



Sierra Leone a year after elections

Still in the balance

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Summary points

- The UN mission that led Sierra Leone out of bloody 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 – the last successful military intervention before the Iraq war. 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.

Introduction

The end of September 2008 sees the final withdrawal of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL). A UN presence will remain in the country in the form of the new United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). However the withdrawal of UNIOSIL is symbolically important, marking as it does the end of the immediate post-conflict UN presence in the country that began with the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in the wake of the ill-fated Lomé Peace Agreement of 1999.

September 2008 also marks the first anniversary of the landmark 2007 elections which were rightly praised for their remarkable transparency and efficiency. The elections were also notable, even in continental terms, in that they saw the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) defeated at the ballot box by the All People's Congress Party (APC).

Unfortunately the new government has struggled to make progress in tackling the multiple challenges confronting it. Inexperience, lack of resources, lack of direction and poor judgment have all played a role. Some problems, such as rocketing food and fuel prices, are beyond the government's immediate control. The shortage of skilled administrators, a product of the decayed education system, is also a major challenge. However, the popular mood in Sierra Leone is increasingly grim, and the current government does not have long to turn things around before voters may lose faith completely. Although another civil war is not thought to be likely, an equally destructive impact could be felt if the growing drugs trade takes root. West Africa is recently believed by some to have surpassed the Caribbean as the main conduit for cocaine from South America to Europe.

Colombian and other drugs cartels are setting up base across the region, and the amounts of illicit money involved could dwarf the resources of both governments and donors.¹ Sierra Leone has a large alienated, unemployed youth population, many of whom have experience of handling weapons, and a poorly paid military, police and civil service. If the drugs cartels do become established, the implications for Europe and West Africa will be severe. For Sierra Leoneans, the effects could be catastrophic.

With the downsizing of the UN physical presence, the government of Sierra Leone will be even more dependent on its own limited resources and those of its international partners. The UK is prominent amongst these, with the Department for International Development (DFID) the largest bilateral donor. Conversely, the widespread domestic and international perception that the success or otherwise of Sierra Leone is partly or wholly dependent on UK policy, whether true or not, means that the UK has a reputational stake in events in Sierra Leone far out of proportion to the country's small size. Post-Iraq, the success of Sierra Leone is arguably more important to the UK's international reputation.

This briefing paper will outline some of the international dimensions of the challenges facing Sierra Leone, in particular the burgeoning drugs trade, and explore the UN's future role there. It will also highlight the dilemma for the UK and other partners, as much as for the government of Sierra Leone, in squaring sky-high expectations with extremely limited resources.²

Challenges

The remarkable success of the 2007 Sierra Leone elections should not be under-estimated. The first elections since the war to be wholly administered by domestic institutions passed largely peacefully and, most

1 *Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and Development*, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, December 2007, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/west_africa_cocaine_report_2007-12_en.pdf.

2 In presenting this snapshot, this briefing paper relies heavily on the far more comprehensive and authoritative Chatham House Report by Brian Thomson, *Sierra Leone: Reform or Relapse? Conflict and Governance Reform* (June 2007). The paper also takes into account the ICG July 2008 *Report Sierra Leone: A New Era of Reform?*, which offers strong analysis of the internal governance challenges to Sierra Leone. The focus here will be more on the international dynamics of the challenges facing the country. The other principal source is a number of research trips by the author to Sierra Leone, including a week of interviews in late February 2008. All interviews were conducted off the record and took in a section of opinion from government, opposition, civil society, media and donor communities. <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/493/>; <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5608&l=1>.

remarkably for sub-Saharan Africa, resulted in an orderly transfer of power from government to opposition in line with the will of the people.

No attempt will be made here to describe the history of Sierra Leone prior to the 2007 election period. A concise and informative historical background is in Brian Thomson's report of 2007.³ It is fair to say, however, that by early 2007 the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party appeared to many observers within and outside the country to be well entrenched in power.

Indeed, while one of the retrospective conspiracy theories circulated by SLPP sympathizers is that the international community had a 'regime change' agenda to remove the SLPP from power, the truth is that in private among officials from international partners there was a degree of resigned expectation of another SLPP victory. As late as May 2007 certainly little confidence was being expressed in the APC, beset as it was with internal disputes, with a controversial historical legacy to overcome and a leadership with little experience of competing for and wielding power.

This is not the place to go into any detail as to why and how these expectations were proved wrong, but several factors are relevant to Sierra Leone's prospects and the role of the international community. First, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) proved far more resilient, efficient and independent than had been anticipated. Excellently chaired by Christina Thorpe, and with experienced advice from UNIOSIL, the NEC was able to devise a campaigning, voting and counting process to which all parties found themselves adhering far more closely than they may have felt comfortable with. Once the resilience of the NEC became clear, it naturally became a target for those wishing to subvert the process, but equally it became a rallying point for those who wished to see a fair and transparent process. It was this overt protection for and championing of the NEC by the overwhelming majority of international actors, such as the National Democratic Institute, that led some who perceived NEC independence as being *de facto* opposition to attribute these qualities to the international community as a whole.

The second element underestimated by many within and outside the country was the intense frustration of so many people in Sierra Leone at the corruption and lack of progress that were apparent. There was a genuine and widespread sense of 'time for change' among voters, and opposition candidate Ernest Bai Koroma's relative youth, business credentials and promise to professionalize government and transform Sierra Leone drew the support of many.

Unfortunately, victory in the presidential and parliamentary elections appeared to come as much to the surprise of the APC as it did to many others. There is a widespread acknowledgement that the party, and in particular Mr Koroma, had not planned or prepared a strategy for implementing policy. In the defence of the new government it is asserted that the need to maintain unity in the APC during the elections precluded the possibility of making key appointments ahead of the election. The recent turmoil within the APC added to this need. In addition it is pointed out that the unexpectedly poor state of the administration and government finances meant that the incoming administration was forced to completely change both assumptions and priorities. These are valid points. However, it must be acknowledged that for a party that campaigned on the basis of a businesslike approach to government, the lack of preparedness was a major flaw.

Ever since, the government of Sierra Leone has been struggling to both plan a strategy and implement policy simultaneously in the context of multiple competing urgent priorities and very limited access to resources. In a country with an advanced skills base this would be a major challenge. For Sierra Leone the task is truly formidable. On top of all this has come the rocketing price increases in food and fuel that have had a severe impact on the population. As has been the case the world over, the fact that the government has extremely limited control over these major global impacts has not stopped the people of Sierra Leone from holding it responsible. The global situation has fed a growing popular sense of frustration at a perceived lack of

3 See note 2.

government action and purpose. In this context, it is no wonder that some are questioning whether this will be a one-term president, and a one-term party. Other are asking whether any president and any party could overcome the challenges Sierra Leone faces, pointing out the expectations that were placed on the government of President Kabbah in 2002. Some suggest darkly that the situation in Sierra Leone is now not dissimilar to that which existed before the war.

As mentioned above, few people believe war is likely, but a new and equally deadly threat is growing in the form of South American drug cartels, which are seeking to use Sierra Leone, and other West African countries, as an access route to Europe.⁴ According to some, West Africa has within recent months become the principal route for cocaine into Europe, a trend that is thought to result from the success of authorities in Caribbean states in disrupting the trade. If the trade becomes embedded, it could completely destabilize Sierra Leone and the whole of West Africa as vast amounts of drugs and money serve to corrupt officials, attract the unemployed, fuel criminal behaviour of all types and feed the gun trade.

There are already worrying signs that the drugs cartels are making progress in recruiting officials at all levels. In recent months dozens of arrests have been made of individuals found to be in possession of drugs at Lungi Airport. In one of the more high-profile recent cases a plane which landed there was found to be carrying a reported 600–750kg of cocaine.⁵ The subsequent investigations led to the suspension of the Transport and Aviation Minister with the suggestion that officials at many levels had been involved. In neighbouring Guinea Bissau the drugs cartels have become more established and the effect has been severely destabilizing. The recent arrest of the head of the navy after links to a coup attempt, among accusations of deepening military involvement with the drugs cartels, points to an extremely worrying trend in a

region which is still awash with arms, and beset by mass unemployment of men with previous experience of weapons and familiar with drug use. The implications for Europe are also severe, for West Africa is far closer than the Caribbean, and access to European drugs markets is easier. There is still too little intelligence regarding the routes used between West Africa and Europe, but decreasing street prices across the EU are a worrying sign that the West African route is at the very least moderately successful.

In fact Sierra Leone's prospects remain firmly bound up in those of the wider region. Liberia is still fragile, while Guinea also remains a potential source of instability and indeed still occupies the town of Yenga in the far east of Sierra Leone. The reinvigoration of the Mano River Union between these countries, and the entry of Côte d'Ivoire to the Union in 2008, are positive signs, but renewed instability in any part of the Union could easily destabilize the rest.

So the challenges to the year-old government are massive indeed, which is why the need for demonstrable policy impact is now imperative. It is a challenge not just for the government but for its partners in the international community to ensure that the security so carefully built up over the past few years is not swept away.

Government responses

Thankfully, there are some very positive signs that the government can and will respond to these formidable challenges. Some of the policy options available and suggestions for action are described in the July 2008 International Crisis Group report.⁶ Various decisions by President Koroma and his cabinet have demonstrated a desire to demonstrate a fundamental change in the style of government. The implementation of performance contracts and regular reviews with ministers is one such novel move, though a surer indication will be what the president does if ministers fail to

4 'Big Cocaine Seizures in West Africa', Reuters, 08/08/08, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LI716757.htm>.

5 'Sierra Leone Police Seize Drugs Plane', BBC, 14/07/08, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7504953.stm>.

6 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5608&l=1>.

achieve their targets. The signing into law of the Anti-Corruption Bill and the president's declaration of his own assets are both admirable and important moves.⁷ The forced resignation of powerful Presidential Chief Adviser James Sampha Koroma⁸ and the suspension of Transport Minister Kemoh Sesay demonstrate that President Koroma is prepared to tackle powerful party figures in pursuit of good governance.

Against this, the most common criticism of the government is that it still does not come across as being in charge of its own agenda. Too much reliance is placed on donors to generate ideas and policy, which leaves the government trying to accommodate too many different agendas instead of firmly imposing its own and demanding that donors accommodate themselves to it. The lack of regular meetings with donors has been a source of great frustration and has added to a sense of drift. This is compounded by poor government communications. For instance, the government could have gained much more positive publicity from the operation to intercept the drugs plane by pointing to the intelligence that led to many of the arrests.⁹ In fact the whole episode, if approached proactively and imaginatively, would offer an opportunity for President Koroma to appear strong and decisive, as well as to gain valuable international attention as a leader who stands up to drug dealers. The concern is that while this may very well be the reality, poor communications very much blunt this image and allow others with different agendas to paint their own, less flattering portrait of the president. Violent clashes between APC and SLPP supporters, allegations of police bias against government opponents, and the rough handling of journalists and insulting treatment of senior SLPP figures when guests of the president add understandable weight to perhaps less legitimate criticisms.¹⁰

International support for Sierra Leone

The reassuring aspect of these criticisms is that they should be far from insurmountable and indeed more likely to be overcome as President Koroma, his cabinet and advisers gain experience and confidence in holding and wielding power. In this section of the paper the focus is twofold: one is on the policy responses of UNIPSIL, which is replacing UNIOSIL as the key vehicle for coordinating UN resources and hosts the local office of the UN Peacebuilding Commission; the other is on the international partners, particularly the UK's role, how it is changing and where the government of Sierra Leone might broaden its international support.

The UN

Given the challenges outlined above, the replacement of UNIOSIL with UNIPSIL comes at a critical time in Sierra Leone's transition. This concern was clear in the mandate approved for UNIPSIL by the UN Security Council in August 2008.¹¹ The mandate contains significant overlap with that of UNIOSIL, but there are noticeable and important differences in tone and content. Whereas UNIOSIL had a large mandate and a long list of responsibilities with much room for interpretation within them,¹² UNIPSIL has a far shorter list of responsibilities but nearly all have a specific focus. These are:

- (a) Providing political support to national and local efforts for identifying and resolving tensions and threats of potential conflict, whatever the source;
- (b) Monitoring and promoting human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law, including efforts to counter transnational organized crime and drug-trafficking;

7 'Sierra Leone Passes Historic Anti-Corruption Bill', VOA, 02/09/08, <http://www.voanews.com/english/Africa/2008-09-02-voa28.cfm>.

8 'Resignation of Koroma's Adviser Attracts S/Leonean Media Attention', <http://www.afriquenligne.fr/resignation-of-koroma-s-adviser-attracts-s%10leonean-media-attention-2008083111763.html>.

9 Private interviews.

10 'Unrest "appals" S Leone leaders', BBC, 14/08/08, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7561852.stm>.

11 UNSC Resolution 1829, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/448/13/PDF/N0844813.pdf?OpenElement>.

12 UNSC Resolution 1620, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/8612824.html>.

- (c) Consolidating good governance reforms, with a special focus on anti-corruption instruments such as the Anti-Corruption Commission;
- (d) Supporting decentralization, reviewing the 1991 Constitution and the enactment of relevant legislation;
- (e) Closely coordinating with and supporting the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the implementation of the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework and projects supported through the Peacebuilding Fund.

In addition the Head of UNIPSIL, the Executive Representative, who will also be UN Resident Coordinator as well as UNDP Resident Representative, must report back to the Security Council every four months of the initially mandated period of one year. One of the most obvious gaps in UNIPSIL's mandate is the lack of a role in strengthening institutions, but this is because it is a core role of the Peacebuilding Commission and Fund.

These stringent and to some degree unprecedented reporting requirements, combined with the focused wording of UNIPSIL's role, demonstrate an awareness of the size of the challenge. Whether this will be translated into improved impacts is another matter. However the vastly reduced size of UNIPSIL compared to UNIOSIL – around 60 personnel, down from around 300 – will demand a new flexibility and efficiency in operation if UNIPSIL and the Commission are to make faster progress.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) itself is a relatively new phenomenon, established by Security Council Resolution 1645, and concurrently by General Assembly Resolution 60/80 as a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly in December 2005. Its purpose is threefold:

- (a) To bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated

strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;

- (b) To focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development;
- (c) To provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery.¹³

The Peacebuilding Commission represents an attempt by the UN to rationalize and make more effective its response to countries deemed at risk of instability. It aims to marshal resources and develop long-term strategies to support development. As such it is part of attempts in recent years to make the United Nations more accountable, effective and relevant, and is in itself an ambitious experiment. One of the strengths of the PBC is that it coordinates country-specific work through Country Specific Meetings (CSMs), which bring together representatives from the 31 countries on the PBC organizational committee, as well as from the region of the country being discussed, together with representatives from multilateral donor institutions. Representatives from the target country are also included. There are already signs that in the case of Sierra Leone this has been a useful source of emerging developmental partners.

In the Sierra Leone context there is much complementarity between the PBC and UNIPSIL, but it is a novel situation. The Peacebuilding Commission has only recently started work in Sierra Leone, and prior to this was working in Burundi. The Peacebuilding

¹³ UNSC Resolution 1645, [http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/Security%20Council/Resolutions/Post%20Conflict%20peacebuilding%20S%20RES%201645%20\(2005\).pdf](http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/Security%20Council/Resolutions/Post%20Conflict%20peacebuilding%20S%20RES%201645%20(2005).pdf).

Cooperation Framework, the main vehicle for the PBC commitments to Sierra Leone, was agreed in December 2007. The areas of focus agreed roughly followed the priorities set out by President Koroma in his January presidential retreat:

- Youth employment and empowerment;
- Justice and security sector reform;
- Consolidation of democracy and good government;
- Capacity-building;
- Energy sector;
- Sub-regional dimensions of peacekeeping.

A review of progress was held June 2008.¹⁴ The Commission can point to progress in the last year, such as the establishment of a Human Rights Commission and the continued, if slow-paced, constitutional reform efforts. Results are also apparent in judicial reform and anti-corruption efforts. Credit should be given for the Commission's role in ensuring funding for the local elections, and support for President Koroma's commitment to providing electricity to Freetown, which was opposed by some development agencies. However, the Peacebuilding Commission has struggled to communicate these successes to audiences both in Sierra Leone and more broadly. Unfortunate political timing of the Commission's initial activities in the last days of the SLPP government created a sense of distrust. The Peacebuilding Support Office in New York has a new head, Jane Holl Lute, who brings valuable experience from her former position as Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Field Support (DFS). The challenges the Commission has faced in Burundi, given its ongoing instability, offer a stark reminder of the obstacles this new institution will face in Sierra Leone.¹⁵

The role of the UK

As a former colony, Sierra Leone has traditionally enjoyed strong links with the UK. These links extend much further than government-to-government relations, encompassing links between civil society organizations, academics and churches in both countries. A relatively large and active Sierra Leonean diaspora lives in the UK, with many of its members active in British business, politics and professional life. This complex fabric of connections ensures that Sierra Leonean issues have a level of importance in Whitehall out of proportion to the small size of the country.

This was most dramatically made evident in the decision by former prime minister Tony Blair that Britain should intervene militarily in Sierra Leone in May 2000. Although the original mission was initially extremely limited in scope, it gradually spread to the point where, for a short time, British officials were placed in virtually every Sierra Leonean government ministry and arm of government. This massive 'mission creep' would have been far less likely without such strong links between the two countries.

Since the UK intervention in 2000, DFID has provided around \$500 million in support for a vast range of reconstructive, institution-building and developmental projects. Unfortunately, increasing concerns about corruption and mismanagement blunted the UK's initial goodwill and enthusiasm. Despite the widespread assumption that DFID and the UK government as a whole had a high, even disproportionate degree of influence over the government of Sierra Leone, in fact UK officials found to their frustration that it was quite the reverse. Budget support was withheld on a number of occasions and support for the Anti-Corruption Commission was brought to a halt in the wake of a damning DFID-funded report on its activities in early 2007.¹⁶ By mid-2007 there was a growing sense of unease in Whitehall at the reputational risk attached to the

14 Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework: Review of Progress, June 2008, <http://www.peacebuildingcommission.org/files/index.php?act=view&id=385>.

15 See, for example, 'La Commission de consolidation de la paix: la paix durable se fait attendre', GRIP note d'analyse, 26/08/08, <http://www.grip.org/bdg/pdf/g0909.pdf>.

16 Annual Review of DFID Support to the Anti-corruption Commission Phase 2 in Sierra Leone, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/anti-corruption-sierraleone.pdf>.

UK's dominant and visible profile in a Sierra Leone that some officials perceived as slipping back and in real danger of becoming unstable again in the medium term, despite the intensive political and financial resources expended by the UK. Given the relatively long period over which this disenchantment set in, the election of the APC government has not reversed the unease, merely checked it. A sense of caution, albeit tempered by much goodwill and hope, is very much evident among UK officials.¹⁷

At the same time, until recently the UK government has consistently and publicly used Sierra Leone as an example of a successful humanitarian intervention. Its importance as a success story increased as criticism of the UK's role in Iraq grew after 2003. Tony Blair's choice of Sierra Leone as one of the last countries he visited as prime minister in 2007 underlined the importance he attached to it. 'However ferocious the challenges are in this part of Africa, it's better to intervene and try to make a difference than stay out and try to cope with the consequences at a later time.'¹⁸ In South Africa, the day after making this statement, he again made clear the importance he attached to intervention: 'Africa has been a prime example of a foreign policy that has been thoroughly interventionist. I believe in the power of political action to make the world better and the moral obligation to use it.'¹⁹

These two divergent trends have left the UK government in a dilemma. When Gordon Brown became prime minister, it was inevitably argued that he should try to reduce the strong implied link between Sierra Leone's performance and the UK's claim to be an active force for good in the world. Certainly, since succeeding Tony Blair, Gordon Brown has not publicly linked the UK intervention to the broader UK foreign policy record, despite meeting President Koroma at Downing Street in January 2008.

Yet that meeting, and indeed President Koroma's visit to the UK, demonstrated that the prime minister is

still committed to UK support for Sierra Leone, as did the visit to Freetown of Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development, a month later. Sierra Leone remains important, not just in its own right, but as part of the larger regional security complex that encompasses Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. The importance the UK attaches to the region is evidenced by the opening of a British embassy in Guinea in 2004, and the presence of a UK diplomat in Monrovia and Abidjan. UK policy in Sierra Leone is now to continue engagement and to increase support as capacity develops, but also to encourage and facilitate Sierra Leone's efforts to widen its international developmental partnerships. This has the twin virtues of lessening the UK risk profile, while increasing the level, diversity and stability of development assistance flows to Sierra Leone.

This shift in policy has caused some confusion and even grievance among of senior officials in the Sierra Leone government. They complain that the new government is bearing the brunt of decisions to withhold funding made in the last months of the former SLPP government. They accept that the challenges facing Sierra Leone are daunting, and there is a sense that expectations placed on the new government from both within and outside Sierra Leone are almost impossibly high. However, it is these very circumstances that make a renewed and increased commitment from the UK at this time so crucial to Sierra Leone's prospects. In hesitating, the UK is making the failure it fears more likely, at the very moment that a new and reforming government is giving Sierra Leone the best chance of progress it is likely to have for some time.

Despite these concerns, the UK is and will remain an important development partner in Sierra Leone, as well as encouraging a widening of Sierra Leone's support base. DFID still provides far more support than any other bilateral donor and UK officials contributed much to the drawing up of UNIPSIL's carefully worded

¹⁷ Private interviews.

¹⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6703139.stm.

¹⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6708917.stm.

mandate and the presence of the Peacebuilding Commission. Indeed much of the PBC's success stems from DFID-funded projects. Another recent development which may go some way to addressing Sierra Leone's desire for a strong public champion has come in the commitment made by Tony Blair in June 2008 to support both governance and efforts to win new international partners.²⁰ There has been an inevitable degree of wariness over the impact this might have on high-level UK interest in Sierra Leone. However, the work undertaken by the Office of Tony Blair may go some way to easing both Sierra Leonean and UK concerns over the bilateral relationship, by effectively 'outsourcing' some of the reputational links between the UK's intervention and Sierra Leone's future performance.

Yet recent frustrations, difficult bilateral relations, compounded by the change of prime minister and a history of complex relations between UK departments in Sierra Leone, underline the importance of a strong diplomatic commitment to Sierra Leone for some years to come.

Other partners and prospects

Sierra Leone enjoys relatively high levels of aid, but is dependent on a fairly small number of aid partners, which means changes in the aid flows of a few partners can have a large effect on overall aid levels. As is common in 'post-post'-conflict situations,²¹ bilateral aid levels are declining.²²

Prominent support from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund is therefore central, and looks set to increase modestly over coming years. The World Bank is a little over halfway

through its current Country Assistance Strategy, with a committed amount of \$244 million over around 20 projects.²³ In July 2008 the IMF completed a review of Sierra Leone's performance and granted a one-year extension of its agreed 2006–08 concessional loan agreement of around \$50 million, though more on the basis of future commitments from the government of Sierra Leone than on past performance.²⁴ The African Development Bank is similarly part-way through its 2005–09 Country Strategy. A July 2008 review, held jointly with the World Bank, DFID and the European Commission, again found more basis for optimism on recent commitments than on past performance. However, the continued commitment of these three institutions to Sierra Leone is not currently in doubt. In recent years the European Commission has also grown to become an important partner, and in December 2007 agreed a joint country Strategy Paper with DFID covering 2008–13 and committing €242 million (~\$360 million).²⁵

The continued presence and support of these multilateral institutions is essential, but it is no substitute for strong bilateral engagement. While the government of Sierra Leone may reluctantly accept that the UK is not going to significantly increase its overall assistance, it very much shares the view that Sierra Leone must broaden its support base if developmental objectives are to be met and if aid volatility is to be reduced. To this end Sierra Leone's foreign minister, Zainab Bangura, has been travelling almost constantly since taking office in an attempt to gain new international development partners, to the point where political opponents have criticized her long absences from Sierra Leone.

Fundraising takes time and resources, and the challenges a small nation with such limited resources faces

20 Press Release, The Office of Tony Blair, 09/06/08, <http://tonyblairoffice.org/2008/06/tony-blair-to-work-with-sierra.html>.

21 See, for instance, 'Post-conflict Aid, Real Exchange Rate Adjustment, and Catch-up Growth', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, April 2007, http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2007/04/09/000016406_20070409135857/Rendered/PDF/wps4187.pdf.

22 'Mapping External Resource Flows to Sierra Leone', Internal UN Peacebuilding Support Office paper, 08/08/2007, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/18/26/39718221.pdf>.

23 World Bank Country Assistance Strategy for Sierra Leone, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/SIERRALEONE-EXTN/0,menuPK:367836~pagePK:141132~piPK:141105~theSitePK:367809,00.html>.

24 Sierra Leone: Second Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.cfm?sk=22203.0>.

25 European Commission Geographical Partnerships, http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries/countries/country_profile.cfm?cid=sl&type=short&lng=en.

in getting access, let alone support, in foreign capitals cannot be underrated. In acting as both clearing-house and champion for specific projects, the Peacebuilding Commission organized a high-level meeting in May 2008 to lobby for additional support and is committed to encouraging two new partners to support Sierra Leone by December 2008.

Currently principal bilateral donors are the United Kingdom, China and the United States, with smaller contributions from Ireland, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, France, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. Of these countries Norway seems the most likely to increase its contribution substantially in coming years and discussion is ongoing regarding the setting up of a representative office in the country. China has increased its aid levels substantially in recent years; although there is no definitive figure, contributions include \$22 million of debt relief in December 2007 and infrastructure projects including support for the energy sector.²⁶

There has been criticism from some Western donors regarding the lack of a public cooperation framework through which Chinese aid flows can be channelled and mutual commitments guaranteed. This is particularly significant now that China is the second-largest bilateral donor after the UK. However, Sierra Leone officials point to the high transactional costs involved in coordinating such a multiplicity of agreements with donor commitments. The Peacebuilding Commission, and a reinvigorated Development Assistance Coordination Office, aim to ease these problems, but certainly in the first months of the new Sierra Leone government, Chinese assistance offered an important source of discretionary funding. This is set to continue to grow, but Chinese engagement with the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework has been strong, with active participation in CSMs.²⁷ This will need to continue if the PBC is to be effective.

Other emerging partners include Brazil and India which are also members of the PBC, and Sierra Leone recently announced that it would open embassies in both countries.²⁸ They also reportedly agreed to sell rice to Sierra Leone on concessionary terms to help alleviate the impact of price increases. Brazil has already identified several areas for assistance in crop cultivation, and a visit by President Koroma is planned.²⁹ South Africa has been working with DFID on agriculture research,³⁰ Kuwait has assisted in infrastructure development, and Egypt has provided some technical assistance and training in recent years.³¹

Other potential partners are harder to identify, though the United Arab Emirates may be approached to form a developmental partnership with the Mano River Union. Its expertise in port facilities may be of particular interest to Sierra Leone. A more complicated potential relationship would be with Iran, which in July 2008 sent a trade delegation to Sierra Leone to discuss, among other things, agricultural assistance. No concrete commitments are as yet apparent, but the dilemma that results from any such offer is obvious. Sierra Leoneans may understandably feel that broader international political concerns are not their concerns, and that assistance when offered is welcome. Existing partners will need to tread carefully to avoid alienating public opinion in such circumstances.

Conclusion

There are many very positive signs that the government of Sierra Leone is committed to the reforms and development that are so desperately needed across the country. The improvements in power provision, the commitments demonstrated to anti-corruption efforts, and moves to instil professional values among ministers and civil servants are all extremely hopeful signs. Growing experience and assertiveness will go a long

26 Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework: Review of Progress. June 2008 (see note 14 above).

27 See, for instance, Peace Building Informal Thematic Discussion: Sierra Leone Energy Sector Development, Tuesday 13 November [2007], <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/Country-Specific%20Configurations/Sierra%20Leone/November%2013%20chair's%20summary.pdf>.

28 Salone to Open Three New Embassies, 16/07/08, <http://www.sierraeye.net/News/Salone-to-Get-Three-New-Embassies.html>.

29 Brazilian Foreign Ministry Press Release 06/05/08, http://www.mre.gov.br/ingles/imprensa/nota_detalhe3.asp?ID_RELEASE=5379.

30 DFID Press Release 14/06/07, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/pressreleases/research-action.asp>.

31 Sierra Leone Development Assistance Coordination Office Encyclopedia, <http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/>.

way towards demonstrating control of the situation. However, the scale of the challenges is large, and past performance, beyond the stabilization of the security sector, has been questionable. The external threats posed by increased oil and food prices are great, but are dwarfed by the severe threat of the increasing drugs trade in Sierra Leone. If these threats are to be met, new bilateral support will be needed. Given that the level of UK commitment has almost certainly peaked, other countries in Europe which will be affected by the establishment of drugs cartels in West Africa should increase support as a matter of self-interest. The Peacebuilding Commission offers a very hopeful route to new partnerships, as well as to a better coordination of donor efforts with Sierra Leonean priorities. The challenge is for a new UN coordinating office, UNIPSIL, working with a relatively new government, new mechanisms for coordinating aid and hopefully new partners, to quickly deliver tangible and popular results for ordinary people. In these circumstances strong political engagement from the UK will be essential to provide the continuity, experience and historical memory lacking in these novel configurations. Ultimately however, it must be up to the government of Sierra Leone to provide the leadership and direction that both the international community and people of Sierra Leone so clearly need if the country is to develop and prosper.

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