

**Turning Former-military Network into a Public Entity :
Motorbike Taxies and Statehood Authority in post-conflict Sierra Leone**

Hideyuki Okano

Senior Researcher
The Kinugasa Research Organization
Ritsumeikan University

In Sierra Leone, several researchers have illustrated motorbike taxies as ‘peacebuilding from below’ (Bürge 2011; Menzel 2011; Peters 2007). This is because the business is for ex-combatants.

Commanders have leading roles for employing combatants as riders. It means that they convert their military network into business network in post-conflict Sierra Leone. However, the networks of ex-commanders and ex-combatants are taken over by ex-NGO workers. They replace the positions by using non-profitable activities and authority of statehood.

In Africa, informal networks are considered to be vital for operating politics, warfare and businesses. A recent trend on anthropology illustrates how these informal networks function (Utas ed. 2011; Christensen 2013). What Utas calls ‘bigmen’ is the vital figures which mobilize useful individuals in informal networks.

Motorbike taxies in Sierra Leone is not exceptional. Motorbike taxi emerged in Sierra Leone as new business in the early 2000s. The period which motorbike taxies emerge corresponds the transitional period from the civil war (1991-2002) to peace. Ex-combatants and ex-commanders who search for ways of making their livings enter to the business. Ex-commanders work as ‘bigmen’ who mobilize ex-combatants for motorbike taxi business.

Since then, this business has absorbed a large number of youngsters: some of them are ex-combatants, others are not. In parallel with the growth of the business, motorbike taxi business has been institutionalized for the sake of riders and passengers. At first, rider’s associations had been created spontaneously in major towns. Then, they were integrated into a national body: The Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union. In the process of the integration, ex-NGO workers take over the positions of ‘bigmen’.

They take leading roles in riders’ associations by getting funds from NGOs and by using the associations for public activities. In addition, they approach to the government in order for associations to gain more power. Through the process, ex-NGO workers achieve the positions of ‘bigmen’ in the informal networks of taxi riders.