87	8	1.5	0.3	233
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	9	2.3	0.8	213
Married	4	0.8	0.1	509
Widowed, divorced, separated	10	0.0	0.0	52
Total	6	1.2	0.3	778

however, drinking alcohol and taking drugs are simply not options that are seriously considered; as such behaviour would be frowned upon and met with social sanctions from other members of the village. Traditional life in an ordinary village in Sierra Leone is a sober life. However, we cannot claim an absolute relationship between rural life and abstinence from alcohol and drugs, as the experience from the rural communities around Bo indicates that rural life and customs can also change if, for example, the village is located near valuable and easily exploitable natural resources. This is clearly the case for the rural areas in the districts where diamonds are found. The availability of a resource like diamonds not only creates a migration pattern of young men seeking their fortune – it also changes attitudes to traditional authority and norms. Diamonds shift perceptions about wealth, status, and modernity (see Boeck 1999).

## Drug use and non-use

Among the representative sample of adults in Freetown, Bo, and Yoni, six percent had used or tried marijuana at least once in their lifetime, one percent had used marijuana during the preceding 12 months, and 0.3 percent had tried hard drugs like brown-brown or crack cocaine. As Table 2.6 shows, it is mainly men who have tried drugs; 1 out of 10 men have used marijuana, versus only 1 out of 100 women. There were no current female users of marijuana in the sample, while 2.5 percent of the male population said they had used marijuana during the last year. Because the frequency of hard drug use is so low, little meaningful can be said about the differences across users.

Table 2.7 Drug use in percent by site of living, religion, education, and activity level

	Marijuana,ever tried	Marijuana,last year	Heroin or cocaine ever	n
<b>Site</b>				
Freetown Urban	6	1.3	0.7	342
Yoni Rural	6	0.4	0.0	132
Bo Urban	4	0.0	0.0	102
Bo Rural	7	2.8	0.2	202
<b>Religion</b>				
Muslim	5	1.0	0.3	554
Christian	7	1.9	0.4	218
<b>Ethnic group</b>				
Mende	5	1.1	0.0	253
Temne	7	0.7	0.7	262
Other	5	1.9	0.3	263
<b>Highest completed education</b>				
Never attended school	4	1.1	0.6	330
Not completed primary	8	1.2	0.0	96
Primary completed	8	1.0	0.0	94
Junior secondary completed	4	1.3	0.3	125
Senior secondary or higher	8	1.7	0.3	127
<b>Employment or work last month</b>				
None	6	0.9	0.6	152
Unpaid activities	3	0.8	0.0	182
Self-employed	7	1.3	0.4	328
Paid employment /activities	8	2.3	0.4	116
Total	6	1.2	0.3	778

The profile of drug users is quite similar to the profile of alcohol consumers, although the level of use is substantially lower, as Table 2.6 and Table 2.7 show. The highest frequency of users is found in the rural areas around Bo and in Freetown. There is a greater tendency for current use of marijuana among those with the highest education level, and among people who had had paid activities the previous month.

### 3 The boys who drink and smoke

As mentioned above, we conducted fieldwork in Freetown, around Mile 91, and in Bo. Freetown is the most cosmopolitan of the cities in Sierra Leone. As the capital of the country, it was, even before the war, the most multi-ethnic city in Sierra Leone. People from throughout the country, and all ethnic groups have long come to Freetown in search of education, employment, and better opportunities for upwards-social mobility. Naturally this process increased during the war, although not necessarily for the same reasons: as more and more people became internally displaced, they sought refuge in Freetown. Freetown also has substantial Lebanese and Nigerian community. The city is disorderly, dirty, and run-down; provision of services like water, electricity, and sanitation is unavailable to the majority of the population. It is, however, also a city of opportunity – and, for a tiny minority, of wealth. The two best colleges of the University of Sierra Leone are located here: Fourah Bay



*For many young people from traditional communities, the cosmopolitan freedom of Freetown is a magnet in itself*

College and Njala College.<sup>10</sup> Although the absorption capacity of the official labour market is very low, in the informal sector employment opportunities do exist. Moreover, for many young people from traditional communities, the cosmopolitan freedom of Freetown is a magnet in itself. The multi-ethnic composition and large population of the city make Freetown a place where one can lose oneself: it is an escape from the rigid social control of the elders and traditional authority in rural communities and places like Bo, where traditional authority must still be respected so long as you are in the 'visible' world.

## **Freetown: Magazine and Sawa Grounds**

Two of the main sites for the qualitative fieldwork in Freetown were the areas known as 'Magazine' and 'Sawa Grounds'. 'Magazine' is a downtown area that lies between Nicols Brook, Kissy Road, and Lower Bombay Street. It is a major transition point, as it is the landing point for most of the small traditional boats that go along the coast (some all the way to Conakry in Guinea) and inland on the rivers. Most of the people who live here are poor, but some more affluent traders and trading families also live in this area. The worst living conditions in 'Magazine' are on the hill down towards Destruction Bay (i.e. the sea). This hill is quite steep and lined with small creeks, which are usually filled with garbage and pollution from inhabitants living further up in the city. Particularly in the rainy season the area gets immensely humid and dirty.

Most of those who have made this part of 'Magazine' their home are young men between 17 and 25 years-old, who have come to Freetown quite recently. Here they live in informal structures made out of plastic and other kinds of used material, or they simply sleep on the street. Most of them also 'work' and spend most of their idle time in 'Magazine'. Life in the 'Magazine' is hard, and many of the young boys and men in this area have developed a lifestyle of alcohol and drug use. Some income is earned by carrying goods for arriving passengers from the boats. When a boat arrives the young boys and men are already present, grabbing bags and goods from the passengers and carrying them up the hill for a small fee. Depending on the numbers of boats that come in, the daily income varies between 1,000 and 4,000 leones.<sup>11</sup> Most days, the boys involved in this business are lucky if they make more

<sup>10</sup> Njala College used to be located just off the highway between Mile 91 and Bo, but was looted and burned by the RUF during the war. Since then it has been operating from Freetown; plans are currently being made to relocate it to its original site.

<sup>11</sup> 1,000 Leones = 0.36 USD (October 2004)

than 2,000 leones. Some also make some money by sweeping the streets for traders; others sell palm wine or marijuana. However, few have palm wine and marijuana as their main income-generating activity: it is rather an activity taken up when there are no more boats coming in for the day. The passenger boats come in between 6 am and 12 am, meaning that most of the boys try to earn some money as porters in the morning before turning later to other kinds of income-generating activities. From the interviews and focus group sessions, we were able to construct the following time schedule of an ordinary day for an ordinary boy in the 'Magazine'.

His day starts at 6 am, when he wakes up and looks for work. Breakfast is not an option. If he is lucky, he will make some money as a carrier or have an arrangement with a trader to sweep his or her part of the street. At around noon, this work is over – the streets are swept and no more boats are arriving. Our boy will then head for the beach in order to wash himself before buying something to eat, and thereafter he will go to one of the many informal shacks in the 'Magazine' to drink palm wine or smoke marijuana. Alternatively he may have a small business selling palm wine and marijuana, which, on a good day, may earn him an additional 2,500 leones. Around 6 pm, however, these activities are also over, as few people venture into this part of the 'Magazine' after dark. Thus, for the rest of the night the boys hang around in their informal meeting places, using what little money they have left on some food and more palm wine and marijuana. This is their life, seven days a week. Few things change in this part of Freetown.

The majority of the boys that we talked to had come to Freetown in search of formal employment and education. Unable to find either they continued to stay at the place where they first entered Freetown. Their lives are difficult: they see very few opportunities, and palm wine and marijuana become their only comfort. As most of them either live alone or with friends, they are also outside of the social control and support of families and communities. The feeling of permanent exclusion and lack of hope for the future that these boys express is immense, and hanging around with them, we got the sense that many of them are just waiting for something to happen. Should civil unrest once more return to Sierra Leone, the boys and young men that we met in the 'Magazine', in Sawa Ground, in and around Lumley Street and Regent Street, and in so many other palm wine shacks elsewhere would be likely to join with anybody who promised them a better life in return for their services.

The men and women who hang around at Sawa Grounds in Victoria Park represent a different, but in many ways similar, segment of the population. Sawa Grounds is by and large a recreational area. People do not live or sleep there, but it is where many spend most of their days, coming to drink palm wine and omoly and to smoke marijuana.

Victoria Park was originally established as the ‘green lung’ and major recreational area of Central Freetown. It no longer resembles the beautiful park that it may once have been; now it is mainly a market and a trading centre. Sawa Grounds is in the middle of Victoria Park. Originally established by traders, the stalls were abandoned once business went sour. This part of Victoria Park has now been completely taken over by people selling palm wine, snacks, food, and other kinds of drinks (mainly soft drinks and omoly) and drugs (mainly marijuana). The men we interviewed in Sawa Grounds were all former combatants; some had belonged to the militia known as the Westside Boys and had spent nearly four years in jail, in Pademba Road prison, from which they had only recently been released. All these men and their women show signs of having been through terrible ordeals during the war. We will return to the Westside Boys in more detail when we discuss the legacy of the war. However, as a site for fieldwork, Sawa Grounds was in many ways different from the good-spirited conversations we had with the boys in the ‘Magazine’. The atmosphere in Sawa Grounds was much more tense, and fighting and violent behaviour happened frequently. The air was thick with the smoke of the marijuana, and the mud stank of urine and sweat. In the suffocating heat under the plastic roof over the stalls, there was a sense of danger present that we never experienced in the ‘Magazine’ or elsewhere in Freetown or in Mile 91 or Bo. That said, the stories told by the people frequenting Sawa Grounds were by and large the same as we heard elsewhere: tales of missed opportunities and sentiments of social exclusion, marginality, and the little comfort to be found in drinks and drugs.

## **Bo: diamonds, drinks and drugs**

Bo is the heart of the area of Sierra Leone that is dominated by Mende people. Although Bo is Sierra Leone’s second largest city, it is also a town very much embedded in the traditional norms and values of Mende society. Alcohol and drugs are used by certain segments of the youth and males here, but abuse is less openly seen than in Freetown. Palm wine is consumed in rather large quantities in informal bars, but you have to look for them in order to find them; it is similar with the drug scene. People told us that ex-combatants and the young men driving motorcycle taxis were notorious drug users. According to popular discourse, most of them were ‘high’ on drugs, particularly at night. The nightly activity of these young men was observable from the hotel we stayed at in Bo. The hotel, the Sir Milton Margai was located close to two of Bo’s most popular nightclubs, keeping the young men on their motorcycle taxis busy on the streets until the early morning. We made a few attempts

to penetrate this scene, but had little success. Drugs were simply not a subject of conversation in Bo, and the timeframe of our study did not give us the time necessary to gain the trust of some of the young men.

However, the traditional values evident in Bo and its surrounding areas are being eroded by the influence and implications of the diamond trade, centred nearby. Bo is situated close to the major axis of distribution of Sierra Leonean diamonds, the Sewa River Basin. The majority of the diamonds in Sierra Leone are of the alluvial type, meaning that their extraction requires little if any industrial equipment. Tributors dig gravel from swamps and streambeds during the dry season, and then sieve the gravel before the rainy season floods overtake makeshift work camps. At times, a shovel, sieve, and headpan will suffice, plus the equipment to camp in the bush. Compared to the informal tributors, the licensed operators work the more accessible and better-serviced sites, sometimes using pumping and dredging gear. What almost all tributors have in common is a 'supporter'. Mining diamonds is a hard way to make a living, and, although Sierra Leone is rich in diamonds, tributors sometimes still have to dig for a considerable amount of time before they find anything. In the meantime, they have to live – hence the supporter.

The 'supporter' normally lives in the nearest town, in this case Bo. He (for it is nearly always a *he*) is the financial backer and sometimes also the license holder. Typically, he has another or several other businesses to run, and leaves the actual mining operation largely to the tributors. The arrangement between a supporter and his tributors may vary in accordance with its duration, whether there are communal or family ties between them, and last but not least, the reputation of the tributor. According to our informants, the standard arrangement is that the supporter provides each of his tributors with 300 leones and a cup of rice per day. Sometimes they are also given some tools, and shot-guns and cartridges to hunt for food. When there is profit, the tributors split between them a two-fifth share of the local price of a season's catch of diamonds (see also Richards 1996). However, of this profit each individual tributor must usually pay back to the supporter what has been provided to them during the season, i.e. the cost of the rice and the 300 leones per. The relationship therefore resembles bonded labour arrangements. The economic circle of the miner is almost always one of rise and fall.

What keep the tributors going are the dream, vision, and idea about the diamond. Many believe that diamonds make their way through the earth, working their way upward carrying with them their finder's name. But one will only find 'his diamond' if he has the courage to continue the search: there is immense hardship that must be overcome before your diamond will appear. The hardship is made tolerable by consuming palm wine – which most of the tributors we talked to also consider

food – and by using marijuana and to a certain extent crack cocaine. Music, drink, and recreational drugs help sustain the dream about the diamond.

In order to understand the world of the tributors, it is important to recognise that this is *a man's world*. There are supposedly very few women living with the miners. One explanation for the lack of women is taboos connected to diamond mining: Women living with diamond miners are considered likely to reduce their luck (*hajia*), and they are therefore excluded from the tributors' living area. This belief reflects the connection between current ideas about diamonds and traditional taboos about sexual activity, gender mixing, and hunting (see also Boeck 1999). The fact that these men live without a family, and that many come from all over Sierra Leone, contributes to the establishment of a certain subculture built on wishful ideas about diamonds maintained through drinking and drug-use. Traditional rural authorities have little or no control over this group: detached from traditional norms and their native society, this group of men is negotiating its own version of modernity. This is in our view, the main explanation for why rural communities in the diamond areas have a completely different pattern of alcohol and drug consumption than rural communities that are not exposed to diamonds and similar resources.

## 4 What people drink and how it is produced

### Drinking styles: modern and traditionally

Bottled beer and *God to Man* are, as Figure 4.1 shows, the most frequently used alcoholic beverages in Sierra Leone. Approximately one out of ten drank omoly, and roughly the same percentage drank bottled spirit. One-third consumed bottled, imported wine, and one-fifth reported drinking yeasted palm wine. One-third of the respondents reported that they drank more than one type of alcohol the last time they were drinking.

However, there are huge differences between the geographical areas with regard to drinking patterns. As Figure 4.2, next page, shows, the alcohol consumers in Freetown drink industrialised beer, wine, and spirit, while the rural population around Bo mainly drinks locally produced omoly and palm wine.

Figure 4.1 Type of alcohol consumed last time among the population that had used alcohol last year; n=86 persons that have used alcohol during last 12 months

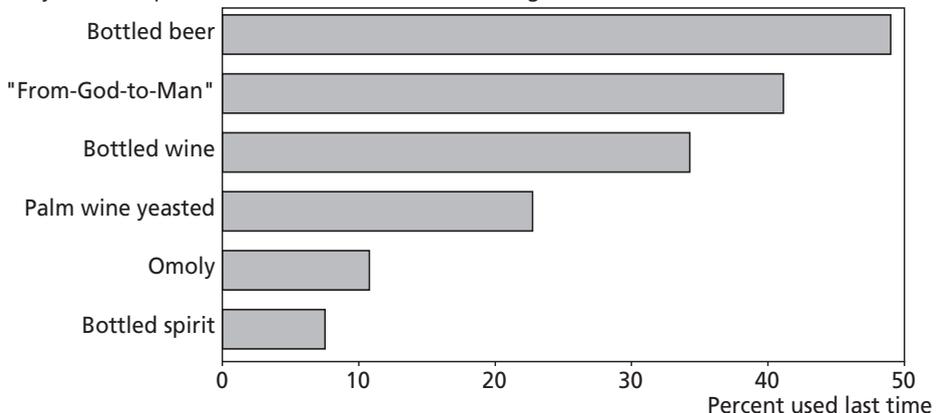
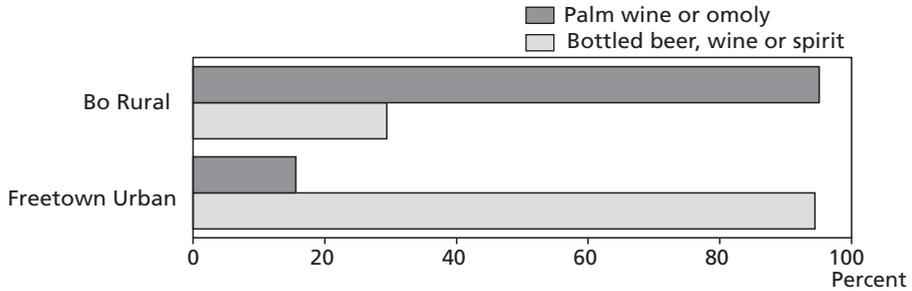


Figure 4.2 Differences in the kinds of alcohol consumed in Freetown (n=35) and the villages around Bo (n=40)



However, there are huge differences between the geographical areas with regard to drinking patterns. As Figure 4.2 shows, the alcohol consumers in Freetown drink industrialised beer, wine, and spirit, while the rural population around Bo mainly drinks locally produced omoly and palm wine.

## Bottled beer

In Freetown, most alcohol consumers drink bottled beer. Travelling around in Freetown, one sees massive billboards for Guinness, Carlsberg, Heineken, and other types of western beer. Among the youth, 'Stout' or Guinness is very popular, but the local beer Star is also widely consumed, as it is slightly cheaper. According to the consumer price index for Freetown from 2003, the price for domestic beer was 1,433 Leone/pint, while the price for imported beer was 1,933 Leone/pint (Statistics Sierra Leone 2004).

There seems to have been a remarkable recent increase in the beer consumption in Sierra Leone. In 1994, the industrial production of beer and stout was 0.74 million litres; by 1997, it had increased to 5.9 million litres (Statistics Sierra Leone 1998).

## Palm wine

Palm wine is a beverage drunk throughout West Africa. It is tapped from the oil palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*), which is indigenous to West Africa. In Sierra Leone, palm wine comes in two different forms. The traditional form is known as *From*

*God to Man*. This is palm wine directly tapped from the palm tree, free of yeast or other additives, except for the residual yeast in the collecting gourds (which are not washed between collections). This type of palm wine has been produced in Sierra Leone for centuries. It is not clear when it was first traded, but Lebbie and Guries (2002) indicate that palm wine was already an important product in the domestic economy of coastal Sierra Leone in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and markets for palm wine on the Freetown peninsula have existed since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In theory, every palm tree belongs to somebody or someone: a landholding family, an individual, a community, or, in the case of a forest reserve, the state. This means that, formally, access has to be granted before the tree can be tapped. If ownership can be established and enforced it is typical for the tapper to pay the owner a fee of about 2,500 leones and a gallon<sup>12</sup> of palm wine for access to a certain section of trees per month. Access to trees on community land has to be negotiated with the local chief; most often it requires a modest fee and a certain quantity of palm wine.

The tapping of palm wine is quite dangerous, as the tree must be scaled to the crown where the palm wine can be tapped. This wine is produced for immediate consumption or for sale the same day. When tapped, it is a colourless juice comprising 10–12 percent sugar, without any alcohol, but the process of fermentation starts when it is tapped into the contaminated containers, and by the time it is consumed at a palm wine shack it is usually about 7–8 percent alcohol. In its un-yeasted form, it is believed to be good for consumption up to about 12 hours after it has been tapped (see also Beckman 1988 and 1990).

From *God to Man* is very popular, and for many people, this is the preferred drink. Most of those involved in the production of palm wine are Limbas, who have a reputation for tapping the best palm wine in the country. Limbas are supposed to have special knowledge about the palm tree: how to cut it open and when and how to tap the wine from the palm tree. Tapping skills and palm wine lore are taught to their young boys, who take up the work of their father or another male relative before they reach manhood. Very few of these boys ever go to school, and whole families are in this way locked into a life as palm wine tappers. All tappers are male, as prevailing taboos prevent women from climbing trees. Should a woman climb a tree, people believe that this would prevent the tree from flowering and fruiting (see Lebbie and Guries 2002). Women's involvement in the palm wine business occurs almost exclusively in the last stage of the commodity chain, e.g. as kiosk vendors. Most of the women with their own kiosk or stall are uneducated and supporting several children and other family members, and they make a substantial contribution to the household income by trading palm wine.

<sup>12</sup> 1 gallon = 4.54 litre

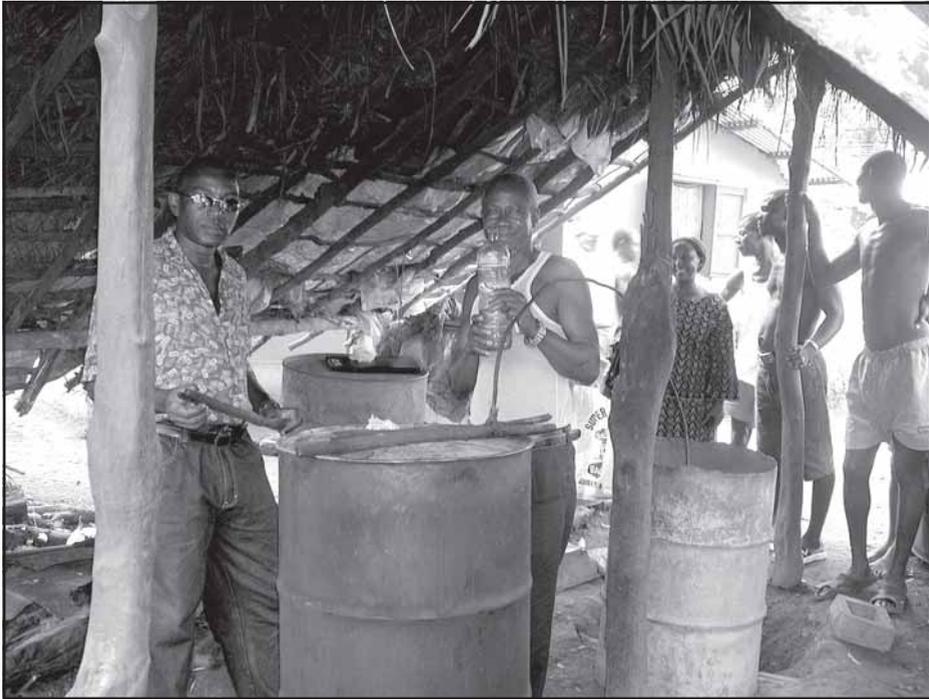
Yeast is added to palm wine mainly for conservation purposes. Yeast prevents the palm wine from going sour so quickly; this makes it possible to tap the wine at one place and then transport it over some distance in order to sell it on the market. The price of palm wine is the same, no matter yeasted or not. One cup (about 0.5 litre) of palm wine costs 500 leones; one litre is 1000 leones; and five litres is 2000 leones.

## Omoly

Omoly is Sierra Leone's locally produced gin. The name is supposed to be an abbreviation for the saying, *On My Own Little Experience*; other people argue that the name 'gin' actually means *God Is Near*. It is sold both in plastic sachets and in used bottles, and it is very popular. In almost all markets it is possible to find at least one, if not several, traders selling omoly. Most people buy omoly from traders at established markets or from petty traders who have small stalls along the road, but it is also possible to buy it directly from producers. Omoly is a semi-industrial product, but made almost exclusively by small producers. Omoly is the preferred hard liquor for poor people and the lower middle class, as it is not very expensive. The price for Omoly may vary according to the quantity and where it is produced. The standard size is called 'Pegapak' – a plastic sachet of about one decilitre, costing approximately 350 leones.

The production process for omoly is by and large the same as for 'moonshine' produced anywhere in the world. Omoly is produced from water, sugar, corn, and yeast. These ingredients are mixed together, usually in five-gallon barrels, and left to ferment for 26 days. Once the specified 26 days has passed, the barrel is placed over a hole in the ground in which a fire has been started. The barrel is then heated for between four to five hours. As a result of the heat, the omoly is pushed to the top of the barrel, where it goes into a closed pipe. This pipe is led through another barrel filled with cold water, and the omoly is tapped at the point where the pipe comes out of the water-filled barrel. It is a simple and inexpensive way of making liquor. Officially, one is supposed to have a license in order to brew omoly, but this is rarely checked and most producers don't bother to obtain one, as the process involves much hassle and the payment of bribes.

The main investment for omoly producers is the barrels; once these have been acquired, the major running cost is the price of sugar. The average price for one bag of sugar is 6,000 leones, and it takes approximately half a bag to produce five gallons of omoly. In addition, the producer must have access to or the ability to buy



*The production process for omoly is by and large the same as for 'moonshine' produced anywhere in the world*

corn and yeast. These costs, however, are quite small; the producer we interviewed was himself not certain how much he paid for those ingredients.

An average producer, such as the one we interviewed in Old Grafton village, produces about 10 gallons of omoly per month (i.e. two boils). However, if demand is high, our informer claimed that he could easily expand to 20 gallons per month. On average, the producer is able to sell one gallon for 14,000 leones. Our informant was mainly selling large quantities, a gallon or more, to traders, who then refill the omoly into 'pegapaks' and used bottles. These traders sometimes sell omoly themselves in the markets, but more often they resell it once more to market vendors and petty street traders.

The prices we have recorded here give an average producer of omoly a monthly income (before subtracting the production costs) of 140,000 leones. This was the main income for the producer we interviewed in Grafton; all he had in addition was a small pension of 20,000 leones per month. Omoly was the breadwinner not only for the old man himself, but also for his extended family, and he was very proud of his talent for making omoly and how this made it possible for him to provide for his family. In addition to the producer we visited, there are two other distilleries in Old Grafton village. All are fairly successful, as this area is famous for the produc-

tion of omoly, known for making the strongest and the best in the country. According to our informant, this reputation is sustained because the producers in the area take pride in what they do: they do not add chemical products to the process, and they still adhere to old taboos concerning the production of traditional palm wine. The men – because alcohol production is a ‘man’s world’ in Sierra Leone – are supposed to abstain from sexual activity when producing wine. This old taboo has been transplanted to include the production of omoly, but according to our informant in Old Grafton, these days it was only the old men in the business that still lived by this rule. Omoly is a not a traditional liquor as such, but narratives has been created around it, which embeds its modernity into the traditional way of life in Sierra Leone.

## 5 When do people drink

Traditionally people did not use much alcohol in Sierra Leone, and, for the overall majority, that is still the case as we have seen in the previous chapters. People usually taste alcohol for the first time in private settings: at home, or at the homes of friends or relatives (Table 5.1). Private social settings are still an important arena for alcohol consumption for current consumers, but few drink at relatives' or friends' homes anymore. Instead the major site for consumption is now either one's own home or public arenas such as bars, pubs, and street corners. Most of those who started drinking in a public setting have continued to drink.

It is not only the locations that change from the first time people taste alcohol, but also the social setting. As Table 5.2 shows, about half of the people that have ever tasted alcohol consumed it together with friends, and another 40 percent consumed it with family members. Only five percent of alcohol users were alone the first time they tasted alcohol. This trend changes, such that when asking about the last time alcohol was consumed, one sees a tendency for people to drink less frequently with family members and more often with friends or alone.

Traditional rites such as marriage or initiation ceremonies are commonly considered to be important arenas for the consumption of alcohol. This is supposed to be particularly true for women (see Bryceson 2002).

Table 5.1 Location where people consumed alcohol, first and last time it was consumed, in percent

	First time	Last time
Private setting	72	44
Public setting	28	56
Total	100	100
n	215	75

Table 5.2 With whom do people drink the first time they ever tasted alcohol, and the last time they were drinking, in percent

	First time	Last time
Family	41	24
Friends	54	64
Alone	5	12
Total	100	100
n	229	86

Table 5.3 Where were the consumers offered alcohol the first time they ever tasted alcohol, and was the first time they tasted it at a ceremony in percent by current users (consumers last year) and former users (have tasted alcohol, but not during last year)

Alcohol first time during ceremony	Male	Female	Total
No, other social function	77	50	65
Initiation	12	27	18
Wedding	7	16	11
Funeral	2	2	2
Baptism	0	1	0
Don't know	3	4	3
Total	100	100	100
n	138	91	229

However, as the results from this study shows (Table 5.3), two-thirds of the adult population claim to have consumed alcohol for the first time at a social function unrelated to traditional ceremonies. Nonetheless, the ceremonies, especially initiation, seem to be somewhat more important for women than for men as an introduction to drinking alcohol. On the other hand, 72 percent of the respondents claim to have never tasted alcohol, while it is likely that they have participated in the same type of ceremonies as alcohol users. There is therefore no evidence that traditional rites increase the use of alcohol in Sierra Leone.



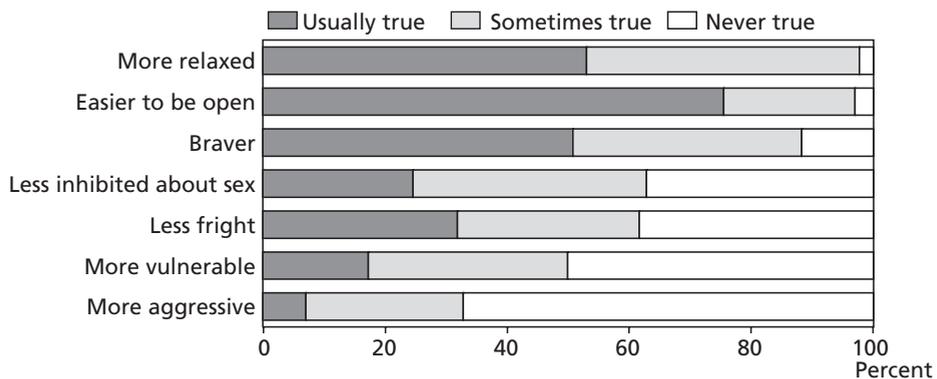
*Traditionally people did not use much alcohol in Sierra Leone, and, for the overall majority, that is still the case*

## 6 How do people behave when they drink

Why do Sierra Leoneans drink? Of the 86 respondents who were current users, most of them said they have positive feelings when drinking. As Figure 6.1 shows, most said it was usually true or sometimes true that alcohol use made them feel more relaxed and easier to be open. Most of them also felt braver.

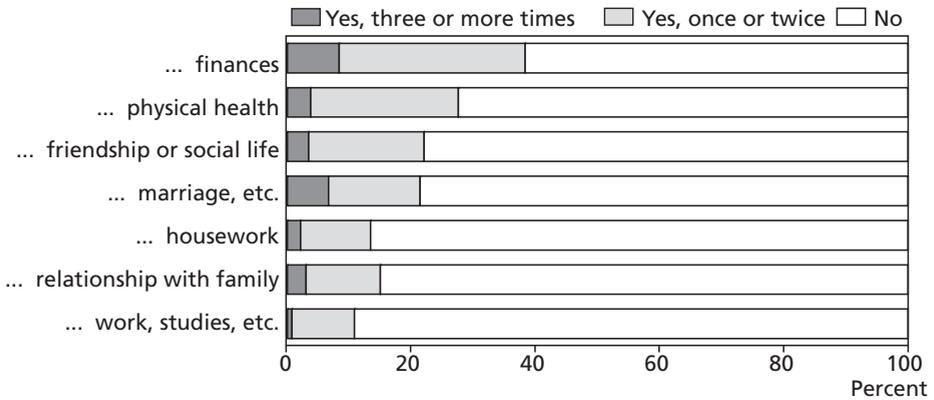
About one in four current users said it was usually true that alcohol use made them less inhibited about sex, and less frightful. It was much less common to admit to negative feelings when drinking, such as being more aggressive (seven percent usually true) and more vulnerable (17 percent usually true).

Figure 6.1 How true is it than when you drink you feel... (n=86 current users of alcohol)



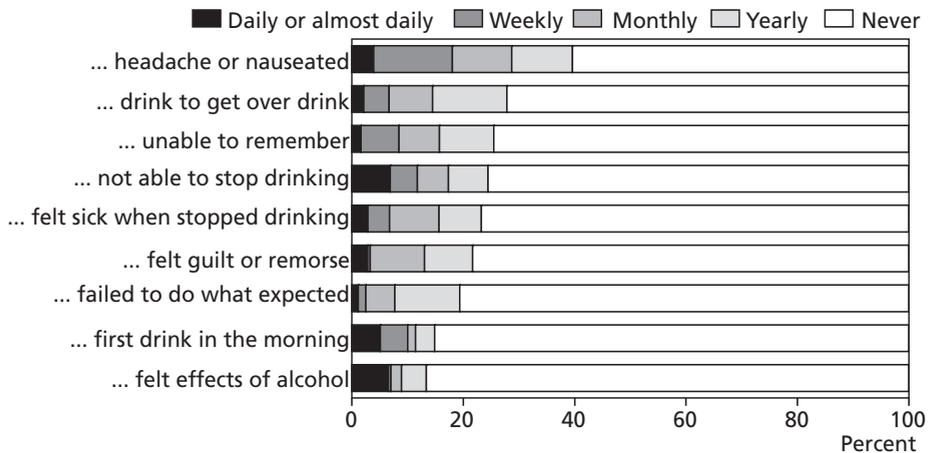
The alcohol drinkers admit that there may be some negative drinking-related experiences. Nearly 40 percent of current users said that during the previous year, drinking had had a bad effect on their finances at least once; nearly eight percent admitted to such problems three times or more during the preceding 12 months (Figure 6.2). In addition, more than one out of five said that, at least once the previous year, their drinking had a bad effect on their physical health, their social life, and their marriage or intimate relationships.

Figure 6.2 During the last 12 months, has your drinking had a harmful effect on... (n=86 current users of alcohol)



Seven percent of the alcohol consumers reported that on a daily or almost daily basis, they get drunk enough to feel the effects of alcohol, such as slurred speech and unsteady walking (Figure 6.3 ). Similarly, seven percent said that they daily have problems stopping drinking once they start; this is a problem that one out of four feels at least yearly. Headache and nausea are bad effects of drinking for 40 percent of the alcohol users at least yearly, and for 18 percent weekly.

Figure 6.3 How often during the past 12 months have you... (n=86 current users of alcohol)



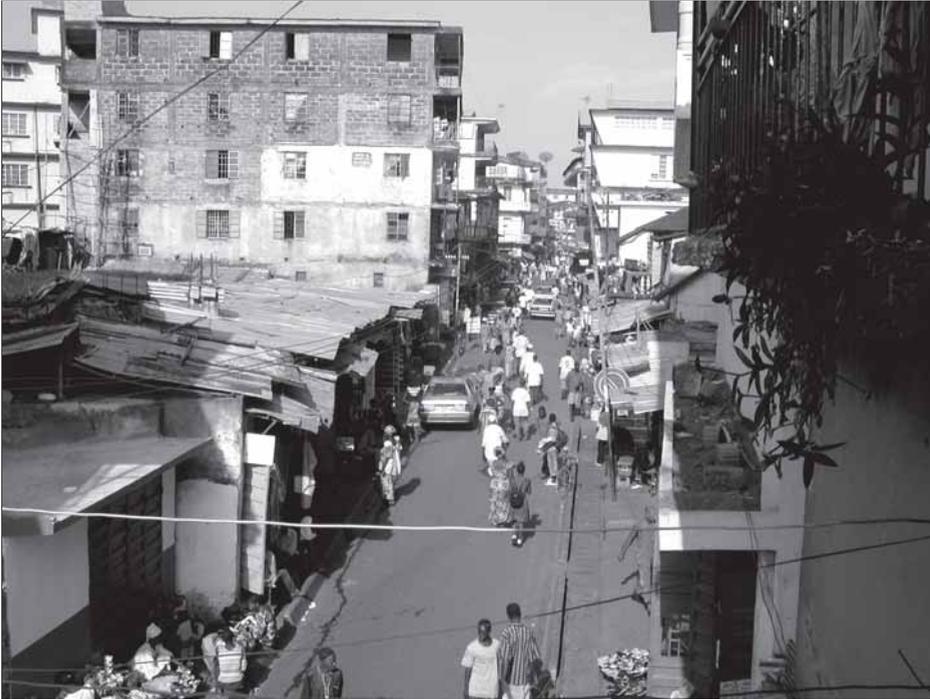
## 7 Drugs in Sierra Leone: Production and marketing

### Djamba (Marijuana)

‘Djamba’ as marijuana is called in Sierra Leone, is not used by a very broad spectrum of the population (see Table 2.6), but among certain groups – youths in particular – its use is both widespread and socially accepted. Djamba is not an indigenous drug. It was introduced to the Sierra Leonean population in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it was quickly discovered that the climatic conditions in Sierra Leone – warm, humid, with plentiful sun and rain – was ideal for cultivating marijuana.

Currently, the main areas for cultivation are in the Western District, in the eastern part of the Peninsula Mountains, in villages such as Grafton and Hastings. These villages are located just outside the border of Freetown, before Waterloo, off the highway toward Masiaka Junction. The marijuana fields are located outside the villages, in secret areas far away in the hills. Marijuana production is an illegal business: potentially profitable, but also dangerous. The marijuana farmers we interviewed complained that, if the police found their fields – which happened very rarely, as the police almost never went on patrols in the mountains – or stopped them when they were carrying the drug down from their fields, they had to pay a substantial bribe, usually around 200,000 leones. If they could not pay, the police would take all the djamba in their possession. Although unpleasant and annoying, dealing with the police is much less dangerous from their point of view than the armed gangs from Freetown that sometimes come into the mountains searching for marijuana to steal. These gangs would be heavily armed, and, as a means of protection, our source (individual cultivators) claimed to have established a collective early warning system.

When discussing marijuana in Sierra Leone, it is important to keep in mind that most of the producers are individual farmers with relatively small plots of 100 to 200 square-meters of djamba. They plant and sell djamba mainly to be able to provide slightly better lives for their families; they plant and sell in order to survive. Of course, they could cultivate other products – which many of them do – but they can make more money on djamba. Moreover djamba has an advantage over almost



*For one kilo of djamba, the farmer is paid about 90,000 leones. A good harvest on a 200 square-meter plot will yield about 35 kilos, and most farmers are able to harvest twice a year.*

all other agricultural products produced in Sierra Leone: it does not have a seasonal calendar. The fact that djamba is in season throughout the year makes it a much more secure source of income.

For one kilo of djamba, the farmer is paid about 90,000 leones. A good harvest on a 200 square-meter plot will yield about 35 kilos, and most farmers are able to harvest twice a year. This gives the farmer an annual income (before factors of production are subtracted) of 6,300,000 leones per year. A household with this income is not necessarily rich, but should be able to afford school fees and live in relative comfort. Since no other agricultural commodities offer similar prospects for profit, it would be very difficult to convince those involved in marijuana-production to stop cultivating. The farmers we talked to see themselves as doing what they must in order to feed their families and provide educational opportunities for their children. The notion that what they are doing is wrong or harmful to other people is not something that they would readily accept. In their view, they simply grow an agricultural product that other people are willing to buy for a relatively good price. All the farmers we spoke to also smoked djamba themselves, and none of them believed that it was in any way dangerous or harmful to themselves or their families. Djamba is perceived very differently by these farmers than other drug use. When

asked about alcohol or other kinds of drugs, they immediately said that too much alcohol or the use of ‘brown-brown’, crack cocaine, or tranquillisers could be both dangerous to their individual health and have harmful consequences for their families. However, with regard to djamba, they did not consider these outcomes to be likely. Djamba to these farmers is a recreational drug, taken to relax and have a good time; and it also has medical uses, for example in the case of colds, malaria and asthma. They also claimed that smoking djamba was good for their sexual stamina, with aphrodisiac properties. Djamba is, to these people, connected mainly to the good things in life: providing food and opportunities for the family, good health and mental relaxation, and being a good lover.

In terms of the sales and marketing end of the business, the farmers seemed to sell both small and large quantities. They told us that they would sell to anybody: from individual users, who will buy the amount necessary for a couple of joints, to large shipments of djamba meant for external markets. The latter case could comprise as much as 200 to 300 kilos. In the event of such a sale, many individual farmers would join together in a pre-established deal, which would be composed long in advance by middlemen working for people targeting the European market. According to the farmers, the marijuana they produced in Sierra Leone is very popular outside of the country, because it is considered second in quality only to that produced in Jamaica. Only the Jamaican type, they claim, has a higher level of THC than the marijuana cultivated in Sierra Leone.<sup>13</sup> Whether this in fact true is more or less impossible to verify, but the statement is informative both of the pride the farmers take in what they do and the imaginary connection that exists between this part of Sierra Leonean culture and its Jamaican counterpart. We will return to this ideational dimension when we discuss the relationship between modernity and alcohol and drugs.

It is important to emphasise that the individual farmers presented here have nothing to do with the organization of the trafficking of the marijuana to Europe. They plant, cultivate, harvest, and then sell the drugs to those who have the money to buy, but do not participate in the levels further up in the commodity chain.

## **‘Brown-brown’, crack cocaine and ‘top-up’**

Brown-brown is heroin produced for the purpose of being smoked and is not meant to be injected. It is not an indigenous drug, but is smuggled into the country. As mentioned in the introduction, we were unable to study the use of brown-brown,

<sup>13</sup> THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

crack cocaine, and strong tranquillisers such as ‘top-up’ to the same extent that we researched the consumption of alcohol and djamba in Sierra Leone. This part of the drug scene is much smaller and more secretive, and therefore also much harder to penetrate. The time we had available for this study simply did not allow us to spend the time necessary to conduct such research. However, through discussion with some former addicts and sellers of hard drugs, we were at least able to gain a rudimentary understanding of this part of drug life in Sierra Leone.

The type of heroin on sale in the domestic market in Sierra Leone, brown-brown, gives a very quick and intense high. Heroin is the fastest acting of all opiates and, when smoked, it reaches the brain in around seven seconds. The peak experience via this route lasts at most a few minutes, giving way to a sense of calmness. Although brown-brown is not expensive, it is not as cheap as omoly or djamba: a user dose costs about 2,000 leones. In Sierra Leone, 2,000 leones for a high that lasts only a few minutes may not seem very enticing. These two reasons – costs and short duration of the high – may explain why relatively few people in Sierra Leone use this drug.

Heroin in Sierra Leone is called brown-brown simply because the heroin on the streets mainly comes in a dark brown colour. Pure heroin is a white, odourless powder with a bitter taste, but the variant sold in Sierra Leone is dark brown due to impurities leftover from the manufacturing process and the presence of additives.

As already mentioned, brown-brown is not produced in Sierra Leone: it comes from abroad, mostly from Nigeria into the rest of West Africa. In Sierra Leone, it is sold mainly from a few front shops in the central Freetown area, and from there distributed to some extent to other larger cities and to the diamond-mining areas. Although it is not our intention to accuse the Nigerian community in Sierra Leone, it is an open secret that the Nigerian mafia has come to occupy an important role in international drug trade, particularly the trade in hard drugs. Asian megacities such as Bangkok currently have sizeable West African communities that are used as entry points to establish connections between drug lords in Southeast Asia and West Africa (see Lehtinen 2004).<sup>14</sup> Whereas the high-quality heroin typically finds its way to European and North American markets, the lower-quality heroin is sold on the streets of Freetown and other West African cities as brown-brown. Although the drug was already present in Sierra Leone prior to the war – routes for drug trafficking were already established in the 1980s between West Africa and Moscow (on Aeroflot) and other Eastern European cities, and from there to mar-

<sup>14</sup> Bangkok has a small but rapidly growing African community, which since the mid-1990s has risen from the hundreds to beyond the 10,000 mark. They involve themselves mainly in legitimate textile and leather goods trading, but some also deal in diamonds and drugs. See also Crispin (2001) and Sunday Nation (2003).

kets in Eastern Europe – the real introduction to brown-brown and other types of relatively cheap hard drugs took place during the civil war (see Richards 1996).

From our material, it is very difficult to make an accurate estimate about the number of brown-brown users in Sierra Leone. It is clearly being used by some people, mainly young men and some boys, but most likely it is a rather marginal phenomenon compared to djamba and alcohol.

## Crack cocaine

Crack cocaine is a type of cocaine produced for smoking only. It is not meant to be snorted, as with the type of cocaine made infamous through American movies such as *Scarface*. To obtain crack cocaine, the hydrochloride of ordinary cocaine is concentrated by heating the drug in a solution of baking soda until the water evaporates. This type of base cocaine makes a cracking sound when heated, hence the name 'crack'. It vaporises at a low temperature, so it can be easily inhaled via a pipe. Crack cocaine delivers an intense pleasure, always followed by an equally intense crash.

In Sierra Leone, crack cocaine costs 5,000 leones for a rock (e.g. a user dose), and as much as 90,000 leones for one gram. As such, it is probably the most expensive drug that is relatively widely available in Sierra Leone. Crack cocaine is distributed and marketed through the same commodity chains as brown-brown, and its history in Sierra Leone is by and large the same as brown-brown's. It was also previously known to be used by a rather small group of people in the larger towns (almost exclusively Freetown) and by some in the diamond areas, but it was not until the war that larger parts of the population became aware of this drug. Crack cocaine was used during the war to prepare recruits for battle, but it is difficult to say how widespread the use was with any kind of accuracy. The same is true today. We met and interviewed people who said they had used it and knew people who were using it, but we were not able to conduct detailed interviews with any current users. Most of those who told us they had used crack cocaine said they had done so during the war.<sup>15</sup> Those we talked to have first been in the army, then joined the faction of the army that committed the coup in 1997, then, at the end of the war, been part of the Westside Boys militia. We will return to their experience with and attitudes toward hard drugs when we use the case of the Westside Boys to discuss the legacy of the war in Sierra Leone.

<sup>15</sup> The only exceptions were a few cases in the diamond areas surrounding Bo.

## Top-up

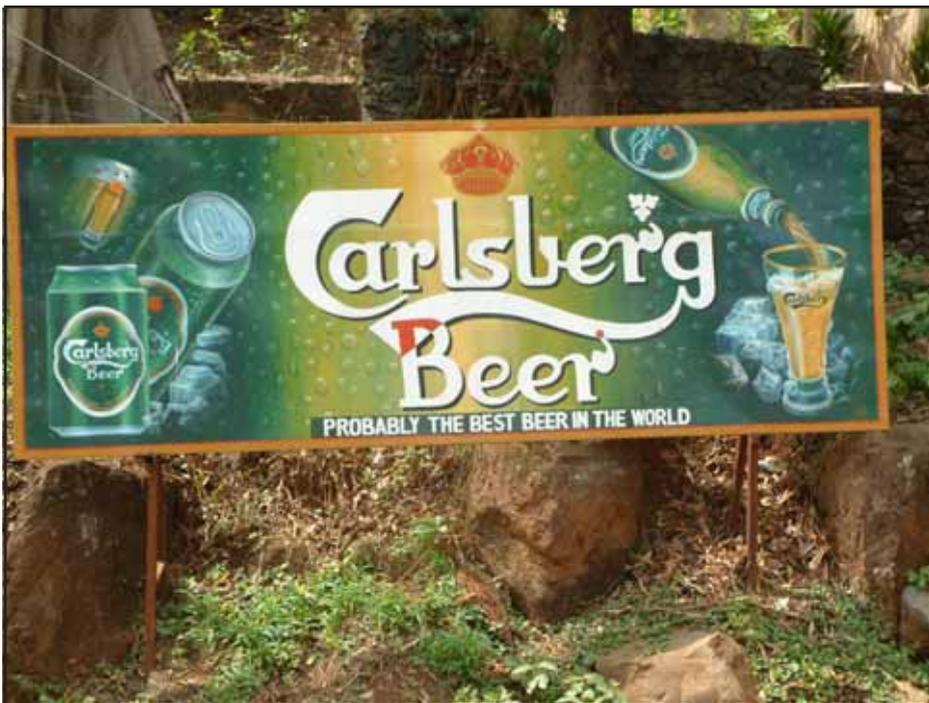
This is a new drug on the market in Sierra Leone, and we do not actually know what it consists of. From the stories told, we believe it is a strong tranquilliser. Top-up is a white, oval tablet that costs up to 1,000 leones each. It is an upmarket drug taken by weekend party-goers to literally 'top-up' an existing level of intoxication. The name therefore refers to its ability to sustain and increase an already established state-of-mind.

However, the name is also interesting due to its connection to other branding strategies currently used in Sierra Leone. Cel-tel is the country's most reliable and largest provider of cell phone services. Their adverts for their so-called 'top-up' card can be seen all over the country. This card enables the buyer to relatively cheaply top-up the number of units on his or her cell phone card. Cell phones and Cel-tel are important representations of modernity, progress, connections to the global world, and other things generally considered as good in life by the younger population. Thus, the idea behind giving a drug the brand name 'top-up' is to connect the drug to an already established frame about 'the good life'. Anyone pretending to be someone in Sierra Leone must have a cell phone and, when you have a cell phone, you naturally buy a top-up card. A cell phone user is a modern person who cruises the clubs at the weekend, and nothing could be more natural than to 'top-up' then as well. Giving the 'new drug on the block' such a name is clearly a deliberate and well-planned marketing strategy.

As this drug is new on the Sierra Leonean market, we are unable to say much more about the commodity chain as such. It may originate from the same networks as brown-brown and crack cocaine; however, we also heard rumours that it was coming in from Europe, with both Amsterdam and Eastern Europe (Poland and Belarus) mentioned by informants with good knowledge of the Sierra Leonean drug scene.

## 8 Modernity, alcohol, and drugs

In a country such as Sierra Leone, modernity and its many representations are much sought after. Today no country or community lives in isolation from global events and trends. People in Sierra Leone, particularly the younger generations, know perfectly well that their country is in a sad state of affairs. Through radio and television, video films, and other media, they are daily exposed to representations of modernity that are seemingly beyond their reach. In some places and communities, this trend is much more evident than in other communities, and we see this also in our material. There is a significant difference between drinking patterns and drug use in cosmopolitan Freetown versus the traditional Mende city of Bo; similarly, important differences are evident between the traditional rural communities around Mile 91 and the rural villages in the diamond areas surrounding Bo. Among certain



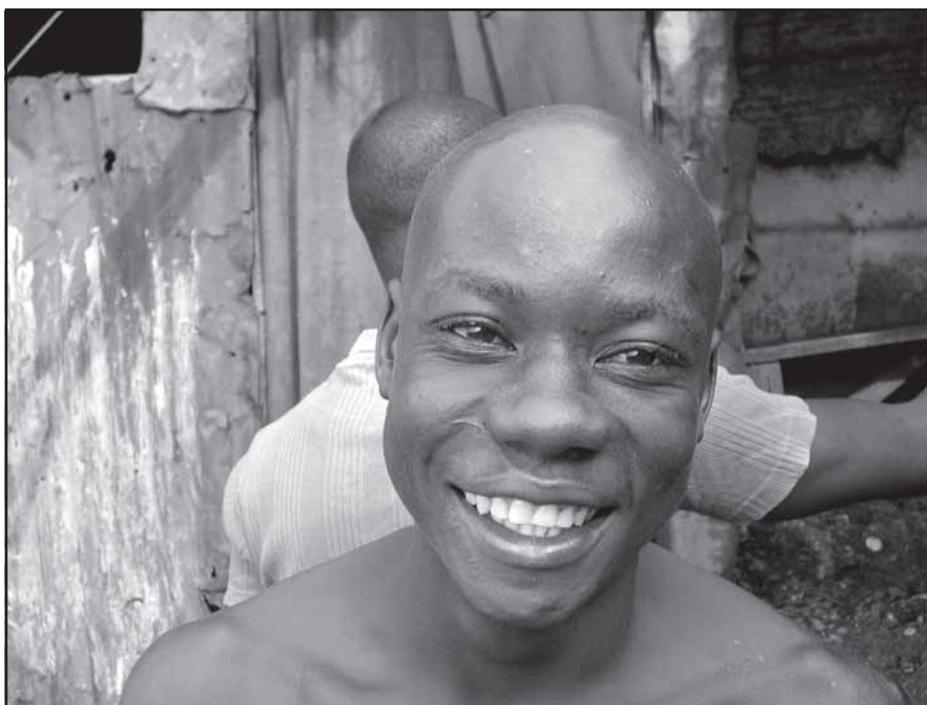
*In contemporary Sierra Leone, international brand names such as Carlsberg, Guinness and Star are important representations of modernity.*

segments of the population in Freetown and in the diamond areas, alcohol and drugs become the means to help negotiate a modernity the people would desperately like to be part of, but are effectively prevented from ever reaching.

In contemporary Sierra Leone, international brand names such as Carlsberg and Guinness are important representations of modernity. As a modern, successful individual, these brands are what you are supposed to drink when socialising with peer groups and friends or meeting colleagues for after-hour business meetings. Some can afford these brands, but many cannot. For those who cannot afford the status symbols, other types of alcohol and drugs can help displace or replace this feeling of being disconnected from the modern world. Thus, we argue that drinking or using drugs is not only about stimuli, but is also a way of creating a collective social identity and belonging. For the 'boys' in Magazine or Sawa Grounds, in the diamond areas or in informal palm wine bars elsewhere, this sense of collectivity may be of considerable importance. Making alcohol and drugs integral parts of their subculture gives them an identity, relieves them of boredom and worries, and also connects them to the wider world. The palm wine is their 'Guinness' and the djamba that they smoke connects them to world of Bob Marley and reggae music, and increasingly also to the heroes of American gangster rap such as Tupac Shakur and 50-Cent. Their lives become part of something that is bigger than their own miserable circumstances. Alcohol and drugs can facilitate a negotiation of modernity in situations where other paths to the 'good life' of the modern world are perceived as closed.

## 9 The legacy of the war

Regardless of how one looks at the causes and consequences of the war in Sierra Leone, it must be characterised as a watershed in the history of the country. During the war, alcohol, and drugs were often used as a boost to masculinity and a rite of passage into the army or rebel movements. The rebels of the RUF, the soldiers in the army, and the militiamen of the Kamajoi all used alcohol and drugs in one form or another. Both the army and the RUF used drugs like crack cocaine in order to prepare recruits for battle, although we still do not have any systematic evidence of the degree to which this took place. Moreover, young men caught up in a situation like the one prevailing in the Sierra Leone civil war can easily come to internalise a certain pattern of alcohol and drug consumption. In the Sawa Grounds, most of our informants had belonged to the militia called the Westside Boys, and it is to



*During the war, alcohol, and drugs were often used as a boost to masculinity and a rite of passage into the army or rebel movements*

the experiences of these boys that we now turn in order to illustrate one of the many legacies of the war in Sierra Leone.

As a group with a common external identity, the Westside Boys emerged in the latter part of the war, in 2000. However, both the 'leaders' of this group and many of the rank – and – file had backgrounds from the army. Many joined the army as young boys just after the coup by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in April 1992; most were recruited in Freetown and sent to the front to fight against the RUF. In May 1997, they belonged to the faction of the army that committed a coup against President Kabbah and his government, and that thereafter invited the RUF to share power in the so-called *Armed Forces Revolutionary Council* (AFRC). When West African troops from the ECOMOG force regained control of Freetown in March 1998, these men followed RUF and their allies in the AFRC into the bush.<sup>16</sup> The next time the boys returned to Freetown, it was as part of the RUF invasion in January 1999. Half a year later, a peace agreement was signed in Lomé – as part of which the Westside Boys were supposed to be debriefed, re-educated, and reintegrated into the new army. During a period in 2000, the Westside Boys fought together with British troops against the RUF, but this was not to last very long. Too undisciplined after years of rebel warfare, the Westside Boys fell out with their new allies and established themselves as an independent militia based in the Occra Hills. The Occra hills are located just north of the highway between Freetown and Bo, between the villages of Mantana and Robat. This is how one of Sierra Leone's major newspapers described their base in August 2000:

Gen Bomblast, Brigadier 555, Gen Guilt, Col Superman, Gen Junior Lion. All are products of Occra Hills. The soldiers who come from Occra Hills wear a toga of arrogance, one that borders on bravado which itself is a product of mind-boggling temerity to slit stomachs, extract and munch human hearts ... At the base, guns are free for all. Hard drugs are aphrodisiacs and tranquillisers. Food is in short supply but this is compensated for by a marijuana farm just nearby. Kids have a pastime picking marijuana leaves and making soup of them. Occra Hills amazes, it assaults decent existence but it plays up as some medieval communalist setting. It invites nausea; it is the hangover of years of carelessness, ruthlessness and mindlessness that has swept this country since independence (Kingsley Lington in *Concord Times*, Freetown, 30 August 2000, pp. 1–2).

A few days later, this base was attacked by a British helicopter gunship and about 20 Westside Boys members were killed. The remaining members were jailed in

<sup>16</sup> The ECOMOG force is the peacekeeping force of Economic Community of West African States, the main regional interstate arrangement in West Africa. For further details about their involvement with the war in Sierra Leone, see Bøås (2000 and 2001).

Pademba Road Prison in Freetown; most were released shortly thereafter, but some of the former Westside Boys we interviewed had just recently been released. Now these men were back with their friends, celebrating their newfound freedom in the Sawa Grounds.

Although as a group they may give an impression of danger and carelessness, when talking to the men individually we were struck by their feelings of betrayal, of being lost and without opportunities. They are mostly jobless and, lacking normal employment possibilities, it is hard to see how they can break out of the frame they have established for themselves as 'hard men'. While they are clearly afraid of being sent back to prison, it is also very hard to envision other 'careers' for this group apart from crime and warfare. Those are the only lives they know, embarked upon as young boys when they were recruited in Freetown by the NPRC to fight against the RUF; twelve years later they are back in Freetown, again just hanging around like they did in 1992. For some of them, it must seem like time has stood still: much has happened to them but, in the larger scheme, little has changed in their life, and little is likely to. Sam's story is an example. Sam is 22 years old, and was recruited by the NPRC in 1993. He lost his right hand during the war when he tried to defuse a grenade while high on crack cocaine. Sam claims that he is not doing hard drugs anymore but when we interviewed him, he was drunk on palm wine and smoking djamba. In Sam's view, all he needs is a job, as he still considers himself to be a strong man. However, between his missing limb and his status as a former Westside Boy, no one will hire him. Thus, Sam occupies his days hanging out with his former buddies in the Sawa Grounds, drinking palm wine, smoking the djamba, and remembering the days when they were somebody, when they had the guns and it was they who gave the orders. This dissipation and wastefulness is also a part of the legacy of the war in Sierra Leone.



## 10 A sober but polarised nation

The polarised drinking habits exposed in our study fit very well with the general picture emerging from other studies of alcohol consumption in Africa (see Bryceson 2002). Some people drink a lot and use a lot of drugs, and some of this consumption is quite open; this is particularly the case in parts of Freetown. Such observations may easily lead us to think that the problem is larger than it actually is in Sierra Leone.

There are many reasons why people drink and take drugs, and why consumption patterns change. However, we believe that in Sierra Leone, as in any other country, such patterns are affected by urban migration and mobility (e.g. to Freetown), new income opportunities (e.g. the diamond areas around Bo), and by extreme social stress (e.g. the civil war). These three factors, alone or in combination, point to the probability of increased consumption of alcohol and drugs. Conversely, our material shows that being a woman, a Muslim, and living in a traditional community significantly reduce the probability of drinking or taking drugs. Importantly, what separate a traditional community from a non-traditional community are not necessarily the urban-rural distinction, but the degree to which the community is exposed to high levels of migration and/or new income opportunities. This is illustrated in our study by the cases of the villages around Mile 91 and Bo town.

### Traditional culture

The villages around Mile 91 were heavily affected by the war, and this could lead us to expect a higher level of alcohol and drug consumption in these villages than in areas not as affected by the war. This was clearly not the case. These areas remain typical, traditional, rural communities where life proceeds under the guidance of the traditional norms and authority of Temne society. Drinking and producing alcohol or smoking and cultivating djamba is simply something that these people do not do; it is unheard of in this society. This is not necessarily so remarkable. What makes the case of these villages so interesting, however, is how quickly these communities returned to the traditional way of life. After all, these villages were in the

so-called 'death-zone': many were attacked and burned to the ground, and the majority of the inhabitants had to flee the area for IDP camps in Freetown. This experience therefore entailed both the extreme social stress of war, and the exposure to modernity that life in IDP camps in Freetown gave them. This did not, however, destroy the values of traditional Temne life. Rather those that returned to the area around Mile 91 after the war swiftly returned to the traditional way of life.

The strength of traditional society as a barrier against alcohol and drugs use is not unique, nor is it not found only in rural areas. The case of the city of Bo illustrates this point. The city of Bo was also very much affected by the war, but during the war it continued to be under the authority of a traditional Mende structure. The drinking pattern – or the near absence of such – is by and large the same as in the rural villages around Mile 91 and in Bo town. We believe that this is mainly due to the strength of the norms and values of traditional society, be it Temne or Mende. Concerning Bo, it is also worth considering that, due to the composition of the armed factions during the civil war, the traditional authority structure of the Mende was not weakened, but rather emerged reinforced after the end of the war. This was mainly due to the 'success' of the Kamajoi, the Mende militia, in preventing the RUF from capturing Bo town: the picture created thereafter of this militia was as a force battling for democracy and good governance against the drugged, ruthless young thugs of the RUF. Cumulatively, these cases suggest that the relationship between war and the consumption of alcohol is more complicated than what one originally may have thought, and it is therefore probably too easy to blame the war for any increase in alcohol and drug use in Sierra Leone. The relationship is in actual fact much more complex.

## **A marginal phenomenon**

Heavy drinking and the use of drugs may be a relatively marginal phenomenon in Sierra Leone but, as we have seen, there is also some polarisation in the sense that some people drink a lot and use quite a lot of drugs. Those that do are, for most part, relatively young people that either live in a more cosmopolitan urban setting (e.g. Freetown) or in a rural setting where non-agriculture income opportunities are available (e.g. the diamond areas). Both these areas have experienced high levels of migration and mobility, cutting people off from the bonds of traditional society. The war obviously also explains why some people are part of a subculture that has internalised alcohol and drug use as a way of life. The latter scenario is vividly illustrated in our case study on the former Westside Boys. The visibility of some of these user

groups, particularly in Freetown, may in fact lead one to the conclusion that the problem with alcohol and drugs is larger than it actually is in Sierra Leone. However, for those that drink too much or take drugs, or live in conditions such as ‘our boys’ in the Magazine, or have past experiences like the former Westside Boys, the consumption of alcohol and drugs clearly contribute to their problems and misery. Less drinking and drug use will not necessarily solve their problems or give them access to employment and education, but it may at least increase their opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives, both as individuals and collective groups. This is important because, given the current state of affairs in Sierra Leone, neither state nor other actors do very much for these people.

Finally, it is important to note that, in contemporary Sierra Leone, what we in fact see is a three-faced Bacchus: the face of joy, the face of misery, and the face of pragmatism. First, whether one likes it or not, alcohol and drugs do offer some people some comfort and joy. This may be of importance in itself, particularly for people whose life otherwise has so little consolation. In some ways, it is a coping strategy: for some it may work, but for others it just leads to more misery. This suggests that the problem of alcohol and drugs in Sierra Leone must be addressed with pragmatism. Although alcohol and drug use is a problem for certain parts of the population, for others – such as the many female kiosk and street vendors of palm wine – it is an important income-generating activity whose loss would be extremely hard for them to bear. In this case, as in so many others, the principle for policy intervention should be ‘do no harm’.



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# Alcohol and Drug Consumption in Post War Sierra Leone – an Exploration

This report is the result of an assignment from FORUT to Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies. It is part of the FORUT project Alcohol, Drugs and Development supported by Norad.

Drinking alcohol is not very common among the Sierra Leoneans; only ten percent of the adult population have been drinking during the last year. The polarised drinking habits exposed in this study fit well with the general picture emerging from other studies of alcohol consumption in Africa. Some people drink a lot and use a lot of drugs, and some of this consumption is quite open; this is particularly the case in Freetown. Such observations may easily lead us to think that the problem is larger than it actually is in Sierra Leone.



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Fafo-report 469  
ISBN 82-7422-501-5  
ISSN 0801-6143