

Helpdesk Research Report: Political Economy Literature on Sierra Leone

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Query: Identify and synthesise current political economy literature on Sierra Leone

Enquirer: DFID

Contents

1. Overview
2. Post-Civil War Literature
3. Civil War Literature
4. Other Related Literature
5. Useful Websites
6. Additional Information

1. Overview

Political economy analysis is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time (Collinson, 2003). Despite a large body of research on the Sierra Leone Civil War there is little recent political economy analysis on Sierra Leone. The most relevant pieces of research is a 2005 DFID-funded Drivers of Change study and a 2008 World Bank Governance and Political Economy study. It is also possible to draw inferences from the other literature on Sierra Leone. The key message from the literature is that actors should focus attention more on informal institutions while acknowledging that their legitimacy and durability should not be taken as certain.

Post-Civil War Literature

Brown et al. (2005) undertook a political economy analysis study based on a literature review of academic and 'grey' literature, interviews with a variety of individuals and team member insights. The key conclusion was that Sierra Leone remains fragile and that this is largely due to the behaviour of its elites. The report also found that informal institutions often matter as much as formal ones. Robinson (2008) also criticises the lack of political reform. The political strategies that led to conflict in the past still have appeal, new potential belligerents have emerged and the lack of real political change ensures economic growth is unlikely to benefit the poor.

International Crisis Group (2008) notes how increasing individualism and interest in voluntary association have begun replacing the old system of extended families and elite patronage networks but this has led tensions to arise. Donor's capacity to influence the government on politically sensitive matters is limited, however the report provide a series of recommendations for donors.

In relation to humanitarian activities it is important to note that such activities are essentially political acts (Fanthorpe, 2003). Understanding local political dynamics can help to improve targeting of beneficiaries, organisation of delivery, understanding of risks, and prediction of a

project's likely impact. In particular it is important to have a good understanding of the dynamics relating to patrimonialism and chieftancy.

Patronage networks, youth unemployment and corruption deteriorated ahead of the 2007 election (Thomson 2007). Progress will depend on building coalitions and taking available opportunities. The international community should maintain a long-term commitment and a clear understanding of local needs. Zack-Williams (2008) argues that there is strong demand for change from young people who may otherwise destabilise the country. People in general demand an accountable government which shows respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Though the government of Sierra Leone may be serious about reform they will need to find new international partners and to deter drug-traffickers from establishing themselves in the country (Cargill, 2008). Other obstacles to reform and progress include shortage of funds, creeping donor fatigue, poor government credibility and poor infrastructure (Sesay et al., 2009).

Civil War Literature

Much of the current situation is attributed to events that happened during the Civil War, the cause of which are still contested. Keen (2005) argues that though greed and diamonds undoubtedly exacerbated the conflict it was disrespect and lack of recognition, factors that are still relevant today, which were more crucial. Richards (2003) argues that the key causes of conflict were the social exclusion of the young and poor whereas Reno (1998) posits warlords were the key catalyst. Zack-Williams (1999) warns against trying to implement elections too soon commenting that the pressure to elect a civilian government under difficult conditions may have contributed to the coup of 1997. Abdullah (2004) provides further analysis and insight into the actors and their motivations. Clapham (2003) identifies key areas for further research.

Other Related Literature

Various insights relating to the general political economy of Sierra Leone can be gleaned from literature that examines local political and economic dynamics. Jackson (2005) looked at the relationship between the diamond trade and local authorities – both formal and traditional authorities. The paper argues that attempting to recreate political and economic networks relating to diamond extraction which bypass local government would risk alienating potentially belligerent groups.

Richards et al. (2004) provide an analysis of rural communities and how they function, focusing particularly on issues of collective action. This study illustrates the capacity for community-driven development and how to go about instigating this.

Fanthorpe (2005) examines chieftancy noting that though chieftancy can result in grievances by both the national elite and rural poor it can also prevent the abuse of bureaucratic power.

2. Post-Civil War Literature

Brown, T., Fanthorpe, R., Gardener, J., Gberie, L., Gibril Sesay, M., 2005, 'Sierra Leone Drivers of Change', IDL Group

http://www.theidlgroup.com/documents/SierraLeoneDriversofChange_june06_.pdf

This study was commissioned by DFID for its country office and UK government partners. The study drew on published and unpublished research and reports, interviews and the insights of team members based in Sierra Leone. The team undertook over 60 interviews with politicians, civil servants, civil society leaders and participants, media figures, traders, farmers, business people, chiefs, donors, researchers and other observers. While much of their analysis was Freetown-based, the team carried out field visits to Bo and Makeni municipalities and to several chieftaincies in Southern and Northern Provinces. Case studies

on decentralization and civil service reform were commissioned. The study looked at contemporary politics and governance; structural dimensions of politics and governance; continuity and change (i.e. political, economic, demographic and social); the political economy of public sector reform and gave conclusions and operational implications. The key conclusions were:

- Sierra Leone remains a fragile state.
- Sierra Leone's fragility is largely internally driven and is fundamentally political.
- Elites and elite behaviour lie at the heart of Sierra Leone's persistent fragility and its lack of progress.
- The civil war and post-conflict period changed less politically and economically than might be thought. Many pre-conflict political and economic institutions, networks and practices have been preserved and even reinforced.
- Sierra Leone's social and demographic landscape is changing. The population of Sierra Leone is younger, more urban and more mobile than ever before.
- In Sierra Leone informal institutions of governance often matter as much as formal ones.

The report concludes that there is a need to nurture a 'capable enough state' and generate broad-based economic development while fostering social empowerment. For this, key actors in government, civil society and the donor community must be aligned. Donors must be politically astute, attuned to informal institutions, more focused and harmonised, and more incremental and opportunistic.

Robinson, J. 2008, 'Governance and Political Economy Constraints to World Bank CAS Priorities in Sierra Leone'

http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~jrobinson/researchpapers/unpublishedpapers/jr_wb_sierraleone.pdf

This paper, based on desk research, examines the political economy of Sierra Leone in relation to how it may influence the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). The main aim of the research is to try to understand the extent to which the perverse political incentives which drove the country into poverty and civil war between 1961 and 1991 have re-asserted themselves since the return of peace in 2002. The key conclusions are:

- Though there have been some obvious changes in the political environment, the political strategies that have resulted in conflict in the past still remain attractive.
- Some new forces have emerged which can have potentially perverse consequences.
- Changes in the economic environment, such as the terms of trade, may provide the prospect of sustained economic growth, but without political change such growth will likely be oligarchic, lead to large increases in inequality and is unlikely to be pro-poor.

The paper suggests that the World Bank try to further deepen reform of political institutions and foster decentralisation. This needs to be complemented by the reduction of executive autonomy, the strengthening of Parliament and the introduction of greater democracy into the institutions of chieftancy.

International Crisis Group, 2008, 'Sierra Leone: A New Era Of Reform?' Africa Report No.143, ICG Brussels

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/sierra-leone/143-sierra-leone-a-new-era-of-reform.aspx>

This report is based on desk research and interviews in Freetown and Bo. It documents the period since the end of the civil war in 2002, detailing political and social changes, and progress of reform. The report examines how the All People's Congress (APC) wrested the parliament from the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and proposed a programme of reform. Increasing individualism and interest in voluntary association have begun replacing the old system of extended families and elite patronage networks. The president appears to be playing out a long-term strategy of reform in introducing new political discipline and accountability to the old system of patronage politics. However, rising food prices highlight the government's limited room for manoeuvre, and the Presidential Transition Team underscored the continuing dependency on donors. Even in an aid-dependent country like Sierra Leone donors' capacity to influence the government on politically sensitive matters has proven to be very limited. The report ends by providing a series of recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone, donors, and the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Fanthorpe, R, 2003, 'Humanitarian aid in post-war Sierra Leone: the politics of moral economy', Chapter 4 in Collinson, S. (ed.), 2003, 'Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action, Report 13', Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London
<http://www.odl.org.uk/resources/download/241.pdf>

The research for this study relied on informal qualitative ethnographic and participatory methods, including observation, semi-structured and group interviews and the collection of personal testimonies. The chapter concludes that attempting to repair social fabric by: providing training and education for ex-combatants and seeds and tools for everyone else, targeting the most vulnerable for aid inputs on the basis of one's own assessment criteria, resisting demands from widely distrusted local authorities for greater control over aid projects, and punishing implementing partners for not conforming to one's own standards of accountability and practice – all are political acts. Political economy analysis helps to bring home this message, but its greatest value lies in helping aid agencies to understand the political environment in which they have become engaged. For example, patrimonialism is entrenched in Sierra Leone's politics and tends to generate intense grievances. Despite this people continue to rely upon chiefs to guarantee local citizenship and property rights. A patrimonial political system is not just about getting one's own people into high places, but also about doing whatever seems necessary to attract the interest and patronage of the rich and powerful – including airing grievances about one's current patrons. These political tactics may be misunderstood by well-meaning aid agencies. A better understanding of local political dynamics allow better targeting of beneficiaries, better organisation of delivery, better understanding of risks, better prediction of a project's likely impact.

Thomson, B., 2007, 'Sierra Leone: Reform or Relapse? Conflict and Governance Reform', Chatham House
<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/493/>

This report, released ahead of Sierra Leone's 2007 elections describes the collaboration between the international community and the Sierra Leone government in building and reforming state institutions during the civil war and its aftermath. The report argues that while successful efforts to reform the security sector and economy have been made, the underlying causes of the conflict - patronage networks, youth unemployment and corruption - are deteriorating once more and that without action Sierra Leone will become increasingly vulnerable to instability and violence. Progress will depend on building appropriate coalitions of interests and taking opportunities for reform as they arise. The international community can be part of such coalitions but only if it is willing to make a long-term commitment and develop a thorough understanding of local needs and interests.

Zack-Williams, A., 2008, 'The Search for Sustainable Democracy, Development and Peace: The Sierra Leone 2007 Elections', Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

http://www.nai.uu.se/publications/electronic_public/978-91-7106-619-0-1.pdf

This book follows a public seminar on Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections and the Search for Sustainable Peace and Development, organised by the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). It includes contributions by three members of the Sierra Leone Research Network. The chapters discuss background history; international intervention and democracy; the role of youths and diaspora in this democracy and finally the conduct of the 2007 elections. The book concludes by looking at some observations and recommendations on peace building and democratic challenges:

- Politicians and their rich benefactors may have fettered them during the election campaigns, but the young people in particular, were not prepared to compromise their demand for change.
- The country would benefit if the political class could move away from the winner-takes-all attitude that pervades many political systems.
- It has to be recognised that the Sierra Leonean people are demanding a government that will be accountable, show respect for the rule of law and the people's political and socio-economic rights.
- Unemployment among a largely unskilled youthful population, many of who have participated in the civil war, a group with some potential to destabilise any post-election government, will be a major challenge.

Cargill, T., 2008, 'Sierra Leone a Year After Elections: Still in the Balance', Briefing Paper, Chatham House

<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/658/>

This briefing note examined the political situation in 2008. The UN mission that led Sierra Leone out of civil war in 2002 ends on 30 September 2008. Despite significant advances, and landmark elections last year that saw the opposition win power, the country remains amongst the poorest in the world. It is vulnerable to crime, corruption, and the growing power of South American drugs cartels. The UK has been Sierra Leone's major donor since its military intervention in 2000. However, slow progress and uncertain prospects for the country mean that the UK is keen to broaden the responsibility for supporting Sierra Leone. There are good signs that the government of Sierra Leone is serious about reform. But if it is to cement stability and growth, it will need to find new international partners, continue its reform efforts, and deter drug-traffickers from establishing themselves in the country. Most importantly, it will need to show greater leadership, confidence and direction to both voters and donors to ensure that widespread goodwill is not eroded by uncertainty and drift.

Sesay, A., Ukeje, C., Gbla, O., Ismail, O, 2009, 'Post-War Regimes and State Reconstruction in Liberia and Sierra Leone'

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=WNh7sSvRmnwC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This study examines post-war reconstruction processes in Liberia and Sierra Leone, focusing on the effects of regime types on the nature, scope, success or failure of their post-war reconstruction efforts. It investigates how the nature and character of a post-war regime can influence or affect the direction, pace and quality of peace building, reconstruction and national reconciliation. The book concludes with highlighting the obstacles to reconstruction: shortage of funds; creeping donor fatigue; the wilting credibility of government, and the difficulty accessing rural communities due to bad roads and other basic infrastructure. Other obstacles include shortage of man-power and requisite experience, pervasive corruption, and the failure of the government to appreciate the magnitude of the post-war reconstruction.

Kamara, K., 2009, 'Sierra Leone Policy Papers: Perspectives on Social Innovation and Change in Sierra Leone', iUniverse

This book is a collection of essays of forecasts, trends, and ideas about government in Sierra Leone. It combines analysis, theory, and political trends to explore the influences on leadership and institutional performance in Sierra Leone. The book aims to identify how much can be learned from examining Sierra Leone's leadership and management challenges towards realizing the potential of a Sierra Leonean regeneration, and to discerning what the global community may learn from Sierra Leone.

3. Civil War Literature

Keen, D., 2005, 'Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone', Oxford: James Currey
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SEz1PCvILHUC&lpg=PP1&ots=UWxCt6adbU&dq=Conflict%20and%20Collusion%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%E2%80%99&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This book provides a history of the last ten years of Sierra Leone. It analyses the political and economic functions of violence with an exploration of how violent people see their own violence. It thus examines both the societal context and the individual factors at work. The book questions the assumption that conflict is taking place between two parties and suggests instead that there are various armed groups that have little interest in ending the conflict. The key conclusion is that "greed" – or the more neutral term, "economic agendas" – cannot explain the full dynamics of violence, conflict, and war. The lure of diamonds undoubtedly played a strong role in the conflict, yet it was disrespect and lack of recognition that were the major drivers of violence.

Abdullah, I., 2004, 'Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War' CODESRIA
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=05wYkaUGQm8C&lpg=PP1&dq=Between%20Democracy%20and%20Terror%3A%20The%20Sierra%20Leone%20Civil%20War&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This book aims to be the most authoritative study of the Sierra Leone civil war. It explores the genesis of the crisis, the contradictory roles of different internal and external actors, civil society and the media; the regional intervention force and the demise of the second republic. It analyses the numerous peace initiatives designed to end a war and asks why the war became so prolonged. The study articulates how internal actors achieved power and non-conventional actors were able to inaugurate and sustain an insurgency.

Richards, P., 2003, 'The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone', Working Paper 21, Clingendael Institute
http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2003/20030800_cru_working_paper_21.pdf

Post-Cold War conflict is often attributed to a weak state and actors such as ethnic militias, religious groups, terrorist cells, private security companies, mercenaries and organised criminal gangs. This essay critically examines this view. The essay reviews the 11 years of civil war; addresses the 'greed, not grievance' theory of conflict in respect to Sierra Leone; and examines recent evidence on patterns of organisation of combatant groups and civil defence. The paper concludes that although parties of the conflict funded their efforts through mining there is little evidence that diamonds were the fundamental cause of the conflict. Instead the conflict was caused by social exclusion of the young and poor.

Clapham, C., 2003, 'Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Internal Conflict', Working Paper 20, Clingendael Institute
http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2003/20030700_cru_working_paper_20.pdf

This report provides an overview of events since independence and attempts to identify the driving forces behind the violent conflict. The report examines state decline and decay in Sierra Leone; the major sources of extractable surplus, such as diamonds, and their link to conflict; and the limitations of attempting to manage resources in an attempt to undercut some of the driving forces of conflict. The report identifies the critical areas where more primary research is required.

Zack-Williams, A.B. 1999, 'Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Civil War, 1991 - 1998', Third World Quarterly, vol. 20, no.1, pp143 - 162.

<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~courses/PoliticalScience/474A1/documents/Zack-WilliamsSierraLeonePolEconCivilWar.pdf>

This report analyses Sierra Leone's political and economic history since independence. It aims to identify what factors contributed to the social unrest which culminated with a military coup in May 1997. The report argues that pressure to elect a civilian government in 1996 under conditions of a breakdown of civil society and democratic accountability was futile and perhaps a significant contribution to the coup.

Reno, W., 1998, 'Sierra Leone's Transition to Warlord Politics', Chapter 4 of 'Warlord Politics and African States' Lynne Reiner

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=rUpClqrw-fgC&lpg=PA113&dq=Sierra%20Leone%E2%80%99s%20Transition%20to%20Warlord%20Politics%E2%80%99&pg=PA113#v=onepage&q=Sierra%20Leone%E2%80%99s%20Transition%20to%20Warlord%20Politics%E2%80%99&f=false>

This chapter looks at the nature of political authority in Sierra Leone following the Cold War. It documents how the rulers of what was a bureaucratically weak state faced warlord rules in neighbouring Liberia who based their authority on a different logic of organisation. It was these warlords who acted as a catalyst for conflict. The chapter goes on to document the unique influence of warlords and warlord politics on Sierra Leone, how political elites responded to this threat, for example through hiring private military companies, and how history unfolded.

4. Other Related Literature

Jackson, P., 2005, 'Chiefs, Money and Politicians: Rebuilding Local Government in Post-War Sierra Leone', Public Administration and Development, vol. 25, no.1, pp. 49-58

<http://blds.ids.ac.uk/cf/docdelcf/blds/grcdel1.cfm?rn=247576>

This paper analyses the interaction between the different elements of local government, finance, and the diamond trade in Sierra Leone and offers guidance for post-conflict reconstruction at a local level. Very little has been written so far about the complex interaction between traditional chiefs, modern local government and the illegal diamond trade in Sierra Leone, which have implications for the financial structure of local government under the new system. This paper argues that the reconstitution of the politico-economic networks surrounding diamond extraction outside of local government may lead to the alienation of the same groups that led the rebellion over the last few years.

Richards, P., Khadija, B. and Vincent, J, 2004, 'Social Capital and Survival: Prospects for Community-Driven Development in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone', World Bank Social Development Papers, Paper No. 12, World Bank, Washington

<http://go.worldbank.org/FUXQQC9AN0>

This World Bank Social Development Paper analyses and evaluates how social capital (defined as collective action) functions in rural communities recovering from war in Sierra Leone. This study provides an account of social capital in Sierra Leone, describing and analysing the processes of collective action in the countryside. It discusses the nature of 'community' in Sierra Leone and the impact of governance – both internal, and interventions by development agencies – on local processes of post-war collective action.

Fanthorpe, R., 2005, 'On the limits of liberal peace: chiefs and democratic decentralization in post-war Sierra Leone', *African Affairs*, 105/418, 27–49
<http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/content/105/418/27.full.pdf+html>

The present government of Sierra Leone remains supportive of chieftaincy whereas international donors are supporting a fast-track decentralization programme. This article, drawing upon the author's recent fieldwork in Sierra Leone, undertakes a critical examination of this policy. It is argued that, popular grievances notwithstanding, chieftaincy is the historic focus of struggles for political control over the Sierra Leonean countryside. Both the national elite and the rural poor remain deeply engaged in these struggles, and many among the latter continue to value customary authority as a defence against the abuse of bureaucratic power. Fast-tracking decentralization in the war-ravaged countryside may therefore only succeed in shifting the balance of political power away from the poor.

5. Useful Websites

African Economic Outlook

<http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/sierra-leone/>

The African Economic Outlook is a joint publication with the African Development Bank, the OECD Development Centre, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and a network of African think tanks and research centres. It covers the economic, social and political developments of African countries.

PRI-Center: Sierra Leone Country Analysis

http://www.pri-center.com/country/country_specific.cfm?countrynum=171

The Political Risk Insurance Center (PRI-Center) provides a searchable database of Web-based documents on political risk environments; on legal issues related to arbitration, mediation and other investment dispute resolution and prevention mechanisms; research findings and analyses of political risk issues and their relationship to foreign direct investment (FDI), as well as specialized tools for practitioners.

World Bank Data – Sierra Leone

<http://data.worldbank.org/country/sierra-leone>

The World Bank Data website provides data on a range of economic, social and environmental indicators.

6. Additional Information

Author

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Selected websites visited

GSDRC, African Economic Outlook, World Bank, DFID, African Development Bank, Chatham House, DFID, Nordic Africa Institute

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