

From Peace-building towards Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Sierra Leone's Future

Simone Datzberger (LSE), Viviane Dittrich (LSE) and Luisa Enria (Oxford) review the recent Sierra Leone research workshop that took place at LSE.

Since the end of the civil war (1991-2002), Sierra Leone's transition from conflict to peace and development has often been portrayed as a success story. Following three consecutive peaceful elections (2002, 2007, 2012), Sierra Leone was recently also classified as a "Low Income State" and is no longer considered a "Fragile State" by the International Monetary Fund. Moreover, the UN Security Council will be reviewing a report on the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), focussing on mission drawdown and transition to a UN country team. The Government of Sierra Leone is eager to continue this trajectory away from the country's violent past to become a beacon of development. The Agenda for Prosperity, launched in July 2013, anticipates that Sierra Leone will become a middle-income country by 2035, and a net lender within 50 years, with 80% of its population above the poverty line. Despite significant achievements in Sierra Leone since 2002, various challenges remain.



Sierra Leone – Photo: Getty images

Against this background, academics, researchers and practitioners alike gathered on 6 December 2013 at LSE, to address and critically assess the challenges as well as emerging opportunities in the ongoing peace-building and development process of the country.

The event was generously co-sponsored and supported by the **BISA Africa and International Studies Working Group**, **LSE African Initiative** and the **LSE IDEAS Africa Programme**. The former Chairman of Sierra Leone Diaspora Network (SLDN) UK, Ade Daramy, chaired a very dynamic and interactive roundtable discussion, which consisted of experts ranging from various disciplines and professional backgrounds: Sneha Baljekar (Postgraduate Adult Nursing Student, Sierra Leone Student Partnership representative, King's College London), Nana Busia Jr. (Former Senior Advisor on International Human Rights Law & Head of Access Justice Programmes, U.N. Sierra Leone), Lisa Denney (Research Officer, Overseas Development Institute), David Harris (Lecturer in African Studies, University of Bradford), Francis Ben Kaifala Esq (Barrister and Solicitor, Partner at Wright & Co) and Alexandra Malet (Postgraduate Adult Nursing Student, Sierra Leone Student Partnership representative, King's College London).

In the following, it is our pleasure as organisers of the event to present some highlights of the roundtable discussion and provide an overview of the topics and perspectives debated.

Rule of Law and Corruption

Generally, it was acknowledged that Sierra Leone has come a long way since 2002 and has reached a level of normality with an impressive record today. Speaking about some recent shootings, Francis Kaifala cautioned that such incidents, while certainly worrying, should not be used to judge the general situation in the country. Nana Busia drew attention to the dysfunctional justice system in the early 1990s and stressed that while there may be sporadic cases of police brutality there have been no reports of systematic human rights violations since 2002. Two challenges to the rule of law were identified: non-state actors and violations taking place in the private realm, for instance by companies in the extractive industries and violence against women in the homes. According to David Harris, the most salient problems in the judiciary are lack of capacity and corruption and questioned whether the funds that went into the Special Court for Sierra Leone could not have been put to better use in supporting the local judiciary.

With regard to corruption and the importance of perception, David Harris made a distinction between what he termed illegitimate and semi-illegitimate corruption, stressing that while both are illegal it is more difficult to deal with the second form as it seems systemic and wide-spread. Nana Busia then juxtaposed mega corruption arising out of greed and that out of need and pointed out that when focussing on corruption itself, donors often neglect its causes. Sneha Baljekar and Alexandra Malet focused on the practice of ordinary small-scale corruption; for instance, to be found in hospitals. Lisa Denney noted that many peace-building initiatives emphasise addressing issues of governance and propose changing or putting into place formal structures while ignoring the underlying informal structures and practices. Francis Kaifala agreed and highlighted that the judiciary is at the heart in the fight against corruption and yet the Anti-Corruption Commission is understaffed and lacks capacity. Justice is a perception-driven sector of governance and hence it is critical to tackle perceptions in light of the lack of trust in the judiciary and rule of law but also to sustainably address the root causes of corruption.

Private Sector Development

Participants were asked to express their views on the role of the government of Sierra Leone in promoting Private Sector Development (PSD). The discussion mainly revolved around the issues of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the lack of local expertise, legislation and regulation. According to Lisa Denney, the assumption that PSD creates more employment opportunities does not always hold, as few Sierra Leoneans are qualified for the high-skilled jobs, such as engineering, that mining companies require, meaning that companies often bring in their own (usually expatriate) expertise. Besides, the government needs to implement much stronger enforcing mechanisms at the levels of taxation to effectively contribute to the local economy. Correspondingly, Nana Busia stressed that voluntary standards (e.g. CSR) do not bring about desired results. In countries like Sierra Leone, there is no equal correlation between private sector companies and the state. Companies, such as London Mining and African Minerals, are extremely powerful and it would be naïve to believe that a legal regime can successfully enforce certain standards. On a more general note, David Harris and Sneha Baljekar emphasised that PSD is not simply a magic formula that inevitably leads towards peacebuilding, stability and development. In particular Harris believes that PSD does not lead to development.

Youth unemployment and intergenerational power imbalances

As Ade Daramy noted, “youth” is a hot topic in Sierra Leone and one that is constantly highlighted in political campaigns from all sides of the spectrum. When asked about youth underemployment, intergenerational power imbalances and potential underlying conflict between elders and youth, the panellists focused primarily on the theme of education and opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Education of the youth, as Francis Kaifala pointed out, is at the heart of empowerment as a central precondition for their effective involvement in the country's development. This emphasis needs to start before higher education and reform is needed at all levels. This is especially important given the low levels of employment often resulting from skill mismatches in the country. However, Kaifala also noted that legislation plays a pivotal role alongside addressing the skills pool, with local content policies especially for low-skilled jobs needing to be enforced far more effectively.

On the issue of youth voices and intergenerational power imbalances, David Harris pointed to the impact of young people's gaining of power through the gun during the war, in changing post-war dynamics. While this has led to both domestic and international focus on youth inclusion in the aftermath of conflict, for example through youth groups, it also inevitably means that tensions rise as traditionally gerontocratic power structures are challenged and more accountability is demanded.

Public Health Care

Another subject of debate addressed the GoSL and international community's efforts to promote public health care in the course of the peace-building process in Sierra Leone. Immediately after the war, Sierra Leone received a lot of support from international donors. Yet, Lisa Denney and Alexandra Malet argued that this overwhelming response rather substituted urgently needed capacity than actually building it. Similarly, David Harris described the current free health care system for lactating mothers and children as a "partial package". While there have been substantial reforms, ultimately, these new frameworks are badly managed by the Ministry of Health. In addition, it was stressed by some participants that health care is not only underdeveloped in Sierra Leone (lack of medication, infrastructure and retention of trained medical staff) but also corrupt. Frequently patients have to bribe nurses and doctors (thereby bumping up their low salaries) for better treatment. Moreover, health initiatives hailed in the press as ground-breaking, such as free health care for under-fives struggle in their implementation. For example, drugs are often not available as they are siphoned off and sold privately.

Concluding Discussion: Peacebuilding and Development Processes

Critically reflecting upon Sierra Leone's transition from conflict to peace, the roundtable perceived the country's peace-building and development track record as largely positive yet cautioned against a too enthusiastic and monolithic assessment. The panellists agreed that there was great diversity in terms of capacity across government departments and therefore in their ability to function effectively. Considering Sierra Leone's past, it was acknowledged that significant strides have been made in terms of achieving civil and political liberties. For instance, Lisa Denney pointed to some important improvements in the security sector and citizens' willingness to use institutions such as the Sierra Leone Police. However, as Nana Busia noted, the interface between state and society remains weak, something that he felt was a long-standing outcome of state formation in the country.

The lively discussion from the audience that followed the panel discussion reflected not only the complexity of the challenges that Sierra Leone faces, but also the commitment among participants to find solutions. Above all, the audience emphasised the need to counter negative images of the country as it takes considerable steps in its trajectory from peace-building to development.

February 14th, 2014 | [Development](#) | [1 Comment](#)
