

Research Paper No. 2005/50

Is the International Community Helping to Recreate the Pre-Conditions for War in Sierra Leone?

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August 2005

Abstract

'In a very real sense, the conditions that spawned the war and inflicted gruesome casualties on Sierra Leone's citizens have not disappeared', warned the International Crisis Group. In this paper we argue that many of those conditions are being recreated. The same old men who were responsible for the war are still in power, both in government and in a reinstated chieftaincy system, and corruption is still endemic, while young people remain jobless and largely uneducated. Further, we argue that the policies of the international community are, perhaps inadvertently, promoting a return to pre-war conditions.

Keywords: Sierra Leone, conflict, government, aid, corruption

JEL classification: F35, O55, N47, O17

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This is a revised version of the paper originally prepared for the WIDER conference on Making Peace Work, 4-5 June 2004.

UNU-WIDER acknowledges the financial contributions to its research programme by the governments of Denmark (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Norway (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—Sida) and the United Kingdom (Department for International Development).

ISSN 1810-2611 ISBN 92-9190-733-2 (internet version)

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Camera-ready typescript prepared by Liisa Roponen at UNU-WIDER

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1 Introduction

At independence from Britain in 1960, Sierra Leone was extremely poor, had a literacy rate of only 7.7 per cent (World Bank 2003) and had inherited a ramshackle government system largely based on indirect rule by over 200 paramount chiefs. The colonial authorities had exploited the main mineral resources and left behind a declining economy; even diamond production was falling as the best reserves had been worked out. Britain backed the Sierra Leone People's Party, which was seen as the party of the chiefs and urban middle-class. When the opposition All People's Congress won the 1967 election, it took a series of three military coups before the elected Siaka Stevens was able to take his post as president. From that weak start Stevens was necessarily concerned with consolidating power, which led to the development of a patrimonial system and one-party state. Stevens retired in 1985 and passed power to a weak, hand-picked successor, Joseph Momah. Through the 1980s the government won increasing support from donors, despite growing corruption and patrimonialism and collapsing state institutions, perhaps because it was also faithfully introducing IMF policies such as devaluation. By 1986, education spending was one-sixth of what it had been five years before; teachers were often not paid, and President Momah declared that education was a privilege, not a right. In Sierra Leone, privileges went through the patrimonial system, and young people felt increasingly excluded.

Idealistic but unemployed and excluded young men formed the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and in 1991 began a guerrilla war to overthrow the government. It soon went badly wrong, with the RUF increasingly dependent on terror and brutality, and its fighters were increasingly drugged and kidnapped young people. The government became weaker, suffered multiple coups, and was dependent on mercenaries from Executive Outcomes. Under heavy international pressure elections were held in 1996 in the hope of bringing the RUF back in; it did not work, and the RUF cut off the hands of many people who had voted. A weak former UN official, Ahmed Kabbah, was elected, and came under IMF pressure to cut spending on the military. Executive Outcomes was expelled and there was a coup in 1997, as the army increasingly became *sobel*s—soldiers by day and rebels by night. Kabbah was reinstated the following year, but the war continued and the RUF occupied the capital, Freetown, in 1999.

With UN, British and Nigerian backing the RUF was finally pushed back and two unsuccessful ceasefires agreed. In early 2001 a ceasefire was agreed which held. Hasty elections in May 2002 led to the re-election of Kabbah. Demobilization and reconstruction, largely with British support, began in late 2001 and still continues. Britain is committed to a ten-year programme, which includes military and police training. The United National peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, will remain in Sierra Leone at least until the end of 2005. Out of a population of 5.2 million, 70,000 people were killed, 10,000 maimed (many with limbs cut off by rebels), and half the population forced to flee their homes; 72,490 ex-combatants have been demobilized (Kaikai 2004; HRW 2005).

Diamonds undoubtedly fuelled the war. Initially the RUF needed diamonds to pay for arms and other costs, but for some leaders and some rebels and *sobel*s, diamonds became a way to try to get rich. But this was never a war about diamonds. An Overseas Development Institute Report said that, 'the more considered view is that years of government neglect of education and other state services have helped to create a large cohort of unemployed and barely literate young people, easily conscripted by both

political and criminal organizations' (Fanthorpe 2003: 54). A World Bank (2003: 5) study comments that:

It is significant that everyone we spoke to talked of the collapse of institutions as the root cause of the civil war, not diamonds. ... The collapse resulted in a signal failure to provide public services equitably and an almost total failure to maintain a just dispute resolution system.

In this paper, we point to a growing fear that this is happening again, and that that not enough is being done to redress the grievances which triggered the war in 1991.

The desire of Sierra Leoneans to move forward is obvious. The war brought death and destruction without resolving any of the country's problems. The economy and government institutions have been badly fractured and will require both careful reconstruction and a long period of healing and regrowth. Yet the country is being led by many of the same people who operated the patrimonial state that brought about the collapse of the 1990s, while the youth remain unemployed and disempowered as they were a decade earlier.

In the remainder of this paper, we look at four interlinked issues:

- Rushed elections and the reinstatement of the chiefdom system means that government is controlled by the same patrimonial, self-centred elite as a decade earlier;
- IMF spending caps prevent the essential expansion of education, and require civil service salaries to be so low that civil servants need additional income;
- Corruption cannot be tackled, both because the government does not want to, and because of these low salaries; and
- Ex-combatants do not receive enough training or money to be reintegrated into society. Young people remain jobless and largely uneducated and job creation is not a priority of donors or government.

2 Electing the same people

After the successful 2001 ceasefire, Britain and the United States pushed hard for early elections, because they backed Kabbah who they knew would be more likely to be re-elected than the earlier elections were held, because they refused to accept the RUF in a transitional government, and because they wanted to speed their own exits from the country (ICG 2001a).

But there was widespread disagreement with this policy. ICG, the International Crisis Group (2001a 2001b) repeatedly called for a delay in the May 2002 elections: 'recalling the hurried 1996 elections that replaced the military regime with the Kabbah government but ushered in the most brutal phase of the civil war, [many civil society activists] call for 'peace before elections'. They argue that Sierra Leone should ensure that necessary foundations are in place before heading for the ballot box' (ICG 2001a: 3). Editorials in local newspapers called for a transitional unity government for

two years before elections. Some opposition parties and civil society groups called for a national consultative conference that would bring together a wider range of people than just the old politicians and military leaders. There was deep domestic dissatisfaction, particularly among the younger generation, about the corrupt, aged and indifferent nature of its government.

The ICG was not alone in pointing to the failure of the donor-promoted 1996 elections. Alfred Zack-Williams (1999) noted that:

It is quite plausible to argue that if ‘peace had been sought before democracy’ and the process of national reconciliation pursued, the events of 25 May 1997 [when the newly elected Kabbah was overthrown] might have been avoided.

Elections have not produced stable governments in Sierra Leone, and putting Kabbah back in power reinstated a weak, corrupt, and partisan government. In a bitter attack on the government in 2003, the ICG said that the government’s ‘performance has been disappointing and complacency appears to have set in’. It adds that ‘there are consistent signs that donor dependence and the old political ways are returning’. The ICG goes further and points to ‘a consensus between donors and the political elite [which] may entirely miss the realities of ordinary people’ (ICG 2003: 1, 2004: 24).

In March 2003 during planning for local elections, there was a broad formal consultation with 12,000 people at local level. One of the key recommendations was that special seats on district councils should be reserved for women, young people and the disabled. This was rejected by the Kabbah government (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: 13).

Despite pressure for democratization and decentralization, Kabbah convinced the British government to support the rebuilding of the paramount chief system, which traditionally was the lowest level of administration and which covered the entire country except the area around the capital, Freetown. It had been the basis of rule of British colonial authorities and then that of Siaka Stevens. Traditionally, chiefs handled dispute resolution and tax collection. Because of the war, 63 of the 149 paramount chiefs had been killed or died, and nearly all the others had fled from their areas. DfID in 2000 established a paramount chief’s restoration programme, which, among other things, built houses for 50 chiefs (DfID 2002). Elections to fill the 63 vacancies were held in late 2002 and early 2003; taxpayers (mostly men) elect councillors who then elect the paramount chiefs, who hold the position for life (Malan and Meek 2003).

Within Sierra Leone, however, there were substantial objections to the programme. Chiefs are seen as being an important cause of the war, through their corruption and alienation of the youth. As long ago as 1955-56 there were uprisings against the abuses of power of chiefs and their demand for illegal taxes and fees, which was described by a commission then as ‘a civil war rather than a disturbance’ (quoted in Fanthorpe 2003).

The World Bank (2003: 44) reports that ‘chiefs’ rule has led to mismanagement, power abuse and failure to ensure the delivery of decentralized services’. DfID (2002: 35) notes that ‘over the last 20 or 30 years, this [customary court] system has fallen into decay and been the subject of considerable abuses’. It also notes that ‘customary law’ contains ‘inherent abuses of human rights such as the status and treatment of women’. A study of peace operations by the Conflict, Security and Development Group (CSDG) of

King's College, London notes that 'bad governance at the chiefdom level had been an important factor in the revolt against authority and was ostensibly at the root of the RUF's doctrine' (CSDG 2003: 91). Fithen and Richards (2005) point to the importance of high fines in customary courts as forcing men to choose between indentured labour to a chief to pay off the fine, or fleeing to the diamond fields or rebel groups. Glentworth (2002) notes that 'local people and particularly women and the youth are no longer prepared to put up with the kind of exploitation that they previously suffered' under the chiefs.

The final assessment of the government-donor post-war National Recovery Strategy points to the 'need to redress the bias of customary law and social system at the village and chiefdom levels which protect the 'influential' at the expense of the poor and vulnerable'. In particular, the Forced Labour Ordinance of 1932 remains in force, allowing chiefs and their extended families to force young people and outsiders to work for them (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: 22).

DfID (2002: 87) admits that the chiefdom system can succeed only if there are 'new relationships between the chiefs and their people. Chieftaincy can only really be effective and accepted if chiefs' behaviour avoids many abuses of previous decades—vindictive and exploitative punishments through the courts, arbitrary seizure of land and property, etc'. But this is not happening. Chiefs in diamond mining areas are using the 0.75 per cent diamond tax they receive for personal gain instead of, as intended, for the benefit of the community (Malan and Meek 2003). Chiefs are using aid money for personal enrichment and to reward political supporters (Fanthorpe 2003). Chiefs are also complaining that the British-built houses are not grand enough and not compatible with their status; Paramount Chief Sigismond Caulker Quebboka told the *Salone Times* (5 Feb. 2004) that he cannot stay in a house with such small rooms and no parlour.

The return of chiefs has brought tensions in some areas as the government also tries to restore civil administration. Some chiefs are refusing to cooperate with district officers and there are conflicts with local governments elected in 2004 (Malan 2003a; RSG 25). Tunde Zack-Williams (2003) argues that Britain has chosen to reify and rebuild a discredited feudal tradition and delay the development of grassroots democracy.

Archibald and Richards (2002: 358, 360) note that 'standard NGO practice in post-war Sierra Leone' is to work with village development committees (VDCs). The problem is 'that VDCs were invariably comprised of elders and members of elites' who excluded some groups and individuals. 'In a majority of cases VDC members had registered themselves as the 'most needy' residents or (allegedly) diverted inputs to their kin residing in urban areas. IDPs [internally displaced persons], women and youths were excluded because they had no representatives (or 'friends') on the committee'.

3 IMF limits to spending

The IMF's priority for Sierra Leone, under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), is 'continued maintenance of macroeconomic stability'. The IMF sets a series of 'quantitative performance criteria and benchmarks' for the PRGF; a key one of these is the government wage bill, which must fall from 8.4 per cent of GDP in 2002 to 7.0 per cent in 2005 (IMF/World Bank 2002: 29, 36). In addition there is a total government

budget ceiling (IMF 2003 2005). Meeting these benchmarks is a criterion for all aid. Britain is the largest donor to Sierra Leone, and a condition of its aid is that ‘the government of Sierra Leone will remain on track with the IMF’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility’ (UK/GRSL 2002: 5).

‘Many civil servants have salaries that are close to or below the poverty threshold’, notes a study by the World Bank (2003: 16). The report continues that “public service pay is too low to attract, motivate and retain the key staff needed to improve performance and lead reform. Salaries of senior staff are a fraction of equivalent salaries in the private and parastatal sectors”. Across the board, there ‘are difficulties in hiring, motivating and retaining staff because of low pay as well as low skill levels’. Low pay leads to high vacancy rates, and the reports notes that ‘the salary issue is aggravated at the central and local levels by the competition among donors, including NGOs, for the well qualified people [who] are in very short supply because of the brain drain during the war. This applies at all levels: NGOs pay teachers and health workers in the provinces more than the government does. ... some international NGOs have hired some of the state’s best qualified health workers’. The report also notes that ‘there are few incentives to encourage staff to relocate because remote area allowances are too small to attract any teachers’.

The World Bank conclusion is stark. The salary issue is critical. ‘If services are to be improved, the staff responsible for delivery must be much better paid than they are now’ (World Bank 2003: 14). But the IMF will not allow that. Indeed, the benchmark requires a cut in the wage bill. The IMF (2003) admits that the high wage bill is caused by higher-than-budgeted spending on teachers and health workers. In part, there is a problem with corruption—an estimated 11 per cent of teachers on the payroll do not exist, and parliamentarians decided to pay themselves high wages. But even dealing with the ghost teachers is not enough to solve the problem, because an estimated 25 per cent of teachers are simply not being paid, although they are still teaching (Moore, Squire, MacBailey 200: 44). There is little money for expansion of health and education services into war affected areas.

The assessment of the National Recovery Strategy found that ‘currently the numbers of primary school teachers nationwide remain insufficient. An additional estimated 8000 teachers were required in 2003, but with the Ministry of Finance’s ceiling of 25,000 teachers (already reached) only 3000 were approved to be hired effective 2004’. Pupil-teacher ratios have reached 118:1 in some parts of the country (Moore, Squire, MacBailey 2003: 43-4). Primary education is supposed to be free, ‘but there are many strings attached, that made education so expensive in Sierra Leone’, said Emmanuelle Beart, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador on a visit to Freetown (*The Independent* 13 Feb 2004). An estimated 375,000 children could not attend school in 2005 (RSG 25).

In education, salaries average US\$72 per month, and in health only US\$48 per month. (calculated from World Bank 2003). Sierra Leone has fewer teachers than the average for sub-Saharan Africa, and the number of health workers is ‘much lower’; 70 per cent of health facilities were not functioning at the end of 2001 (World Bank 2003).

Many commentators accuse the International Monetary Fund of ignoring the war when it demanded that the Kabbah government cut government spending by cutting the rice ration to the army and ending the contract with Executive Outcomes in 1997, which triggered the military coup. Even the World Bank (2003: 8) cites IMF ‘pressure’ and

says this 'resulted in a renewal of violence'. By stressing the standard prescription for peaceful countries and ignoring the civil war implications, the IMF is accused of causing immense damage. Many critics feel the IMF is doing the same thing again.

A World Bank study *Breaking the Conflict Trap* (Collier *et al.* 2003), also questioned some of the orthodoxy of the international financial institutions. It finds no link between what the World Bank defines as 'good' economic policy and the risk of subsequent war. Further, the report challenges the IMF view, namely that 'the priority is to correct macroeconomic imbalances'. Instead, the study finds that 'social policy is relatively more important and macroeconomic policy is relatively less important in post-conflict situations than in normal situations'. Indeed, economic growth actually increases if preference is given to 'social policies—specifically policies for social inclusion'. High priority should be given to health, education and the rehabilitation of key infrastructure that links to rural areas. The report also points to 'signals of intent'. High military expenditure signals a belief in the risk of renewed conflict, whereas broadly based, inclusive spending, particularly in areas which had been controlled by rebel groups, signals a commitment to peace and reconciliation. This, in turn, has direct economic effects, because peaceful signals encourage private investment. Road projects, for example, can have a 40 per cent rate of return (Collier *et al.* 2003: 137, 154-6).

In particular, the report warns against growth-promoting policies which discriminate and increase grievances. Overall growth will be promoted by public expenditure in those areas where private activity is already reviving most rapidly, but that will have a high social cost. 'The most difficult regions to revive are likely to be those that the rebel organization controlled' because market forces and private activity will discriminate against those areas (Collier *et al.* 2003: 166). The study calls for 'an explicit long-term strategy for intergroup redistribution'. Finally, the study warns about the 'lethal cocktail' of 'low and declining incomes, badly distributed, [which] create a pool of impoverished and disaffected young men who can be cheaply recruited by "entrepreneurs of violence"' (Collier *et al.* 2003: 4, 140) This has already happened once in Sierra Leone, and could happen again.

The World Bank study seems to suggest that Sierra Leone should worry less about macro-economic balances than the IMF demands, and spend more rapidly on reconstruction in rural areas and on finding jobs for impoverished and disaffected youth.

4 Corruption

Endemic corruption was one cause of the war, and Britain is supporting an anti-corruption commission. But there are warnings that this may be ineffective. At high level, the government does not seem to back the programme; the ICG (2004: 24, 8) says that 'the judicial system ... has shown itself unwilling or unable to go after corrupt officials'. Indeed, the ICG accuses donors and diplomats of 'turning a blind eye to local corruption and exercising influence through coalitions with old power elites while marginalizing those truly interested in reform'.

Members of the anti-corruption commission complained about government interference in late 2001. At the start of 2002, the anti-corruption commission indicted three of the five national election commissioners, but the Kabbah government refused to prosecute

them. The European Union withheld €2 million that was to be used for 2004 local elections because the Electoral Commission has not accounted for EC funds for the 2002 general elections (MacJohnson 2004).

And the government is cracking down on its critics. Three journalists who wrote about alleged government corruption were jailed for ‘seditious libel’ in October 2004 and May 2005.

Meanwhile, at lower levels, the poverty wages imposed by the IMF force civil servants to find additional sources of income, meaning they steal time or money, or demand bribes. A British study warned that ‘salaries and allowances for the Sierra Leone civil service are much below reasonable living costs, not only de-motivating officials but creating the necessity of additional jobs or supplementary corrupt earnings’ (DfID 2002: 30). The World Bank (2003: 26) reports that ‘corruption in the health systems seems to affect most public and private services’ and that ‘there are allegations of extensive corruption practices by teachers demanding bribes and favours in exchange for school enrolment and exams’. But DfID (2002: 30) admits that the required ‘large across-the-board salary increases are ruled out by the strictures of the IMF’.

In mid-2003, the ICG cited the necessity to reform ministries and government institutions to reduce corruption and promote development. ‘Unfortunately there have been only cosmetic changes. Institutions still lack credibility and accountability, which has reduced popular confidence over the past year’ (ICG 2003: 19).

Both UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the ICG have pointed to the government’s inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to gain control over illegal diamond mining (RSG, 17, 25; ICG 2003). Mine monitors earn so little that they have rapidly been corrupted. It would appear that less than half, and perhaps as little as one-sixth, of diamonds are passing through official channels.

5 Where are the jobs?

A growing concern is the return of the very problem that started this brutal war more than a decade earlier—unemployed and poorly educated youth with no jobs and no future. ‘A particular challenge for Sierra Leone society and the government is how to manage the expectations of the country’s young people, and in particular to prevent them from feeling a sense of exclusion’, wrote the UN Secretary-General. By late 2002 he was warning that donors were failing to provide money for the programme to reintegrate former combatants, who would simply return to fighting, either in Sierra Leone or in neighbouring Liberia (RSG 15: 15, 17). And this happened.

Porter (2003: 50) notes that donors’ ‘parsimony towards peacebuilding activities appears highly incoherent, in view of the high sum invested in UNAMSIL’. The total cost to the international community is likely to be nearly US\$4 billion by the end of 2005—US\$800 per Sierran. But the tiny reintegration programme was repeatedly short of donor funds, which one UN official described as ‘incredibly frustrating and short-sighted’.

The hope was that many fighters would settle as farmers. But ‘Sierra Leone’s government and its international partners still do not take the sector that employs some

three quarters of the population seriously', warns the ICG (2004: 15); they only pay 'lip service' to agriculture. There has been virtually no support, especially for those who want to grow rice, the staple crop. Roads remain poor and there is no credit. International insistence on removing trade barriers means that cheap Asian rice swamps the local market and small farmers cannot compete. And there have been no attempts to deal with the serious land tenure problems caused by chiefs' right to confiscate the land of young men.

Not surprisingly, this mean ex-combatants want jobs and do not want to be farmers. Yet there is a total lack of job opportunities, leading some 'frustrated ex-combatants to sell their tool kits' which they received after training. The ISS study confirms that the three month training is much too short to teach a trade. 'The reality is in fact that many ex-combatants have little prospect of securing productive work when they return to their communities'. At the same time, there is growing community resentment at what is seen as special treatment for ex-combatants, and that those who committed atrocities are being rewarded (Ginifer 2003: 48).

There has also been widespread criticism of the limited nature of the retraining ex-combatants have been given. Too many have been trained for tailoring, tie-dying, and soap-making, when there is not a sufficient local market. It has been assumed that people will have to go into the informal sector and create their own jobs. But the CSDG's study found that 'the length of the tuition periods has been insufficient to provide the skills necessary for an individual to launch a small, sustainable business' (CSDG 2003: 126).

The International Crisis Group (ICG) warned that 'the rank and file combatant has effectively been promised an alternative livelihood in return for embracing peace. Conflict is traded for development'. Ex-combatants' 'high expectations of acquiring skills, a job and a livelihood threaten to precipitate a crisis of expectations as they discover a country which is more destitute and lacking in opportunity than before they went to war'. And ICG warns that 'the international community has promised combatants what they were after all along—a livelihood' (ICG 2001b: 14).

In its study of Sierra Leone, the South African Institute of Security Studies (ISS) warns that 'improving education opportunities has been seen as particularly important, as 36 per cent of ex-combatants surveyed never attended school'. Indeed, the lack of educational opportunities was an important cause of the civil war. Yet there remains a severe lack of school places and few ex-combatants were given to opportunity of primary or secondary education (Ginifer 2003: 44; HRW 2005).

The ISS study suggests an increase in public works schemes, especially ones with some training component, and praises a handful of projects for building roads and local police stations and post offices. UNAMSIL soldiers have also employed ex-combatants on road-building projects, partly as part of a conscious policy of high visibility, quick impact projects to give credibility to peacebuilding (Ginifer 2003; Malan 2003a). The final assessment of the 'National Recovery Strategy' points to the 'lack of progress' in rehabilitating primary and feeder roads, and also says that 'willing groups or gangs of youth should be used as much as possible in support of employment creation'. Labour intensive technologies and local resources should be used for road maintenance and building, in order to generate jobs (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: 11, 69, 70).

The government of Sierra Leone's IMF-agreed 'Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies' states that 'a key finding' of a joint private/public sector review of factors affecting private sector development in Sierra Leone 'is that the country's competitiveness is seriously adversely affected by the high cost and unreliability of services (telecommunications, electricity, etc) and a grossly inadequate infrastructure' (IMF 2003). This is a point similar to the one made more generally by the recent World Bank study *Breaking the Conflict Trap* (Collier, *et al.* 2003). But rather than rebuilding war damaged infrastructure, the IMF answer is privatization of public enterprises. Mobile telephones are helping to fill the telecommunications gap, but roads cannot be privatized and who will repair them?

The final assessment of the 'national recovery strategy' is caustic about its failures. 'The questionable progress on infrastructure rehabilitation and development is a cause for concern. ... Productive (agriculture and mining) areas remain ubiquitously difficult to access. Crucial line ministries are being made vacuous to the point of non-functionality' because donors are bypassing ministries and setting up alternative mechanisms for project implementation (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: iii).

6 Is there a security threat?

No one in Sierra Leone wants a return to what is widely seen as a pointless war. Nevertheless, a history of coups and violence and a lack of alternatives is leading to worries of insecurity. Kofi Annan warned in 2005 that

the greatest danger to peace and security in the country may emanate from civil unrest resulting from lack of improvement in the economy and the general living standards of the majority of the population (RSG 25: 13–14).

The assessment of the 'National Recovery Strategy' concludes that 'there are more jobless youths, women and men roaming the streets of major towns and in the countryside today than before the war'. It continues:

Economic inequities continue to exist. The national economy cannot engage the ex-combatants who have been demobilized and other jobless citizens. Economic disparities and inequalities, fuelled by blatant corruption and decisionmakers that seem trapped in crisis management mode, continue to characterise social-dynamics in the country. This could constitute flash points of conflict in future (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: iv, vi).

A study by the South African ISS (Malan *et al.* 2003: executive summary: 2) warns:

Securing employment of ex-combatants, many of whom do not have formal training, represents a major challenge. The danger of disgruntled ex-combatants drifting into criminality or even renewed conflict remains a potential threat.

The CSDG's study says that 'the reintegration programme has been worryingly inadequate' and warns that 'most of the RUF's personnel, a large number of whom were abducted at school age from regional urban centres, still lack the necessary skills to make any positive and sustainable contribution to the economy. Such great numbers of

socially and economically excluded young people imply a risk of future political instability. ... [T]he same young people who fought together now frequently live in proximity to one another. It is not impossible they could reassemble under certain circumstances' (CSDG 2003: 87, 96). Indeed, several thousand young men (and women) went on to fight for all sides in neighbouring Liberia, and in 2005 there were groups of ex-combatants just waiting to be called to fight in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea or Sierra Leone itself.

The ISS study warns that 'economic stagnation and a lack of infrastructure creation also seem to be factors hurting both Sierra Leone and the reintegration process. If there are failures to deliver in these areas over the medium to long term, there may well be increasing criminality and tensions among the ex-combatants, with consequences for Sierra Leone's future. Furthermore, reconciliation is not deep-rooted. In an unstable Sierra Leone these could be worrying factors for peace in the country' (Ginifer 2003: 51).

Britain has become the dominant donor in Sierra Leone. Its support through IMATT (International Military Advisory and Training Team) is not simply training the armed forces, but trying to completely reconstruct the ministry of defence (MoD) and the military apparatus. Previously the MoD was run by the military for its own benefit (which was one reason for the multiple coup attempts); IMATT is attempting to change the entire culture, creating civilian control and loyalty to the government of the day, probity, and a respect for human rights.

But can the new army be trusted? Perhaps most worrying was that 85 per cent of the army did not vote for Kabbah; most supported Johnny Paul Koroma, who led a failed coup in early 2003 (World Bank 2003). ICG (2003) estimated that only 60 per cent of the army is loyal to the government. There is a growing fear that when the UNAMSIL mission finishes at the end of 2005, the tradition of military coups could resume. For the newly retrained military, salaries are low and living condition poor. Some soldiers are only staying in the army because there are no other jobs. Some soldiers are reported to be selling equipment, ammunition, fuel and even uniforms (ICG 2003). Soldiers and police have set up roadblocks to extort money from travellers; soldiers on the beach at Freetown have put pressure on foreigners to give them money; some members of the new RSLAF have used their arms for robberies (Malan 2003b; Conteh 2003).

In private discussions in February 2004, IMATT officers were increasingly concerned about a growing gap between junior officers, who they see as more honest and patriotic, and senior officers who maintained the patronage and authoritarian attitudes of the previous era. The possibility of a junior officers coup was openly discussed. British officers thought this could be prevented because IMATT was keeping 'a hand on the tiller' and that IMATT would probably discover and block any coup attempt.

7 A restive youth

The ICG (2003: 24) pointed to the growing number of youth groups. Some are bettering the communities through work projects, but many have incorporated former armed elements and could 'pose a threat to peace and stability if they become more militant and more radical in pursuing redress for their grievances'.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan points out that:

The large number of unemployed youths, mainly concentrated in urban and mining centres throughout the country, present another long term issue. In addition to being a security problem, they are regularly interfering in diamond mining. Some youths appear to enjoy political patronage, and the Sierra Leone police seem to be reluctant or unable to challenge the undermining of state authority by these groups (RSG 17: 2).

Richards notes that ‘War has spread and become endemic in Sierra Leone because combat, while not the preferred option for so many young people ... is their only means of survival’ (Fithen and Richards 2005). He notes, ‘The civil war in Sierra Leone mobilized people marginalized by poverty, educational disadvantage, and injustice. If social exclusion was a cause of war, then peace requires society to be re-formed along more inclusive lines’ (Richards 1999).

‘Durable solutions to the Sierra Leone crisis will have to pay attention to the basic weaknesses that made the country vulnerable to war. Rebuilding basic rural education is a clear priority. But equal attention is needed to creating rural employment opportunities outside the diamond economy. Basic education is no good unless it leads to work and respect’, argues Richards (2001). ‘The danger is that the lack of opportunity that drove young people into the ranks of the RUF is likely to persist, and the frustration that it generates boils over once again’, warns the Conflict, Security and Development Group’s study (CSDG 2003: 87).

In 2004 there was an explosion of pop music criticizing the politicians; ‘Corruption’ by Daddy Saj, ‘Wake Up’ by Steady Bongo, and ‘The System (Wutehteh)’ by Jungle Leaders were popular. Daddy Saj’s demand that corrupt politicians should ‘pack and go’ became a catch phrase throughout the country. Jungle Leaders sings of young people unable to afford to go to school. The leadership hears the songs, but are they listening? One local columnist said government was simply dismissing the music as opposition politicians misleading the youth, and warned that ‘the songs of these youngsters, if not taken seriously, might bring this government down like the Biblical walls of Jericho’ (Kpakra-Massally 2004).

Are the conditions that caused the war being reproduced? Will the frustration boil over again? Both the ICG and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warn that the root causes of the war remain. Annan warned in April 2005 that just this might happen:

Many of the key human rights issues that led to or resulted from the Sierra Leone conflict still persist. ... Lasting peace cannot be achieved without addressing the significant political, economic and social marginalization of the youth in Sierra Leone (ICG 2004; RSG 25: 10, 12).

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission in late 2004 said:

It came to the conclusions that it was the years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable. ... Many of the causes of conflict that prompted thousands of young people to join the war have still not been adequately addressed (quoted in ICG 2004: 8).

Conclusion

This paper cannot make predictions. But there is worry about prioritizing rapid elections and the re-election of a weak, corrupt, patrimonial government over inclusion and transformation. The same old men are back in power, and women and young men are sidelined from the political process. ‘The result is a large, disgruntled population with time on its hands and the capacity to do both great good and harm’ (ICG 2003: 23). Similarly, ‘high unemployment is one of the biggest threats to stability’ (ICG 2003: 28). The assessment of the National Recovery Strategy warns that ‘the spectre of instability and civil conflict may still haunt the country’ (Moore, Squire and MacBailey 2003: 130). But the international community has prioritized macroeconomic stability over reconstruction, job creation and democratization. Though its economic and political policies, is the international community inadvertently encouraging the reproduction of the conditions that caused the war?

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