

Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007

The Security and Development Nexus: A Case Study of Sierra Leone 2004-2006

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The working paper series on Sierra Leone is part of the research programme 'Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007'. These working papers present perspectives from both Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom regarding the implementation of activities broadly defined as security sector reform (SSR) in the period towards the end of and following the Sierra Leone war.

Following a core narrative constructed around four key events in the history of post-war Sierra Leone, starting in the mid-1990s and finishing with the successful General Elections of 2007, the work draws on a range of experiences from the process that may be used to inform future SSR policy and implementation. The final output of this research is a book documenting the security system transformation activities in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007.

This series is both an intermediate stage and an important output in itself. All papers were written by Sierra Leonean and British participants in security system transformation activities. The philosophy of the series is to edit as little as possible so that the views and opinions of the individuals are expressed, as much as possible, in their own words. As such, while the papers vary considerably in style and length, they provide a unique, collective insight into the Sierra Leone security system transformation process.

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Introduction

In my observations below, I will not focus on the individual successes within the Sierra Leonean security sector itself over the duration of the security sector reform (SSR) process. Instead, I will focus on the interconnections and disjuncture between security and development that occurred during my time in Sierra Leone. I will also attempt to demonstrate that whilst significant progress has been made since 1999 in ensuring that security and development are *inter-related*, there is still some way to go before they are fully *integrated* into either policy or programmatic practice.

Had security and development been better integrated at the outset of United Kingdom (UK) intervention, more progress would have been made on the core development agenda in Sierra Leone than there has been to date. This is my personal view and may seem excessively critical – an unfortunate legacy, perhaps, of being too close to the issues.

Whilst I believe that SSR undertaken in Sierra Leone still sets the benchmark for success in the field of SSR programming, there are still some valuable lessons that can be learnt. This is the case both within the sector itself and for the interrelationship between security and the broader development agenda.

The Security and Development See-Saw

In post-conflict environments, security and development are sometimes described as two sides of the same coin. This should not be the case. Instead, they are better seen as a see-saw. At some stages, support for one might outweigh support for the other, but wherever possible, they should be in equilibrium. This requires a careful balancing act by both the international community and the host government. At any stage, overloading one could cause other fragile entities to collapse. For individuals responsible for making these decisions, it is rather akin to walking a tightrope with no safety net underneath.

In a highly political decision-making environment, it is somewhat inevitable that excessive caution is exercised by both governments and donors. People would rather not make a decision than make the wrong one, which is why

so often the status quo is maintained. Furthermore, as the various reform actors move away from the immediate post-conflict period, it becomes even more difficult to overcome this reluctance to be held accountable. But as post-conflict countries progress along the conflict spectrum, there is an increasing need to ensure that security and development issues are placed on the same page, rather than destined to be opposites that never intertwine. It is only then that the trade-offs, synergies and challenges between security and development can be understood and debated.

These discussions and debates are, by their very nature, difficult, particularly in a resource-constrained environment: One cannot please all actors in a given reform process all of the time. However, without these discussions, we are left with a series of rather glib assertions such as ‘development needs security and security needs development’.

What Sierra Leone experienced between 2005 and 2007 was a failure to merge security and development into an integrated relationship. Rather than use the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process as a springboard to integration, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) used the safety and stability created through effective SSR to rest on its laurels. The international community were equally unprepared for the ‘post-post conflict period’ and struggled to demonstrate a peace dividend to a frustrated population. Ironically, at times this resulted in the international community bearing more responsibility for maintaining a fragile peace than the democratically-elected Government. In short, there was security, but there was no development, and whilst it was true to say that security now required development, no one was sure how best to achieve this.

The UK Department for International Development (DfID) and the Security and Development Agenda

Security and development are clearly linked. However, it has taken development agencies a long time to articulate in their policies and mission statements why this is so. This is in part due to the conceptual difficulties many development professionals have in engaging with the security sector, as well as a shortage of relevant capacity

and experience within development agencies. Effective SSR facilitation requires a coherent ‘whole of government approach’ and few donor governments have the coordinating architecture or the political will to engage in what is seen by many as an all too difficult agenda.

DfID is more advanced in this area than some other bilateral donor agencies. Having broadened its engagement with the ‘traditional’ national security agenda, it has developed an approach that sees security as a basic public service – akin to health, education, street lighting and refuse collection – provided by a government accountable to its population. Both the delivery of security and the expectation amongst populations that Governments will indeed deliver security to their citizens are regarded as key first steps in the development of social contracts between states and citizens. The provision of security is equally regarded as laying the foundation for broader accountability mechanisms in other sectors. There remains a clear gap between policy and the practice, however, as evidenced by the fact that a significant proportion of the population in sub-Saharan Africa receives security and justice services from non-state actors. Nonetheless, the challenge of seeing security as a public good at the policy level has been won in development circles, for the time being at least.

Security and Development in Sierra Leone

It was the belief in the above principles that prompted DfID to embark on what was seen as a very non-traditional development programme in Sierra Leone at the end of 2002. It started with an unusual decision made by then-UK Secretary of State for International Development Clare Short to agree a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the UK Government and the GoSL that binds both parties to a series of commitments until 2012. This type of arrangement was unique at the time and was a consequence of UK national and developmental interests aligning. Furthermore, it was coupled with a broader geopolitical commitment to demonstrate that a consolidated defence, diplomatic and development effort, as evidenced by the Global and Africa Conflict Prevention Pools, could deliver a stability sum total in excess of its constituent departmental parts. In other words, pooling

the human and financial resources of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and DfID towards delivery of a common agenda was seen as potentially constituting broader and more flexible overseas assistance and support.

There were other key principles expressed in this agreement. The principle of local ownership, often quoted but rarely adhered to, was at the core of the MoU. The GoSL were presented in writing with activities planned to be undertaken by the UK Government and the sectoral and financial commitments required to deliver them. Similarly, in signing the document, which included objectives as diverse as reshaping the armed forces, supporting the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme and developing and implementing a national anti-corruption strategy, the GoSL was demonstrating political buy-in at the highest level for the reform processes scheduled to take place in the country. In effect, the MoU amounted to a form of benevolent donor conditionality. The GoSL was provided with a series of political and financial guarantees deemed necessary to lay the foundations for a comprehensive ‘root and branch’ development programme. This programme was aimed at addressing both the symptoms and root causes of the conflict, but it required local actors to deliver on a series of commitments in return. That was the theory behind it, but as the security situation improved and more opportunities for genuine development arose, this became a significant challenge.

The MoU provided a mechanism for conditionality in the form of performance-related budget support, another common aspect of a development programme in a country with as high a fiduciary risk as Sierra Leone. But despite the potential of up to £5m per annum being either provided or withheld based on Government performance, this mechanism of conditionality was never really utilised as effectively as it might have been. Often, the departments responsible for delivering against MoU benchmarks were not aware of their deliverables; decisions made regarding the allocation of the performance tranche were made in-year, so were never incorporated into the document. Furthermore, the deliverables were often not clear. This is yet another example of strategic engagement being sacrificed in favour of crisis management. (Further examples of the urgent presiding over the important are referenced later in this

paper.) The first phase of the DfID/Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP) programme² was designed to test the first part of the phrase that ‘development needs security and security needs development’. Recognizing that it would not be possible to facilitate economic and social development in the absence of an effective, accountable and sustainable security sector, significant sums of money were committed to what became known as SSR in Sierra Leone. The rationale behind this strategy was that some of the ‘traditional’ development activities such as education programmes had failed as a direct result of a collective inability to address the extreme levels of insecurity in the country.

Initial SSR efforts were targeted at the armed forces, seen by the GoSL to be a root cause of instability, considering their involvement in every coup in the country since 1967. First, attempts were made to disband the discredited Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) and replace it by combining the various rebel factions into an integrated Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Force (RSLAF) of approximately 16,000. This force was clearly too large and unsustainable for a country the size of Sierra Leone. (Ghana, by contrast, with four times the population, has an armed force of 5,000.) However, the collective view at the time was that it would be better to integrate all the different factions under one banner and contain the problem than to isolate various groups at the outset and risk the development of fragmented militia forces. The phrase ‘better to be inside the tent pissing out than outside the tent pissing in’ was often used to describe this process.

Over time, the RSLAF was right-sized to the more affordable figure of 10,500, as stipulated by the MoU. This still remains an unaffordable size, particularly in an economically weak country such as Sierra Leone. However, further attempts to reduce the size of the armed forces and improve their capability in the process fell foul of the ‘security needs development’ phrase. Essentially, it is not possible to retrench members of any government service, particularly those trained in combat, if there is no economy into which to integrate them.

In parallel, £25m of core DfID funding through a programme called the Commonwealth Safety and Security Programme (CSSP) was spent building a police service of 9,500. This was the figure to which the Sierra

Leone Police (SLP) had aspired at the peak of their competence, with accommodation, training, vehicles and uniforms to match. It was considered critical that as soon as was feasible, the SLP should assume responsibility for internal security. This would not only result in the army being kept off the streets – and out of politics – but would also send a clear message to citizens about the Government’s commitment to ensuring community security by non-military means. The re-establishment of the SLP was appropriately referred to as ‘Operation Phoenix.’ The presence of the United Nations (UN) Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was vital in providing the embryonic SLP with a cocoon within which they could develop their own level of competence. A succession of UNAMSIL downsizings, culminating in the withdrawal of UNAMSIL troops at the end of 2005, passed without incident at each stage of the process.

Once the SLP had been developed to what was deemed to be a basic level of competence against criteria established at the outset of the process, the policing programme expanded to include the broader justice sector, encompassing prisons, the judiciary and state and non-state justice systems. The Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP), responsible for facilitating and supporting a sector-wide approach to justice (including the SLP), began in early 2005. The transition from a programme entirely focused on the police to one that integrated policing support into a broader approach to the justice sector was not a smooth one, and was a good example of the lack of strategic focus of not only the GoSL, but also the international community – in this instance, DfID.

It was not beyond the realm of foresight to predict that expanding a programme focused entirely on one institution into a broader sector starved of resources would cause animosity. The SLP felt aggrieved at having to share donor resources with the prison service, the judiciary, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and others, at the cost of its own progress. In turn, the other criminal justice institutions were reluctant to share their newly-acquired access to funding with the SLP, to whom it was felt the lion’s share of the development assistance to date had already been provided. In reality, both were right, but the fact that there was very little managed transition between the two programmes did not get the JSDP off to the most auspicious of starts.

The SLP/JSDP transition also created some interesting challenges from the point of view of the Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP) programme. Since it was clear that the level of funding of the RSLAF, primarily in the form of the International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT), would remain significant throughout 2005 and beyond, the UK government could not be seen to be delivering the message that the SLP and their critical internal security role were no longer as important. It was critical that both this role and SLP's ability to deliver against their mandate were clear in the eyes of the rest of the security sector as well as the population. It was for this reason that security aspects of the SLP's core business³ were absorbed into the SILSEP programme, whilst the JSDP maintained the lead for broader organisational development of the SLP. This allowed the SLP to maintain a foot in both security and justice camps, but retrospectively, this division of aspects of security encouraged security and justice to be seen as interrelated rather than integrated, just as security and development, in the broader sense, were struggling with the same conceptual issue.

Both SLP and RSLAF development was coordinated by the Office of National Security (ONS), a central coordinating body designed to oversee the various security institutions at national and local levels. The ONS acted as the secretariat to the National Security Council (NSC) and was the executive arm of that entity at the working level. The ONS chaired the National Security Council Coordination Group (NSCCG) at fortnightly meetings, at which all key security sector actors were represented and security sector issues were debated and resolved.

Unusually, development assistance was also provided to support the Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU), which operated separately from, but out of the same building as, the ONS. Many UK participants were uncomfortable at the prospect of development funding being allocated to an intelligence organisation. However, the UK Government felt that ensuring that intelligence was depoliticised and democratically accountable was decisive. The CISU also had the potential to contribute to countering insurgencies and cross-border rebel movements through the effective management of intelligence and the dispelling of rumours at provincial and district levels. Over time, issues relating to organised

crime, arms trafficking and people and diamond smuggling made the relatively small investment in CISU worthwhile.⁴

The CISU suffered more than most from the lack of direction provided by the GoSL (outlined in more detail below). Without clear policy priorities articulated by the state, it was hard to clearly define the role of the intelligence services. This, coupled with the unreliability of many security institutions' capacity to receive and protect intelligence, meant that the CISU were often caught between a rock and a hard place. They recognised the necessary restrictions placed on an intelligence agency's capacity to directly engage in core security-related activity. However, unless other agencies' levels of competence developed, it was hard for CISU personnel to demonstrate their value and for the Government to allocate the finances to make the institution effective.

The Security Sector Review

It was in late 2004 and early 2005 that the security and development dichotomy was most closely aligned, primarily in the form of the National Security Sector Review (NSSR). The aim of the NSSR was to assess potential and actual threats to the national vision, to identify the relevant institutions to counter these threats and make recommendations to those institutions as to how best to do so. It was hoped that the process would lay the foundation for a new national security policy that would combine statements of intent for the sectors with the projected resources required to deliver against them.⁵ It is important to note that from the outset, this process provided a potential framework for the GoSL to develop links between its security sector architecture and a broad range of national and sectoral policies, encompassing economic and social development in Sierra Leone over a 5- to 10-year period. From the 'Sweet Salone Vision 2025' through to the embryonic PRSP process, the security sector saw itself as an enabler as well as a contributor to a safe environment in which poverty reduction and economic development could occur. The main focus of the NSSR was 'the provision of a safe and secure environment for the citizens of Sierra Leone, free from external and internal threats, guaranteeing the rule of law, access to justice and respect for human rights and civil liberties⁶'. It was clear from the outset, however, that the ONS saw their role not just as *interrelating* security and development, but also as *integrating* security and

development. In order to do so, the NSSR would need to be directly linked to other policy processes within Government.

For much of 2003 and 2004, the ONS had been interviewing a cross-section of the population concerning their perceived threats to security. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the threats identified by the population were not of the traditional national security variety. The people made little reference to Guinean border disputes or Charles Taylor-backed rebel incursions from Liberia. Instead, all the threats that citizens reported were developmental in nature, covering topics from youth unemployment and bad governance to corruption and lack of economic opportunities.

Having identified the threats to security within the country, the ONS worked with national security institutions and other parts of government to develop an overarching national security framework. A series of institutional security frameworks were also developed to assess the institutional capacity to respond to the threats identified by citizens. This involved identification of each institution's vision and perceived threats, their current capabilities and a gap analysis between the threats and their capabilities to respond. What emerged at the end of 2004 was a draft series of recommendations for each institution on how best they could address the disparities between their current capabilities and those required to deal adequately with the threats facing them and the people they served.

The challenge that the security sector faced was disaggregating between the recommendations made to national security sector institutions and those targeting other Government institutions beyond the security sector. One example of this was corruption. There were recommendations for various security sector institutions as to what contribution they could make to tackle corruption from a national security perspective, but the lead organisation mandated to address the issue was the Anti-Corruption Commission. Was it appropriate for the ONS to make recommendations to an entity with which it had no formal relationship? If so, it was a question of how best to ensure the security sector's ability to allocate its limited resources as effectively as possible in support of various Government department objectives.

It was at this stage that the decision was made by the security sector to attempt to combine the NSSR with the PRSP process currently underway. Conversations began with the Development Assistance Coordination Office (DACO) on this topic in late 2004. There were clear similarities between the NSSR and DACO processes at both conceptual and practical levels. The NSSR process recognised the value of an integrated and consultative approach to developing an effective and evidence-based security sector strategy in post-conflict Sierra Leone, as did DACO, which led preparations for the PRSP process. The NSSR plan envisaged a multi-stakeholder approach, with different parts of Government working together in a multi-disciplinary manner to achieve the objectives for which they were allocated responsibility. This approach was replicated in the PRSP. The PRSP sought to combine implementation at national and regional levels, through local government mechanisms working in parallel with various state departments. The NSSR wished to adopt the same approach, using Provincial Security Committee (PROSEC) and District Security Committee (DISEC) mechanisms established at district and provincial levels. In sum, the two processes overlapped conceptually and methodologically, but also in what they were trying to ultimately achieve. There would be clear gains in terms of synergy by combining the two processes.

Further, the ONS thought that by pursuing a merger between the NSSR and the PRSP, many of the concerns regarding conflicts in policy priorities would be addressed more effectively. For one thing, the security sector would align its priorities to those of the Government and thus be seen as a contributor to, rather than an enabler of, poverty reduction. Furthermore, actors within the security architecture saw the PRSP as being the means by which to move on to a second phase of consolidating gains among security sector actors. Ultimately, of course, the alignment of the NSSR and the PRSP would benefit the country as a whole.

The ONS had a strong argument for adopting this approach. Fundamentally, the analysis contained within the NSSR document is stronger and more participatory than the PRSP. Hence, security sector actors made the strongest outward demonstration to the Government that

they were key contributors, not just a drain on Government resources, to the broader policy making effort. This was the first time that security and governance were merged in the eyes of key government decision makers, and also the first time the security sector was seen as potential asset to the country.

The Security Sector Review and the PRSP

In late 2004–early 2005, there was a significant amount of reluctance, both inside and outside Government, about the merger of these two processes. Many concerns were practical, rather than conceptual, and as with many issues in Sierra Leone, concerned funding rather than policy. The World Bank was sceptical about the merits of linking security and development agendas. In particular, it raised the legal issue of providing security actor access to the Bank's PRSP trust funds and concern that the prospect of funding being allocated to non-traditional PRSP actors might jeopardise future donor pledges to the PRSP process. This was in part a legacy of the relative novelty of security being seen as a core contributor to poverty reduction. Similarly, many donors faced the problem of ensuring that all development assistance they provided could be classified in developmental terms. Prior to the amendments made by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC) to allow SSR to be seen as a legitimate developmental activity, support to organisations such as the ONS was seen by some as problematic. (During my 2004–2006 tenure as DfID's Sierra Leone Programme Manager, I recall Sweden and Germany having lengthy conversations with DfID in advance of the PRSP pledging process; at the time, DfID's reassurances that security sector activities would directly contribute to poverty reduction were to no avail.)

In parallel, internal GoSL actors were concerned about the prospect of 'securitisation' of the development agenda, arguing that the majority of funding since 2002 had been focused on security sector institutions and that their alignment to the PRSP was a means of securing alternative funding. This concern was reinforced by the fact that the highly-regarded ONS was allocated the responsibility of addressing some of the threats identified in the NSSR to security actors instead of the Government

departments officially mandated to do so. Substituting the ONS for departments with the statutory authority to perform such functions was justified on the basis that the department in question lacked either the competence or the apolitical robustness to ensure a successful outcome. But while ONS intervention on a case-by-case basis was not always problematic, it could establish a dangerous precedent, should the actors and the competence of the ONS change over time.

One example of this was the Immigration Department. While it reported to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the ONS intervened upon the request of the President following the death of the Chief Immigration Officer in 2005. The ONS's desire to engage was, I believe, more a matter of enthusiasm rather than anything more nefarious. They were keen to demonstrate their competence and 'get things done' and their political masters, in turn, were pleased to have a dynamic institution that wanted to work. However, it was important for both the ONS and the politicians not to confuse or misinterpret their mandate. Highlighting the potential security implications of a dysfunctional or corrupt Government department is one thing; the security sector acting to transform that department unilaterally is quite another. A national water shortage had the potential to cause rioting in the streets of Freetown; this did not mean, however, that the ONS should go out and start drilling bore holes (as was recommended in the summer of 2006). Nor should ONS members engage in arbitration processes following the General Strike in early 2005, as was advocated at the time. On a practical level, there were significant implications in allocating limited financing to a range of equally viable poverty reduction activities. The perception certainly was that the security sector had already received more than its fair share. In short, it became difficult to justify significant further funding for the sector, especially as part of the PRSP process.

To a certain extent, this claim of financial favouritism of the security sector is legitimate. Between 2001 and 2005, 80% of the ACP allocation for SSR programming was spent on Sierra Leone. Most of DfID's SSR programming and all IMATT costs were funded through this mechanism, the latter distorting the figures somewhat, given that the majority of the spending was and remains related to capitulation (i.e. funding was not spent on the RSLAF).

However, to understand the full picture of SSR in Sierra Leone, it is critical to remember that barring the money spent on CSSP and JSDP, funding came from the ACPP, not the development budget⁷. One important issue related to receiving funding from a pot of money designed specifically for conflict prevention is that there is no opportunity cost in development terms. (For example, a health or education programme cannot be funded from the pool.) Thus, Sierra Leonean SSR is not competing with other governance sectors; instead, it is competing with other conflict prevention priorities in other parts of Africa. Ultimately, and this is something of a universal truism: the further away from the original conflict one is, the harder it is to justify spending large sums of money on conflict prevention. Unfortunately, rather than consolidating success, in 2005, when the PRSP process was being finalised, Sierra Leone was ceding priority to other countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan or Liberia next door.

Security, Development and the International Donor community – A Strategic Deficit?

When PRSP commitments were being considered, the main issue was how to continue support to the security sector and consolidate successes whilst allowing the development space to be maximised – and all with the same amount of available money. Not easy. This would not have been as big a problem as it was had the international community been better coordinated. If all donors had collectively agreed with the Government as to where Sierra Leone was situated on the post-conflict spectrum and aligned their development programmes accordingly, it would have been possible for donor agencies to divide the work based on comparative advantage. However, in 2005, there were very few donors active in the country; there was certainly no agreement on Sierra Leone's post-conflict trajectory. Some donors were still engaged in humanitarian operations, whilst others were focused on traditional development programmes. In an environment where there were few external actors, it was vital that the international community cooperate, rather than compete.

Although this might seem counter-intuitive – fewer donors should mean coordination is easier – there were two reasons why this was not the case. First, fewer donors means more competition for power and leadership, meaning that no donor wanted to accept a supporting role. Thus, whereas in other countries there are clear divisions between small but flexible donors and behemoths, everyone in Sierra Leone views themselves as important. Second, the biggest issue has been the competition between bilateral and multilateral donors. The UN, European Commission and World Bank are not accustomed to working in a country in which a bilateral has more political access and spending muscle than a multilateral. It took time for the multilaterals to respond positively to such a challenge.

Finally, there were inconsistent messages delivered to the Government on its spending allocations. The GoSL were asking the international community to provide larger sums of money in support of programmes aimed at economic growth and increasing tax revenue. However, in order to do so, Sierra Leone was required to take up the slack caused by the reallocation of resources away from sectors that had heretofore been primarily supported by external funding. These fiscal decisions were made harder by the International Monetary Fund's insistence that the GoSL should increase the proportion of its spending to health and education, meaning that certain sectors would move from receiving significant to limited support within a relatively short time frame.

There are clear lessons of sustainability that need to be learnt from the Sierra Leonean experience. In 2006, when I left Sierra Leone, the SLP needed to replace 100 vehicles a year of their 800-strong fleet; they could afford to replace only 10. (The only thing worse than not having any capacity is having temporary capacity that is then taken away.) Additionally, there are urgent lessons that need to be learnt at the strategic level regarding planning capacity for post-post-conflict environments, before history repeats itself in other SSR interventions. I believe that the UN could play an extremely important strategic coordination role here, working, rather than competing with, strong bilateral partners. In many of these environments, the UN has the people but limited funding; the bilaterals have the money, but few people. There is clearly an alliance that can be forged here to mutual benefit. Such alliances should not be allowed to be dependent on personality rather than process.

Security & Development, Post-PRSP – Prioritisation and Costing

When the final PRSP was published in the spring of 2005, the security sector had managed to convince their political masters of the NSSR's strategic position within it. The security sector can therefore be found under Pillar One of the PRSP: 'Promoting Good Governance, Peace & Security'. In May 2005, the NSSR was launched by the President; he noted the links between the NSSR and the PRSP in his inaugural speech. The security sector, buoyed by this support from the highest level, began to develop activities to support the recommendations identified in the NSSR, in the hope of persuading the international community to provide implementation funding.

However, the recommendations needed to be adapted slightly in the light of the new links with the PRSP. There was also a need for a multi-stakeholder approach to solve challenges identified at both national and regional levels. It was clear at the outset that the costs of delivering against NSSR recommendations would be huge; hence, careful prioritisation was required to ensure both the realism of stakeholder funding as well as their contribution to poverty reduction. Activities were ranked on a scale from 1 to 5 on the basis of the ability of the activity to deliver against the security policy objectives outlined within the PRSP framework. The primary objective was 'to build security forces able to prevent and respond to external and internal security threats and provide an enabling environment for poverty reduction'⁸. Only activities scoring 1 or 2 had a realistic possibility of being funded under the PRSP framework.

It was important that the security sector demonstrate the progress they were already making towards both Pillar One of the PRSP and the broader PRSP process. Activities that were already being funded were included in the implementation plan; their contribution could be captured in any reporting against PRSP implementation. When the ONS submitted the NSSR implementation plan to DACO, 73 activities were determined to be of top priority out of the 148 security-related activities submitted by security sector institutions. The total cost of the activities submitted was estimated at US\$93.1m. This was 55.6% of the total financial requirement of Pillar One of the PRSP and 24.7% of the total cost requirement for the PRSP as a whole.

Meanwhile, over at DACO, the rest of the PRSP activities matrixes were facing difficulties. It was at this stage that the security and development see-saw should have swung towards 'security needs development'. Relative success had brought its own shortcomings – Sierra Leoneans were no longer worried about being raped or killed; they were concerned that their kids were not going to school, healthcare was woefully inadequate, corruption was all-pervasive and economic opportunities were in short supply.

The challenge was to build the capacity of weakened and inexperienced institutions that had the ability to bid for funding. But often, these organisations lacked the capacity to know where they lacked capacity and were part of a Government that knew they needed to realign priorities, but did not know how. Rather than the security sector being the leader in enabling the environment necessary for poverty reduction to occur, it now needed to be a follower, but lead institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Revenue Authority, the Ministry of Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Marine Resources did not appear, for reasons of either disorganisation or disinterest. This presented all concerned with a quandary – how could a set of institutions contribute to broader government when there was no broader government to contribute to?

As mentioned earlier, it was at this stage that both the international community and the GoSL were badly caught out, for different reasons. One of the main assets of the 10-year MoU between the UK and the GoSL was that rather than being subject to the standard donor three-year bidding cycles, UK aid allocation to Sierra Leone was fixed at £40m a year for the duration of the MoU. This is a sizeable amount of money – the UK's largest aid per capita programme in the world – but once allocated, allows no flexibility for filling the development spaces created by success in other sectors. The work undertaken in the security sector, for example, created opportunities for work in trade, the diamond industry, healthcare, education and local government, but the funding was not there to take advantage of the opportunities.

The simple fact is that Sierra Leone, whilst over-aided by the UK, was and remains poorly served financially by other international donors, many of whom see the country as being a 'UK aid darling'. The November 2005

Consultative Group meeting⁹, designed to generate financial support for the PRSP, did not meet expectations. This left a large funding shortfall between the PRSP budget of originally over \$1bn, revised to approximately \$500m, and the final amount pledged (which, in turn, differed from the amount actually given). When this was coupled with a high inflation rate, very little additional money was available for developmental activity, with most of the GoSL's budget being spent on recurrent costs, mainly wages. The situation was made worse by the withdrawal of UNAMSIL at the end of 2005, and in particular, the economic impact this had on the population in Freetown.

It would be wrong to solely apportion the blame to the international community. The GoSL had ample opportunity to demonstrate to sceptical donors that they had the wherewithal to implement an ambitious PRSP programme. Instead, Government representatives selected to promote the PRSP opted to take a comprehensive 'PRSP road show' to international capitals, with very little thought given to policy priorities. The PRSP amounted to little more than a substantial shopping list; limited effort had been made to prioritise, or indeed link, activities, either within or between the three pillars. There was much repetition, little economies of scale achieved and no multi-disciplinary approach across departments. A set of government departments were pursuing their own objectives in isolation from each other and none of them had the funding necessary to do much other than pay recurrent costs. This state of affairs poses an interesting conundrum for an international donor: how does one support the policies of a Government that has no policies?

The PRSP process was, in sum, a debacle. Worse still, it became clear that a potentially dangerous stalemate was brewing. With no new money appearing, the Government had little interest in governing. This meant a small elite was being propped up by a competent but frustrated security sector whose mission to create an enabling environment in which poverty reduction could take place had been achieved, but yet no poverty reduction activity was visible. The security sector wanted to contribute to broader Government policy implementation, but was unable to do so, as there was no real commitment to govern. Any security sector intervention, if undertaken in the absence of a broader level of political will, was

doomed to failure – the political will simply was not there. Business and politics became increasingly inter-related, as it was clear that the country was not in danger of any imminent coup attempts. Several high profile corruption cases in the minerals and marine resources sectors involving ministers or the families of ministers became public without any action being taken by the Government.

The removal of the Commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission and his replacement by an appointee sympathetic to the Government was the final nail in the coffin. It appeared that rather than embrace the opportunity to govern that the secure environment had created, some members of the Government instead opted to use that security for their own self-aggrandising ends. Thus, whilst the symptoms of the conflict had been addressed in part, the root causes were very much in evidence amongst the elites. Once more, it was business as usual.

This malaise was also evident in the international community. The substitution of the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) for UNAMSIL brought in a new set of difficulties, primarily the lack of human and financial resources and the inability of individual UN agencies to align headquarters and field priorities. The result was internal turf-wars for scant resources rather than a collective effort. The selection of Sierra Leone as a UN Peace Building Commission country with access to the Peace Building Fund was also a mixed blessing. It served to distract Government actors from existing policy commitments in favour of potential access to 'new money', which was slow to materialise. Furthermore, the UN failed to reinforce the messages contained within the NSSR. Instead, to make clear links between peacebuilding, security and poverty reduction, the UN opted to reinvent the wheel, producing its own strategy document. Whilst it had token government endorsement, it was essentially seen as a means to an end and had limited strategic buy-in.

DfID and the UK Government also seemed focused on the urgent rather than the important. Significant periods of staff time were spent on crisis management, rather than strategic thinking about how to realign the development programme in light of the shifts in the post-conflict environment. The presence of a PRSP and any impact that it might have on how the MoU would operate in the

future was not fully considered. There is a constant need to prioritise strategic planning in a country like Sierra Leone, where the UK's diplomatic, defence and development assistance is so influential. The appropriateness of need for policies to be evaluated regularly, the context analysed and the operational and programmatic responses adjusted accordingly. If one doesn't know where it is one wants to go and where on the continuum one is at any given time, it is almost impossible to know whether one has arrived.

In short, the scene was rather reminiscent of a school disco – a large number of disparate actors all waiting at the edge of the dance floor for someone to take the lead. With leadership comes accountability, however, and the GoSL and donors alike were reluctant to make the first move. Security sector actors were in a particular quandary, conscious as they were of their potentially dual role. On the one hand, they were state institutions, accountable to and for the state's activities in the eyes of citizens. On the other hand, as the majority of their development spending was externally-financed, they were also loyal to the international community, the UN and the UK in particular.

It was a time of great frustration for all concerned, and the lack of financial support for the PRSP hit the security sector particularly hard: they received no funding through the official PRSP trust fund. The sector itself had clear ideas as to where its priorities should lie: organised crime, drug smuggling, diamond smuggling, fisheries and customs and border controls. However, none of these activities could be undertaken in isolation, and the government departments concerned were either unable or unwilling to take the initiative required to develop the comprehensive strategy required to incorporate the role of the security sector. The failure of the PRSP process was further evidence as to why SSR can not be separated from development: Developing a competent security sector in a vacuum can be as much a threat as a benefit to security, if there is no accompanying plan for the rest of the government.

It was also a time of frustration for the population. After the end of the war, a raft of humanitarian programmes were launched, coupled with community reintegration schemes that saw churches and mosques rebuilt, clinics constructed, roads created and various other practical

activities, largely externally-funded and implemented by development contractors. However, now the majority of international funding was being channelled through various auspices of government, either national or local, and the benefits to the population in terms of end-user services were nowhere near as visible. This contributed to the belief that the Government was not delivering and that people were worse off than they had been previously. Appalling levels of misinformation did not help; when this was coupled with the Government's innate fear of communicating with its population, the general sense of mistrust and disgruntlement increased.

The international community must take some responsibility for this. In particular, DfID may need to give more thought to the public relations impact of a shift away from highly visible support to less visible assistance in post-conflict and fragile states. This is especially a lesson for those countries for which the UK is the largest bilateral donor, as is the case in Sierra Leone. As the UK Parliament's International Development Committee rightly noted, 'If peace is to be viable, it is important that people perceive both immediate and sustained benefits from it.'¹⁰

Funding the SSR Implementation Plan

In an attempt to break the inertia, DfID agreed to allocate £1m of funding in support of delivering against the Security Sector Review Implementation Plan (SSR-IP). This allocation was in large part designed to ensure that the security sector did not negatively react to the lack of progress made by the rest of Government, thus contributing to increased rather than reduced insecurity. It was also due to the need to reinforce the UK's beliefs that in supporting the security sector, the UK were actively contributing to both poverty reduction and the PRSP process. However, it should also be acknowledged that there was an element of luck involved – under-spending caused by lack of GoSL progress in other parts of the development agenda meant that funding was available.

Having decided the 'what', the next challenge was the 'how'. At that time, in my capacity as DfID Sierra Leone Programme Manager, I was committed to ensuring that we practiced what we preached. Having supported the Sierra Leonean security sector in the development of its own priorities and activities required to implement them, it was important that we also provide them with the

resources required to do so, and on their own terms. The challenge was to ensure that sufficient accountability mechanisms were in place to protect UK taxpayers' money. It is important to remember that no project management in any substantial shape or form had existed in Sierra Leone for many years (a substantive DfID Country Office was only established in Sierra Leone in 2005). In effect, we at DfID were asking organisations almost entirely reliant on voucher systems to receive funding from the Ministry of Finance in order to become responsible for managing substantial sums of money.

We prioritized practicality over political advantage and called a meeting of all the accounting officers (usually the Directors) of the security institutions to explain our decision to support the implementation of the security sector review. We wanted to help them, but in order to help them they needed to help us. The solution was that a bank account was set up to which all the heads of the security services, plus DfID as the final signatory, needed to sign in order to release funds for any project or programme. This may sound cumbersome, but it achieved two main aims. One was that the entire security sector needed to achieve consensus on any decision before approaching DfID. The other was that we were able to account for any funding allocated at any one time. The security sector institutions were well aware of the trust placed in them through this mechanism. They were also aware that should any funding be misappropriated, the arrangement would end.

Perhaps surprisingly in a country as financially needy as Sierra Leone, it took a significant amount of time for projects to be funded under the first phase of the SSR-IP. This was in part due to project management capacity constraints outlined earlier; it was also due to the importance of getting it right. Long debates took place over the various merits of different programme options, but in the end all of the agencies received support in some shape or form in a manner that focused on the important rather than the urgent.

Conclusion

What has been achieved in Sierra Leone in a relatively short space of time cannot be denied. The SLP assumed primacy for internal security only three years after the end of the conflict, civil oversight of the armed forces was broadly achieved in a similar time frame and national security architecture developed from scratch already proved its added value in the August 2007 elections. These successes are all the more impressive given the extremely low capacity base and the depths to which the country had sunk during the years of the conflict. However, the relative failure of the PRSP process means that one cannot help but wonder how much more progress might have been made since 2005 with a committed international community prepared to not only put its money where its mouth was, but more importantly, its mind where its money was. Mistakes undoubtedly occurred; too many decisions were made to stave off the almost daily crises, rather than on the basis of sensible strategic trade-offs and full regard for opportunity cost.

The security sector remains Sierra Leone's greatest asset; it still has the potential to be used effectively by the incoming Government. There is a danger that the sector will be a victim of its own success, with financial priority being granted to other sectors that can deliver more immediately and effectively in support of the peace dividend and the core development agenda. However, the security sector still has a contribution to make to development. It should certainly not be the sole focus of development assistance, but a component of broader governance or revenue generation programmes such as fisheries management and border control.

The security development see-saw is now rightly balanced in favour of more traditional developmental activities. But both the Government and the international community need to recognise that security and development activities must be integrated if the country is to continue to progress. Simply being interrelated is not sufficient.

Footnotes

- ¹ Mark White was Sierra Leone Programme Manager for the UK Department for International Development (DfID) from December 2004 until December 2006. Until recently he was DfID's Security Sector Adviser in London; he now holds the position of West Africa Conflict Adviser to the UK Government.
- ² From 1999-2008, the UK, with ACPP funding managed by DFID, has been providing support to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Office of National Security (ONS) and Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU) through the Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Project (SILSEP). The project goal was to assist the GoSL in developing a centrally-coordinated, apolitical, affordable and sustainable security sector able to meet the security needs of citizens. SILSEP works to achieve a sustainable policy, institutional and legal framework to create national security and defence strategies that reflect civil control, accountability and transparency and to shift institutional focus towards individual security. This programme was complemented by the 2002-2005 Commonwealth Safety and Security Programme (CSSP) that focused on increasing SLP efficiency, effectiveness and accountability and the current Justice Sector Development Programme, which adopted a comprehensive, sector-wide approach.
- ³ SLP core business includes: internal security, maintenance of public order, maintenance of the MACP policy and their role within the national security exercises and the national security council and its coordination groups.
- ⁴ It is worth bearing in mind that CISU was established in the late 1990s by the GoSL in response to the 1997 Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) coup.
- ⁵ A national security policy had been developed in 2000, albeit in a very different, unstable context. In brief, there was little consultation, not least because of limited freedom of movement, and because international advisors had been heavily involved in formulating the final document.
- ⁶ National Security Sector Review, 2005.
- ⁷ The ACPP was a UK mechanism designed to support joined up conflict prevention initiatives across the British Government. Funding decisions were made jointly, with the idea being to try to ensure the 3 D's (defence, diplomacy, development) provided added value over and above their individual comparative advantages. At the time of publication, the ACPP has been replaced by a larger GCPP.
- ⁸ Security Sector Reform Implementation Plan, Nov 2005
- ⁹ The Consultative Group meeting was designed for the Government of Sierra Leone to present the PRSP to donors and for donors in turn to pledge financial support to the GoSL for the delivery of its objectives.
- ¹⁰ Report from the IDC's visit to Sierra Leone, March 2006.

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