

Brief supporting Evidence Report 38

IS IT THE RIGHT TIME FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO EXIT THE SIERRA LEONE?

Addressing and Mitigating Violence

Jeremy Allouche

(with the collaboration of Cassandra Biggs, Ngolo Katta and James Vincent)

November 2013

The IDS programme on Strengthening Evidence-based Policy works across six key themes. Each theme works with partner institutions to co-construct policy-relevant knowledge and engage in policy-influencing processes. This material has been developed under the Addressing and Mitigating Violence theme.

This development of this material has been led by the Institute of Development Studies who holds the copyright.

Input was provided by Cassandra Biggs, Ngolo Katta and James Vincent. The authors would also like to acknowledge comment, review and feedback on this publication by Markus Shultze-Kraft and Jeremy Lind, as well as to thank the Center for Coordination of Youth Activities, CCYA-Sierra Leone, in particular Ngolo Katta (National Coordinator) for supporting the organisation and holding of the policy validation workshop at their offices in Freetown.

The material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

AG Level 2 Output ID: 35

IS IT THE RIGHT TIME FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO EXIT THE SIERRA LEONE?

Jeremy Allouche

(with the collaboration of Cassandra Biggs, Ngolo Katta and James Vincent)

November 2013

This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are clearly credited.

First published by the Institute of Development Studies in November 2013
© Institute of Development Studies

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (No. 877338).

Executive Summary

In the eyes of the international community, Sierra Leone is seen as the model for successful post-conflict peacebuilding. At the end of 2012, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that it had removed Sierra Leone from its list of 'fragile and conflict-affected' countries, and graduated the country to low-income status. On paper, the move reflected Sierra Leone's more stable political environment, as evidenced by largely fair and violence-free elections in November 2012. The success of the elections was also highlighted UNIPSIL (United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone) as a reason to wrap up its mission, which it will do by 2014. A glance at key indicators – in terms of growth forecast and stable elections – will project Sierra Leone as a model for a successful post-conflict state. However, a detailed analysis of the country's socioeconomic trends, its political institutions and the logic and dynamics of violence show a more disturbing picture where actually Sierra Leone today shares similar conditions with the Sierra Leone before the outbreak of the civil war.

Efforts by the international donor community to decentralise power to the margins, both geographically and demographically, have failed. Instead, this focus on the institutions of governance has allowed the same elite to maintain power, and at the same time, created a new layer of elite to benefit from reforms, natural resources and donor funds.

Sierra Leone remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. In the decade after the civil war, it remained in the bottom ten of the 180+ countries on the Human Development Index – a measure of people's freedoms and their standard of living, focusing on health and levels of education. Over the past two years, it has moved up three places, driven by an increase in GDP that is the result of royalties from mining the country's natural resources: diamonds, iron ore, rutile, bauxite, and gold. Yet, while Sierra Leone's GDP has shown significant improvements over the last few years (GDP was projected to grow 35.9 per cent in 2012),¹ this improvement has only benefited a narrow layer of elite, at both the national and local levels, and failed to trickle down to ordinary citizens. The lack of transparency around national resource revenue and the failure of robust government oversight on how those revenues are spent, led this year to the suspension of Sierra Leone from EITI, the Extractive Industries Transparency Index.

Anger and frustration at the inequalities are again manifesting as violence, in the mining areas, on the streets and in universities and schools, at times manipulated by the very politicians who are supposed to serve and protect citizens. Many youth gangs took part in violence around the 2003 and 2007 elections. Violence has also broken out between fans of rival music labels, and between fraternities in schools, which are also divided along national political lines and fanned by a political elite looking to mobilise a youth wing. With disenfranchised youth feeling disempowered and cut off from society, organised crime and gang membership can offer them a sense of belonging and purpose. While not on the scale seen during the decade of conflict from 1991 to 2002, these new, emerging forms of violence are worryingly omnipresent in daily life. At the forefront of this violence are the youth, who feel they have again been excluded by the institutions that are supposed to represent them – the National Youth Commission and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, both of which are run by figures from the country's political establishment – and in which they have little voice. In the 15 years that the international community has been in Sierra Leone,

¹ IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2012.

very little has been done to address youth exclusion, one of the grievances considered a driver in the conflict. Youth unemployment stands at about 60%, compounded by a nascent private sector based almost exclusively on the non-labour-intensive mining industry and a lack of opportunities for education.

In addition, an externally imposed peace agreement that focused on ending the conflict, and disarming the population, has meant there have been few efforts to address any of the lingering animosity between ex-combatants and those who suffered during 11 years of war. Building peace, reconciliation and trust among the populace was a second-order priority. Many feel a sense of injustice that the crimes that were committed across the country were never dealt with. Only 13 people were ever tried for war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, yet hundreds more carried out atrocities for which they never had to answer. Ostracised from their communities, however, many youth ex-combatants have again been pushed to the margins.

Sierra Leone's winner-takes-all style of politics has been highlighted by the UN as one of the biggest risks to stability in the country. Up until now, it has largely been mediated by the international community and while the electoral violence of the previous two elections was avoided in 2012, it is unclear if the government can maintain that without the support of external forces.

We therefore make the following recommendations.

Youth employment and empowerment

Youth employment has been neglected as a policy priority both by the international community and the government of Sierra Leone. Youth employment programmes focus on providing youth with work opportunities in agriculture in rural areas. While this is an important aspect of the country's development, it will not suit all individuals and there have to be opportunities for those who do not want to work in agriculture (Sumberg & Okali 2013). Many youth want to remain in the urban areas where they have been since the end of the war. More employment should be generated through investment in industry, and that means a renewed focus on power generation. The Agenda for Prosperity, which is the newly articulated Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for 2013–2018, needs to have clear, robust targets for youth employment, as currently its methods for including youth in the economic development of the country are ambiguous. At the same time, despite the creation of the National Youth Commission, the political space for youth has not opened up and more avenues for the youth to express themselves and to realise their potential need to be created so that they can be properly involved in governance and in the decision-making process. Both youth employment and empowerment are central as these are linked to economically motivated violence, which is a substantial problem in Sierra Leone.

Resource extraction and revenue distribution

Sierra Leone's expected growth in relation to the mining economy is substantial. Land is gaining value and there are now many conflicts in rural areas over land rights. More fundamentally, there are many questions around the benefits of mining development for the local community. In this respect, the government of Sierra Leone should take all the steps necessary to rejoin the Extractive Industry Transparency Index (EITI). The EITI Board asked Sierra Leone to undertake four remedial actions for the suspension to be lifted, namely: (1) that all relevant companies and government entities participate in the reporting process; (2) that the disclosures from government entities are based on accounts audited to international standards; (3) that the government ensures that all material companies comprehensively disclose

all material payments in accordance with the agreed reporting templates; and finally (4) that the government ensures that all government agencies comprehensively disclose all material revenues in accordance with the agreed reporting templates. These corrective actions could be addressed by publishing a supplementary 2010 EITI Report, or through the 2011 EITI Report to be published before 31 December 2013.

Divisive politics

Sierra Leone's winner-takes-all politics is causing national divisions that are spilling over into schools and onto the street. Building on successful experiences to date, there should be more focus on activities that build peace, such as intergroup sports activities and peace clubs that reward schools for peaceful term times. Furthermore, the divisions between ex-combatants and communities needs to be addressed through new initiatives that deal with the reconciliation process. The government of Sierra Leone and donors should respond to youth's call for education as the linchpin of their recovery and should make the reconstruction of formal and non-formal education systems and the promotion of youth's livelihoods and entrepreneurship a priority. Divisive politics are for the moment framed as a two-sided dispute between political parties but there are dangers that the division may become a two-sided dispute between the youth and the elderly.

In the light of these three challenges that are linked to emerging new forms of violence, the government of Sierra Leone and the international community should include conflict prevention as a core aid priority as part of UNIPSIL exit strategy and donor transition strategies. This focus would entail maintaining the conditions for investment in youth employment and youth empowerment, expanding off-farm employment and would encourage accountability and transparency mechanisms in relation to resource extraction and revenue distribution.