The Role of Faith-based Organizations in Building Democratic Process: Achieving Universal Primary Education in Sierra Leone

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Abstract—This paper aims to argue that religion and Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) contribute to building democratic process through the provision of education in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone experienced a civil war from 1991 to 2002 and about 70 percent of the population lives in poverty. While the government has been in the process of rebuilding the nation, many forms of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including FBOs, have played a significant role in promoting social development. Education plays an important role in supporting people's democratic movements through knowledge acquisition, spiritual enlightenment and empowerment. This paper discusses religious tolerance in Sierra Leone and how FBOs have contributed to the provision of primary education in Sierra Leone. This study is based on the author's field research, which involved interviews with teachers and development stakeholders, notably government officials, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and FBOs, as well as questionnaires completed by pupils, parents and teachers.

Keywords—Civil society, democracy, faith-based organizations (FBOs), religious tolerance, universal primary education (UPE)

I. INTRODUCTION

DEVELOPMENT aims at improving living standards by encouraging economic advancement, greater political participation, and improvements in health and education for all people. However, of the world's 6.6 billion people, 5.3 billion are found in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) where 3 billion of them live on less than $2 per day [1]. Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem, involving social, economic and political issues which are linked *inter alia* to hunger, ill heath, inequality, political and economic instability and conflicts. In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, lack of good governance and democracy, along with weak political institutions are major problems which hinder national development. Silue [2] points out that these problems have endured due to the fact that the majority of the population is illiterate and does not participate in the development process. To bridge the gap between the elite minority and the majority, education should be made accessible for all. Education brings about improvements in social equality, health, participation in the economic sector and democracy [3]. Considering the benefits, education is a crucial human development goal and an essential tool of empowerment for the poor. Therefore, the international community has placed education, especially at the primary level, at the top of the development agenda, aiming to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015 along with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The state is usually viewed as the main executor in delivering public services to the people. However, since 'the state has been unable to fulfill its role in extending access of appropriate quality to all children in the context of the Education for All (EFA)', the role of non-state providers which deliver services to the 'under-served' is becoming increasingly important [4]. The role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is seen as being particularly relevant for impoverished countries, such as Sierra Leone, whose education system has been seriously affected by the civil war that ended in 2002. Among many forms of CSOs, such as Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and trade unions, this paper focuses on the role of religion and FBOs in social development, particularly the provision of primary education in Sierra Leone. This is because the current education system has remained influenced by the history of "civilization" brought by British colonialism through the work of Christian missionaries as well as by Islamic missionaries through Islamic expansion in the country. Recently there has been an increased recognition of FBOs' significant role in development in the international community, and examining their impact on the provision of education is critical with regard to the development of Sierra Leone.

This paper firstly discusses the linkage between education and democracy, outlining how education could contribute to bringing about a democratic society. Second, the role of FBOs in social development, which has been increasingly active is discussed. Subsequently, key background issues concerning primary education in Sierra Leone is outlined, followed by an explanation of the methodology used in this study. Then, this paper shows Sierra Leoneans' unique forms of religious tolerance and discusses how FBOs in Sierra Leone have made efforts in the provision of primary education. In conclusion, this paper argues that FBOs are key stakeholders with regard to Sierra Leone's progress towards achieving UPE which leads people to actively participating in social and political arenas and building a democratic society. It argues that FBOs' role in social development will be even more active and significant in the future.

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II. EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

Poverty is not just about a lack of income, but is also concerned with the fact that poor people do not have access to all the opportunities they need, as they are locked into multiple forms of vulnerability. One of the reasons why education is seen as a means of poverty reduction is that it can lead to the democratization of societies. Harber [5] argues that 'democracy is about people actively participating in social and political institutions' and what is important is how they participate. Democracy gives people an opportunity to improve their lives through participating and being integrated into their societies. The UNDP [6] argues that people's participation is an essential element of human development, and defines participation as people's close involvement 'in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect people's lives', with an emphasis on its importance in providing access to decision-making and power. People can participate in four spheres: household, and economic, socio-cultural, and political arenas. However, Harber [7] points out that the post-colonial African government is primarily characterized by the authoritarianism of either one party or military rule, which has exacerbated levels of poverty. This is because authoritarianism makes openness, transparency, and accountability very difficult and instead causes civil unrest, violent repression, and wars against neighbors. It also leads to higher military expenditure. Authoritarian governments bring about repression, censorship, intimidation, and intolerance. Under these systems, elites seek their own interests, while the poor are marginalized. Development cannot make progress in such a situation. Ake [8] argues that the decline of the economy in Africa 'is not just a cause of marginality, it is also the process of marginalization', and 'the discourse on marginalization is really about the deepening crisis of underdevelopment'. Ake [8] strongly criticizes African elites, arguing that they have marginalized the majority in the development of Africa through politics, and that they have instituted the colonial system in pursuit of their own interests rather than transforming it into a democratic movement for the people. Ake [8] contends that both foreign agents and local elites do not see the majority as agents of development, and 'democracy is the only way to relate development to social will'. Harber [7] also argues that a greater level of democracy will be possible when 'political culture and civil society in Africa become more democratic' and 'this will depend on the spread of more democratic values and behaviours'. There is a strong need for people's participation in their civic lives.

In order for people to take the opportunities they need to understand the process of democracy, its meaning and values, education is needed as a means to impart values. Education is seen to play an important role in supporting people's democratic movements. Harber [7] argues that education can play a significant role in helping to develop 'more democratic political systems over time through cultivating and developing the values and behaviors of a democratic political culture'. This is because school is a powerful social institution for cultivating a democratic political culture. School is a place to impart to pupils 'the fundamental values on which society is based', which include the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, recognition of the equal value of all people, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable. School should provide a forum for the effective exercise of citizen's rights and participation as critical and active members of society. Therefore, education can encourage the poor and the marginalized into the social and political arenas through empowerment [9]. Harber [7] also argues that the skills and values of democracy are not generic nor naturally given, but socially learned, and that 'African schools and education systems play a part in fostering the knowledge, skills and values necessary to promote and protect a democratic political culture'. Furthermore, the access to, and spread of, literacy increase the chances of political participation and a high degree of public contestation in political life [9]. Overall, education can lead to people exercising power and participating in social movements. Sierra Leone is a country which has been in the process of rebuilding the nation and encouraging people's participation in social, economic and political areas. However, considering that the adult literacy rate of 34.8 percent indicates that not many people have such an opportunity to enjoy a democratic civil life. In this respect, it is critical to promote a foundation of education, and particularly primary education in line with efforts to achieve the MDGs.

III. THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOS) IN DEVELOPMENT

Hulme and Edwards [10] define civil society as 'the collectivity of those social organizations that enjoy autonomy from the state (are not a part of the state or creatures of it) and have as one important goal among others to influence the state on behalf of their members.' The institutions of civil society are called CSOs, and this paper regards FBOs as an important example of CSOs. Although the special attention given to FBOs by academia and western donors is a relatively recent phenomenon, religion has long been an important source of culture and social structures. Colonialism brought Africa formal education through missionaries, and Islam also established formal and non-formal education. Therefore, FBOs have created a solid foundation of work in social development. Belsaw, Calderisi, and Sugden [11] argue that religion provides consolation to people, including the poor, and is part of 'their personal identity, the foundation of their sense of community, and the basis of their hope'. This is because religion is part of, or even central to, their lives, and people trust religious leaders and respect religious norms and values in many areas of Africa. In such areas, religions influence people's conduct, ethics, and morality. Additionally, FBOs have provided emotional, moral, and spiritual support to people and their significant influence can mobilize the communities. Therefore, FBOs' involvement in the public arena can be a powerful tool to bring about positive effects, especially in terms of the development of health and education through sensitizing their members. Belshaw [12] describes the advantages of FBOs' development work as the following: 1) The long-term commitment to their memberships, as they have served the community for a long time; 2) The majority of the members are likely to consist of the poorest and most marginalized in LDCs; 3) Links to sister organizations that possibly provide funding and expertise; 4)

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Emphasis on the 'golden rule' (i.e., treat others as you yourself wish to be treated) as a guide to social relationships; and 5) Spiritual and relational experiences that can raise the self-regard and confidence of marginalized people and help them benefit from new opportunities. Thus, as FBOs have often worked in communities for a considerable period of time, they can engage in long-term commitment to work there while obtaining the people's trust. Furthermore, local religious leaders, such as imams, sheikhs, reverends and pastors, have a moral and spiritual legitimacy in terms of influencing and mobilizing people through the dissemination of their views and their encouragement of behavioral change.

There are some potential weaknesses of FBOs as follows: restricted beneficiaries of faith based allegiance, the possibility of a top-down manner relating to policies and action, and the possibility for integration into a state-dominated political structure or the promulgation of ideas which favor the elites in society. Furthermore, a view exists, that FBOs tend to engage in long-term work, based on pursuing their religious mandate, which may result in them lacking in a focus on results and professionalism [12]. Nonetheless, considering FBOs' crucial advantages of probably having closer moral and spiritual ties to the poor than any other development stakeholders, their role in development work can be significant. Since FBOs are often deeply rooted in the communities that they serve, they can play an important role in promoting education, by providing opportunities and mobilizing people, including marginalized groups. This can lead to them exercising their right to participation. Participation is one way of creating and enhancing democracy, and local participation is critical to the success of many development projects. When the intended beneficiaries are fully involved, the programmes can be more beneficial to them [13], and the outcomes can be more sustainable.

IV. PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone is a country characterized by diversity. Christians comprise 30 percent of the population, Muslims 60 percent, while 10 percent of the population is made up of people with indigenous beliefs. This diverse composition was influenced by the history of British colonialism and Islamic expansion. Primary education in Sierra Leone has also been influenced by the particular history of Sierra Leone. Although secular municipal schools are available, about 75 percent of primary schools are faith based and are organized according to either Christian or Islamic principles. The following three types of schools are mainly available for formal education in Sierra Leone: government schools, government-assisted schools, and private schools. A government school is defined as a school managed by or on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Technology (MEST) and often owned by the local government and district council. A government-assisted school is mainly established by religious organizations, and recognized and assisted by the government through school subsidies, the provision of teaching and learning materials and teachers' salaries. A private school is established by an individual and run by a private business without receiving public funds. All schools use the same syllabus. Sierra Leone

once had the reputation as the "Athens of West Africa" because of its high level of education and superior educational resources in colonial times [14]. However, after the end of the war, the net enrolment ratio at primary level was 41 percent [15]. This is largely related to poverty due to the war damage. About 70 percent of the population lives in poverty with more than two-thirds of the people categorized as living in extreme poverty [16]. Poverty has been worsened by the conflicts that occurred in 1991. The decade of war resulted in 20,000 deaths, over two million displacements and thousands of injured or maimed individuals through human rights abuses. The social, economic, and physical infrastructure was destroyed, and nearly 90 percent of primary schools across the country were completely destroyed or heavily damaged. The government has also been impoverished and largely dependent on foreign donors; approximately half of the government budget is donor-funded [16][17].

Sierra Leone implemented the UPE initiatives in 1993 with donors' assistance. The government also introduced a free primary education policy in 2000, in order to achieve the international goals associated with the MDGs. Under the policy, the government began paying tuition fees and providing teaching and learning materials, including core textbooks, and carrying the responsibility for National Primary School Education (NPSE) fees. Furthermore, the government set a fine of up to Le500,000, imprisonment, or both for a parent or guardian who fails to send their child to school. Sierra Leone's full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was adopted in 2005. The government has developed and implemented the PRSP with the intention of making progress regarding the international targets set out in the MDGs and has stressed the need for this work to be conducted in a participatory manner that encourages the involvement of civil society in development processes [17]. In the education sector of the PRSP, the increased allocations have catered to implementing UPE programmes [18]. The allocation is about 23 percent of the national budget. Considering the budgeted amount for education was only 8.7 percent of the total budget 10 years ago, this is a considerable improvement. Furthermore, between 48 and 50 percent of recurrent expenditures are allocated to primary education, and 47.7 percent of recurrent expenditures will continue to be spent on primary education until 2015 [17][18]. The government's strong commitment to, attaining the international goal of UPE by 2015 the policy of free primary education has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of enrolled pupils. The net enrolment increased to 63.0 percent in 2004 from 41 percent just after the war [15][18]. This is tremendous progress in terms of access to primary education. However, the government still does not have the ability to provide appropriate services in terms of finance, logistics and personnel, and therefore schools charge parents fees to manage schools [19]. In addition, behind the rapid increase in the access to primary education, there are serious trade-offs in the quality of education provided; a high teacher-pupil ratio, a shortage of teaching and learning materials, school buildings and furniture, and low motivation on the part of teachers, due to delays in paying salaries, are quite common [19]. Moreover, the MEST [18] indicates that more than 30 percent of children at the primary education level are still out of school. Additionally, the

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national primary completion rate is below 60.0 percent (63.9 percent for boys and 47.6 percent for girls). These highlight the government's inability to provide adequate education services to all children. The MEST [18] identifies the key disadvantaged groups as follows: the poor, girls in certain regions, children with disabilities, orphans, and children who are acting as head of household since they lost their parents for the war. The eleven year civil war further marginalized vulnerable children. One of MEST's [18] strategies to include the vulnerable is to work with CSOs to reach the under-served populations.

V. METHODOLOGY

To examine how religions and FBOs have contributed to the provision of education in Sierra Leone, this research involved a literature review, an observation of schools, interviews with teachers and development stakeholders, such as government officials, NGOs, and FBOs, and questionnaires distributed to teachers, parents, and pupils. Regarding FBOs, Ansarul Development Services, Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood, and the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone participated in this study. Other participants included 125 teachers, 454 parents, and 488 pupils from 27 primary schools located in five towns, including Freetown, Bo, Moyamba, Kenema, and Makeni. To reduce geographical bias, towns in the east, west, south, and north of Sierra Leone were chosen. As the majority of schools throughout Sierra Leone are faith-based, eleven Christian schools and ten Islamic schools were chosen as samples in addition to five municipal schools and one private school. The fieldwork was conducted from April to July in 2005. Policy makers often tend to be in favor of a statistical approach with benchmarks. This paper includes some important descriptive data which use percentage counts to present relevant characteristics and views of participants. However, this study tries to move beyond the quantitative approach and reflects the voices of the participants to draw a deeper understanding of the views of the participants and their roles. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analyses were taken. While quantitative or statistical data would provide explicit outcomes within given choices, the use of qualitative data is useful to supplement, validate, and explain quantitative data. To gain insight into the knowledge of the participants and the understanding of the primary education and religious contribution to this sector in Sierra Leone, the gathered data were processed in the following way: 1) Raw quantitative data from questionnaires were coded through Excel; 2) Figures, diagrams and charts were made to organize and examine components of quantitative data from questionnaires; 3) All the interviews were transcribed. The printed transcripts were read through, and irrelevant data were excluded. The relevant data were coded manually according to categories that were made based on the question and themes examined. During this process, the qualitative data were carefully interpreted as it involves cultural inferences; 4) Coded data were then re-examined, sorted, categorized, evaluated, compared, and synthesized; and 5) All the data were combined and further refined and re-examined to identify any patterns or emergent findings.

VI. RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN SIERRA LEONE

In Sierra Leone, the government has a reputation for being unbiased and tolerant with regard to religion, and Christian and Islamic groups work in collaboration when necessary. This religious tolerance has been brought up with a great influence by the Inter-religious Council Sierra Leone (IRCSL) which played a significant role in ending the war. IRCSL is a national multi-religious organization dedicated to promoting cooperation and peace among the religious communities. It greatly contributed to the end of war by mediating negotiations between the government and rebels. This is an important reason why people in Sierra Leone respect religious leaders greatly. This is supported by participants' comments which included the following:

'In our country, there is an organization which provides unity between Christianity and Islam called the Inter-Religious Council which brings Christians and Muslims together'

Furthermore, many Sierra Leoneans have a relatively good understanding of, and respect for, both faiths. This view is supported by three aspects: the first is inter-religious marriage, which is becoming more common, according to participants. They stated that a wedding ceremony in a church would often be followed by another ceremony in a mosque, with the marriage being celebrated in both traditions; second, is parent participants' views on tension between Christianity and Islam through questionnaires, the outcome of which is shown in Table I.

TABLE I
PARENTS' VIEWS ON TENSION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
(PARENTS N=454)

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No Answer
No.	164	75	181	24
%	36.1	16.5	39.9	7.5

Looking at Table I, the outcome that 181 parents (39.9 percent) "disagreed" might not sound a large number enough to support the view. However, this is mainly caused by a question which did not confine the remark to "Sierra Leone". Therefore, even significant number of those who "agreed" also put extra comments which included:

'Not nationally, but internationally there are tensions'
'There are so many religious wars between Christians and Muslims such as ones in Nigeria, the Middle East and terrorism, but not in Sierra Leone'

Even relatively negative comments did not convey hostility, as shown by the following:

'I do not term it tension, but we have some differences'
'Muslims object to their day of worship, "Friday" being a working day. Christians visit the toilet during church services which the Muslims consider filthy'

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Overall, this study gathered that people in Sierra Leone do not really feel much "tension" between the two religions, as the following amicable comments show:

'In my country, there is no tension between the religions. We do inter-marry, attend to each others business and even interact closely each other'

'Because of our religious tolerance, children of both religions attend the same schools and so expand their scope of education and discipline'

'Because both Christianity and Islam have respect for each other, for example, with regard to religious holidays and celebrating occasions most of the time together'

Finally, related to the one of parent comments above, this research indicates that there is "flexibility" in the way people practice their religion. However, this needs a careful examination, since from questionnaire responses, this study found that parents chose their children's school for the following reasons, as seen in Table II.

TABLE II
PARENTS' REASON TO CHOOSE A SCHOOL
FOR THEIR CHILDREN
(PARENTS N=454;
NOTE: SOME OF PARTICIPANTS CHOSE MULTIPLE-ANSWERS)

	No.	%
Financial reason	229	50.4
Religious reason	112	24.7
Quality education	49	10.8
Proximity	32	7.1
Other	17	3.7
No answer	25	5.5

There were other reasons, including "being able to learn both Arabic and English," "the child's choice," "a parent went to the school," and "a friend or mentor assisting in parenting or financing had the religion". Although "a financial reason" was the top reason considering school fees to pay, it is pointed out that religion is one of the important reasons for parents to choose a school for their children.

However, interestingly, as seen in Table III, the pupils' religion does not always match the school's faith, and there is an indication of "flexibility" in the way people practice their religion.

TABLE III
SCHOOL FAITH AND PUPILS' RELIGION
(PUPILS N=488)

	No. of schools	No. of pupils
Christian schools	11	182 92 Christians (50.6 %) 90 Muslims (49.4 %)
Islamic schools	10	194 16 Christians (8.2 %) 178 Muslims (91.8 %)
Municipal schools	5	93 33 Christians (35.5 %) 60 Muslims (64.5 %)
Private school	1	19 11 Christians (57.9 %) 8 Muslims (42.1 %)

Furthermore, this "flexibility" between school faith and individuals' religion was not only about pupils but also teachers. As seen in Table IV, the teachers' religion did not always match the school's faith.

TABLE IV
SCHOOL FAITH AND TEACHERS' RELIGION
(TEACHERS N=125)

	No. of schools	No. of teachers
Christian schools	11	56 47 Christians (83.9 %) 9 Muslims (16.1 %)
Islamic schools	10	41 15 Christians (36.6 %) 26 Muslims (63.4 %)
Municipal schools	5	24 11 Christians (45.8 %) 13 Muslims (54.2 %)
Private school	1	4 2 Christians (50.0 %) 2 Muslims (50.0 %)

Considering that FBOs are involved in teacher recruitment of faith-based schools, it can be argued that FBOs and religious leaders also have certain understanding and respect for both faiths. If Sierra Leone was a solely Islamic state and Sierra Leoneans were strict in their practicing of faith, parents would not provide such favorable views on the relationship between Christianity and Islam, and also differences between school faiths and pupils' and teachers' religion would not be possible. These examples show that Sierra Leone has a good level of religious tolerance. That is, a religious symbiosis is established in people's minds which can be a good base for building a democratic society. On Fridays many women wear traditional African dress regardless of their religion. They see African dress as formal and are proud of wearing it. Some participants explained that Sierra Leoneans like beautiful African dresses, and that it is good for national unity. The term, "national unity" was sometimes used when my participants talked about their cultures and religions. It can be argued that the eleven years of

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civil war, in a way, has strengthened people's awareness and sense of the need for unity and religious tolerance.

VII. THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOs) IN SIERRA LEONE IN PROVISION OF EDUCATION

Religious leaders from both of the main faiths said that they have stood for development and democracy in Sierra Leone. FBOs in Sierra Leone, such as Ansarul Development Services, Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood and Methodist Church of Sierra Leone, have contributed greatly to the development of education. Through interviews with the FBOs, this study found that the role of the FBOs in the formal primary education are: 1) Obtaining land for school construction; 2) Construction and rehabilitation of schools; 3) Provision of vehicles, furniture, teaching learning materials from time to time; 4) Offering scholarships to teachers for further study; 5) Offering scholarship to pupils; 6) Regularly visiting schools to monitor; 7) Recruitment of teachers; 8) Training of Arabic teachers (in Islamic schools) and offering in-service training for Religious Moral Education; 9) Producing religious literature for schools and churches or mosques; 10) Occasionally making up teachers' salaries when teachers have not been paid by the government; 11) Sensitizing parents at churches or mosques so that they send their children to schools; and 12) Establishing and disseminating a code of conduct to maintain morality in schools and communities.

Acknowledging their contributions, the government asks FBOs to propose and implement projects, and offers grants for them to do so. This is because even in remote rural areas there are churches or mosques and networks of FBOs, which are very helpful in establishing schools and sensitizing communities about the importance of education. Separately from the district inspectors, religious leaders also visit schools to monitor; their physical presence also helps to maintain good discipline. They also attend end-of-term assemblies, make speeches and give special awards to those with excellent academic results. Furthermore, a religious leader is always one of the School Management Committee (SMC) members in faith-based schools. Therefore, they work closely with schools and their contributions are appreciated by teachers and parents. In this study, 96.8 percent of teachers and 96.5 percent of parents thought religion (Christianity/Islam) contributed positively to education. Fifty five teachers (44.0 percent) pointed out that religion made a "moral and spiritual contribution to children's character" followed by "establishment of school" cited by 27 teachers (21.6 percent) and "religious and moral education as a subject" stated by 18 teachers (14.4 percent). Moreover, 296 parents (65.2 percent) pointed out "moral and spiritual contribution to children's character" followed by "establishment of school" cited by 113 parents (24.9 percent) and "the subject reason" stated by 65 parents (14.3 percent). The following teacher's comment obtained through questionnaire shows FBOs' role clearly:

'Rehabilitation of education and infrastructure as a relief agency to schools and sensitize them and provide books. Peace and civil education for social rehabilitation after the war. Training of

SMC. Production of Christian literature for schools and churches in local languages'

However, it is noteworthy that although they were a minority, some negative views on religions were obtained. In response to a question about whether religion had an adverse effect on education, three teachers (2.4 percent) "strongly agreed" and six teachers (4.8 percent) "agreed" on Christianity's adverse effects on education, while seven teachers (5.6 percent) "strongly agreed" and eight teachers (6.4 percent) "agreed" on Islam's adverse effects on education. Only one teacher left a further comment:

'The two religions have dismissed all our traditional secret societies, thus alienating us from AFRICA, our customary HOME and from our form of education'

Similarly, in response to a question about adverse effects of religion on local values and traditions, 42 parents (9.3 percent) "strongly agreed" and 65 parents (14.3 percent) "agreed" that Christian values have eroded their local values and traditions, while 44 parents (9.7 percent) "strongly agreed" and 82 parents (18.1 percent) "agreed" that Islamic values have eroded their local values and traditions. Some of their comments included:

'Because of the introduction of Christianity and Islam into out society, it has eroded our local values and tradition. For example, neglecting some of our traditional belief like the poro and bondu society. Moreover, our ancestry way of worship such as pouring libation for the dead have being neglected completely now'

'All the traditional secret societies inherited from our ancestors have been eroded and discouraged. Thus, it creates cultural alienation. But the religions have enabled us to be universal brothers and sisters to each other'

From these comments, it can be argued that overall Christianity and Islam have changed some of cultural and traditional values and practices people used to have in Sierra Leone.

Significantly, FBOs often do not have sufficient funds, so that the effects of their education work are often small. Methodist church staff said that after independence the missionaries could not maintain bigger schools because they lost financial support from the former colonial master, the United Kingdom, and today missionaries do less than the government since the state took over the running of schools. In this respect, considering that some teachers and parents appreciated the religious contribution to the establishment of schools, people might reckon that FBOs assume full responsibility for the school establishment because those schools are faith-based. However, as MEST [18] states 'many [FBOs] provide no [financial] support, however, for the maintenance and development of schools and institutions bearing their names', the MEST offers FBOs grants to propose projects and help deliver education services to the people,

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while international NGOs, such as Plan Sierra Leone, construct school buildings for faith-based schools. That is, although FBOs lack capacity in terms of financial resources, they are very important 'service providers' from the government's point of view, since they have the comparative advantages of good networks, wide coverage across the country and a high level of trust from the communities.

Moreover, considering their close relationship to the communities, the most effective work by FBOs, regardless of the remoteness of areas, can be their powerful impact in terms of sensitization. This was pointed out by many parents and teachers, and the following comments by a parent and a teacher show it clearly:

'We learn most of things from churches or mosques such as health and family issues including AIDS and its prevention. It shapes moral and behaviors of children. Religious leaders help sensitize people to promote education in churches or mosques'

'Religion has encouraged Muslim parents to send their children to school to acquire quality education'

Some local NGO staff, including those at the Pekin to Pekin Movement, also asked religious leaders to help with sensitization as to the importance of education, to assist with placing an emphasis on girls' education and to introduce their members to workshops operated by NGOs. This shows how FBOs and religious leaders influence people in Sierra Leone and reveals how their participation in the development of education can bring about positive outcomes, even in rural areas.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In Sierra Leone, a religious symbiosis has been established in people's minds which can be a good foundation for building a democratic society. This paper shows that Sierra Leoneans have a good level of mutual understanding of, and respect for, each other. Therefore, it is possible for pupils to follow a different religion to that of the school they attended. Similarly, differences between the religions of individual teachers and the faith of the schools they work in are possible. Both Christian and Islamic religious leaders and FBOs have supported development and democracy in Sierra Leone. In this respect, the argument of Belshaw et al. [11] is useful in examining Sierra Leone's case. They point out that most of the poor in Africa are deeply religious and religion provides consolation to people including the poor, and that FBOs have a great influence on conduct, ethics and morality, which enables them to mobilize communities. Their argument applies to Sierra Leone, as this paper shows through its examination of the roles of religions and FBOs in provision of primary education and how teachers and parents saw their contributions. Since religious leaders in Sierra Leone played a significant role in ending the bloody civil war they are greatly respected. Sierra Leoneans trust religious leaders and religions influence people in the areas of conduct, ethics, and morality, while providing emotional, moral, and spiritual support. Therefore, the impact of FBOs, which mobilize people and sensitize them regarding important issues, such as encouraging education, is significant. FBOs in Sierra Leone contribute to practical matters, including school construction and rehabilitation, provision of school materials, providing scholarships to pupils and teachers, offering in-service training for teachers and compensating some teachers for non-payment of salaries. Indeed, their steady, often grassroots-based work, was acknowledged by the government, which sees them as important service providers, and offers FBOs grants to propose and implement projects. This is because there are some comparative advantages of FBOs in development work in Sierra Leone, including long-term commitment to the served community and closeness to the poor and marginalized. Moreover, FBOs have use of churches or mosques as bases, and good networks, even in rural areas, where about 70 percent of the population lives. As FBOs are rooted in the communities that they serve and cover wide regions, the government and NGOs ask FBOs for their cooperation in school construction and advocacy work.

However, the fact that FBOs in Sierra Leone lack financial resources, and consequently the MEST offers them grants for provision of education, regarding them as "service providers", brings to mind some of the cynical arguments concerning development and NGOs: Hudock [20] points out that when southern NGOs receive funds from the government, 'their legitimacy as non-governmental actors is eroded and their relationship with clients at the field level is compromised'. This reflects the nature of the word "contractor" [20][21], and could apply to FBOs in Sierra Leone too. In this respect, how FBOs in Sierra Leone form partnerships with the government needs further study. Nonetheless, this study shows that when the government's ability to provide education is not adequate, FBOs can bring about effective outcomes and their involvement in development projects is vital. This is because FBOs can reach beneficiaries effectively, including those otherwise marginalized. In order to bring about a more democratic society and sustainable development, people's empowerment and participation in civil life is necessary. Particularly unless the poor and the marginalized are actively engaged in the development process, the aimed development cannot reflect their values and needs, and therefore attain sustainability. Education can play an instrumental role in providing the means to obtain information through literacy and cultivating people as to having a sense of their rights, citizenship and democratic values. This can lead to people exercising power and participating in social and political activities. Considering Sierra Leone's current process of national development, the role of FBOs in the education sector is important in aiming to achieve UPE and building a democratic society. FBOs will be more actively involved as key players in this area, and study of the effects of their work and strengths and their weaknesses is thus very important.

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