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Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone 1997 - 2007

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Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007

Civil Society's Role in Sierra Leone's Security Sector Reform Process Experiences from Conciliation Resources' West Africa Programme

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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 September 1990, a refugee walked into Sierra Leone's Police 'Special Branch', one of the country's intelligence-gathering services, and filed a 13-page report about an alleged plan to attack Sierra Leone. While the report was passed on through the security structures, there was no response in preparation for a potential attack.

Six months later, in March 1991, a Sierra Leonean soldier made a 17-page statement confirming the threat of an imminent border attack. As in 1990, the report passed through the security structures but there was no response.

Days later, attacks from the Liberian border in the east of Sierra Leone ensued, plunging the nation into more than ten years of a brutal war that claimed thousands of lives and devastated the country.

It is impossible to tell how events would have unfolded had the refugee's report been taken seriously by the authorities. What is certain is that security structures at the time were predominantly military-based and cooperation between civil society and the security sector was infrequent and tainted with distrust. Nonetheless, the fact that the second warning of an imminent border attack by a soldier was also disregarded indicates a more endemic, organizational failure by Sierra Leonean security forces at the time.

While the war officially ended in January 2002, Sierra Leone has been undergoing a security sector reform (SSR) process supported by the United Kingdom (UK) since 1999. It is internationally acknowledged that democratic oversight of the security sector contributes to good governance, accountability and transparency. Furthermore, in post-conflict societies such as Sierra Leone, effective and sustainable SSR is a crucial prerequisite for the consolidation of peace.[2] While the challenges of promoting practical civil society–security sector cooperation are many, the benefits of building such a relationship contribute to the prevention of internal as well as external threats to national security.

In the case of West Africa, the international community recognizes the potential impact of ongoing SSR on most cross-border challenges and SSR's potential to prevent

relapse into regional conflict. In 2007, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's report on cross-border issues in West Africa[3] recognized the importance of SSR to conflict prevention and peace building in the region and highlighted the need to address cross-border issues more effectively. Crucially, the same report states that civil society has a vital role in SSR processes and that the establishment of sound civil-military relations is critical to good governance in the region. The report highlights the importance of linking civil society, social awareness and education in the fight against corruption in border areas by noting that "when one witnesses soldiers with guns or police extorting money from motorists and market women, one cannot help thinking the battle against corruption is lost."[4] The report also highlights how this type of petty corruption erodes state institutions and credibility, as populations give up all hope of changing the governance culture. This is of particular concern in Sierra Leone's Mano River Union sub-region, where poor governance and corruption at local and district-levels, simmering intra- and inter-community tensions, low-level conflict and cross-border security threats threaten a relapse into widespread conflict.

The primary function of civil society is to provide oversight of security forces, including budgetary oversight, and to ensure their accountability and transparency. Civil society involvement is also likely to contribute to more effective and equitable decision making and implementation and provide the sector with a more comprehensive range of specialised, expert information. There is also a role for civil society organizations in creating opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders, such as initiatives to build trust between communities and security sector forces.

It is also recognised that parliament plays a fundamental role in ensuring democratic oversight over the security sector.[5] Here, too, civil society organizations can play an important role in building parliamentarians' knowledge and skills about security. The experience in South Africa in the 1990s has shown that security and justice sector reforms are more effective and more sustainable if civil society supports the process and provides its expertise to parliaments and other oversight institutions.[6]

SSR in war-torn Sierra Leone presented two main challenges. Firstly, it was necessary to establish effective and accountable security agencies that could provide the security foundation for much-needed socio-economic reconstruction of the country and protect the state and its citizens. This had to be achieved against a history of politicized and unaccountable security sector forces and their fundamental breakdown during the war. Secondly, it was also necessary to establish effective civilian oversight of the restructured armed forces and security agencies. Historically, civil society had not actively engaged with the security sector in the country in any meaningful way.

Civil society's engagement with SSR in Sierra Leone has been slow and limited, due to a combination of factors, including the scale of the task of reforming the sector in post-conflict Sierra Leone, capacity issues and the need for a fundamental change in mentality. But it is happening and bridges are being built.

This paper brings together experiences and lessons learned about the role of civil society in SSR in Sierra Leone as seen through the experience of the Conciliation Resources West Africa Programme (CR). CR started working in Sierra Leone in 1995 to support capacity-building efforts of civil society organizations to address the many challenges they faced in reducing the negative impacts of conflict on communities and promote reconciliation and peace building. Over the years, we at CR have responded to critical peace and security needs, largely focussed in Sierra Leone, although some projects have a sub-regional focus. Our work has evolved under the thematic areas of community peace building, sub-regional security and stability and social exclusion and marginalization, with a focus on women and youth.

CR's involvement in SSR in Sierra Leone has evolved from responding indirectly to the impact of reform on our peace building work to a decision to directly engage with and contribute to the process. By working in partnerships, CR has engaged broadly with various aspects of the SSR process over the years and more specifically with the impact of SSR on the communities and organisations it worked with. For example, CR supported the work of

civil society organisations in promoting the demobilisation and re-integration of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) combatants. It was part of two key civil society networks that analysed security issues, which provided important entry points for the security sector to engage with civil society. These were Christian Aid's initiative 'Partners in Conflict Transformation' (PICOT) and the Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding (NCPSL), now the West Africa Network for Peace-Sierra Leone (WANEP-SL).

Over time it became clear that responding only to the impact that SSR was having on our work was not the most useful way to engage with the process of peace consolidation in Sierra Leone. Through our work with young people, for example, we became aware of the tensions and mutual mistrust between youth and the security sector and the need to facilitate dialogue and promote information-sharing between these groups. It was only last year that CR started to directly engage in the SSR process through the *Strengthening Citizen's Security* pilot project. In 2007, CR formed a partnership alliance with the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Centre for Development and Security Analysis (CEDSA) and Search for Common Ground–Talking Drums Studio (SFCG-TDS) to pilot the *Strengthening Citizen's Security* project in Freetown, Kailahun and Kenema. This project was designed to reflect specific recommendations from the 2005 Sierra Leone Security Review[7] about the importance of and need for civilian involvement in the SSR process. As such, a guiding assumption of this project, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) was that civilians have an active interest in participating in decision making processes affecting their own security. The project, which ended this year, has helped facilitate dialogue and strengthen the relationship between the security sector and the civilian population.

CR's experience in Sierra Leone over more than a decade and through this project in particular, has provided useful insights on how the SSR process in Sierra Leone has approached engagement with civil society and civilians in general. The following section of this paper provides a brief historic overview of the main characteristics of the security sector in Sierra Leone until the end of the war in 2002 and of how it fundamentally shaped relations between the sector and civilians. Sections 3 and 4 look at implementation of the SSR process in the country *vis-à-vis* civil society engagement. Section 5 reflects on specific improvements and mechanisms for civilian oversight of the security sector that were established as part of the ongoing reform, informed by CR's experience with the *Strengthening Citizen's Security* project. Finally, Section 6 offers some concluding thoughts.

The Historic Relationship between Sierra Leone Security Forces and Civil Society

The breakdown of trust between civilians and the security sector in Sierra Leone started well before the war. Three decades of single party and military rule politicised the sector, eroded its professionalism and undermined civilian oversight.[8] Sierra Leone's security forces gradually became involved in politics: members of the military and police were intimately involved in government, including parliament, and either planned or supported three coup d'états. By the 1980s, President Siaka Stevens had created his own loyal security force, the ruthless Special Security Division (SSD), which brought fear to the minds of many civilians and earned them the nickname of 'Siaka Stevens' Dogs'. Political alliances with the army increased under the military rule of President Joseph Momoh, himself a Major General, who succeeded Siaka Stevens in 1985. After 24 years of misrule, Sierra Leone was divided and economically and politically bankrupt; corruption was rife and the country was heavily dependent on foreign aid and loans. By 1992, the government's troops had not been paid for three months and frustration led to the ousting of President Momoh through a military coup. Young Captain Valentine Strasser emerged as the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) not long after the rebellion had begun, as the recently formed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) crossed the border from Liberia in 1991.[9]

The NPRC promised to end the war and return the country to civilian rule and announced the first multi-party elections since 1967. But after the initial high expectations for Strasser's 'Youth Revolution' and as the war continued to rage through the provinces, the NPRC regime was slow in implementing promises of change and soldiers regularly abused their power over civilians[10]. Despite having unique access to the RUF, it became increasingly clear to the general public that the NPRC

lacked the capacity to take the peace process forward and renewed offensives ensued with the RUF's takeover of Kono, Sierra Leone's principal mining district.

By 1995, as the long-promised election was nearing, a stalemate developed between a regime that had lost the population's trust and a rebel force that lacked widespread popular support. By then civilians were demonstrating an unequivocal desire to vote out the military. In fact, the brutality perpetrated against civilians by both government and rebel forces did not prevent civil society organisations from playing an active role in the National Consultative Conference of 1995, known as Bintumani I, with Paramount Chiefs, unions, academic institutions, journalists and NPRC and other public institutions. This was an important opportunity for civil society representatives to express their views and play a part in decision making processes that led to the elections in 1996.
A week after a change in leadership of the NPRC in August 1996, the RUF declared a ceasefire under the condition that the election be postponed. This prompted a second round of consultations, known as Bintumani II, where civil society demanded overwhelmingly that elections take place on schedule. The government acquiesced and the Sierra Leone People's Party candidate Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, became president.[11] However, civil society remained largely on the fringes of the Abidjan peace negotiations in 1996, which took place mostly outside Sierra Leone, thus preventing more meaningful local participation.[12]

In the first years following the end of the war in 2002, considerable focus was given to the restoration of the country's social fabric and infrastructure, both of which had been devastated during the conflict. The Government directed its resources primarily to practical needs. International humanitarian aid, provided in large part by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), flooded Sierra Leone in an attempt to address the breakdown of social structures and livelihoods and respond to the nation's psychological trauma. Development agencies' efforts to foster community collaboration were often faced with public scepticism, making it difficult to create community cohesion and encourage livelihood production. This widespread mistrust among Sierra Leoneans and their unwillingness to work as a community can be related to many factors. There was, of course, the trauma of the war and the brutality experienced by many civilians. In addition, people were forced to migrate to other areas and fend for themselves during the war, becoming more self-reliant and mistrusting of others' motivations and believing there was more security in working independently. Some of the conflicts among communities and individuals that existed before the war were also magnified by reprisals during the war. The conflict also reversed traditional social hierarchies when elders, who were traditionally protectors of the community, fled to safety while young people were encouraged to stay and defend the villages. At the end of the war, confidence in and respect for customary leaders among young people was significantly reduced; in some areas where they had been part of militias, the young were unwilling to relinquish power back to the returning traditional leaders.

In addition to this, Sierra Leone's history of military and, to some extent, police allegiance to politicians and authoritarian regimes had produced the widespread public view that there was no one to protect them. Rather than protect the population, the military committed the ultimate abuse of power when they turned against civilians and perpetrated appalling acts of violence and human rights abuses. This had a profound effect in people's' opinion of security forces, particularly the military.

By the time the SSR process began in 1999, relations between civil society and the security sector were based on fear, suspicion and outright mistrust. Not surprisingly, the SSR process was met with immense public scepticism. While this was partly due to historic legacy, it was not helped by the initial lack of a clearly delineated reform process strategy and by poor communication about the process with the public.

Civil society's involvement in the SSR process

As noted above, civil society has important oversight functions, promotes accountability and can contribute to decision-making processes through information-sharing, training and building of security sector capacity. If in place, civil society, a critical element of democratic governance, helps avoid some of the historical problems Sierra Leone has experienced and can also help prevent a

relapse into conflict. But to have a fully functional security sector with adequate civilian oversight, it is necessary to address the severe and crippling lack of resources and operational capacities of both government and civil society. In the Sierra Leonean post-conflict context, this has been one of the greatest challenges of the reform process.

By the time DfID's Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP) was initiated in 1999, the concept of civil society involvement in SSR had not been formally outlined. In practice, civil society became involved on an *ad hoc* basis in the reform process as early as 1998, shortly after the restoration of the legitimately elected Kabbah government that had been overthrown in a coup in May 1997. As the government developed plans to create the new armed forces, it decided to include soldiers who had previously mutinied and joined the RUF. This controversial decision sparked a reaction by NGOS in October that year, leading to a meeting between 300 civil society representatives from all over Sierra Leone, the government and armed forces representatives. As a result, civil society pro-actively influenced SSR by making a range of proposals that promoted civilian involvement in the process, such as the circulation of pictures of all recruits so that ordinary Sierra Leoneans could vet them for previous human rights abuses.[13] While the government reacted positively to this engagement, implementation was hindered by the renewal of hostilities in 1999.

In 2000, a collaboration between the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)[14], the police, Ministry of Defence and the Office of National Security Advisor provided the opportunity for civil society to re-engage and respond to some of the controversial issues that were creating public concern. In particular, civil society was focused on highlighting a major public concern about the implications of re-integrating ex-combatants into the military and the future role of the Civil Defence Forces[15], who were, like the army, accused of committing human rights abuses during the war.

By mid-2001, a more formal policy emerged to ensure that SILSEP engage with Parliament, civil society and the media. The UK, Sierra Leone's major international partner, made it clear that without establishing effective civil control over accountable and effective armed forces, long-term peace and stability would be difficult to achieve and sustain. This official recognition of fundamental tenets of civil society – transparency and accountability to the people – signaled that civil society could assist in the gathering of intelligence, report early warning signs and participate in conflict resolution, thus contributing to SSR. But despite these developments, for most Sierra Leoneans there was still very little knowledge or understanding of SSR as a structured process that involved strong collaboration between the UK and Sierra Leone Governments, with input from the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). In fact, the Government made little effort to communicate with the people about the few visible changes in the security sector that impacted them directly, such as military and police reform. In fact, what little information was available to the people resulted in negative reactions.
For example, people were aware that SSR included absorbing ex-combatants into security forces. By 2002, approximately 2,300 ex-combatants from various factions had been absorbed into the new army through the Military Reintegration Programme.[16] Combined with the public perception that the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process had rewarded the perpetrators, this further deepened distrust of security forces in communities that had suffered brutality at the hands of these same soldiers. To make matters worse, in early 2003, a group of former soldiers and civilians attacked an armory in the outskirts of Freetown. A police investigation of the incident later uncovered a plan by ex-combatants and soldiers to destabilize the country, allegedly to prevent the work of the Special Court, which was set up to prosecute war criminals. These incidents only added to popular mistrust in an army tarred with a history of abuse, now composed of ex-combatants from different factions hiding under a national uniform.[17]

Despite these difficulties, the creation of the Office of National Security (ONS) in 2002[18] and the subsequent decision to carry out a review of the SSR process proved decisive in clarifying the approach to security specifically and its engagement with civil society and the people.

Making security "everyone's business"

Security na la man bizness is an expression in Krio[19] coined by security reformers in Sierra Leone. It means that security is everyone's business and is now widely used by both security sector and civilians, which shows how much things have changed. Making security everyone's business became the explicit approach to SSR between 2002 and 2005, where a donor-driven change in paradigm and the Sierra Leonean government's commitment to it led to a change in focus from traditional state security to a people-centred view of human security.

But making security all men's business was no minor task in a country like Sierra Leone, where the security/development nexus, or the lack of it, had contributed significantly to the cycle of poverty and conflict. Underlying the country's new approach was the belief that it was necessary to create a security sector that would not only help create an environment conducive to economic development, but would also break the cycle of institutionalized violence. This required a fundamental change in mentality to replace unaccountable, politicised organizations that protected only the state's interests with a professional, transparent military sector capable of implementing the philosophy of human security.[20]

This new human security paradigm was embodied in the government's Security Sector Review in 2005, which also linked the paradigm with the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy, where security was identified as one of three pillars. The review explicitly recognised the value of civil society's involvement in security. President Kabbah stated this new paradigm in no uncertain terms to civil society, media and the public: *"SSR (Security Sector Reform) and the resulting improved security sector are there to serve you, the people. Security is no longer a secret; it is a public service, requiring public support and increased confidence…development needs security just as security needs development. Therefore, the successful implementation of the (security sector review) findings and recommendations outlined…must be a priority for all Sierra Leoneans".*

While the Government's Security Sector Review offered a valuable critique, recommended institutional reforms and detailed specifically the institutions responsible for making reforms, it was not broadly communicated to the public. A large part of the population was unaware of the significant efforts to reform the security sector and, most importantly, of its implications to greater protection for citizens and civil society participation. In light of the legacy of a culture of silence, repression and mistrust, this would have been a good opportunity to dispel scepticism about the new security sector forces and the reform process. Nevertheless, the reform has taken visible steps to improve civilian oversight of Sierra Leone's security sector and promote engagement between civil society and security sector forces. Against the background of authoritarianism, bad governance and a devastating decade-long war, these important steps present opportunities that need to be seized by all relevant stakeholders.

Strengthening Human Security in Sierra Leone: Opportunities and Shortcomings

> *"My personal impression about ONS was that it was another government agency. I did not understand what it is and what they do. But my impression is quite changed now. I only hope that they reach out to the wider public…"*
>
> Women's Coalition Representative, Kailahun District
> Conciliation Resources facilitated Civil Society–Security Sector meeting

The current security architecture foresees improved civilian oversight mechanisms, including parliamentary oversight, and information-sharing between civil society and the security sector that allows for a two-way flow of information from the grassroots to the presidential level. The architecture also calls for new, reformed military and police forces. The following analysis takes a closer look at what these proposed reforms offer in terms of civil society engagement and strengthened citizen security. It draws on Conciliation Resources and its partners' experience with the *Strengthening Citizen's Security* project to help better understand future opportunities and challenges.

Civilian oversight of the security sector through Parliament

A fundamental element of civilian oversight of the security sector is to make it accountable to a democratically-elected parliament. In the past, Sierra Leone Parliament's oversight functions, particularly under Siaka Stevens' one-party rule, have been largely weak and ineffective, serving mainly to approve executive decisions. This left a legacy of unaccountability and lack of transparency, which the 2005 Review addressed by recommending the transformation of coordinating and oversight mechanisms. The Review said, in part: "*reflecting on past evolutions in the security sector, civilian monitoring and oversight must be strengthened to ensure adequate transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the security forces*". The Review went on to propose *"strengthening the Parliamentary Oversight Committee for the security sector…to ensure democratic governance of the sector*". This is no minor task.

The Constitution of Sierra Leone provides legal authority for parliamentary oversight of government agencies, including ministries, the defence sector and security and intelligence agencies. The Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Defence, Internal and Presidential Affairs (POCDI&PA) is specifically responsible for oversight of the security sector. But the Committee still faces substantial challenges to perform its oversight role effectively.

In April 2008, as part of the *Strengthening Citizen's Security* project, CR commissioned an assessment of the POCDI&PA[21]. The aim of the assessment was to identify ways to build parliamentary oversight of the security sector, ascertain the policy, regulatory and material needs of the security-related parliamentary sub-committee and identify training needs for its members.

The majority of those interviewed for the assessment emphasized that there is a lack of clarity surrounding the Committee's functions, noticeable in the Committee's name. While the Committee's mandate is restricted to issues of defence, internal and presidential affairs and does not include security (police) and intelligence, it has effectively extended its remit to these areas. However, the police, Ministry of Defence and National Security Council still continue to approve national security policies. There is also an overlap between the Committee's mandate and other parliamentary oversight bodies; the POCDI&PA does not have exclusive power and authority over defence appointments or budgetary issues.

As noted in the assessment, *"there was general concern about the existence of a plethora of oversight bodies provided for in the 1991 Constitution…and lack of clarity of the specific role of the Committee dealing with defence matters. Almost all those interviewed called for clarity of the functions of this Committee"*. The assessment concludes that *"the lack of clearly-defined legal authority to address complex defence and security issues such as procurement, budgeting and preparedness of military units for international cooperation adversely affects the political will to effectively promote democratic control and transparency on security matters"*.[22]

The assessment also highlighted other challenges, such as the Committee's lack of human, financial and material resources. According to the assessment, the selection of the 16 Committee members, of whom only one is a woman, is not based on knowledge of the security sector; appointments occur through consultation with party leaders in Parliament. In the 2007 general elections, approximately 80% of elected Parliamentarians were new; many had returned home from living in the Diaspora. The assessment noted that most Committee members *"still see security matters in terms of state security and the physical security. They do not see it in human security terms, which has implications for their role in broader security matters"*. The assessment also noted that the Committee's support staff do not have specialised knowledge of security matters.

NGOs such as 50/50 Women's Group, the Campaign for Good Governance, CR as well as the ONS have facilitated a series of workshops and training sessions to build Parliament's capacity on a number of issues, including SSR and oversight. But much more needs to be done to increase parliamentarian and the POCDI&PA capacity to perform effective security sector oversight functions.

Civil Society engagement through Provincial and District Security Committees

> *"I don't think people know what PROSECs and DISECs are, but I do think it is important that the public understand these issues more and what we are mandated to do"*
>
> Provincial Administrator & PROSEC Secretary

As mentioned above, opportunities for civil society involvement in the security architecture exist at the level of Provincial and District Security Committees (PROSECs and DISECs), which were established to serve as early-warning mechanisms at the community level. PROSECs are security committees based in each provincial capital that provide early warning to the Government of the existence or likelihood of any security threat to the province, the country or the Government. They submit fortnightly reports to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). DISECs are the equivalent security structure at the district level; they submit weekly reports through their respective PROSECs. The Committees are comprised of representatives from the ONS, provincial and district civil service, traditional security forces and civil society represented by traditional authorities from the Paramount Chiefs Committee (PCC). Temporary membership is given to civil society representatives when they are relevant to a particular security-related circumstance, such as the National Electoral Commission (NEC) during national and local elections. Each committee offers limited membership to an additional civil society representative, who participates in the non-classified portions of meetings, on the premise that they can bring the voice of the people to the security table.

In principle, PROSECs and DISECs provide important mechanisms where civil society representatives meet with security personnel to assess local security issues share and verify pertinent information and come up with a plan of action to address security threats. This process gives civil society a voice in important security decision making processes and provides a venue where the civil society and security sector relationship can be strengthened.

However, because of the legacy of public distrust and suspicion of the security sector, these committees are often perceived to be secretive and potentially opposed to civil society. Some security personnel have been reluctant to engage with civil society and NGOs on the premise that security issues are 'secret' and not for public consumption. For example, one military officer challenged CR's involvement in security issues: *"What is Conciliation Resources doing with security? You NGOs should be engaged in relief and development issues, not in security. Security is the domain of institutions like the military or police, not NGOs. So what is your interest in this?"*

Another hurdle to overcome involves selection of civil society membership, which has not always followed set criteria, but rather has relied on existing personal relationships between committee members and individual civil society representatives. Initially, there were also difficulties with coordination and scheduling of meetings. However, ONS involvement in the process has since ensured that PROSECs and DISECs meet regularly and that information filters through the system. As these groups began to work effectively, it became clear to both civil society and security personnel that once each party was able to express their concerns and misconceptions about each other, relationship building between them led to good information-sharing that benefited both citizens and the security sector.

The ONS has also begun to employ young professionals in district offices. Their enthusiasm and commitment to bringing security to the public forum has had a powerful impact on the civil society-security sector relationship. For example, in Kenema and Kailahun districts, following their participation in CR-facilitated meetings with civil society, ONS has been eager to engage young people and other civil society representatives in security issues, such as collaborating on public campaigns against violence in elections (see Box 1).

One of CR's partners, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), has worked with community radio stations in Kenema and Kailahun districts to develop bi-weekly radio programmes focused on security. These 'Security Talk' programmes offer an opportunity for District Security Committees and Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPB)[23] to air information about their meetings.

A panel of DISEC and LPPB members chooses a pertinent local security topic to discuss and time is allocated to live phone-ins whereby the public asks questions and responds to panellists. These community radio programmes have helped support DISEC's and LPPB's efforts to respond to public security concerns and share outcomes from meetings that might otherwise remain restricted to the meeting room.

Box 1

An entry point for Civil Society to engage in security processes through District Security Committees

"This is an issue of serious concern to the people and we have been waiting to know what has been done. Please, for issues such as these, communicate earlier so that the public is informed about the outcome of your investigations. This has been the usual way of treating public concerns and this is not good".

Civil Society representative on the importance of security personnel responding to public concerns by announcing the outcomes of police investigations (CR-facilitated meeting in Kailahun, 2007)

Conciliation Resources facilitated open meetings between civil society and security sector personnel in Kailahun District with the aim of improving local understanding of security structures and dialogue between security personnel and civil society.

During the first meeting, when security personnel presented the structure of national security, including the function and membership of Kenema's DISEC, it became evident that most civil society participants did not know that there was someone representing them in the DISEC. As one civil society participant stated, *"He does not represent us and we are not aware he sits on DISEC on our behalf."* At the same time, security personnel stated that this member was currently suspended from the DISEC while investigating the alleged allegation that he was a political aspirant, which, if true, would breach the criteria of political impartiality. In turn, the security personnel used this civil society representative to argue that civil society was neither serious nor committed to participating in security issues.

This issue highlighted some of the challenges of collaboration and at their own admittance civil participants acknowledged that civil society was fragmented *"…there is no civil society here (Kailahun). I would like to ask that you (CR) please help set up a civil society umbrella group for Kailahun."* As a result they do not have a strong voice, which made it difficult for security personnel to identify civil society partnerships.

The two-day meeting covered a wide range of issues that gave people the chance to express their views on security and directly interact with security personnel. As one participant expressed, *"this initiative is an eye opener for us. I have the feeling that the frank discussions around how we perceive ourselves will go a long way to bridge the gap between them (security) and us (civil society)."* It was agreed that there was dire need for civil society to coordinate as a forum from which they could nominate representation on the DISEC. Security personnel acknowledged the importance of improving communication to the public. As the ONS representative said, *"I think the issue of DISEC going to the radio to discuss issues on security that is of use to the public will be an issue to be discussed at the next DISEC meeting. I consider this to be crucial."*

As a response to recommendations, within a month of the meeting, the Kailahun District Civil Society Organisations (KAIDCSO) was formed and one of its members nominated and accepted by DISEC to represent civil society on the committee with the directive to report relevant information back to KAIDCSO. In the ensuing year, KAIDCSO members and security personnel have collaborated on a number of events and information gathering activities, both as part of CR's Strengthening Citizens Security project and independently.

In May 2008, two months prior to District elections, in response to recommendations from a security sector–civil society meeting, KAIDCSO and security personnel organised a local village-to-village campaign against the use of violence in the election process. For communities, watching civilians and military personnel walking together echoing slogans of non-violence was an historic event in terms of boosting public relations for the security sector.

The relationships developing between security personnel and civil society in Kailahun has noticeably helped to 'demystify' security and create information resources that are mutually beneficial to civil society and the security sector.

Another positive example of a successful security sector-civil society relationship with is the Bo Peace and Reconciliation Movement (BPRM).[24] In recent years, BPRM has worked to develop links with decentralised government structures, particularly the justice and security sectors, in order to augment collaboration between civil society and the security sector. After the Police's Family Support Unit (FSU)[25] programme was developed in 2000 to address gender-based violence in communities, the BPRM complimented this work by collaboratively reconciling domestic disputes and helping victims file police reports of sexual and violent crimes against women and children. This collaboration was supported by a series of CR-facilitated dialogue and discussion sessions in 2004, which clarified roles between the police and BPRM's alternative dispute resolution mechanism, emphasizing the complementary nature of both roles.

This initial collaboration with the security sector has led to a greater involvement by BPRM in the recent years. As a rule, it will only participate as mediators in large Chiefdom disputes if both conflicting communities and state authorities endorse their involvement. This brought BPRM in contact with the ONS and the relationship that has since developed between BPRM and the ONS is an important example of the benefits of security sector and civil society collaboration. The ONS and BPRM have cooperated on a number of regional security threat cases that were successfully resolved. ONS Director of Provincial and Border Security, Ismail Tarawali, believes that BPRM *"are able to gain the confidence of the factions as a neutral body*" and *"well-placed to identify potential conflict areas"*. As a result of their reconciliation work and collaboration with the security sector, BPRM were elected to serve as the civil society representative on the Bo DISEC in 2008.

There is no doubt that these mechanisms and processes are welcomed reforms. But experience also shows that it will take time, and more importantly, commitment by all stakeholders, to overcome the current challenges. A large portion of the public is still unaware of the new security paradigm and relations between the security sector and civil society are still limited. As a result, crucial lines of communication are too often broken or ineffective (Box 2), with the most common public complaint being that when civil society reports security concerns security personnel, who provide reports to the upward flowing information exchange, there is no response back from the security sector. This does little to appease tensions within the communities. This mechanism also assumes that civil society organisations have an effective structure for disseminating information and the capacity to reach grassroots communities, which is generally not the case.

The ONS also develops public contacts at the provincial level, using opportunities to educate people about security structures. Projects such as *Strengthening Citizens' Security* are also making a valuable contribution to the reform process in terms of security sector/civilian relations. But it is clear that the reform process cannot be entirely successful or even sustainable if challenges noted above are not specifically addressed. Decades of mistrust and failed structures are not easily replaced by what is still a relatively young reform process.

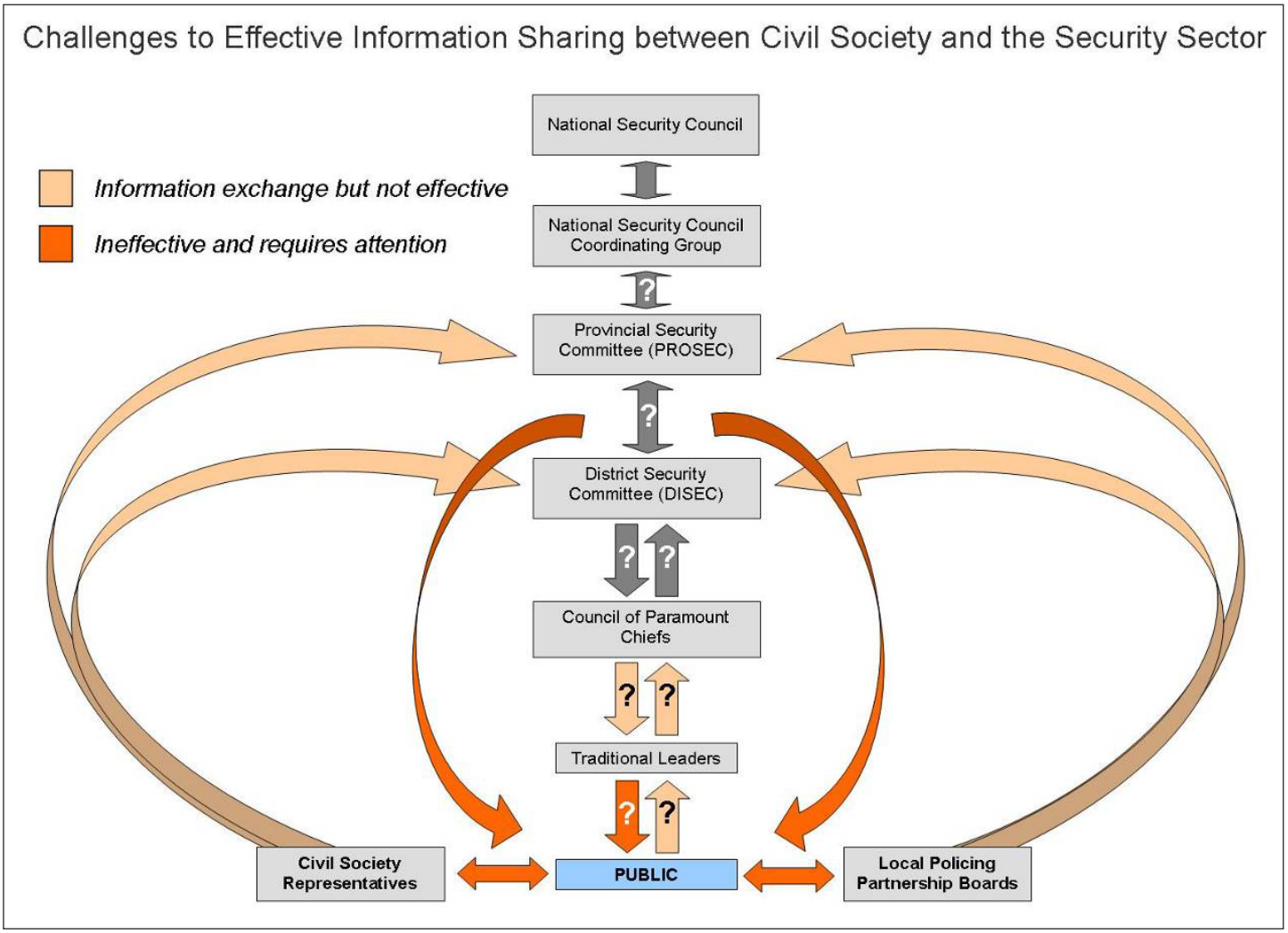
Reconciling broken relations between the military and civilians

As stated earlier, the breakdown of public faith in the security sector reached its climax during the war when the military turned on the people and joined the rebels in their onslaught of the nation. Restoring public trust and confidence in the armed forces is a long-term, high-priority process involving not only consolidation of the current peace but also the healing of the suffering endured by civilians at the hands of the military.

Military reforms have been undertaken largely by the International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) funded by DfID and led by British military personnel. The UK government's long-term commitment to support IMATT in their 2002 Memorandum of Understanding with Sierra Leone initially helped alleviate public anxiety about a potential relapse of conflict triggered by military officers. People viewed IMATT as a near guarantee that the army would be unable to mutiny and that training would raise the professional standards of the country's forces.

Today, Sierra Leoneans openly acknowledge that there have been visible changes in the professional performance of the renamed Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) over the last few years. The military has begun to recognise that community relationship-building is crucial to healing some of the suffering and is creating more opportunities to make positive contact with civilians. This

Box 2



commitment has extended to the military's budget, as each Battalion receives limited funds for Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC). For example, the CIMIC fund supports the coordination of sports activities in the barracks with neighbouring communities. While this military involvement in communities is an important step towards improving local relations, like the police, the military would benefit from a nationwide public relations campaign to promote the 'new' reformed image.

During the first civil society–security sector meetings facilitated by CR in Kenema and Kailahun in 2006 as part of its *Strengthening Citizens' Security* project, there was a clear division between the military and civil society, based mainly on historic prejudice that manifested itself in an unwillingness to empathise with each other or understand positive changes that were taking place. Civil society pre-judged military personnel and assumed they had little interest in associating with the public. Women in particular, who were the target of brutal sexual violence during the war and remain subject to widespread gender-based violence, have understandably displayed deep distrust of the military. The military, too, pre-judged civil society as weak and disorganised.

Some of the project's activities supported civil–military interaction; there have been evident, albeit limited, improvements in how they relate to each other. In April 2008, CR collaborated with the Kailahun District Battalion to organize a football tournament between army officers and neighbouring communities (Box 3). While this activity may appear basic, CR believes it is of enormous significance: it brought together former warring sides or former victims and perpetrators. It is one step in the right direction.

BOX 3.
Building relationships between the military and their neighbouring communities

"I would like to take this opportunity to invite civil society to the brigade command at any time they agree to have discussions with us regarding activities that will possibly cement our relationships". -2IC third Brigade Command, Kenema district

In April 2008, CR collaborated with the Kailahun Battalion to organise a football tournament between army officers and neighbouring communities as part of the armed forces' Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities. Among the various teams was the Bike Renters Association (BRA), a self-organised commercial motorbike rental service formed in Bo district in 2003 as a response to the high level of unemployed ex-combatants. The BRA includes ex-combatants from the Civil Defence Force (CDF) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel movement who fought on opposing sides during the war.

The BRA parked their motorbikes near the barracks and sat side-by-side with military officers, drinking soft drinks and discussing football tactics. Competing on the football field were reformed ex-combatants from the three warring factions.

The tournament was open to the public; people from neighbouring communities came to cheer their teams and enjoy a free football match. The military were defeated by the BRA team and other teams and eventually lost the tournament. However, they took their defeat in good spirit and focused on the value of the event, which was to build civil society–security sector understanding and trust. At the end of each game, teams shook hands and shared a post-game social time, putting aside historical divides.

The 'Force for Good' – Sierra Leone Police (SLP)

Reforming of the security sector included promoting a new face to the public, one which would portray a sector working for and with the people. As the framework for Sierra Leone's new security placed the onus of internal security on the police, images of a new, re-structured, more professional police force were displayed around the country with the slogan 'a force for good'. As part of the reform process, the SLP have made visible attempts to transform their image through their Media and Community Relations Departments. The use of high-ranking police officials, such as Assistant Inspector General Kadi Fakondo, to promote the reformed police service has contributed to elevating the image of police professionalism, particularly among women.

The creation of nationwide Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPBs) has also increased collaboration between SLP and civilians. Given the imbalance between the number of police in relation to the fast growing population, police officials supported this measure in order to involve citizens in crime prevention. LPPBs embody the language of the 2005 Security Sector Review: *"to encourage people to participate actively in their own security, additional support must be provided to the SLP to strengthen their public participation strategy through Local Policing Partnership Boards"*. In every district, LPPBs are non-partisan, inter-religious groups that work to create a peaceful and healthy police/community rapport. Their main responsibilities are to monitor police performance, act as a general forum for discussion and consultation on matters affecting policing and enhance public-police cooperation on crime prevention. As a result, LPPBs should perform a crucial a key role in ensuring that police enjoy the support of all sections of the community.

But the process has not been without its challenges. Civil society representatives are nominated by their community to serve on LPPBs, but neither police nor civil society have defined criteria for their election. In addition, there is no effective induction programme to inform new representatives about their role. As one young man nominated to sit on a LPPB stated, *"I was nominated or asked to serve as a member of the partnership board. But since I was nominated, no body has taught me what this is all about. I will appreciate it very much if you can ask them to explain what this is all about."*

Establishment of Family Support Units (FSUs) has also been a welcome development within the SLP. Established by the government in 2000, FSUs address gender-based violence and offer a venue, especially for women, to report domestic violence and sexual abuse cases. FSU offices are now located at police stations around the country. While it has been reported that FSUs lack basic infrastructure and communications support, they are playing an increasingly important role in the investigation of violence against women and children.

As with security structures in general, financial constraints are the greatest challenge to mainstreaming community policing. LPPBs do not have budgets; their work consists of police and members of the community meeting to discuss and share information about security concerns. It was clear during the *Strengthening Citizens' Security* project that in many rural districts, like Kenema and Kailahun, vast areas without viable roads make it extremely difficult for all members to meet. Aside from being severely understaffed, rural police stations lack vehicles and funds to fuel them to offer support to LPPBs or even adequately investigative cases. Without adequate resources, positive structures like LPPBs and FSUs run the risk of becoming dysfunctional and ineffective.

Youth and Security

Through our work we have found that one of the greatest challenges has been the dynamics between youth and the SSR process. Young people played a central role in Sierra Leone's conflict, both as fighters and victims of atrocities. After the war ended in 2002, around 70,000 ex-combatants went through a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reconciliation (DDR) programme. While DDR in Sierra Leone is officially considered as having substantially increased the country's immediate security, it has not adequately addressed the plight of marginalized young people. Six years on, many have not been successfully reintegrated into their communities and remain deprived of education, access to basic services and economic opportunities. Engaging and reintegrating war-affected youth is a crucial nation building task and a security issue.

CR has always believed that youth can and should play a crucial role in rebuilding safer communities and contributing to the political, social and economic development of the country. One key step in this process is to ensure that young people and the country's security

forces see each other as partners, able to share experiences and articulate common goals. This has already begun to happen.

During the 2007 Presidential elections, young people got involved in campaigning for violence-free elections, with the support of CR, security sector personnel and civil society organizations in Kailahun and Kenema. As part of the *Strengthening Citizens' Security* project, CR brought together 29 students from Fourah Bay College, Njala University and Milton Margai College and civil society organizations to participate in an innovative academic study of concepts and dimensions of security from both practical and theoretical standpoints. Consideration of the country's SSR process was also part of the course curriculum.

While there have been positive examples of collaboration, youth marginalization and unemployment are severe. In December 2007, the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission adopted the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework. The Framework identifies youth marginalization and unemployment as a major challenge to the country's stability. It reminds us that the marginalization and political exclusion of youth were identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one of the root causes of the civil war and that today two-thirds of the country's youth are unemployed or under-employed. It is vital that SSR be accompanied by a national youth policy that delivers long-term, meaningful youth employment and empowerment opportunities. In the country's journey to peace and stability, this could be the difference between peace and a relapse into violence.

Conclusion: Positive Civil Society–Security Sector Collaboration Results

There has been marked improvement, particularly since 2005, in the way the security sector engages with the public. Citizens generally have a more positive perception of security forces and institutions. In communicating with civil society, ONS officials speak of 'human security' and a 'holistic approach to security', concepts that have helped formulate the "security is everyone's business" motto. More than ever before, SSR offers opportunities for civil society participation at a local level in community policing, sharing information on potential and actual security threats, aspects of local decision making and trust building with the military through joint social activities.

One of the most recent and clearest indications of the positive impact of SSR in the eyes of civil society was the widespread public praise of the professionalism of security sector forces in the 2007 Presidential elections. Given the historic background to this election and the potential for conflict, public tensions leading up to the elections were high. Reassurances from the police that they had planned for all eventualities and that the situation would be under control were met initially with great scepticism. While a number of local-level conflicts occurred in the run-up to voting (largely instigated by political party supporters), the SLP were able to address each incident and establish calm. Operating under more open public communications policies, the SLP were also able to communicate their mobilization plans more widely; there was a corresponding increase in public trust. On election day, successful cooperation between the police and military was proof of a new era for security in Sierra Leone. The fact that there were no major disruptions to people's ability to vote increased public pride in their security forces.

CR's experience suggests that, despite poor access, integration of civil society in SSR has been more successful in rural districts. By focusing on the local context, solutions to problems and potential conflicts have been reached through collaboration between civil society and security sector. While it has been possible to engage high level, Freetown-based security sector representatives in the *Strengthening Citizens' Security* project, broader public engagement with the security sector in the urban Western Area, which includes Freetown, has been less visible. Entry points for security sector-civil society exchange in these areas remain more complex and challenging. The large number of civil society organisations in the Western Area and the fragmented nature of these organisations make it difficult to identify genuine representation. While this state of affairs may justify the security sector's perception that civil society is not serious about participating in SSR, the security sector itself does not yet have the capacity to reach out to large urban areas.

SSR in Sierra Leone has been lauded as a success; it has proved to be one of the most successful internal processes of reform since the end of the war. No doubt, the significant financial and advisory UK government support and the commitment of the Government have been factors in that success. But such success to date should not indicate that the reform process is concluded, or even sustainable. The real proof is yet to come, as donor support dwindles and the Sierra Leonean government has to make choices amidst all the other economic and social challenges that the country still faces. Civil society will, no doubt, continue to play a critical role in this process.

Footnotes

[1] Rosalind Hanson-Alp is Conciliation Resources' West Africa Programme Coordinator.

[2] The Review will be discussed below.

[3] Inspiring the term SOBELS, a contraction of soldiers and rebels

[4] The Campaign for Good Governance is a non-governmental organization formally established in July 1996 after Sierra Leone's first multi-party democratic elections in three decades. It promotes the building of democratic institutions, transparency and accountability in government, active citizen participation in the political process, voter education, human rights, and the rule of law.

[5] The Civil Defence Forces were a paramilitary organization that supported the elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah against the rebel groups RUF and AFRC (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) during the war.

[6] The Office of National Security (ONS) was created in 2002 by the National Intelligence Act. It supports the National Security Council, the highest body in Sierra Leone's security structure, which is headed by the President and responsible for defining and implementing National Security Policy. The ONS is a non-political structure that serves as the NSC secretariat and coordinates security matters and policy initiatives. It collects ands analyses intelligence from all security agencies and provides the government with balanced intelligence assessments upon which to base policy decisions. The NSC also receives advice from the National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG), which includes members of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), security agencies and the United Nations Observer Mission (UNIOSIL). The Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU) is responsible for the collection of classified intelligence within and outside Sierra Leone. Also part of the country's security decision-making structure are the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the Provincial Security Committees (PROSECs - North, South, East and West) and the District Security Committees (DISECs). The JIC translates certain policy decisions of the NSC into formal intelligence requirements for the intelligence and security services. Both PROSECs and DISECs provide early-warning to the government via the ONS, of the existence or likelihood of any security threat. DISECs meet more regularly than the PROSECs and forward their security reports to the ONS through the latter.

[7] The lingua franca of Sierra Leone.

[8] Local Policing Partnership Boards will be discussed later in this paper.

[9] In 1996, Conciliation Resources facilitated the development of the Bo Peace and Reconciliation Movement (BPRM) at a time when Sierra Leone was in dire need of peace intermediaries at the community level. BPRM is a community-based, voluntary peacebuilding organisation made up of a union of nine civil society groups, including regional ex-combatants, traders and teachers union. Initially, BPRM were involved in engaging with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)combatants to promote their demobilisation and re-integration. Since then, BPRM have trained over 350 community 'Peace Monitors' to facilitate conflict resolution processes within their Chiefdoms and are recognised at the national level for having helped resolve over a thousand cases of both armed violence and community disputes in the southern provinces. BPRM's success in reconciling disputes at local level has resulted in the movement being asked to intervene in conflicts around the country.

[10] These are described in greater detail below.

Endnotes

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[9] For more details about civil society peace initiatives in the Sierra Leonean peace process please see: 2000. Paying the Price: the Sierra Leone peace process, Edited by David Lord, Accord Conciliation Resources, Issue 9.

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