

Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007

National Security and Intelligence Reform in Sierra Leone - 2000-2003

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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

This paper outlines a number of the key aspects of building an Intelligence and Security Service (ISS) as part of the Sierra Leone Security Sector Programme (SILSEP) from 2000-2003. The ISS reform experience in Sierra Leone was unique for various reasons. First, these reforms were essentially initiated during a time of war; thus, capacity building processes and delivery of intelligence products were carried out simultaneously. Second, the ISS reform programme had an unusual funding structure. Thirdly, there were, in general, great sensitivities regarding capacity-building of intelligence services, particularly since the country was just emerging from conflict.

The paper will discuss these and other issues; it will suggest key lessons learned that may benefit similar processes in other post-conflict contexts. It will also demonstrate, based on the author's practical experience, that security sector reform (SSR) in general, and ISS in particular, are inherently political and specific to context.

Background

The ISS element of SSR in Sierra Leone emerged out of the military SILSEP programme. SILSEP focused on restructuring the Sierra Ministry of Defence (MoD) and was conceived as a complement to military reforms led by the United Kingdom (UK) International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT). As part of this effort, it was agreed that SILSEP would also need to work within State House, the building of the executive, to ensure that parallel reforms would take place at the senior government, service and ministry levels. In 1999, the head of the SILSEP team was tasked to concentrate on developing and supporting the function of the Sierra Leone National Security Advisor.

Despite difficult circumstances, progress was made during 1999-2000 in establishing a number of key platforms on which later success was built. With additional support and direction from a visiting UK intelligence advisor, SILSEP began to contribute towards a functioning National Security Council (NSC), the outline of a National Security Act and the drafting of a National Security Policy.

However, it also became clear during this period that SSR within the national security and intelligence sphere needed to be considered as a separate activity and not just an

adjunct to the development project in the MoD. In 2000, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) established a separate ISS programme to balance the programmes in the MoD, armed forces and police. It concluded that this ISS programme would require a full-time advisor with both a government intelligence background and an understanding of capacity-building, development and other related issues. To this end, the former UK army officer who had been covering the embryonic ISS was replaced by a professional intelligence officer with experience in organisational development.

With the latter's arrival in January 2001, the ISS element of SILSEP acquired an identity separate from the MoD programme (by that time known as MODAT, the Ministry of Defence Assistance Team) and a distinct ISS strategy emerged.

At the same time, a concept of ISS reform was taking shape in DfID in London around the core functions of 'all-source intelligence assessment' and security coordination. Guided by advisors from the UK intelligence establishment, DfID was on a steep learning curve. It had begun to recognise that certain national security functions are critical to central government; in particular, they are an important ingredient in the constitution of an effective NSC. At this stage, however, the question of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of collecting agencies was still not addressed; neither were other ISS issues, such as the policy advice function, national crisis management and a number of other functions which were later to become SILSEP issues. As a result, the scope of the ISS element was underestimated and initial resources allocated to the new Intelligence and Security Advisor (ISA) were soon to prove insufficient for the task ahead.

The objectives assigned to the ISA were:

- Create an all-source intelligence assessment capability.
- Shepherd the passing of a National Security Act.
- Develop secretariat support of the National Security Council.
- Support the development of the role of National Security Advisor.
- Make the collecting agencies more accountable and transparent.
- Establish a central and provincial security coordination capacity.

This, therefore, was the skeleton of an ISS SSR strategy, although it lacked many connecting rods and above all, lacked an understanding of the key task of creating a fully functioning intelligence collection capacity on which all else would be based.

Fortunately, as the greater remit of the programme became clearer, funding became available from the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, while DfID provided two more advisors to support the ISA in late 2002. These Advisors worked on a part-time basis and concentrated on particularly resource-intensive areas such as intelligence assessment processes and development of detailed standard operating procedures.

Misleading Assumptions

Upon arriving in Sierra Leone, the ISA found that he was working within the context of a number of assumptions held by many stakeholders, not least the donors. The most significant of these were:

- National security and intelligence organisations are inherently undemocratic, unaccountable and not transparent; there is therefore a conflict between increasing effectiveness and increasing accountability and transparency. It was implicitly accepted that a principal task of any ISS SSR programme was to ‘rein in’ such organisations. In fact, this assumption was critically flawed and created a negative starting point from which to run such a programme. Much else follows on from this assumption, so it is important to get it right.
- ISS functions are not interdependent: for example, it is possible to build a central intelligence assessment group without building the capacity to deliver reliable intelligence to such a group.
- Success would be achieved by creating a scaled-down replica of the UK intelligence machinery.
- It was necessary to accept and work with all the individuals that the host nation had originally allocated to the organisations.
- It was necessary to compromise on certain basic practices of running an effective intelligence organisation (e.g. screening and vetting processes) because local circumstances would not allow them or there was insufficient time to implement such practices.

- The various SSR programmes did not need to be carefully coordinated.
- SSR was a technical development activity and did not possess any substantial political dimension.
- SSR was a development activity much like any other and did not require any additional protective security measures for those carrying it out.

All these assumptions were later found to be flawed; but before that realisation occurred, much opportunity, energy and time were lost.

The Human Factor

Good process, technology, and funding cannot compensate for fundamental failings in human capacity. In taking forward an ISS SSR programme, the human dimension is particularly important, whether it concerns the expertise and behaviour of the SSR programme manager/advisors or the individuals who are to staff the reformed security institutions. This aspect is, however, easily overlooked, and there is often pressure to implement SSR programmes without making sufficient effort to identify individuals and match them with the tasks at hand.

A number of Sierra Leone nationals originally assigned to staff security institutions were unsuited for the work. These appointees came with political baggage which would have severely impeded the ability of security institutions to function effectively and be seen as politically impartial. Moreover, they could have undermined the sustainability of institutions at this critical juncture in the security reform process in war-torn Sierra Leone.

Considerable effort was made early on to remove these individuals, which diverted time and energy that could have been better spent in other pursuits. However, this effort later produced benefits, especially when compared with other government departments which had not taken, or were prevented from taking, steps to assure appropriate staffing. This was also an early indicator that the SSR programme existed in an intensely political environment and that management of the political dimension would be critical to the programme’s success.

On a positive note, the project had also attracted two capable Sierra Leone nationals: the new National Security Advisor and the head of the Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU). Both were well-suited for the task ahead and proved to provide robust and resilient leadership for their respective organisations.

Institutes

CISU and Collecting Agencies

At the restart of SILSEP in early 2000, there were apparently three intelligence collecting agencies: the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) Special Branch (SB), the Military Intelligence Branch (MIB) and CISU, formerly existing under the name of the National Intelligence Unit. Of these, only CISU was new; while it had been established in the pre-2000 phase of SILSEP, it had existed largely on paper and only its director was capable of operational activity.

The first meeting of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in 2000 concluded that radical restructuring of all three collecting agencies was necessary in order to achieve a workable level of intelligence production and, in turn, provide the JIC with reliable and actionable intelligence. This meant that a new and substantial task had already emerged, but it was equally clear that there was no point in building capacity in the JIC and a Joint Assessment Centre if there was no usable intelligence for them to assess and action.

This call for improved intelligence gathering immediately caused problems for programme management, since the original timetable and resource allocation had not foreseen the need to develop intelligence collection capacity. Furthermore, this created institutional problems for DfID, since it did not believe that developing such operational capacity was part of its charter.

In the event, it was agreed that the UK intelligence community would support development of operational capability in parallel with SILSEP development of analytical and other downstream 'non-operational' capacities. This operational capacity-building was aimed primarily at CISU, although SLP-SB and MIB were also beneficiaries, largely by participating in various training programmes. This development activity was funded separately out of the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool.

This was no small matter. This response to identification of an additional development task demonstrated how progress could be made by applying flexible and creative thinking and adopting a collaborative approach. It was achieved, in part, by the fortunate ability of key UK players, the SLP-SB and MIB Advisors and the ISA, all of whom had considerable inter-agency experience in their former government positions, to work together and agree on a set of common objectives.

In fact, early in the ISS process, the ISA and UK Advisors to the SLP-SB and MIB made an informal agreement to seek every opportunity to collaborate and share resources. This, in turn, led to Sierra Leone members of the three collecting agencies gradually overcoming traditional and deep-rooted suspicions, learning to collaborate with their Sierra Leone colleagues and thus creating a sense of a Sierra Leone intelligence community. It is important to note that where shared experience of inter-agency cooperation did not exist, coordination and agreement between wider SSR strands appeared to be weaker.

Office of National Security (ONS) and the National Security Coordinator

The coming together of the new National Security Adviser and the UK's ISA in early 2000 provided an opportunity to rethink the national security architecture and early assumptions. The major outcomes of this were:

- De-personalisation: the new National Security Advisor (formally personal advisor to the President and supported by his secretariat) became the National Security Co-ordinator and head of the new Office of National Security (ONS).
- De-politicisation: systematic removal of party politics (and politicians) from the ONS and CISU was an obvious necessity. These organisations would primarily support the rule of law and protect the constitution, not individuals, parties or tribal groupings.
- Separation of clandestine intelligence operations (CISU) from intelligence assessment and security policy advice (ONS).
- UK advisors would not function independently of their Sierra Leone counterparts, but in support of them. Therefore, the ISA would only meet with the President in the company (and with the support) of the National Security Co-ordinator and Director General of CISU.

- Quality over quantity: organisations would grow in line with their ability to absorb growth and internalise guiding SSR principles. It was agreed that a small number of carefully selected and trained individuals would be better than a large number of unsuited and insufficiently trained individuals.
- Involvement of civil society and provincial authorities: the ONS would be the interface between the security apparatus and general society and would extend this role to the provincial and district levels.
- Government agency (as opposed to department) status for both ONS and CISU: the more flexible agency status allowed for:
 - Necessary increased levels of protective and information security as compared to the rest of the civil service;
 - More suitable terms and conditions of employment;
 - Conduct of needed security and intelligence activity without waiting for the rest of the civil service to catch up with its own reforms.
 - Continued linkage of the ONS and CISU to wider governance reforms while they remained integral and accountable branches of government service.

While these points may seem self-evident and unremarkable in retrospect, it is worth remembering that at the time each point was innovative and critical to future success and sustainability of the programme.

Other Government Departments (OGDs)

It was accepted early on that national security should be viewed 'holistically'. This approach was included in the first draft of the National Security Policy and signified that national security was part of and not separate from wider aspects of government activity, economics and civil society. This philosophical position had many implications, not least of which was the inclusion of OGDs in various aspects of security strategy and policy advice and formulation. Unfortunately, the uneven pace of reform elsewhere in the Sierra Leone government did not allow integration of government activity to occur seamlessly. For example, at first, the JIC did not permanently include officials from, say, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nor did it allow for attachments from OGDs to the ONS.

There were, however, some welcome and early exceptions to this. In late 2001, for example, the Anti-corruption Commission sent an observer to the JIC, a

move which enabled the Commission to inform SSR of wider corruption developments as well as to receive practical support from the Sierra Leone security sector. Furthermore, by late 2002 it was increasingly possible and productive to invite members of OGDs to take part in JIC meetings discussing issues of interest to that department and for ONS analysts to visit OGDs for research purposes.

Capacity Building and the Three Variables

According to one widely accepted theory of organisational development, there are three variables present in developing capacity in an organisation; success depends on balancing and integrating the three.

People

As mentioned above, it was agreed within the ISS part of SILSEP that resolving the human aspects of the programme satisfactorily constituted a *sine qua non*. While considerable political effort was expended ensuring that only suitable individuals were to staff the executive levels of CISU and ONS, similar efforts were made to recruit suitable new entrants to staff the organisations from the bottom up. This meant avoiding the trap of importing new entrants wholesale from, say, the armed services, police or the ad hoc organisation that formed the Sierra Leone government in Conakry.² It also meant avoiding pressure from inside and outside Sierra Leone to create a fully-staffed (but dysfunctional) organisation as quickly as possible.

Despite initial scepticism, events were to demonstrate that a small number of carefully selected, well-suited and well-trained officers was far more effective than a large number of unsuitable and unqualified staff members. Such appointments also facilitated genuine attainment of many core SSR principles more easily than otherwise might have been the case.

It was therefore agreed to take time to create a talent-spotting, screening and recruitment mechanism in keeping with the ethical, intellectual and physical demands of the new organisations. To achieve this, the principles behind recruitment methods for UK intelligence agencies were adapted to suit Sierra Leone conditions and the process was submitted to the Sierra Leone Establishment

Secretary for approval (i.e. there was no circumventing of Sierra Leone government procedures). Following the recruitment process, all staff members were given formal training by UK intelligence officers in the basic principles of intelligence direction, collection and analysis. This included members of the ONS on the basis that a good understanding of this function was important to their subsequent roles of all-source assessment and security coordination. CISU officers were then provided with more advanced training in their chosen areas of expertise, while ONS officers received separate coaching in their subject areas. This training was probably less satisfactory concerning intelligence assessment, largely because of a lack of suitable courses and trainers in this specialised area.

In keeping with the guiding principle of inter-agency cooperation, Sierra Leone nationals from the SLP-SB, MIB and, later, the Anti-corruption Commission were invited to take part in the courses. This broader training proved to be effective, as it broke down barriers to effective collaboration and gained more training ‘bangs for bucks’. In those areas where there was a clear operational aspect to the training, funding was provided by the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, rather than by DfID development funds.

Technology (Buildings and Equipment)

In Sierra Leone in 2000, when war effectively remained a reality, suitable office buildings were in short supply. Nevertheless, the ONS and CISU were allocated a wing on the State House site, which conveyed certain advantages (including proximity to the new MoD across the street). However, the location was not well-suited to the needs of restrictive security and caused initial confusion within CISU and ONS over their separate identities.

With considerable assistance from SILSEP funds, it was possible to make the offices serviceable and relatively secure. Emphasis was placed on ease of maintenance, physical security and functionality. This meant that a relatively low-tech IT approach was adopted. This allowed for ease of maintenance and information assurance, which would not have been the case with the more costly option of local area network (LAN) and wide area network (WAN) systems. LAN/WAN could not be easily supported within Sierra Leone at that time and would have been vulnerable to hostile penetration.

Limited funding for vehicles, combined with the needs of protective security, led to the decision to purchase an assortment of low profile, used vehicles rather than an even smaller number of high profile, new vehicles.

In CISU, meanwhile, the difficulties of DfID in funding operational requirements were overcome by separate access to funding from the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool. This allowed for a minimum level of equipment purchases, including photographic and vision enhancement tools, intelligence analysis software and training.

Policy and Procedures

The next critical step in capacity building is the development of a structure of policy and procedures, which constitutes the framework within which the organisation operates. This includes standard operating procedures, which provide guidance for safe and secure daily operations of the organisation and the rules by which it functions. Done properly, development of policy and procedures will promote more effective service delivery, help safeguard key SSR principles, give direction to the staff members and improve operational safety and security. It was important to SILSEP that these policies and procedures be developed in parallel with other capacity-building areas and that they be locally-owned and not simply ‘cut and paste’ from some other part of the world. Again, this implies more effort and time, but the benefits are many, including greater sustainability and compliance.

In general, institutional policies and procedures begin with national legislation to establish legal parameters. When the 2002 Sierra Leone National Security and Central Intelligence Act was passed, it established ISS legal parameters, including the organisations’ responsibilities, authority, resources and limits. These legislative boundaries were then translated into Standard Operating Procedures and CISU and ONS staff regulations.

The ISS approach was to develop and draft policies and procedures in response to events and capacity-building efforts and involve Sierra Leone partners in the process. This led to the gradual evolution of local, rather than external, standard operating policies and procedures. In retrospect, this activity initially lagged behind others, largely because of the size of the task. The project did not begin to make good this shortfall until the arrival of one of the additional part-time ISA advisors in the second half of 2002.

SSR Context

Many of the environmental factors affecting SSR programmes in other states were present in Sierra Leone. Because these factors represent additional complexity and ambiguity, there is, perhaps, a desire to ignore them or reduce their significance.

Vested Interests

In Sierra Leone, because of perceived threats to vested interests, there was considerable opposition to many aspects of SSR, including national security legislation. As often happens, many stakeholders were supportive of SSR in principle, but opposed many of its details.

Similarly, there is a perception trap which can operate, whereby principal stakeholders agree to SSR, but frequently have a different idea of what it means. These different perceptions can lead to the expectation that SSR will make security agencies:

- More effective at doing what they are already doing.
- Enable them to do things that they currently cannot (but which might be wrong).
- Make them cost less.
- ...or any combination of the above, while key SSR principles are overlooked or ignored.

This was the case with SILSEP. At a general level vested interests are threatened by ISS SSR in the following situations:

- A group or individual wishes to retain control over part or all of the security apparatus as a means to extend its/their power.
- A reformed and independent security apparatus threatens to reveal and oppose a group or individual's illegitimate activities (especially corruption).
- A more effective security apparatus threatens to identify the shortcomings of another organisation or individual.
- A more effective intelligence machinery demands better policy making and highlights inadequacies.

This list is not exhaustive, but it indicates that in the course of a SSR programme, there can be many who would wish to obstruct progress for reasons which are not immediately obvious. Many of the individuals threatened may be those who populate the local political landscape

and who fear that reformed security agencies will no longer be available to serve their personal and/or political purposes. The list of opponents may also include external actors, such as donor project managers, who identify too narrowly with the organisation they are advising and view other SSR programmes as competitors for donor resources or internal political influence. This was a feature of SSR that was not at all well understood at the outset of the programme and only imperfectly understood at the end of the period in question here.

Legislation

The question of national security legislation, including its conception, drafting, the consultation process and its parliamentary passage, is worth separate and detailed consideration. It is sufficient to note here that the legislative model used in Sierra Leone was not taken from the UK, but from a number of other African countries and heavily adapted for Sierra Leone with a number of innovative features. The entire legislative project was expertly supported by the Sierra Leone Legal Draftsman.

The legislation's slow passage through government was unexpectedly instructive, as it exposed some of the vested interests discussed above. This slow passage may also have reflected discomfort within the establishment regarding defining the roles and limitations of ISS organisations while also establishing their political independence. As a result, the National Security and Central Intelligence Act experienced delays ranging from the sophisticated to the banal. These included repeated delays both in finding space on the parliamentary agenda and obtaining executive sign-off. One of the final obstacles was the apparent lack of the right sort of paper on which to print it. Despite all this, it did finally become an exemplary piece of primary security sector legislation, embodying principles of transparency, democratic oversight, accountability and separation of powers in a manageable and readable form that was accessible and comprehensible to the people.

Collapse/Absence of Public Administration

A common challenge facing SSR and governance programmes in post-conflict societies is the lack of administrative foundation. SSR programme design in Sierra Leone had made certain reasonable assumptions about other elements of public administration being in

place. However, while these administrative elements may appear on paper, they often have little substance. SSR advisors often have to track well beyond their project to find firm administrative foundations upon which to build.

For example, the ISS found that administrative mechanisms for civil service screening and recruitment were inadequate; the task of creating such mechanisms to organise staffing of the ONS and CISU fell to the programme itself. Similar weaknesses in government logistics and finance required that the programme work with OGDs to create suitable logistical and financial foundations.

Poaching

Concomitant to all of the above is the risk of losing new human capacity to other organisations able to offer better pay and conditions. In a society still in or emerging from conflict, there is often a lack of trained and educated manpower to fill the posts that rapidly become available, both within the emerging government and within NGOs and commercial enterprises. Many of the latter are less concerned with local capacity-building per se and more concerned with carrying out service delivery as soon as possible. Therefore, some NGOs and commercial organisations look to governance programmes for suitably qualified local manpower.

Given that the ONS and CISU had invested considerably in selection, screening and training of capable Sierra Leone nationals, there was a constant risk of losing good employees and thus effectively funding human resource development for other organisations. The most simple mitigation measure was to introduce clauses to employment contracts specifying a minimum period of employment. However, this was difficult to enforce and, in motivational respects, was not entirely satisfactory.

Measuring Progress

The issue of how to evaluate SSR programme progress was much debated by both local and UK programme members.

Although programme outputs are generally a better measurement of programme progress and effect, it is an axiom of development programmes that it is usually much easier to measure inputs. Therefore, there was (and is) a tendency to default to inputs as a measurement of

progress. This leads to a situation where the number of training courses carried out, the amount of equipment delivered, the number of buildings constructed and, ultimately, the amount of funds spent were confused by a range of stakeholders as being indicators of capacity development. This, in turn, can lead to SSR advisors, perhaps against their better judgement, to feel compelled to:

- Provide equipment, even when it cannot be maintained or operated effectively.
- Carry out training courses, even when it is beyond the capacity of the students to absorb or benefit from them.
- Deploy advisers at a premature stage, even when they could be more effectively deployed later in the project.
- Form a unit or department, even before it can be properly staffed.

This pressure was certainly felt in Sierra Leone SSR projects and was not always satisfactorily resisted.

Silo Thinking

Absence of Coordination and Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence

Much has been written elsewhere about the lack of an explicit, overarching and detailed SSR strategy for Sierra Leone (and other recent post-conflict environments). Similarly, lack of in-country operational coordination in the early years and absence of integrated, coherent direction from the UK Government have been identified as major obstacles to successful SSR implementation. Certainly, SSR programmes suffered from these deficits, which resulted in time wasted and opportunities lost.

However, these losses were fewer than they could have been, because:

- Most SSR and governance projects were UK-funded, thus avoiding multinational squabbles.
- Informal coordination was effectively maintained by the High Commissioner.
- Individual programme managers and related external actors (e.g. UK intelligence officials) established very good interpersonal relations (not always the case in SSR and governance programmes) and demonstrated a willingness to avoid interpersonal conflicts.

It is a regrettable fact that many government departments, especially in the security sector, create unproductive rivalries, petty jealousies and prejudices towards other security agencies. Inappropriate, exaggerated identification with one's own programme can also arise, leading to isolation among SSR advisors and an over-protectiveness of one's agency or department. At times, this behaviour is imported into post-conflict arenas where it creates a new arena for rivalries to be played out, thus undermining key SSR principles and setting a bad example. While SSR programmes in Sierra Leone benefited from the aforementioned professional behaviour, it still suffered from inter-agency rivalries and turf battles.

This situation is not, however, inevitable. The risks associated with 'silo thinking' can be substantially mitigated by:

- Careful selection of SSR advisors to screen out those with prejudices against inter-department cooperation and seek those with a positive track record of working in multi-agency and multinational environments.
- Integrated local and UK command, control, communication and intelligence structures to manage and coordinate the range of SSR projects (replacing stovepipe reporting lines back to the UK).
- Creation of SSR team spirit before deployment.
- Formal, inter-programme objectives (e.g. concerning corruption and governance).

Making it Work

SSR in Conflict

A key feature of Sierra Leone SSR was that it took place during a conflict. This meant that the *requirement for products* from the central national security function (ONS) and the intelligence service (CISU) predated the existence of these organisations. This created a situation in which senior political figures and organisations, not least the embryonic National Security Council, expected that intelligence would be available, assessments made, policy advice submitted and strategy drafted from the moment the first makeshift office signs were hung on the State House doors. This placed a heavy burden on those who staffed those offices: they had to create organisations and deliver products simultaneously. Clearly, this was an unrealistic expectation that would not occur in analogous

organisations in donor countries, but this circle needed to be squared, somehow, in Sierra Leone.

It is important to point out here the difference between this "create and produce" environment and circumstances surrounding other organisations undergoing fundamental changes:

- *Reforming a dysfunctional but existing organisation*: for example, the Sierra Leone Police. In this case, the reforming organisation was required to improve on an already existing capability (however limited and flawed that capacity might have been).
- *Forming a new organisation from existing functional organisations*: for example, the Serious Organised Crime Agency in the UK. In this case, the new organisation could draw on experienced and qualified individuals who had functioned in similar roles before.

This is not to say that these tasks are any easier; but they are different and require different approaches. In the first case, building capacity in a dysfunctional but existing organisation may concentrate more on retraining existing human capacity and steadily improving service delivery from a low but acceptable starting point. In the second case, forming a new organisation from existing functional organisations might focus more on breaking down former inter-agency rivalries, creating a new corporate identity and refining organisational structures.

In the case of the ONS and CISU, there was neither a pre-existing organisational capacity on which to build nor a body of trained and experienced individuals to draw upon and merge. To deliver against the expectations outlined above, ONS and CISU needed to establish an interim capability to service the immediate needs of both the government and its international partners. This was crucial, but did take time away from basic capacity-building.

The pressure of these expectations placed senior ONS and CISU officials in something of a 'lose/lose' situation. The development lobby accused them of not prioritising capacity-building and reform. The Government and the war-fighting lobby accused them of not prioritising delivery of intelligence material/operations and national security advice.

These challenges were not well understood at the time and could have led to failure. However, both ONS and CISU officials managed to perform a difficult balancing act: both service delivery and reform agendas were able to move forward, although not without disappointing different lobbies at various times.

Building Capacity and Relevance: SSR and War-Fighting

When discussing the more arcane and academic aspects of SSR, it is perhaps easy to lose sight of the fact that security sector agencies are called upon to undertake work that is frequently dangerous. This is particularly so when the country is engaged in armed conflict, as was Sierra Leone for much of the period under review.

In the author's view, there is an implicit responsibility on the part of SSR projects to reduce risks to life that are inherent in the security context. This view was certainly shared by other SSR advisors in Sierra Leone during this period.

The intelligence gathering mission of CISU, for example, required penetration of paramilitary forces known for extremely violent behaviour. Such operations are dangerous. One of the features of good management of intelligence operations is operational security, which reduces risks to an acceptable minimum. This capacity takes time and experience to build. CISU was faced with the challenge of running such operations before operational security capacity was sufficiently developed; it responded to the issue by providing UK advisors to vet and oversee such operations without becoming actively involved in the operations themselves. While this might have involved a more interventionist approach than otherwise desirable or necessary, experience suggests that this was the right and responsible approach and should be recognised as a feature of ISS SSR programmes.

This style of advisor mentoring was known in the project as the 'driving instructor' approach. It allowed a certain amount of advisor intervention to avoid a serious crash and allowed our Sierra Leone colleagues to maintain full control of organisation and operations.

Intelligence Operations

The requirements of restrictive security necessarily limit comprehensive discussion of the contribution of CISU and other intelligence agencies to the defeat of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the establishment of security in post-conflict Sierra Leone. However, no mention of this would leave the question of the value of ISS SSR incomplete.

CISU, despite its small size, was able to make a substantial contribution to understanding the intentions and capacities of RUF leadership and to have an impact on the will of that leadership to maintain armed conflict. CISU and its partners were also able to contribute to an understanding and tracking of the other hostile and destabilising forces in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries. This intelligence was shared with Sierra Leone's allies and was considered to be of good value.

Also of considerable value was the new ability of the reformed security sector to evaluate outside sources of information for the Government, in particular, for the Office of the President. In many cases, these outside sources were evaluated as peddling disinformation or rumour; good evaluation by CISU and others helped prevent inappropriate Government actions and responses.

Security Coordination and Policy Advice

Similarly, in its infancy, the ONS needed to improve security coordination and decision making within Government and with external actors such as the UK Government and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Moreover, it also had the considerable logistical challenge of establishing its relevance and achieving provincial security coordination through the establishment of Provincial Security Committees (PROSECs) and District Security Committees (DISECs).

The establishment of PROSECs and DISECs was considered important in extending the national security coordination function beyond the central government in Freetown and involving the entire country in national security governance. Broader security governance would also result in:

- Increased local government and community cooperation with the security agencies.
- More efficient cooperation between the security agencies.
- Improved quality of information passed on to central government.

The relative delay in establishing PROSECs and DISECs was not due to underestimating their importance, but rather to the lack of central capacity to staff, fund and manage them and the need to first create a solid, central national security function to which regional bodies would report.

One notable national security innovation was the establishment of the National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG), a Sierra Leone-generated solution for the challenges it faced from 2002 onwards. This mechanism could well have application in other SSR programmes. The NSCCG's aim was to establish a high-level coordinating group of the most senior security officials from the Government, the UK and the UN. This enabled analysis of information from all available sources and consequent policy advice, which could then be submitted for approval within the respective organisations. In particular, this analysis would provide clear direction to the National Security Council and the President. The NSCCG filled the perceived gap between the political decision makers, technical experts and operators.

Conclusion

This paper has presented key aspects of the ISS SSR process in Sierra Leone during the period from 2000 to 2003. It has discussed some of the complications, challenges and successes that the author encountered while assisting in the establishment of the ONS and CISU. Remember that Sierra Leone was still at war as the ISS SSR process began. This meant that the functions of ONS and CISU were needed before these organisations

had been fully established. It was also clear that given its involvement in building intelligence community capacity, the UK Government was charting new territory.

The ISS process analysed above initially suffered from a number of assumptions held by many SILSEP stakeholders (not least the donor community) that had to be overcome. For instance, it was assumed that national security and intelligence organizations are inherently non-democratic and far from transparent and accountable. Thus, there is an inherent conflict between increasing effectiveness and increasing accountability and transparency. While the assumptions were later demonstrated to be flawed, much time and effort went into dealing with their practical implications.

Among the many aspects of the ISS process, two are paramount and sometimes easily forgotten. One is the critical role of people and the fact that good processes, skeletal institutions, technical assistance and funding cannot compensate for fundamental failings in human capacity. The human dimension is critical, and this counts for both international advisors and local individuals who will be staffing the institution in question. Though this appears somewhat of a truism it is often overlooked. However, without the right people to sustain technical processes that are being put in place, these efforts will be in vain. The current status of the ONS and CISU as two of the most effective and accountable institutions in Sierra Leone's security sector is very much a testament to its staff.

Second, the vested interests of certain groups or individuals can amount to resistance to the SSR process as a whole. Ultimately, this speaks to the inherently political nature of SSR. Many aspects of SSR in Sierra Leone encountered considerable opposition, for instance with respect to clearly outlining the remits of the intelligence agencies in national security legislation. It is not uncommon that support is given to the principles and framework of SSR, while actual implementation is opposed.

Footnotes

- ¹ Robert Ashington-Pickett was the Intelligence and Security Advisor to the Office of National Security (ONS) and the Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU) in Sierra Leone from 2000-2003.
- ² The democratically-elected Sierra Leone Government, run by the Sierra Leone People's Party, was exiled to Conakry, Guinea in 1997, when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) staged a coup. The Government returned to power in 1998.

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