



# Founding Principles

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**CHANGE**

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# MIND TO CHANGE – Sierra Leone

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES

### MISSION STATEMENT

Mind to Change aims to help (re-)build the postwar society in finding ways for the society to absorb and involve vulnerable groups and people who find themselves in the margins of society, through empowerment of members of vulnerable groups with the tools to help them develop into responsible citizens and to help them (re)build their own lives.

### WHO

Mind to Change will mainly target former child soldiers, war affected youths, the war disabled and children and youths who deviate from mainstream society, as well as talented young people who lack the means to develop themselves in their professional careers.

### GOAL

Our main goal is to bring members of vulnerable groups back to mainstream society and to actively involve them in their communities, raise their awareness of their rights and duties as citizens of the community and the necessity of their contribution to society, and finally, to enable them to take responsibility over their own lives.

### HOW





Our main activity is education, in every sense thinkable. Our programs will range from basic literacy and basic knowledge trainings to scholarships for basic education, academic education, to professional training and job counseling. Mind to Change will make long term investments in individuals as part of their communities. We will relate the needs of the individual to the needs of their communities and the society as a whole, to advise and to enable them to undergo the appropriate training for their professional development. We will employ an 'all the way' approach: a twenty two year old ex-child soldier who is detached from his/her family and community who has the potential to develop him or herself in the academic field, for example, will be guided through his or her educational career until we can deliver him or her at their first job. From secondary school level to university and from university to the practical training necessary to fit in the job market. Mind to Change will provide the individual with material and immaterial assistance and we will try to re-

establish his or her ties with their families and communities and find ways to put them back in the care of their legal caretakers.





## OBJECTIVES | one

Mind to Change will focus its projects and programs on empowering and capacitating individual members of vulnerable groups to enable them to develop their own lives in the postwar society through education, capacity building and skills training.

Mind to Change will:











-  Stimulate durable peace,
-  Protect and promote the rights of members of vulnerable groups,
-  Stimulate societal reintegration and (re)building of the postwar society,
-  Educate donor countries about the effects and challenges of war and living in a postwar society, as well as educate donor countries about life in a developing country.

through;












-  the implementation of programs and projects in postwar societies
-  educational campaigns in postwar societies and donor countries to raise awareness
-  scientific research for the development of effective programs and the general good
-  participation and involvement in the political debate and policy making

## BELIEFS | two

Mind to Change believes that a humanitarian approach means that both beneficiaries and staff members are individuals, with individual needs and interests and both should be in harmony with each other. We also believe that:

-  the needs of the beneficiaries should always be central in our approach.
-  the knowledge and ideas that beneficiaries have of their own problems and of solutions for their own situation should lie at the heart of our projects and programs.
-  for every problem there must be a multifunctional solution.
-  our work must have a lasting impact.
-  knowledge is power, in every sense thinkable.
-  in many cases, a chance is all people need to help themselves.
-  the people involved know what they need,
-  therefore change must come from within the individual and the community,
-  and therefore effective assistance should come from within.
-  our beneficiaries should not become dependent on us.

## TOOLS | three

-  Practical skills training with a special focus on illiterates, with the purpose of
  -  (Re) building the postwar society
  -  Enhancing the quality of individual lives
-  Basic education, with a special focus on adult education and basic literacy training for illiterates
-  Higher education, with the purpose of
  -  Creating better job prospects for individuals
  -  (Re) building the postwar society
-  Computer skills training for individuals, with the purpose of
  -  Preparing individuals for the job market
  -  Creating better job prospects for individuals
-  Supplying materials, start capital and knowledge for small businesses

## APPROACH | four

The backbone of Mind to Change will be a personal approach, in which the needs of the individual are directly related to the needs of the postwar society, so that both the individual and society as a whole benefit from our projects and programs.

The keywords, that form the foundation of Mind to Change, are:

*Chance, Small scale projects, Personal approach, Individuals as part of the community, Target group involvement, Community involvement, Reciprocity, Knowledge before implementation, Long term benefits.*

Mind to Change believes that developmental aid should have a lasting effect on the individuals and the groups that it targets. Short term help is ultimately a 'band aid' that can even cause bigger problems, if the problem remains to exist. The projects of Mind to Change will therefore always focus on the long term, and provide the help and/or assistance that will make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals and the society as a whole. An individual is a member of society, and should get the kind of assistance that will enable him or her to function in his or her own society. Mind to Change will carefully assess the needs of the individual, his or her own community and the wider society before designing and implementing projects, or giving assistance to individuals. The needs of people in agricultural areas, for example, differ from the needs of people in big cities. Mind to Change will

find the link between the different needs and interests and will design projects that place the individual in the whole and that will suit the whole on a long term basis, instead of the different parts on a short term basis.

The word 'chance' is key and central to our method. Mind to Change aims to provide individuals and groups with the fair chance to take control over and to (re)build their own lives, to (one) enhance the quality of life in general and (two) avoid future dependence on humanitarian help.

For developmental aid to be successful and to adequately reach the needs of the beneficiaries, it is necessary to actively involve the target group, the community and the wider society. Mind to Change will therefore actively involve the target group and the community in designing and implementing projects and programs and work closely with (local) government and local organizations to assess the needs of all parties involved and to efficiently implement our projects and programs. Mind to Change will first carefully explore the needs in the field and of the parties involved, and organize workgroups and think-tanks before designing our programs. We will work with pilot projects to monitor the effect of and flaws in our programs before implementing it on a larger scale. Follow up research on the long term will be part of our strategy to monitor our own methods and programs.

Mind to Change believes that reciprocity should be one of the backbones of effective help. We will ask our beneficiaries to actively contribute to our programs. If you receive assistance, you will have to give something in return. With this approach, we hope to spread knowledge and encourage the (re)building of trust relationships in the community. By asking recipients of a computer skills training, for example, to teach other groups, the recipient gains experience in teaching, shares his or her own knowledge with others and broadens his or her social network.

Mind to Change also believes that there is a great potential in the community with regard to humanitarian help. What may seem to be a 'service' or 'sacrifice' for some groups, could prove to be a benefit or chance for other groups. Mind to Change aims to relate needs, so that they can mutually promote and solve each other. By using and guiding local students, for example, to research the field and our projects, Mind to Change will gain better knowledge (that has its roots in the local community) and help develop the local educational system at the same time.

The ultimate goal of our method is to enable people to help themselves. Our projects will be designed in such a way that, if their prolongation is required, they can be continued or maintained by community members.

## JUSTIFICATION

### TARGET GROUP - one

Mind to Change will mainly target former child soldiers, but our projects will also encompass other vulnerable groups in society (eg. the (war) disabled, and (war) orphans). The reason for our choice of a broader target group is threefold:

- One, to prevent stigmatization and resentment of former child soldiers in the wider society*
- Two, to measure the effectiveness of our programs*
- Three, to gain knowledge about child soldiering in general, by determining if and in what way child soldiers differ from their peers and other vulnerable groups in society.*

The eleven years Sierra Leonean Civil War officially ended in January of 2002. In the course of the war, and immediately after its official ending, a total number of 6,845 child soldiers registered for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration programs (DDR). Some of them received an amount in cash in exchange for their weapon(s), some of them received practical skills training and a toolbox, and others received payment for one or two years in (mostly basic) education.

Many different institutions, scholars and researchers have reported about the flaws and ineffectiveness of the DDR programs in Sierra Leone; most former child combatants who went through 'DDR' were unable to find jobs or to complete basic education. Next to that, an unknown (but considerable) number of child soldiers reintegrated into society without the help of DDR-programs, because

- One, some of them escaped or ended their participation in the armed force(s) in the course of the war, when no DDR-programs were in place,*
- Two, out of fear for prosecution or stigmatization,*
- Three, because they could apply for DDR programs due to outside pressure (eg. girl combatants who were denied access to the DDR centers by their husbands),*
- Four, because they had reached adulthood in the course of their participation and could not apply for demobilization programs for adult combatants because they did not fulfill the criteria for this category,*
- Five, only a small number of CDF child soldiers were demobilized because the CDF denied having children in its ranks.*

Former child soldiers form a 'forgotten group' in the humanitarian sector. They are no longer children, but young adults, and they cause relatively little trouble in the postwar society. Their reintegration

therefore, on the surface, seems to be fairly successful. The quality of their lives however, is poor and although they have been accepted back into (mainstream) society, the population still treats them with some degree of distrust. With the 2007 national elections, for example, many Sierra Leoneans expressed a concern and in some cases even the fear that former child soldiers could and would be used to threaten the peace and national security. In order to build a stable civil society after war, the citizens of the country must have a sense of security and mutual trust relationships have to be re-established. Mind to Change aims to help members of vulnerable groups to find their ways in mainstream society, so that they can contribute to the (re)building of the postwar society and live meaningful lives as postwar civilians.

## **Rationale**

*Individual* – Mind to Change believes that most former child soldiers participated in armed forces because of push and pull factors that were beyond their control. After their reintegration, they have felt betrayed and most of them feel that they still don't belong to society. Mind to Change aims to bring former child soldiers 'back on board', to give them a sense of belonging to society, to help them to familiarize themselves with and adhere to societal norms and values, and to take active part in their communities to enhance the quality of their individual lives.

*Society* – Former child soldiers who don't have future prospects are vulnerable to develop deviant lifestyles which ultimately forms a threat to the stability of the postwar society. If former child soldiers are given the chance to contribute to their communities in a positive sense, they will be accepted back into mainstream society more easily, which should ultimately make them less vulnerable to deviation from mainstream society. In simple terms: if they have something to lose, they will be more enticed to stay on the straight path.

## **Broadening the target group**

In the case of Sierra Leone, it were not only the child soldiers who had to reintegrate, but society as a whole had been ravaged by the civil war and needed to be redefined and rebuilt. In present day Sierra Leone, the effects of the war are still noticeable. The situation in the country is rapidly improving, but poverty is still prevalent. Many people still lack access to basic facilities like clean (drinking) water and sanitary facilities, and illiteracy and unemployment rates are still very high. In short, ex-child soldiers are not the only ones who have to rebuild their lives and objectively speaking, their situation does not differ that much from that of many of their peers whose social development, for whatever reasons, got halted during the war. With this difference, that former child soldiers are more vulnerable to develop violent lifestyles than their peers.

In order to prevent stigmatization and resentment of former child soldiers in the society, community and their own families, Mind to Change will also target members of other vulnerable groups who have little to no possibilities to develop their professional lives. In this respect, we want to pay special attention to war victims and talented young people.

## BACKGROUND- two

The opinion of other people is one of the major determinants of how child soldiers reflect on their own participation, and eventually give meaning to it. After the conclusion of the war, Sierra Leoneans in general and ex-child soldiers in particular came up with their own explanations for the war, and in their reconstructions of the past, they developed viewpoints that enabled them to come to terms with the past and that will enable them to build their futures. These reconstructions don't take place in the seclusion of one's head, but are given meaning in the wider society, just like past experiences are constantly given new meanings. The explanations ex-child soldiers give for their own motivation to fight and their behavior during their participation, often changes concordantly with the opinions and viewpoints of others, which gives an important impetus to their experiences and the way they interpret their pasts. Because ex-child soldiers readjust their own understandings about their participation in relationships with others, it is important to realize that every depiction of child soldiers (if it is in their own family, village, town, city, society or even in the rest of the world) plays a role in their experiences. Considering someone to be a vulnerable victim, or the opposite, a senseless killing machine, might well become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Their reason for participation is an important aspect of the experiences of ex-child soldiers, but it does not determine their development into soldiers or combatants, or their growth as human beings. The roles they played, the extent of their autonomy, how they grew into their tasks, and the character and organizational structure of the armed force turn out to be of as much, if not more, influence. Their experiences are strongly connected to the conditions within the armed forces and units in which they participated and the way these armed forces were, and still are, appreciated in the wider society. Fighting for 'the good guys', for example, will give a different meaning to the individual's own interpretation of his or her behavior. No matter if people think that the reasons for the war were genuine, the RUF is generally seen as the reason for the destruction of the country. The Kamajors on the other hand, are largely considered as the liberators of the people. Therefore, there is a big difference between having been a combatant with the RUF and having been a Kamajor. Not only in the eyes of the people around them, but also in their own reflections on themselves as ex-child soldiers.

Next to age, reasons for participation, the objective of the armed force and militaristic functions, the living conditions, autonomy, the (hierarchical) structure of the armed force, the tactics applied and the context of war play an important role in the development of young people into combatants or soldiers. Child soldiers are more than the violent acts they committed. The capability of committing extreme acts of violence is part of the human behavioral repertoire, and it is evidently part of the behavioral repertoire of children and young people. It has nothing to do with cultural conditions or a perceived pre-rational state of mind belonging to the phase of childhood. Violent acts are committed in a certain context and they are coupled with circumstance. If the circumstances change, the participant's willingness to commit violent acts will change.

Most of the ex-combatants assert that the 'trauma' came after the war – the trauma they refer to is social, economic, cognitive and political rather than psychological. Most ex-combatants have stated that they lived more comfortable lives in their armed forces than they do now in postwar society. Almost all of the combatants used violence for functional reasons, either to stay alive, out of obedience, conformity to the group, or to get a promotion in order to have access to privileges. Only some of them went completely overboard and killed out of some sort of addictive feeling or a permanent delirious state.

Although war experiences may not be the most pressing issue in their postwar lives, it does influence their self-image and the makeup of their postwar lives. Some (mostly ex-RUF members) regret their involvement, others (mostly members of the Kamajors) are proud of their participation in the war, but without exception they all regret the war in itself. They feel that the war was "just a waste of time" and a time of "pure destruction and evil"; not so much because they feel damaged by their own use of violence, but because it did not provide them with any lasting benefits. According to our own scientific research, that lies at the heart of the foundation, ex-child soldiers do not differ much from other members of their respective generations. In Sierra Leone, many young people are involved in a daily struggle of survival. This is especially true for those who cannot depend on support from family or other social groups, a situation that is prevalent for many ex-child soldiers. Some ex-combatants have stated that "idleness of the mind makes them to think or do bad things", while non-combatants declared to have disturbing memories of the violence they witnessed when their "brain goes idle". Typically they refer to this as frustrations that come out of the hardships they undergo in everyday life in the postwar society. They feel that when they have a fair chance to rebuild their lives, they will not be troubled by their memories anymore.

The way in which ex-child soldiers develop into their positions as civilians in a postwar situation is not only dependent on their wartime experiences it is also, and in fact even more, dependent on the preconditions in the postwar society. Most ex-child soldiers want to become respected members of society. The will to succeed in life and to remain pacified is clearly present in almost all ex-child soldiers, but without exception they admitted that they could still “be dangerous if they had no other option“. This does not mean that they are ticking time bombs. Their ability to “still be dangerous” is not the result of a psychological trauma or an internalized wickedness that can spark off at any time. The capability of committing extreme acts of violence has become part of their human repertoire; it is something they can use to achieve their goals. Most of them are perfectly capable of making a distinction between wartime and peacetime. Although their participation in armed conflict determines how they develop into combatants or soldiers, it does not determine how they develop into human beings. They developed “the mind to kill” under extreme circumstances. In fact, most of them had to use drugs to achieve that state of mind. Now that the war is over they don’t have the ‘mind’ anymore. If ex-combatants do not manage to embed themselves into postwar society and reintegrate in social economic, cognitive and political sense, though, some of them might be easily enticed to commit violent acts or to take up arms again.