How Does Participation Work? Deliberation and Performance in African Food Security

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1 Introduction

Debates about science, participation and development have been pursued in both Development Studies and Science and Technology Studies (Leach *et al.* 2005; Collins and Evans 2002). Participation (it is argued) assumes two forms – deliberative and performative. Deliberative participation seeks agreement on strategies through discursive means. Performative participation bases itself upon involvement in a set of actions (including both ritual and utilitarian actions). Citizen juries and stakeholder consultations are examples of deliberative participation. Performative participation covers modes of action ranging from political rituals (Perri 6 2007) to technological interventions such as farmer field schools and participatory breeding (Almekinders and Hardon 2007). The two forms of participation appear to involve distinct mechanisms – rational persuasion and a broadly 'musical' kind of process. The scope of rational deliberation is limited by 'leadership effects'. Appropriately configured performative mechanisms may be useful in breaking out of discursive 'loops'. The possibility is tested through an experiment in war-zone seed-system rehabilitation.

2 Mechanisms of participation
2.1 Deliberative participation
In deliberative events, participants respond (it is supposed) to high quality arguments (Jackman and Sniderman 2006: 274). Deliberation allows for the expression of preferences and negotiation of consensus or compromise. Discursive reason replaces power (Habermas 1989) and better decisions emerge (e.g. more effective, widely supported policies, etc).

Humphreys and co-workers (2006: 584) seek to test whether deliberative participation 'return[s] the

benefits attributed'. They do so through analysis of data from an experiment in deliberative democracy in the West African island republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

The government of this small but newly oil-rich democracy agreed to implement a national consultation about corruption and government expenditure. Humphreys and colleagues were involved in designing and monitoring the consultation. A total of 148 groups met to discuss a set of 12 basic questions covering topics such as health, transport and education.[1] Discussions were assisted by facilitators drawn from the National Statistical Office and various civil society organisations. Facilitators were required to report the views of participants and a degree of consensus reached. Allocation of facilitators to specific meetings was randomised to permit statistically valid assessment of the extent to which group preferences displayed leadership effects.

A significant part of the variance in views expressed by groups was explained by the identity of the leader. Groups led by women tended to prefer local health provision to centralised hospitals; groups led by older men were less critical of corruption, and so forth. Depending on the question being considered, leader identity accounted for between one-fifth and one-third of variance in the views expressed. Highly statistically significant leadership-correlated effects were found in answers to 11 out of 12 questions discussed. Furthermore, 'fully two-thirds of the variation in the reported levels of consensus achieved during the discussions can be accounted for on the basis of leader specific affects alone' (Humphreys *et al.* 2006: 608). The article concludes:

The results are unambiguous: while 3500 adults were consulted, the actual outcomes were in fact largely determined by only a handful of individuals. Knowing which member of the country's political elite was randomly selected to lead the discussions provides an extraordinarily powerful indicator of what policies the participants in each group ostensibly supported.

(Humphreys *et al.* 2006: 604)

What does this tell us about how deliberative participation works? More than 'high quality argument' must have been involved. In fact, the authors suggest participants may have imposed self-censorship, or leaders misreported meetings, were active in persuading participants to adopt certain views, or managed information to favour achieved outcomes. If rational choice is the mechanism of deliberative participation it supports only a highly bounded rationality (cf. Arrow 1994).

With regard to everyday political arguments Jackman and Sniderman (2006: 274) have proposed that, 'two mechanisms … argumentation and deliberation' are involved. Data which they analysed from an experiment in France suggest that low quality (unreasoned) arguments also play a role. This introduces us to the idea of a performative mechanism – in this case, *force* of argument. It is not the content but the *act* of argumentation that shapes opinion.

What kinds of performance might have shaped opinion on Sao Tome and Principe? Many West Africans attain adulthood through initiation into sodalities ('secret societies'). One explanation for the spread of these sodalities is that they counter-balanced the power of mercantile elites during the period of the Atlantic slave trade (cf. d'Azevedo 1962). Although Humphreys *et al.* (2006) do not report on the presence of sodalities in rural Sao Tome and Principe, performative mechanisms invoking respect for leadership via initiation would definitely be worth hypothesising for adjacent areas on the West African mainland.[2] Deliberation, in such circumstances, may be seen (by participants) not as an opportunity to debate different points of view but to demonstrate commitment to a group (Douglas 1970). To address leadership effects may require not better arguments but a different kind of performance.

2.2 Performative participation

Rational choice rests on assumptions of methodological individualism (the hypothesis that individual agency is, in fact, the basis for all decision-making in social life).[3] A theoretical tradition established by Durkheim (but to which, according to Lockwood (1992), Gramsci's notion of hegemony should also be assimilated), counters this approach. Durkheim (1964 [1893]) argues that the individual is the product of a group process through which persons are rendered sacrosanct. Theory focuses on explaining elementary (i.e. foundational) processes through which collective representations and sacred elements (i.e. moral orders) are shaped. A key mechanism is the rite (Durkheim 1995 [1912]).

Ritual is often viewed in terms of the recapitulation of emotional states associated with moral alignments or shared values (collective representations). This has created the impression that the rite is a kind of signalling system based on a symbolic code. For example, Rappaport (1999: 405) claims that 'at the heart of ritual … is the relationship of performers to performances of invariant sequences of acts and utterances which they did not encode'.

Durkheimian theory is (in fact) less concerned with symbolic and recapitulative aspects of rites than with their functioning as mechanisms through which shared feelings and values are first generated (Bellah 2005; Collins 2004; Perri 6 2007). Acting as a group stirs emotional excitement. Collective energy becomes fixed upon symbols or ideas with sacred significance. Taking part in a rite creates belief through emotional entrainment. Belief is not the cause of the action but its product. We believe because we pray. Gods and spirits (and symbolic paraphernalia) are epiphenomena. What matters is the cult; 'it is always the cult that is efficacious … we must act, and we … must repeat the necessary acts as often as is necessary to renew their effects' (Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 420).

As a label for this generative aspect of ritual action Durkheim used the term 'effervescence'.[4] It was through 'effervescence' that the French National Assembly voted on 4 August 1789 (against its own interest) to abolish feudalism. The modern French nation was founded in a sudden 'act of sacrifice and abnegation that each … member had refused to make the night before and by which all were surprised the morning after' (Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 212).

'Effervescence' flags an important insight concerning rites as modes of collective action, and their effect, but the underlying mechanism is far from being fully understood (Perri 6 2007). Possibilities of progress towards a more fully elaborated account can be glimpsed from the perspective of bio-musicology.

Moving to a beat seems to be a uniquely human capability (Benzon 2002). Measured responses to musical stimuli show that 'brain neurodynamics tracks musicklike [sic] sequences more accurately than nonmusicklike [sic] sequences' (Benzon 2002: 43). This suggests a 'morphodynamic isomorphism between the tonal flow of music and its neurophysiological substrates' (Benzon 2002: 42, quoting Wallin 1991). Musicians have often reported 'out of body' experiences, and a sense of being part of something bigger when a performance flows well.[5] Benzon (2002) sees this as evidence that music and dance are a crucial means through which individual consciousnesses become coordinated.

Examining a case of first contact between Europeans and Australian aboriginals, Cross (2006) explores the implications of evidence that the event was 'danced out'. Music, he avers, is a sphere of 'unassigned intentionality' through which humans rehearse the possibility of sociality. The give-and-take of a medium for social interaction 'with inexplicitness at its core' generates elementary understandings of coordination and interaction that eventually blossom into the idea of justice (Cross 2006). It is the *action* of give-and-take that creates space for notions of cooperation.[6]

Here, Cross's argument will be extended to include technological means, conceived of as 'instruments of human life'.[7] Too often perceived mainly or exclusively in terms of knowledge or kit, technology is a way of *doing* things. Doing things has a double aspect – it both achieves material outcomes and fixes social values, through aligning energies and emotional commitments, among the group engaged in the 'doing'.[8] In this sense, I make no fundamental distinction between the instruments deployed by musician and engineer. The technology of rice agriculture (in the West African case considered below) includes both drums and hoes. The hoe shapes the soil at the same time as the drum aligns the movements of the workers doing the shaping. It is proper to consider both as instruments of agricultural activity. In short, the emphasis below is performative, with specific recognition of the rite-like character of many kinds of technical practice.[9] The rite-like character of seed-system distribution in a context of emergency food security in an African war zone will be stressed.

The material to be examined derives from studies in a war-affected Upper West African country – Sierra Leone. The main agricultural staple of the Upper West African coastal zone is rice. An unusually large range of rice types is deployed by small-scale farmers, as a consequence of this being the only region in the world in which rice is the main staple where two separately domesticated species of rice are cultivated side by side.[10] Seeds spread through many means. These include natural causes, friendship networks, and theft, as well as through conscious efforts at dissemination. Localised reciprocity has technical advantages where (as here) a large number of seed types is suited to a wide range of localised applications. Seed reciprocity (it will be argued) also sustains egalitarian collective representations. By displacing farm populations and ending local seed reciprocities war undermined egalitarian cultural values. Postwar humanitarianism unwittingly boosted patrimonial political values by distributing seed in a top-down manner. Efforts were then made to re-boot egalitarian seed exchange. Data suggest that this activity was effective, and a corresponding strengthening of cooperative values was reported. Preliminary assessment suggests that the 'inexplicit inclusiveness' of egalitarian seed distribution helped enrich rituals of deliberative participation, and provided a challenge to 'leadership effects'.

3 Case study: engineering food security in postwar central Sierra Leone

A student-led rebel movement protesting one-party rule and corruption in a diamond-rich economy began an insurgency in the forests of eastern and southern Sierra Leone in 1991 (Richards 1996). Rural populations in central Sierra Leone (a region noted for its rice surpluses, supplying the diamond districts in particular) were first displaced in 1994–5, when the insurgent movement – staffed mainly by capture of socially detached rural youths – failed to capture the provincial headquarters town of Bo (December 1994) and went to ground in isolated farming country north-west of Bo.

Fleeing villagers mostly sought protection from the army and international peace-keepers in camps around Bo, but began to return to their farms under

a short-lived peace agreement in 1996–7. The area had been extensively looted for food by rebel fighters, and returning farmers lacked food, seeds and tools. An international development agency (henceforth 'the agency') took on responsibilities for four chiefdoms (traditional administrative units) closest to rebel-held territory in 1998–9. In the first instance, it supplied food-for-work, to re-establish farming after two or three years of abandonment. Later it mainly supplied tools and seeds.

The return of farmers to their villages was led by local hunters (later formed into a counter-insurgency militia by a British–South African company linked to diamond mining). The rebels vented fury at the previous one-party regime through atrocities against its local representatives (Richards 2005a). Chiefs were among the last to return. Seeking to avoid association with a compromised pre-war administrative system, the agency formed instruments of its own, Village Development Committees (VDC).

The VDC was supposedly a group of civilian volunteers tasked with helping the agency (through superior knowledge of the local social landscape) to distribute inputs to the most needy groups and individuals. Each VDC had a male and female leader, and excluded chiefs and fighters. It assisted the agency to register genuine beneficiaries and accounted for distribution at the village level.

But things were not working out well. VDCs seemingly commandeered benefits for their own use, reverting to practices, in regard to development resources, associated with chiefs in the pre-war period. Local populations – especially those subsisting in bush hiding places in no-man's-land (Mende *sokuihun*, lit. 'corners') – were missing from registration documents. The first names on every distribution list, by contrast, were those of the VDC.

Tackled about these anomalies VDC members explained they had been selected as responsible, community-minded persons. They took this as confirmation of their status as patrons (Mende *numuwaisia*, lit. 'big people', i.e. those with many social responsibilities).[11] Thus they needed to ensure they had enough to distribute via their own patrimonial networks.

'Corner' dwellers, and other internally displaced populations, were 'unknown quantities' (unspoken but implied was the assumption that anyone who

had failed to flee during the rebel incursion must in some way be a collaborator). The VDC membership, it was explained, could be accountable to the agency only for its own clients. This made clear one of the problems associated with patrimonialism – its far from comprehensive scope, excluding as many as it protects.

Increased exclusion entailed by a decaying system of patronage was plausibly one of the major causes of the war (Richards 2005a). The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) justified its campaign of violence on the grounds that its members were those excluded from crumbling systems of state educational provision. Even government-loyalist 'hunters' protecting local villages had begun to articulate 'rebel' thoughts about their lack of access to humanitarian distribution.

The agency was also unhappy with its own performance. Inputs (seeds and tools) were substandard. For example, a consignment of badly deteriorated imported groundnuts was certified as acceptable and distributed to returning farmers. Women (major planters of groundnuts) cleared farms in very insecure conditions only to receive inputs with germination potential of less than 10 per cent, but they had been afraid to criticise at the time. The agency was seen as their only protector and patron in conditions of great extremity.

A decision was made to change course.[12] The agency sought to address evident programme defects and challenge patrimonialism as the only viable mode of social accountability.[13] An obvious problem was that deliberation risked triggering 'leadership effects'. Things might work out differently if 'inexplicit inclusiveness' based on practice enriched the deliberative process. The intention was not to impose new accountabilities but engage local alternatives.[14]

One of the first issues to be tackled through performative means was the agency's own (unwitting) patrimonial role. This was handled by adopting a rights-based approach to food security. Exemplary manifestation of the agency's role as a duty holder in regard to food security was attempted through introduction of two new practices – registration of all residents in the area as beneficiaries (not just heads of recognised households) and supply of seed types according to individual user preferences.[15]

Table 1a Knowledge of VDC by gender

| | Yes | | No | | All | |
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Female	234	52	220	48	454	100
Male	236	62	143	38	379	100
All	470	56	363	44	833	100

Table 1b Knowledge of VDC by age and gender

| | Male | | Female | | All | |
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Elder	95/161	59	89/182	49	184/343	54
Youth	141/218	65	145/272	53	286/490	58
All	236/379	62	234/454	52	470/833	56

The first practice made clear that everybody counted; no one was to be excluded, whatever their origins or status. The second practice attempted to correct one of the ways in which the agency had unwittingly undermined an important mechanism of local food security.

Pre-war seed acquisition depended on two main (and contrasted) strategies. A farmer short of rice seed might seek a bulk loan from a better supplied farmer in which 'non-market' repayment rates cemented a patron–client relationship. But poorer farmers also sought to improve food security through experimentation, i.e. careful adaptation of local and incoming seed types to a range of wetland and dry land farming niches (Richards 1986).[16] The major modality for acquiring materials for experimentation was to swap or gift small amounts of seed.[17] Pre-war food security thus engaged two major normative frames – hierarchical values (patronage) and an egalitarian culture of gift exchange.[18]

Rehabilitation via VDCs, it was now recognised, had boosted patrimonialism at the expense of egalitarianism. The new project set out to correct this imbalance. The distributional modality was changed so that all registered persons were offered seeds of choice in 10 kg starter packs, where previously the agency had supplied recommended varieties in bulk to household heads as nominated by

VDCs. The new approach, it was envisaged, would help restore pre-war levels of adaptive agro-diversity and thus kick start a war-damaged performative mechanism of egalitarian social cooperation.

A link was then sought with the deliberative process. A new ritual was proposed – the village peace-and-rights day, modelled on ceremonies of ancestral remembrance (Mende *leeni, leebi*, cf. Krio: *awujo*).[19] Peace-and-rights days were launched by ancestral libations to invoke peace. The main part of the day was taken up with deliberations over causes of local conflicts, using a human rights framework. Closure was signalled by the public distribution of seed packs to every person in the locality recorded in project registration documents. Bags were a convenient size to head-load home, colour coded by gender and age. The principle of inclusive distribution was made evident to all.

This ritualised cycle of meetings was supposed to become an annual event, to address matters likely to disrupt or reinforce the peace. The second event in the cycle was supposed to review the extent to which social cooperation had been boosted by egalitarian seed distributions, thus creating a feedback loop from performance to deliberation.

Later stages were disrupted by a donor decision to break apart the performative and deliberative

Table 2 Perceptions of purpose of VDC. Of 470 claims (56%) to know about the VDC (among 833 baseline interviewees), 413 (86%) persons stated a total of 834 purposes, classified by keywords

Accommodation (67), visitors (63) [97 persons]
Community (128), develop (200), participate (13), mobilise (9) [250 persons]
Conflict resolution (7), unity (155)
Construction (12), school (4)
Credit (9), inputs (12)
Liaison (8), manage (9), represent (9)
Government (6), NGO (49), the agency (27), chief (2)
Welfare (45)

elements, thus effectively ending the experiment.[20] The notion of fostering local debate about patrimonialism may have been viewed as ill-timed in relation to British support for a tradition-minded postwar regime intent on restoring the power of chiefs to the countryside (Fanthorpe 2006; Jackson 2007).[21]

The analysis here presented draws on a 10 per cent randomly sampled 'baseline' survey compiled during the first two years of operation,[22] complemented by observation of peace-and-rights days, attendance at various village discussions and interviews with key informants. Evidence in regard to three issues is presented: the patrimonial character of the VDC, the functioning of the performative mechanism, and the modification of the deliberative process through performative inputs.

4 Results
4.1 The patrimonial character of the VDC
Respondents were first asked whether they knew about the VDC (Table 1a). Over the total baseline sample (*n* = 833), 56 per cent said they were aware of a VDC in their village. This knowledge was greater among males (62 per cent) than females (52 per cent). It was also slightly greater among younger

(58 per cent) than older people (54 per cent). The most aware group was young men (65 per cent) and the least aware group was older women (49 per cent) (Table 1b).

Respondents were then asked about perceptions of purpose of the VDC. Of the 470 persons claiming knowledge of the VDC, 413 (86 per cent) gave a total of 834 purposes. The major purposes reported, classified by keywords, are listed in Table 2. Most frequently used words referred to 'development' (200 mentions) and 'unity' (155 mentions). Significantly, however, a sizeable group of words referred to the VDC as meeting the agency's own needs – including facilitating visits (63 mentions) and accommodation for project staff (67 mentions).

Attention was paid to how the VDC was formed. Among those with knowledge of the VDC it was overwhelmingly claimed that membership was determined by appointment (240 instances) rather than election (15 instances). Some respondents explicitly stated that election was divisive. Qualities required in a VDC member centred on ability, hard work and organisational ability, although trustworthiness was also mentioned 28 times (Table 3).

Table 3 Keywords used to characterise appointment of VDC members

How chosen?	By whom?	Qualities required?
Appoint (240)	All (4)	Ability (40), active (13)
Elect (15)	Community (222)	Intelligent (8)
Nominate (20)	Consensus (6)	Lead (14)
Recommend (2)	Entire (21)	Organise (57)
Select (30)	Meet (23)	Participation (4)
– Chiefs (12)	Unanimous (8)	Sincere (7)
– Elders (7)	Whole village (8)	Trust (28)
– Unspecified (11)		Work (44)

Table 4 Specific reasons for appointment to VDC
Chiefs
Influential (2)
Vie for position (contest)
Nominated or selected by chiefs (5)
Able to lodge strangers, or feed and accommodate project staff (6)
Wealthy (3)
Appointed by their father
Nominated by the agency
Organise youth for work
Personality
Status useful for external representation

Respondents who supplied specific reasons for appointment to the VDC (Table 4) were frank about patrimonial factors. VDC members who were nominated by the chiefs, were 'big persons' vying among themselves, or had the resources to 'host strangers' (i.e. to act as patrons).

Respondents with knowledge of the VDC were asked whether they could name the male and female chairs of the village VDC (Tables 5a,b).[23] The data presented relates to three larger villages (Gondama, Mogbuama and Rogboya). For the first two, there exist prior ethnographic data on leadership patterns and patrimonial networks.

In Gondama and Rogboya, just over one-half of respondents with knowledge of the VDC could (or would) provide an actual name for the male chair. The figure for Mogbuama was higher (76 per cent) but this probably reflects the fact that this large village at the head of a seasonally motorable track had been a base for agency activities for several years. The correct name for the male chair in Gondama was supplied by

87 per cent, but in Mogbuama and Rogboya by only 51 per cent and 40 per cent of those claiming to be able to give such a name.

Overall, 58 per cent of interviewees in the three villages offered a name for the male chair, but 40 per cent of these names were incorrect. In other words, only 35 per cent of all inhabitants sampled in the three villages in question could accurately name the male chair of the VDC.[24] Between four and eight (incorrect) names were supplied for the male chair. In Gondama and Mogbuama it was apparent from information concerning ranked lineages and *numuwaisia* that 'incorrectly informed' interviewees were loyally naming their own patrons, not the actual chair. Knowledge of the female chair was comparably 'deficient' in Mogbuama and Rogboya. In Gondama there was extensive knowledge of the female chair, a politically well-connected daughter of a former (female) Paramount Chief.

It can be concluded that VDCs comprised an existing patrimonial elite, repackaged for agency purposes,

Table 5a Accuracy of knowledge of male chair of VDC

Village	Number of times VDC chair named	Names cited (names citations)
Mogbuama	77/101 (76%)	6 names (1 39, 1 22, 1 11, 1 3, 2 1)
Gondama	71/132 (54%)	5 names (1 62, 1 6, 3 1)
Rogboya	46/90 (51%)	9 names (1 15, 1 10, 1 9, 1 3, 2 1, 3 2)

Table 5b Accuracy of knowledge of female chair of VDC

Village	Number of times female chair named	Names cited (name citations)
Mogbuama	77/101 (76%)	7 names (1 48, 1 13, 1 8, 2 3, 2 1)
Rogboya	47/90 (52%)	6 names (1 19, 1 16, 1 8, 1 2, 2 1)

Table 6 Farmer rice and groundnut plantings before and after displacement (prior to agency seed-packet distribution)

	Total plantings	No. of farmers	Types planted per farmer
Rice, postwar	1931	781	2.5
Groundnut, pre-war	711	391	1.8
Groundnut, postwar	398	318	1.3

and that this was widely understood to be the case. That deliberation in meetings would tend to follow along patrimonial lines can be readily anticipated from the evidence that a substantial number of interviewees loyally (if incorrectly) named their own patron as head of the VDC. The group of one-third to half of all respondents disclaiming any knowledge of the VDC also deserve comment. Some interviewees may have discreetly preferred to disclaim knowledge rather than name a patron from a faction to which they did not belong. But it is also reasonable to suspect that further work might

discover the marginalised 'underclass' of former 'corner dwellers' within this sizeable group.

4.2 The functioning of the performative mechanism
The agency aimed to 're-boot' a pre-war egalitarian culture of seeds. What can be inferred about the success of this strategy from data concerning seed distribution? The baseline data set was compiled after seed choices had been made. Data on farmer seed requests can thus be compared to reported plantings since resettlement (with or without previous project support), and to reported pre-war plantings.

Table 7a Rice diversity, rices per farmer, pre-war and postwar, by location

	On road	Off road
After displacement	880 rices, 337 farmers	1,051 rices, 366 farmers
– Rices per farmer	2.61	2.87
Before displacement	1,171 rices, 323 farmers	1,451 rices, 367 farmers
– Rices per farmer	3.62	3.95

Table 7b Rice diversity, rices per farmer, pre-war and postwar, by civic status

	Citizens	Strangers
After displacement	1,375 rices, 502 farmers	556 rices, 201 farmers
– Rices per farmer	2.73	2.77
Before displacement	1,875 rices, 495 farmers	747 rices, 195 farmers
– Rices per farmer	3.79	3.83

Average for all rice farmers before displacement is 3.82 varieties/farmer and after displacement 2.71 varieties per farmer.

Table 7c Pre-war rice biodiversity by gender, age and ecology

	Upland	Lowland
Female (n = 454)	1.98 varieties/farmer (897 varieties)	1.02 varieties/farmer (465 varieties)
Male (n = 379)	2.16 varieties/farmer (819 varieties)	1.13 varieties/farmer (429 varieties)
Youth (n = 490)	1.97 varieties/farmer (963 varieties)	1.09 varieties/farmer (532 varieties)
Elder (n = 342)	2.20 varieties/farmer (754 varieties)	1.06 varieties/farmer (362 varieties)

Table 8 Rice and groundnut requests, and whether a lost variety is replaced

	A. Requested variety planted last year	A1. Variety planted last year and planted pre-war	B. Requested variety not planted last year	B1. Variety not planted last year but planted pre-war	B2. Variety not planted last year and not planted pre-war
Rice (n = 330)	82 (25%)	32 (39% of A)	248 (75%)	62 (25% B1+B2)	184 (75% B1+B2)
Groundnut (n = 518)	131 (25%)	28 (21% of A)	387 (75%)	153 (40% B1+B2)	171 (60% B1+B2)

It is evident from Table 6 that farmers were still suffering a reduction in rice and groundnut choices, compared with reported pre-war positions, when the agency switched from bulk to individualised distribution of seeds (2001). Pre-war, farmers typically managed between two and six distinct rice varieties per farm.[25] According to base line data, pre-war rice variety portfolios averaged 3.8 types per farmer, but averaged only 2.7 types per farmer in 2001 (Table 7a). This implies that the experimental seed system remained significantly depleted.

Portfolio sizes varied (both pre-war and postwar) according to location (off-road/on-road) and civic status (citizen/stranger). Strangers and more isolated farmers had more rice varieties than citizen farmers in more accessible locations (Table 7 a,b). Pre-war, women and youths had slightly fewer varieties than men and older people (Table 7c). Although portfolios decline across the board when postwar plantings are examined (Table 7a,b), the position of strangers and more isolated farmers are preserved relative to pre-war data (i.e. they have more rice varieties in both cases). These data are consistent with the claim, based on earlier findings (Richards 1986, 1995), that seed is an important adaptive resource, especially among more isolated and socially marginal groups of farmers.

That farmers appreciated the technological logic of agency seed intervention is apparent from the fact that a great majority took the opportunity (from 2002) to expand the number of rice types to which they had access (as opposed to acquiring more seed of the best varieties). Table 8 breaks down 330 individual choices for rice according to whether the variety was the same as any variety planted by the requester in the previous year. The requested variety differed in 75 per cent of the cases. Only one-quarter of such requests related to a (lost) variety planted pre-war. Three-quarters of requests (184) were for varieties farmers had never planted before. This result supports the claim that farmers value experimentation.

Above, it was suggested those more marginal to the patrimonial system are more likely to belong to the group of villagers not recognising chairs of VDCs. When the seed choices of this group (Table 9) are compared with the choices of those who could name VDC chairs (whether accurately or not) choice for a variety never before planted is slightly higher in the more marginalised group (75 per cent, compared with 73 per cent). That most farmers sought novelty is clear support for a conclusion that project intervention strengthened the means to re-engage in experimentation around rice.

Table 9 Knowledge of VDC and rice requests

	Change in rice variety	Same as variety already grown	All
Knowledge of VDC	109 (73%)	41 (27%)	150
No knowledge of VDC	68 (75%)	23 (25%)	92
All	177	64	242

Table 10 Range of variety requests, rice and groundnut, by gender

	Requests		Types		Most requested variety (as % of all requests)	
	Rice	Groundnut	Rice	Groundnut	Rice	Groundnut
Women	121	356	39	7	17%	81%
Men	217	175	45	4	15%	83%

About 60 per cent of the baseline sample chose groundnuts not rice. Assigning seed choices to individuals boosted the popularity of groundnuts, especially among women and young males. This group found cash shortages a pressing problem – money to pay expenses for primary school children was a major concern – and groundnuts are a ready source of cash, as well as item of food. Choice for new varieties (60 per cent) was also high for groundnut (cf. Table 8) but not as high as for rice (75 per cent). Contrary to the case of rice, choice of groundnuts resulted in some reduction of diversity, as assessed by the percentage of total seed accounted for by the most requested variety (Table 10). Seemingly, groundnut choices contributed to the strengthening of individualism as a mode of accountability, but offered less scope than rice to support egalitarian norms associated with seed experimentation. A groundnut farmer may be grateful to turn to a patron when short of seed, but because there are many fewer varieties of groundnuts overall, when compared to rice, there is less incentive to engage in variety swapping activity.

4.3 Modification of the deliberative process through performative inputs

What is the evidence that the revived experimental system facilitated escape from deliberative 'leadership effects'? The assessment below represents a preliminary assessment of the ritual modification of the deliberative process through inclusive seed distribution as a performative element. A considerable stock of observational material has yet to be fully analysed.

Peace-and-rights rituals were well organised by young, highly motivated agency staff, and enthusiastically received by participants. Each event began with ancestral libations, continued with human rights awareness training, led on to a debate (in groups and plenary) over causes of the war, and

was rounded off with seed distribution. Each participant left for home head-loading a drawstring colour-coded bag containing chosen seed. The sorting and distribution of each participant's rightful bag generated considerable excitement, not unlike a school diploma ceremony.

Participants considered that inclusive distribution in a ritual context had established a new norm for transparency over development inputs. Practical evidence is to be seen in the well-maintained village log books in which all subsequent visits by project officials and other visitors are recording, stating the purpose of visits and action promised. These entries are used by villagers to ensure compliance by village leaders and visiting outsiders with project agreements. The log-book system survived the termination of the project. Follow-up work also uncovered instances of reference to peace-and-rights day agreements being used to counter attempts at enforced seed pooling. Informants stated that inclusive seed distribution made them feel personally responsible to raise a crop from the seed they had chosen.[26]

There was also widespread agreement that ancestral libations linked to concrete discussion of rights had created a space for open discussion of 'difficult' issues, notably patrimonial controls over development resources and misappropriation of humanitarian inputs. A digest of topics arising from early peace-and-rights day discussions (2001–2) is presented in Table 11. The extent to which participants were willing openly to discuss abuses of patrimonial redistribution (something I had not encountered in 20 years of earlier field visits) is apparent.

How much this new openness can be directly assigned to the peace-and-rights day intervention itself requires further analysis. Periods spent in refugee camps and towns opened the eyes of many

Table 11 Some conflict-related grievances articulated in peace-and-rights days

Elders' group	The heavy fines levied by chiefs on youths have led to many leaving the village. The chiefs are concerned that these youths will return and seek revenge on them.
Youth group	Chiefs do not allow youths to express their views.
Youth group	Chiefs victimise youths by imposing heavy and unjust fines, criminal summonses make youths run from the village, resulting in disunity and grievance.
Women's group	There is … no support for vulnerable groups.
Youth group	Chiefs withhold benefits meant for the community, resulting in defiance by youths … chiefs protect their own children from doing communal work.
Women's group	There is no proper distribution of humanitarian inputs. It is done according to who you know.
Youth group	Youths are never [appointed] chiefs, unless they become society [sodality] elders, even if they are the best person, youths have no rights over elders; they are always in the wrong.
Youth group	Society [sodality] heads levy fines on youth in the bush, subject to no appeal, chiefs levy frequent contributions on youths for 'development'; refusal or inability to pay brings a criminal summons and a fine, 'up to Le 40,000, or whatever they need'.
Youth group	Those who pay fees and fines 'never see any development'.
Youth group	There is disrespect for youth leaders, youth leaders connive with chiefs to humiliate the youths.
Women's group	Displaced people were excluded from registration for humanitarian assistance.

Source Archibald and Richards (2002).

villagers to the entrenched abuses of merchants and ruling elites. Careful examination of the abundant records of the actual peace-and-rights events (including video evidence) is needed to provide a better grasp of how the ritual process actually worked. But the fact that even elders' groups were prepared to admit their own role in the patrimonial abuses feeding war (Table 11) seems clear evidence that 'a constrained plurality of … ritual forms' (Perri 6 2007) stimulates progress towards 'organic solidarity' (in this case, by helping to provide a framework for settling competing claims of patrons and egalitarians).

It should also be remarked that egalitarian seed distribution was quickly perceived by elements more distant from the 'constrained plurality of the ritual form' (e.g. some government officials, and *numuwaisia* residing in town) as a direct challenge to patrimonial hegemony. Patrimonialism builds its appeal by claiming to reduce social competition under the wise leadership of a *pater familias*. Sceptics thus several times predicted that inclusive seed

distribution, and meeting the choice of commoners, would increase competition and strife. Specifically, it was predicted that the new project seed distribution modality would weaken inter- and intra-household cooperation.

Reviewing the first two seasons of work, farmers and field assistants found the opposite to be true. Having a diversity of seed types locally available was reported to have stimulated gift exchanges, boosting inter-household cooperation. With stakes of individuals so clearly mapped out some heads of households noted that family members were more, not less, willing to cooperate in a joint farm. In evaluating individual choices there was more to discuss, one group of farmers explained. Several household heads reported they now took the knowledge and opinions of wives or children more seriously than before, as a result of seeing the effectiveness of their seed choices. 'Sharing seeds' was an interactive performance all household members could understand. This was said to have enhanced the interest of farming together,

comparable with an older performative practice (hiring drummers to spur on group agricultural work, Richards 1986, 2005b).

A brief return visit to the area after the experiment ended suggested that patrimonial elites were busy reasserting their grip over local deliberation. One village commoner elected to a 'reformed' VDC after peace-and-rights day deliberations explained how he (and other commoners) had been systematically undermined by *numuwaisia* spreading false information. It had been suggested that the new intake had been paid secret amounts of money by the agency and, unlike true patrons, were unwilling to share their windfall with the wider populace. Higher echelons in the local male sodality had been active in engineering this campaign, it was alleged. The mechanism of deliberative distortion described by Murphy (1990) – 'hanging heads' – apparently remained in good working order. With donor pressure for a simpler 'workshop' approach to rights-based programming the possibility for practical 'inexplicit inclusiveness' to feed ritualised scrutiny of alternative accountabilities was ended.

Overall, however, there seem enough positive pointers in the present case study to justify further experimentation in linking deliberative and performative participation. Every settlement – however temporary or remote – was included. Registration approached 100 per cent of the resident population. Seed distribution satisfied more than 90 per cent of choices (with seed quality higher than government standards). Gift-based seed experimentation was boosted. Seed-based egalitarian accountabilities fed back into peace-and-rights days. Vigorous deliberations about patrimonial

abuses took place. But deliberative and performative aspects were later split apart, and patrimonial 'leadership effects' reasserted themselves. With new sources of global patronage emanating from the G8 and private agencies engaging with African poverty it is more than ever necessary to develop viable antidotes to elite capture, including the capture of poverty alleviation by global elites.

5 Conclusion
This article has examined deliberative and performative participation in a programme for agrarian rehabilitation in the aftermath of a West African civil war. A new approach (the linking of performance and deliberation in humanitarian assistance) has been described. Seed distribution was redesigned to strengthen war-damaged modalities of cooperation; deliberation was modified to create a 'constrained plurality of ritual forms'. Evidence suggests that the chosen 'instrument' of performative participation (inclusive seed distribution) functioned as envisaged, in both technical and ritual terms. Incorporation of seed distribution within the rituals of peace-and-rights days appears to have assisted excluded voices to resound in the deliberative arena. Whether and how far this approach might have contributed to the forging of robust local institutions over the longer term cannot be easily assessed, since donors promptly ended the experiment. But findings seem sufficiently promising to merit further efforts to link deliberative and performative participation. Instruments designed with regard to their impact on both human values and material outcomes will bring us closer to realisation of the Durkheimian vision of 'technology … as a branch of sociology'. The phrase 'social engineering' might then strike a less discordant note.

commemorate the Batepa massacre in 1953, a wave of violence unleashed by colonial landlords against islanders resisting rumoured reintroduction of indentured plantation labour.

3 According to Arrow (1994) the qualifier 'methodological' distinguishes the empirical hypothesis (that, in fact, humans make decisions as individuals) from 'normative individualism' (the doctrine that humans ought to take decisions individually).

4 Other labels have been proposed to convey the same sense of ritual taking on a life of its own; Randall Collins (2004) suggests 'sub-cognitive ritualism' and Lockwood (1992) proposes 'hyper-ritual'. Neither term seems much improvement upon 'effervescence'.

5 '[Gustav Holst] was so carried away by the Sanctus (of the Bach Mass in B minor) that he felt as if he were floating in the air, and found himself clutching the sides of the chair to prevent his head bumping against the roof of the cathedral' (Imogen Holst 1969: 11–12).

6 Woodiwiss (2005) seeks the origins of human rights in the performance of sacrifice (cf. Girard 1979); but rehearsing social coordination through ritual can also lead (via positive feedback) to deadly effects, e.g. it can stir massacre in times of war (Richards 2007; Stone 2004).

7 The phrase is Durkheim's ('Technologie' (1901) *Annee Sociologique* 4: 593–4).

8 'Technology, considered in this aspect, is a branch of sociology' (Durkheim 1901)

9 Thus I differ from Perri 6 (2007: 42) who differentiates rites and tools.

10 For recent evidence of inter-specific gene flow see Barry *et al.* (2007) and Nuijten and Treuren (2007).

11 Many VDC members also occupied high-ranking positions in the local male and female sodalities.

12 Steven Archibald and the present author were invited to design and monitor the new approach (cf. Humphreys *et al.* 2006) and agreed to do so if findings could be published (cf. Archibald and Richards 2002).

13 Following Durkheim (1897), Douglas (1970) proposes four basic modes of social accountability (the grid-group scheme) – hierarchy, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist. Robust social institutions (Douglas suggests) require accommodation between the different modes.

14 Murphy (1990) shows that deliberation among the Mende divides public meetings into two parts.

The first is a public session in which non-elites are encouraged to express their views. The second is a private conclave among elders (*hite wu*, 'lowering of the head'), to determine what actual decision to take.

15 After local consultation it was decided to register every person above ten years old. A specialist in local seeds, Dr Malcolm Jusu (cf. Jusu 1999), was engaged to identify and source seed choices of requisite high quality.

16 Mende villagers recognise (Richards 1993) that ordinary farmers are drawn to experimentation (*hugoo*, 'to look into') while *numuwaisia* are preoccupied with deliberation (*njia*, 'dispute').

17 In an unpublished survey of nine chiefdoms from central to NW Sierra Leone in 1987 (by Richards and others, cf. Richards 1997) 490 farmers provided information on first acquisition of 79 per cent of current rice types – 32 per cent came from loans or purchase and 68 per cent from gifts and exchange. Data on 226 recent adoptions showed that 6 per cent came via 'chance factors, 36 per cent via loans and purchase and 58 per cent through gifts and exchange.

18 Market transactions played a minor role.

19 Such ceremonies (cf. *leebi naani* – Muslim '40 day' ceremony) have become common in villages as a way of remembering the unburied dead from the war (Alfred Mokuwa, pers. comm.).

20 The project was funded by EU and Norwegian sources in 2001, and intended to run for four years (to 2005). DFID became a joint funder of the main project. The long-term involvement of the project designers was a requirement of EU funding. Our involvement was ended without formal notification in 2003. The project management had been advised to cut out the 'clever stuff' (Steven Archibald, pers. comm.; cf. Fanthorpe 2003). The agency continued to attract support for continuation activities from 2005, but now separated (topically and regionally) into human rights and agro-technical components.

21 The main party (the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party) in the democratic government elected to power in 1996, briefly deposed in 1997, and restored by Nigerian military intervention in 1998, had historically been a strong supporter of 'traditional' chieftaincy (a system of local governance devised by the British in the colonial period). At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Edinburgh in 1997, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, had been presented with a document

outlining the SLPP government-in-exile's priorities for its first 100 days back in power. This included a request for British aid to help chiefs to return to their rural chiefdoms in the interests of security. The Paramount Chief Restoration Project – though controversial, not least because it was not unconnected to the counter-insurgency strategy developed by private security companies operating in Sierra Leone – became a significant item in British aid to postwar Sierra Leone.

22 'Random sampling' in rural Africa is frequently compromised by lack of an accurate sample frame. Here, we were able to sample from detailed and accurate project registration records.

23 Further details can be found in Richards *et al.* (2004).

24 The agency recognised only one male and one female head per VDC.

25 A large village would have had between 30 and 40 distinct varieties (Richards 1986). The total number of distinct varieties probably approached 100–150 across the four chiefdoms, and 300–400 nationally.

26 That is, to raise a crop from the supplied seed, and thus have the means to engage in subsequent informal exchanges. Data on subsequent transactions (swaps, gifts, etc.) are limited. A post-project seed-tracking exercise, currently in the planning stage, will seek to cover this issue.

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