

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean? ¹

By Dr Tony Karbo



Abstract

Contemporary peacebuilding processes increasingly propose and adopt local ownership as a fundamental prerequisite in sustainable peacebuilding. Local ownership presupposes the application of an organic and context-specific approach to peacebuilding. Localisation also assumes the active participation of local actors, including national governments, civil society groups, community organisations and the private sector, in achieving a common purpose in peacebuilding processes.

Following years under the trusteeship of the international community, including the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC), Sierra Leone's post-conflict peacebuilding processes continue. Within this context, this paper examines how questions of local ownership have been understood and operationalised in Sierra Leone since the end of the civil war. The first part of the paper explores the evolution of both the discourse and practice of local ownership in recent years. The second part of the paper pays particular attention to the implication of local ownership, and the relationship between international and domestic actors. The third part discusses the challenges of implementing locally-owned peace processes, particularly in countries like Sierra Leone where peace is still fragile. The last part of the paper argues that despite the

challenges, local ownership remains essential to Sierra Leone's achievement of sustainable peace.

Introduction

This paper examines the possibility of implementing a sustainable locally-owned peacebuilding process following the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone in January 2002. Interest in Sierra Leone at the sub-regional and international levels post-2002 made the country the beneficiary of one of the largest multilateral United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions ever deployed. In addition to the ample funding committed to the peacebuilding process, Sierra Leone is home to hundreds of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which are leading the peacebuilding and development agenda. In this donor-saturated environment however, the prevailing trend has been that INGOs and NGOs have tended to side-step local groups. They operate independently and only occasionally collaborate with local civil society organisations. This approach ignores the widely held view that building whole societies (and building some parts of a society) is a huge undertaking that must include communities as the most important stakeholders in the process.

Background to the conflict in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is endowed with rich and abundant natural resources, including extractable minerals such as diamonds, gold and iron ore, as well as extensive marine fisheries. Despite this, the country still occupies one of the lowest ranks in the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2010).

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented during a conference themed 'Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: Charting the Way Forward' which was hosted by ACCORD on 21 April 2011 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The author would like to thank Dr Martha Mutisi for her editorial support.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

After Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961, power was centralised in the hands of a few political leaders. During this period, the country was characterised by increasing social inequalities, high incidences of violence, marginalisation of youth and a heightening of patriarchal notions of female inferiority. The latter two issues served to exclude young people and women from participating in political and democratic processes. Post-independent Sierra Leone soon entered into an unstable period that saw the beginning of a power struggle between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC). The struggle only ended with a coup by army officers in 1968. The APC emerged as the victor in this struggle. From 1968, the APC ruled the country with a heavy hand, limiting political opposition and economic opportunities for the majority of citizens. The APC, whose regime sustained itself through nepotism, corruption and the plundering of state assets, oppressed the political opposition, culminating in the 1978 adoption of a constitution establishing a one-party state. The APC one-party government failed to meet even the most basic needs of its citizens. According to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) 'economic decay and fragmentation of the national spirit were exacerbated under the APC one-party system and these became key causes of the conflict' (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2) 2004:6).

In March 1991, civil war broke out in Sierra Leone. The conflict lasted 11 years, eventually coming to an end in January 2002. The rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by former army corporal Foday Sankoh, was fighting against government forces with the aim of overthrowing the administration of President Joseph Momoh. RUF had support from the special forces of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), under the leadership of Liberia's then president, Charles Taylor. This new coup was characterised by the brutalisation of civilians, gross violations of human rights and extensive damage to the country's social fabric (Grant 2005). It is estimated that during the years of conflict, about 200,000 people were killed², two million people were internally displaced, and more than 500,000 were forced to flee across borders to become refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Senegal. In all, it is estimated that 70,000 combatants, including



Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor, was convicted of crimes against humanity for his part in Sierra Leone's civil war

7,000 child soldiers, who fought during the many years of conflict were traumatised, orphaned and homeless as a direct result of the war (Alie 2008).

Intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), through its military arm, the Economic Community Of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), saved Sierra Leone from descending into more chaos. The international community also played a vital role in ending the civil war. The actions of Britain, which sent troops into the country, were particularly instrumental in achieving the restoration of order. A UN peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), was deployed to initiate the peace process. On 18 January 2002, President Kabbah officially declared the conflict over and, in May the same year, parliamentary and presidential elections were held. In the presence of ECOMOG, UN peacekeeping forces and a contingent from Britain, the process of rebuilding Sierra Leone began in earnest in 2002.

² There is some statistical uncertainty. Research by Keen (2005) puts the number at 50,000 casualties, while Chege (2002) puts the figure closer to 70,000 casualties.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

Conceptual understanding of local ownership of peacebuilding

The term 'local ownership' is vague, evoking diverse interpretations both conceptually and operationally. Narten (2007:46) defines local ownership as:

The process and final outcome of the gradual transfer to legitimate representatives of the local society, of assessment, planning and decision-making, the practical management and implementation, and the evaluation and control of all phases of state-building programmes up to the point when no further external assistance is needed.

Chesterman (2007) conceives of local ownership as the end goal, or outcome, of sustainable peacebuilding. The concept has become a catchphrase, particularly in development discourse, with its emphasis on home-grown solutions to development challenges. Although terms such as 'local participation' and 'local empowerment' were widely used in development discourse throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the term 'local ownership' was formally recognised in development practice in 1996, when the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development and Assistance Committee (DAC) called for a comprehensive approach that 'respects local ownership of the development process' (Development and Assistance Committee 1996:9). This shift was based on the realisation that externally-driven development creates a host of problems, including dependency, conditionality, as well as lack of ownership by locals.³

In development literature, local ownership refers to the capacity of stakeholders to design, implement and sustain development agendas and initiatives (Saxby 2003). Local ownership incorporates the active participation of, consultation with, and commitment of local people to development goals and decision-making, supported by diminishing external control over peacebuilding projects and processes. The reality, however, has been that donors have found it difficult to completely give up control of project agendas, partly due to the negative track record of African governments in managing donor funds.

Arguments for local ownership

Local ownership not only requires the design and re-engineering of structures and institutions

that would support implementation of the local peacebuilding agenda, it also calls for revisiting the modalities of cooperation and external engagement. These processes would ideally lead to structural transformation and equality in partnerships between local actors, donor agencies and governments.

Localisation of peacebuilding processes includes the empowerment of local communities to utilise their own approaches and available resources to respond to the challenges and needs of a post-conflict society (Ropers 2003 and Edomwony 2003). Within the conflict resolution field, the importance of local ownership of peacebuilding processes gained currency in the 1990s. Local ownership is conceptualised as a consultative process characterised by engagement of all stakeholders (Miall et al. 1999, McDonald 1999, and van Tongeren 1999). Lederach's model of the peacebuilding pyramid emphasises the importance of involving every level of society in peace processes, namely top, mid-range and grassroots actors. He highlights three conditions for local ownership: indigenous empowerment, cultural sensitivity and long-term commitment (Lederach 1995). The argument for local ownership is that since conflicts take place within societies, it is within the conflicting societies that peacebuilding measures must be conceptualised and operationalised. The concept of local ownership in peacebuilding came about largely in response to the overbearing role that donors and other external actors play in local agendas and peace processes, a phenomenon labelled by Rupesinghe as 'conflict management imperialism' (Rupesinghe 1995:316). When outsiders dictate the pace, nature and structure of peacebuilding, this often leads to marginalisation of locals, and ultimately promotes unsustainable solutions.

An important aspect of local ownership is that it does not just demand local participation in design and participation, but also includes local control of the peacebuilding process, including control of funding and institutions. The overwhelming evidence against externally funded programmes is that they determine the entire agenda and allow no space for decision-making by locals. This criticism has led to the upsurge of discourse around local ownership. Increasingly, the concept of local ownership has become so integral to peace and development discourse that its implementation is now part of the mandates and policy guidelines of global and regional institutions; among them the UN, World Bank, African Union and European Union. In 2001, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that sustainable peace could only be achieved by the local

3 The policy guidelines in the OECD DAC's (1996) *Shaping the 21st century*, assert that sustainable development must be locally owned. This formed the basis for the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

population itself and that the role of the UN was merely to facilitate the process that sought to dismantle the structures of violence and create conducive conditions for durable peace and sustainable development (United Nations 2001).

Another necessary precondition of local ownership in peacebuilding is the creation or rebuilding of local institutions. The effective function of these institutions is partly dependent on factors in the environment, such as other institutions and the overall context (Doe 2009). Imposition of external peacebuilding institutions may reproduce inequalities, alter power configurations and ultimately fail to resolve context-specific structural causes of conflict.

Criticisms of local ownership

Critics of local ownership dismiss the concept as merely a policy ideal that does not lend itself to practical implementation. For example, Reich (2006) argues that in most cases, donors and international organisations have already shaped the agenda, assessed the situation and designed the programmes before any local involvement takes place.

Beyond the obvious donor-driven agenda in local ownership are the structural problems associated with lack of local capacities to implement peacebuilding programmes. Domestic actors (government institutions, local NGOs) often do not have the capacity to effectively implement security sector and institutional reforms and conduct post-conflict elections in a transparent, credible way without outside assistance. In reality, local ownership is also largely viewed as a top-bottom elite-centred process with little or no involvement of local populations in determining what and how peacebuilding should be carried out. This view leads to mistrust and poor coordination between local communities, state actors and the elite.

Local ownership is confronted by both practical and structural problems that makes the idea more rhetorical than real. The biggest conundrum in the application of local ownership is the contradiction between theoretical assumptions and practical applications in the field. What is written in policy documents does not usually translate into action, or is very difficult to implement on the ground. Proponents of local ownership, however, dismiss such critiques, arguing that post-conflict societies by their nature lack the requisite structural imperatives stable societies have and so are bound to be confronted by structural and practical problems in rebuilding war-torn societies.

The evolution of peacebuilding

Following its 11 years of civil war, Sierra Leone has been inundated with external humanitarian assistance aimed at achieving broad national development goals and supporting the peacebuilding process. However, there are questions that have emerged about the relationship between external and local actors in Sierra Leone. One such question is whether there are global values for peacebuilding which can be universally applied and replicated in other post-conflict contexts. The other question relates to how post-conflict societies, such as Sierra Leone, can benefit from external actors without necessarily losing control and ownership of their peacebuilding agenda. To be able to answer these questions, it is important to explore how peacebuilding has evolved over time.

Peacebuilding is a complex, long-term and fundamentally value-laden process that involves core decisions about how to construct a peaceful society. The concept of peacebuilding was coined by the then UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a 1994 UN seminal report titled *An agenda for peace*. In the report, he proposed that promoting democracy would facilitate the evolution of the social contract, which would form the basis for sustainable peace in divided and war-torn societies. Democracy, he argued, is the means through which political, social, economic and ethnic tensions can be alleviated and sustainable peace achieved. Boutros-Ghali's successor, Kofi Annan, also asserted in 2000 that sustained democracy is a highly effective means of promoting conflict prevention.

Some peacebuilding approaches have been situated within the framework of the liberal peace project. The liberal peace project is based on Wilsonian idealism, which is premised on the idea that democratisation and private markets have the ability to promote and foster peace in countries emerging from violent conflict. Scholars have also argued that liberal economic policies can contribute to peaceful relations among democracies (Doyle 1983, Russett 1999 and Paris 2004). Paris (2004) proposes ways in which institutions of liberal democracies can transform war-torn societies and states into sustainably peaceful ones. The underlying assumption of this model is that democratisation would shift the conflicts inherent in society away from the battleground and into a peaceful and formal arena of electoral politics; and that liberalisation of markets would create economic growth that would eliminate some of the root causes of conflict.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

Paris (2004) further argues that the transition from conflict to liberal democracy has a stimulating effect on social tensions and that it could have the effect of reproducing conditions which historically resulted in violent conflict. Some aspects of the liberal peacebuilding agenda⁴ of democratisation and promotion of human rights have contributed to some measure of success in post-war Sierra Leone. However, the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by post-war governments in Sierra Leone only further feed the patrimonial networks that reproduce the structural inequalities which were the root causes of the civil war in the first place. The country's economic benefits are not enjoyed by all sections of society and this situation does little to ensure that war will not erupt again (Sola-Martin 2009).

However, the liberal peace theory is not without its challenges. History shows that instead of creating positive peace, the process of liberalisation had a destabilising effect in some African states. Whilst the liberal peace theory was popular in the period immediately after the First World War, the liberal peace project in modern times became *en vogue* after the end of the Cold War, when the major challenge to the international community was the rise of internal conflicts based on ethnicity.

Post-conflict peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

The UNPBC was created in December 2005, with the aim of supporting the social and economic development that is essential to stop states from relapsing into conflict. Former peacebuilding processes had been characterised by lack of coordination, overemphasis on the diplomatic level, and subsequent disconnection from local realities. As such, the UNPBC was established to provide advice on strategic priorities for integrated peacebuilding, development and reconstruction in countries emerging from violent conflict. The UNPBC coordinates international donors and financial institutions, national governments and local actors in consolidating the peace dividend. A critical function of the UNPBC is to play an advisory role, with a mandate to build consensus around priorities and identify gaps that could pose a threat to peacebuilding. The Commission and its two associated bodies, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), have

been widely viewed as the UN's new peacebuilding architecture. The Commission announced in June 2006 that initially only Burundi and Sierra Leone would be the focus of its work, which later was expanded.



Security Council meeting on Sierra Leone, 11 September 2012

The Peacebuilding Commission for Sierra Leone (PBCSL) was mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1620 to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in a number of peacebuilding processes. These included building the capacity of state institutions to further address the root causes of the conflict and accelerating progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth (Street et al. 2007). The resolution establishing the PBCSL also took into consideration the need to undertake post-conflict reforms in the areas of elections, good governance, rule of law and the security sector.

Local ownership of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

This paper focuses on the feasibility and operationalisation of the notion of local ownership in Sierra Leone by paying attention to two main themes: transitional justice, and demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR).

Transitional justice

Sierra Leone's civil conflict was characterised by unspeakable brutality. War crimes of the worst type were routinely and systematically committed against combatant and civilian Sierra Leoneans of all ages and sexes. The suffering of the civilian population was profound. According to Melrose Jr. (2009), although all sides involved in the conflict committed human rights violations, the rebel forces were largely responsible for the overwhelming majority of incidents. Sierra Leoneans had already suffered a great deal of

⁴ Liberal peacebuilding has three elements: the promotion of democracy; market-based economic reforms; and a range of other institutions associated with 'modern' states, as a driving force for building peace.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

structural violence prior to the start of the civil war in 1991. Before the war, the country was characterised by poor infrastructure, a declining economy, political instability and widespread deprivation. Social services, including healthcare and education, were dilapidated and unemployment was high. Youth and women felt these hardships the most as their participation in the country's political, economic and decision-making processes was barred due to patriarchal beliefs and practices. The neo-patrimonial system, corruption and the liberal capitalist economy made companies, tribal chiefs and political parties the beneficiaries of any profits from the exploitation of any natural resource in the country. Patrimonial networks were used to cement the structural inequalities, which were the root causes of the civil war.

Given these pre-war challenges, the end of the war posed even more challenges. The most immediate was the question of whether to punish those who had caused more suffering on the people by perpetrating violence, or to forgive them. Sierra Leone found itself in the unique position of experimenting with two types of transitional justice systems in parallel: the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC), and the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). At times, there were tensions between implementation of the two, due to the fact that they were pursuing different types of justice.

One of the pillars of the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord was the creation of a SLTRC. While its application was delayed, due to the collapse of the peace agreement shortly after its ratification by the warring parties in 1999, it was eventually established in 2002, along with the SCSL. The simultaneous functioning of the SLTRC and the SCSL created challenges for the application of the dual systems of justice proposed under the agreements. The dichotomy between transitional justice and criminal justice complicated the reconciliation process during the initial stages of implementation. The Special Court and the SLTRC were different institutions, which were meant to work separately, although their goal, to create sustainable peace in Sierra Leone, was the same. This dual approach created dilemmas for people who had experienced atrocities during the war. The perception of many people, according to some studies, was that the SLTRC was not an appropriate avenue for use in their cultural contexts (Shaw 2005). Shaw's study concluded that most people wanted to 'forgive and forget', hoping that social harmony and social integration could be obtained by burying the past.

On the one hand, it has been acknowledged that what is required in post-conflict contexts surpasses the cooperation and patience of the international community and the localisation of universal values. One must go beyond the realm of international and national justice to fully understand the dynamics of social justice and security. Here, one will find the highly politicised nature (as opposed to therapeutic nature) of justice in transitional Sierra Leone. Add to this the inevitable oversimplification and sensationalism that comes with defining victims from perpetrators and requiring the truth commissions to stick to these categories; the result would be victor's justice as opposed to transitional justice. Victim and perpetrator dichotomies simplify complex and scattered experiences in favour of a structured, linear and unambiguous representation of the past.

On the other hand, it is important to address the inherent contradictions between liberal peace theories and practical local or indigenous needs for reconciliation and peace. Sierra Leone's experiences of localising ownership of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation processes provide us with a lens through which peacebuilding can be evaluated. Critical questions to ask in this process include: who owns the crucial ex-combatant DDR process? What economic and political frameworks are used to guide the post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes? How dependent is the country on foreign aid during and after recovery? Although this paper is not in a position to provide answers to these questions, it is important to understand that localising peacebuilding means that locals (not just elites) must participate and own these processes.

In efforts to overcome the perceptions of victims' justice and the feelings of foreign ideology encroachment, the trend has been to look to customary law and traditional leaders to legitimise the process. In Sierra Leone, hearings ended with reintegration ceremonies where, through apology and display of humility, ex-combatants were granted permission to reintegrate into society. Shaw (2005) found that during the hearings, former combatants used the forum as a truth-telling platform. Truth-telling was perceived, and therefore used, as a platform to enact social morality.

However, Alie (2008) opines that although the SLTRC incorporated traditional, religious and civil society leaders in the hearings, it failed to encourage local rituals of cursing which, according to tradition, would

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

have been the most appropriate justice mechanism. Alie also states that the district hearings often failed to elicit detailed and truthful accounts from former combatants, largely due to time constraints. Nevertheless, the SLTRC and local communities considered vague expressions of regret as sufficient, as long as former combatants displayed humility towards the community during the hearings. The Commission also performed general reconciliation ceremonies, where perpetrators accepted their wrongdoings and asked for forgiveness, and victims were encouraged to accept the expressions of remorse and gradually work towards forgiveness and reconciliation (Alie 2008). The SLTRC documented the process into a report.

If the SLTRC's recommendations, as outlined in its final report which was submitted to the Government of Sierra Leone in October 2004, are fully implemented, they will, without a doubt, act as a catalyst for the social and legal reform required to address impunity in the country. The recommendations will also establish a culture of respect for human rights in Sierra Leone, as well as help in the social regeneration of battered communities. One important development in the consolidation of peace took place in August 2006, when the Government of Sierra Leone appointed the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), the implementing agency for the reparations. NaCSA, which was launched as a government ministry in 1996, is the main government body responsible for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-torn Sierra Leone.



Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN, meets with members of the SCSL

The other body contributing to reintegration in Sierra Leone, the SCSL, was supervised by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The main goal of the SCSL was to prosecute individuals who were deemed to be most culpable for the worst crimes committed during the war, including rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and forced

pregnancy or sterilisation. The Special Court seemed to be mainly interested in pursuing retributive justice. Supporters of the SCSL remain convinced that trying and sentencing criminals in Sierra Leone sent clear signals to the international community that individuals or groups acting with impunity during conflict will be pursued and prosecuted according to international law. Opponents of the SCSL, however, argue that culpability was limited to individuals and organisations that were viewed by the international community and the Government of Sierra Leone at the time as the most culpable. ECOMOG, which was also responsible for some of the war atrocities, was not indicted in any of the trials. This led opponents to accuse the SCSL/ICC of selective justice.

In spite of these tensions, however, Sierra Leone's two institutions of transitional justice have complemented each other in many ways (Alie 2008). Addressing the twin issues of justice and reconciliation through the SLTRC and Special Court was necessary, although insufficient. Of greater importance, if peace is to be consolidated, is that efforts must be made to address the causes of the war. By popular consensus, these causes are said to lie in a combination of bad governance, the denial of fundamental rights, economic mismanagement and social exclusion in the context of any peacebuilding initiatives (Alie 2008).

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

The DDR process in Sierra Leone was a crucial aspect supporting recovery from conflict, mainly because the programme focused on the people most likely to disrupt the peace. DDR assisted combatants through a monitored, safe, voluntary process to disarm and reintegrate into society as non-combatants. The DDR process was carried out in three phases. The World Bank and UNDP partnered in the first phase, which began in 1998, but was interrupted when the Abidjan Peace Accord was repeatedly violated, posing serious security threats to the entire nation and the ongoing peacebuilding process.

The 1999 Lomé Peace Accord called for complete disarmament of all warring factions, including the Sierra Leone Army, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), RUF forces and the Civil Defence Force (CDF). The agreement authorised the second phase of disarmament, which was also interrupted when the RUF kidnapped 500 UN peacekeepers in May 2000. The third phase was carried out in 2001, with the UN and ECOMOG collaborating in the implementation process. From a total of 72,490 combatants disarmed during the three phases, the

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

majority remained disarmed in the third phase, in spite of multiple security threats delaying the process (Miller et al. 2006).

The reintegration stage of DDR, called the Reintegration Support Programme, consisted of a monetary 'reinsertion benefit', six months of job training and a toolkit. An estimated 50,000 ex-combatants participated in the programme. However, the lack of job opportunities resulted in many who participated in the reintegration programme selling their toolkits for economic gain. The programme was criticised for not focusing the outcomes on contributions to community needs, but rather on occupying ex-combatants to keep them from returning to conflict (Kaldor and Vincent 2006).

One of the most successful programmes in the DDR process was the Arms for Development (AfD) programme, which can be described as the most genuine locally-owned initiative in the entire DDR process. In the programme, all the important stakeholders participated in the process, including UNPBC, ECOMOG, local civic organisations, civil society groups and the donor community. As a strategy, the AfD programme sought to address violence by requiring supporting chiefdoms to rid their territories of guns, in exchange for development projects. The programme adopted a community-based social mobilisation for peace approach. In this approach, efforts were made to achieve improved trust within communities by engaging members in dialogue around what development projects were most required, as well as identifying areas which needed to be scoped for arms. This process promoted reconciliation at the most basic level, educating and empowering individuals and communities alike to identify problems and solutions for their communities.

The Country Programme Action Plan in Sierra Leone implemented projects focusing on capacity building, peacekeeping and governance in hopes of creating sustainability and security. Implementation of policies to strengthen the workforce, police force and peacebuilding missions formed a key component of reintegration projects in Sierra Leone. Innovative local and international non-governmental organisations provided mediation, support, education and inspiration that promoted reintegration.

UNDP also made border security a priority in the AfD programme. At two borders, one between Sierra Leone and Guinea, and the other between Sierra Leone and Liberia, the programme established border posts

and provided personnel to carry out border control (United Nations Development Programme 2009). The focus on border security was necessary because arms were easily smuggled into the country as a result of loosely controlled borders (Lochhead and Greene 2005). In 2002, the AfD programme took the first steps to review gun licensing in Sierra Leone, which had not been done since 1955. The proposed legislation suggested that only male and female citizens who were trusted by their community, were over 25 years old and mentally healthy would be eligible to own a gun. In 2007, a computerised firearms registration mechanism was implemented to ensure better monitoring of small arms (United Nations Development Programme 2007).

Challenges of local ownership

The debates around local ownership as a condition for successful peacebuilding have been intense, especially during the last several years. A critical issue in all of this, however, is the fact that proponents for and against localising peacebuilding cannot agree at a conceptual level on what localising peacebuilding means. This fundamental disagreement has added to the difficulty in settling the debates. One of the main problems lies in defining who the local actors are. Defining local is a complicated process, given that local stakeholders are not a homogeneous group. The problem of defining local actors has been at the core of criticisms of local ownership of peacebuilding. The disparateness of actors at the local level forces a shift to engaging with elites, and civil society organisations (CSOs) that have managed to build some recognition for themselves. This often excludes critical segments of local populations, including social justice and human rights organisations, women's and youth groups and religious leaders, among others, from the peacebuilding equation.

Resources are as crucial in peacebuilding as the commitment of actors to vigorously build sustainable peace. Lack of resources may actually undermine local ownership of peacebuilding activities and processes. Recovery-based economic growth does not seem to work for Sierra Leone, as evidenced by the fact that the country has remained heavily dependent on foreign aid. Although the country has made significant progress in expanding the economy in the post-war years, large segments of the population, especially the youth, remain unemployed. There is significant growth in the mining sector, but very little expansion in the agricultural sector which is the mainstay of the economy.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

Local ownership of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone has remained at the theoretical level, and is a useful slogan employed to support the continued dominance of donors in the peacebuilding agenda. Reich (2006) posits that external actors use the language of local ownership to give the impression that they are involving the local population in the peace agenda, while they continue to execute their agendas without any tangible local involvement. In addition, the reality on the ground seems to indicate that it could be too premature to completely localise the peace process in Sierra Leone, given the fragility of the peace obtained thus far.

Where localising peacebuilding is concerned, there are worries that in some instances, governments advocate for local ownership with a view to control the resources that come with peacebuilding efforts. In other cases, local organisations may be set up specifically to tap into available resources for peacebuilding, even though such organisations may not have the capacities to implement effective activities.

A critique of the term peacebuilding has been that the inclusion of so many activities, levels and actors under the umbrella term peacebuilding has made its definition so broad that it includes everything, with the danger that it becomes meaningless. The lack of an agreed definition of what peacebuilding actually is could affect the degree to which it is possible to be put into operation and implemented. In the process of implementing the peacebuilding process, the UNPBC in Sierra Leone has faced some hard choices, many of which had a lot to do with the selection of partners. These options included whether, and how, to engage former RUF wartime leaders. UNPBC has inevitably had to make decisions which have had real consequences on the peacebuilding effort.

However, in its internal evaluation report, UNDP (2007) states that its work has made a positive contribution to the building of peace, to governance and poverty reduction in Sierra Leone. While the programme accepts the critique that it worked through direct involvement with NGOs and civil society, rather than channelling funding through the government, UNDP concludes that the programme and the international community have played a positive role in the country (Kaldor and Vincent 2006).

In evaluating peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, Sola-Martin (2009) warns that the challenges inherent in reintegrating ex-combatants and addressing grievances have the potential, if not properly handled, to result

in a violent flare-up. He concludes that the neo-patrimonial system, together with corruption and a capitalist economy makes companies, tribal chiefs and political parties the major beneficiaries of profits from mining ventures. The main concern of Sierra Leone's post-war government has been on restoring security and stability following more than a decade of civil war. The expectation has been that a secure and stable environment will promote economic growth, the benefits of which will then trickle down as peace into local communities. However, Sierra Leone proves that the assumption that integration with a liberal world economy leads to a reduction in conflict is inadequate when it comes to addressing post-conflict challenges. Technical market-based solutions are recommended for social, economic and political issues (Zack-Williams 1990).

A 2007 UN report highlights four key areas where the attainment of sustained peacebuilding in Sierra Leone encountered serious challenges. These issues, which form part of the reasons why war broke out in 1991, include: youth unemployment and disempowerment; security sector reform; consolidation, democracy and good governance; and capacity building (United Nations Development Programme 2007). Sierra Leone has a sizeable youth population, which, according to proponents of the 'youth bulge' theory (Fuller and Pitts 1990, Richards 1995 and 1996), poses a threat to peace, especially if young people are economically and politically marginalised.

In post-conflict Sierra Leone, a lot of attention was given to the DDR process. Although DDR has been acclaimed by the international community as one of the success stories of the UN's peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone, job creation for disarmed and demobilised youth continues to be a major challenge in the country. Young people still find themselves outside the projects that were undertaken to rebuild their country and their future opportunities. If the problems experienced by the youth are not solved, the threat that Sierra Leone will roll back into conflict persists. Addressing the root causes of conflict in Sierra Leone will require scaled-up and coordinated efforts to increase youth employment and empowerment through improved education and other capacity building initiatives.

The role of civil society in overcoming challenges of state building and peacebuilding

The Government of Sierra Leone continues to struggle to provide and deliver basic services to its citizens.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

Building strong and credible institutions that will be able to perform these functions is imperative for the government. In the aftermath of the conflict, the government and international community have tended to focus on reforms in the economic, political and security sectors. However, peacebuilding is not only about a physical and technical reconstruction of what existed before the conflict. It is also about transforming some of the traditions and perceptions that are embedded in the structures and which have been identified as the root causes of the conflict. Corruption is still one of the central factors which explains why development and effectiveness of new institutions in the different sectors is troubled. There has been an increase in the number of CSOs that are able to engage the state on matters of governance. These CSOs include: Campaign for Good Governance, Forum for African Women Educationalists and the Sierra Leone Women's Forum. The main activities of these organisations include encouraging citizen participation in governance issues through advocacy, capacity building and civic education.

A critique of peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone has been the emphasis placed on central institutions, at the expense of CSOs and community-based groups. As stated earlier, one of the fundamental problems with the APC administration before the war was the over-centralisation of the state. Taking into account the role that marginalisation and social exclusion of different groups (such as young people and inhabitants of rural areas) played in Sierra Leone's conflict, the current peacebuilding process runs the risk of perpetuating the marginalisation and exclusions of the same groups. Rebuilding civil society groups and supporting their peacebuilding work is an important step in legitimising local ownership of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

Also important is the need to include civil society in the processes of rebuilding the state and its institutions. With adequate resources, civil society can play an important role in monitoring the state and making it accountable to its people. Promoting and facilitating policy dialogue and transparency between government and civil society (at the village, district and national levels) could have a positive effect on combating corruption.

Conclusions

Hailed as a success story, peacebuilding in Sierra Leone has raised expectations for the country's ability to make the transition from conflict to peace and to

sustain gains made in the process. The international community, the citizens of Sierra Leone and local civil society actors have all come to believe that empowerment of local communities can bring about sustainability. While this may be true, it is important to acknowledge that the UNPBC as a whole stands to lose a lot of institutional credibility if the high expectations of its peacebuilding work are not met. A cursory review of actor roles in Sierra Leone's peacebuilding activities reveals that 11 years after the end of the war, it is very difficult to assess the effectiveness of approaches used by the different actors involved. While there are similarities among the actors, the inherent contradictions are very noticeable. Without addressing some of the challenges outlined above, the concept of local ownership may remain ambitious and appear pretentious. The inherent challenges of local ownership, such as asymmetrical power relations and resource deficits, need to be interrogated if true ownership is to be operationalised. Achieving sustainable local ownership requires that those individuals and organisations planning and implementing the process should have a comprehensive understanding of the context, culture and history of a particular society and situation well before they initiate the peacebuilding process.

Recommendations

For the Government of Sierra Leone:

- Addressing structural causes of conflict in Sierra Leone requires concerted efforts by government to tackle high poverty, unemployment, inequality, inequitable access to land and endemic corruption within government itself. Government must also develop deliberate policies that will support job creation, while encouraging domestic investment and building the capacity of local businesses to allow them to compete with multinational firms.
- It is important that government continues to support work aimed at achieving gender equity and the empowerment of women in peacebuilding by setting quotas for the inclusion of women in decision-making and elective positions, both in the private and public sectors.
- In order to achieve optimum conditions for the upcoming general and presidential elections in late 2012, the Government of Sierra Leone should strengthen the independent commissions, including the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) in order to enhance the culture of democratic governance.

- One of the major causes of the war was the over-centralisation of power and of the state. The APC government should continue to decentralise governance and decision-making in order to encourage wider ownership of the development and peace processes by citizens of Sierra Leone.

For civil society:

- The state and civil society in Sierra Leone should work together to achieve their shared goal of consolidating peace. Civil society organisations should not only be accountable to their communities, but should strive to complement, rather than substitute, the efforts of the state.
- Improving and strengthening the relationship between civil society and the state is imperative, particularly if processes aimed at localising peacebuilding and encouraging ownership of development processes are to be realised. It is therefore vitally important to continue to engage relevant civil society stakeholders, including traditional leaders, in nation building processes. Open dialogue with the government should offer opportunities for civil society to monitor and hold government accountable for good political, economic and social governance.
- In preparing for the 2012 elections, civil society should continue to engage with and educate communities about national peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. This would result in increased peaceful civic participation in the election processes.

For regional economic communities:

- ECOWAS and other bodies like the Mano River Union (MRU), should remain engaged in dialogue with the Government of Sierra Leone and CSOs, with the aim of moving towards the development of early warning systems for conflict prevention.
- Increased trade in the ECOWAS region and in the MRU sub-region will contribute to durable peace. Policies that are supportive of sustained economic interactions among countries in the sub-regions will directly and indirectly contribute towards peace in the region.

For the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission:

- The UNPBC should continue to support the government and people of Sierra Leone in sustaining peace by encouraging some level of local ownership of businesses.
- The UNPBC should also continue to raise funds for peacebuilding activities and infrastructure which are still required in the country. Sustained funding is a prerequisite for continued commitment of all stakeholders to ensuring sustainable peace.

References

- Alie, J.A.D. 2008. Reconciliation and traditional justice: Tradition-based practices of the Kpaa Mende in Sierra Leone. In: Huyse, L. and Salter, M. eds. *Traditional justice and reconciliation after violent conflict: Learning from African experiences*. Stockholm, International IDEA.
- Chege, M. 2002. *Sierra Leone: The state that came back from the dead*. *The Washington Quarterly*, 25 (3), pp. 147–160.
- Chesterman, S. 2007. Ownership in theory and in practice: Transfer of authority in UN state building operations. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 1 (1), pp. 7–31.
- Development and Assistance Committee. 1996. Shaping the 21st century: The contribution of development co-operation. *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*. Available from: <<http://www.oecd.org/dac/2508761.pdf>> [Accessed 20 January 2011].
- Doe, G.S. 2009. Indigenizing post-conflict state reconstruction in Africa: A conceptual framework. *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal*, 2 (2), pp. 1–16.
- Doyle, M.W. 1983. Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. I and II (12), pp. 205–235, 323–353.
- Fuller, G. and Pitts, F.R. 1990. Youth cohorts and political unrest in South Korea. *Political Geography Quarterly* 9 (1), pp. 9–22
- Grant, A.J. 2005. Diamonds, foreign aid, and the uncertain prospects for post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 94 (September), pp. 443–457.
- Kaldor, M. and Vincent, J. 2006. *Case study Sierra Leone; evaluation of UNDP assistance to conflict-affected countries*. New York, United Nations Development Programme Evaluation Office.
- Keen, D. 2005. *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*. Oxford, James Currey/Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lederach, J.P. 1995. *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. New York, Syracuse University Press.
- Lochhead, A. and Greene, O. 2005. Assessing and reviewing the impact of small arms projects on availability and poverty: A case study of Sierra Leone UNDP 'arms for development' project. Report, Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford. pp. 7–12.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

- McDonald, J. 1999. Further exploration of track two diplomacy. Occasional Paper, NR (3). Available from: <www.imtd.org> [Accessed 20 January 2010].
- Melrose, J.H. Jr. 2009. Sierra Leone peace process. In Babbitt, E.F. and Lutz, E.L. eds. *Human rights and conflict resolution in context*. New York, Syracuse University Press.
- Miall, H., Ramsbotham, O. and Woodhouse, T. 1999. *Contemporary conflict resolution*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Miller, D., Ladouceur, D. and Dugal, Z. 2006. *From research to roadmap: Learning from the arms for development initiative in Sierra Leone*. Geneva, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.
- Narten, J. 2007. Post-conflict peacebuilding and local ownership: A case study on external-local dynamics in Kosovo under UN interim administration. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference, March 3, in Chicago, United States of America.
- Paris, R. 2004. *At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Reich, H. 2006. Local ownership in conflict transformation projects: Partnership, participation or patronage? Berghof Occasional Paper, 27.
- Richards, P. 1995. Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: A crisis of youth? In: Furley, O.W. ed. *Conflict in Africa*. London, I.B. Tauris. pp. 134–170.
- Richards, P. 1996. *Fighting for the rainforest: War, youth and resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford, James Currey and Heinemann.
- Ropers, N. 2003. From resolution to transformation: The role of dialogue projects. *The Berghof Handbook*. Available from: <<http://www.berghof-handbook.net>> [Accessed 9 January 2010].
- Rupesinghe, K. 1995. *Conflict transformation*. London and New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Russett, B. 1999. Assessing the liberal peace with alternative specifications: Trade still reduces conflict. *Journal of Peace Research*, 36 (4), pp. 423–42.
- Saxby, J. 2003. Local ownership and development cooperation: The role of northern Ugandan civil society. Paper presented at CCIC/CIDA Dialogue, 21–23 March, in Gatineau, Canada.
- Shaw, R. 2005. Rethinking truth and reconciliation commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone. *United States Institute of Peace special report*. Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace. Available from: <<http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr130.pdf>> [Accessed 6 March 2011].
- Sola-Martin, A. 2009. Is peacebuilding sustainable in Sierra Leone? *Global change, peace and security*, 21(3), pp. 291–307.
- Street, A., Smith, J. and Mollet, H. 2007. Consolidating the peace?: Views from Sierra Leone and Burundi on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. *ActionAid, CAFOD and CARE International*.
- Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2004 (2). Available from: <http://www.sierraleonecrtc.org/index.php/view-report-text-vol-2/item/volume-two-chapter-one?category_id=20> [Accessed 6 January 2010].
- Van Tongeren, P. 1999. Some reflections on peace building. In: European Centre for Conflict Prevention. *People building peace*. Utrecht, European Centre for Conflict Prevention. pp. 124–133.
- United Nations. 2001. No exit without strategy: Security Council decision-making and the closure or transition of United Nations peacekeeping operations. *UN Security Council*, 20 April, S/2001/394.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2007. UNDP Sierra Leone end of year 2007 progress report. *United Nations Peace and Development Unit*. Available from: <http://www.sl.undp.org/2_focus/afd_end_yr_rpt07.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2009].
- United Nations Development Programme. 2009. Country programme action plan 2008–2010. *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*. Available from: <http://www.sl.undp.org/4_media/publications/CPAP_08-10_appraisal_wkshop.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2009].
- United Nations Development Programme. 2010. Human development report. Available from: <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/chapters/en/>> [Accessed 6 March 2012].
- Zack-Williams, A.B. 1990. Sierra Leone: Crisis and despair. *Review of African Political Economy*, 17 (49), pp. 22–33.

Localising Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: What Does it Mean?

About the Author Dr Tony Karbo is a Senior Programme Officer and Associate Professor at the University for Peace (Africa Programme). He has more than 15 years of experience in the conflict resolution field, including working for the Carter Center, the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) in the United States, the South North Centre for Peacebuilding (SNCPD), and the Institute of Peace, Leadership and Governance (IPLG) at Africa University in Zimbabwe. He holds a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University in Virginia, USA.

ACCORD The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a civil society organisation working throughout Africa to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent. ACCORD's primary aim is to influence political developments by bringing conflict resolution, dialogue and institutional development to the forefront as an alternative to armed violence and protracted conflict. ACCORD specialises in conflict management, conflict analysis and conflict prevention. We intervene in conflicts through mediation, negotiation, training, research and conflict analysis. ACCORD Conference Papers are outcomes of conference presentations by both academics and practitioners and seek to stimulate informed and relevant discussions in the field of peace and security. They are produced by ACCORD's Knowledge Production Department (KPD). The role of KPD is to establish ACCORD as a positive and constructive learning organisation that enhances theory, policy and practice in the field of conflict management. The department's activities and outputs are aimed at promoting effective and sustainable peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa and beyond. All ACCORD publications, including research reports, the *Conflict Trends* magazine and the *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* can be downloaded at no charge from our website.

Copyright © 2012 ACCORD. Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorisation on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ACCORD. Views expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the individual author(s) and not of ACCORD.



ACCORD, Private Bag X018 Umhlanga Rocks 4320 South Africa,
Tel: +27 (0)31 502 3908, Fax: +27 (0)31 502 4160,
Email: info@accord.org.za, Website: www.accord.org.za



Photos in order of appearance: UN Photo/Marie Frechon, UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras,
UN Photo/Eric Kanalstein, UN Photo/SCSL/AP Pool/Peter DeJong, UN Photo/Rick Bajornas,
UN Photo/Mark Garten