

Think Global, Transfer Local: The Perils and Opportunities of a Locally Owned Peace Process in Post-War Sierra Leone¹

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Abstract

The transition from international to local ownership provides the perfect barometer to gauge the health and general well-being of a country's peacebuilding process. It offers the opportunity to assess the past, plan for the future and, in the process, nurture the environment that fosters and cultivates opportunities for broader participation in issues of national interest. Peacebuilding, with its emphasis on decentralised empowerment is, in many ways, an exercise in social engineering. It offers one of the few opportunities for marginalised groups to engage with the power structures in ways that enhance the boundaries of power. Without doubt, a vocal and vibrant grassroots citizenry improves governance at various layers of society and contributes to our understanding of the peace-development continuum. But what exactly is local ownership of a peace process, and what is its relationship to sustainable peacebuilding in the context of Sierra Leone? This paper attempts to address these questions.

Introduction

This paper examines the opportunities and dilemmas of locally owned peace processes in post-conflict Sierra Leone. It explores the best mechanisms to bring about durable peace, nurtured and driven from within, when external actors curtail national

peacebuilding activities. The case for such a transfer and the proactive involvement of local actors during and after such a transition is widely shared. It has been argued, rightly so, that the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long-term is always rooted in the local people. The commonly held belief is that building on cultural resources and utilising local mechanisms is the best way to sustain peace. In this sense, sustainable post-conflict peacebuilding is not feasible without the involvement of a broad spectrum of the affected society. Because peacebuilding is about empowering groups and individuals who have been seriously impacted by more powerful forces, an understanding of the demands and constraints of larger social forces is critical to one's appreciation of both the deep-rooted sources of conflict, and the challenges of sustainable peacebuilding.

This paper explores the following key themes:

- the means of local ownership in peace processes in Sierra Leone and the economics and politics of local ownership of peacebuilding;
- the social and psychological dynamics of peacebuilding processes in Sierra Leone and opportunities for local ownership;
- anticipated challenges and strategies for sustainable local ownership of peacebuilding processes; and
- the application of lessons learnt from other peacebuilding processes to Sierra Leone, including some recommended strategies for sustaining and supporting the localisation of the peacebuilding process.

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The paper draws on the *modus operandi* of Sierra Leone's local actors and is enhanced by research on several aspects of local actors' evolution. The ideas have also been developed from conversations with various stakeholders in the country's peacebuilding processes (including donors and government functionaries). The paper is divided into three parts: the war and its effect on local capacity; the case for local transfer and dilemmas of local transfer. It wraps up with conclusions, lessons from elsewhere and recommendations. To understand the transfer to local ownership of the peacebuilding process, one needs to understand the local context within which such a transfer is made. If Sierra Leone's peace is to endure, urgent steps should be taken to engage groups that perform different actions with the same objective.

Understanding some terms used in this paper

Local ownership is used to explain the extent to which domestic actors gain control of and implement processes that enhance a country's peacebuilding and transformation. In this sense, the term refers to not just the process, but the products of and strategies utilised in achieving local-centric peacebuilding goals.

Post-conflict peacebuilding refers to the set of long- and short-term activities undertaken in a post-war phase to lay the foundation for longer-term developments. Lederach (1995) posits that peacebuilding is more than post-agreement reconstruction, but involves the transformation of hostile and violent relationships into a peace system characterised by just and interdependent relationships.

Civil society is comprised of non-state actors or average citizens who mobilise around shared interests, purposes and values. They undertake initiatives designed to positively affect political, cultural and socio-economic dynamics to advance people's common interests (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

Local civil society organisation (CSO) refers specifically to those indigenous groups that are staffed and run by Sierra Leoneans, in Sierra Leone. As by-products of their local setting, local civil society organisations shape, and are in turn shaped, by the evolving socio-political systems, economy, history and varying geography of the post-conflict context.

International community/External actors are two terms which are used interchangeably to refer to all foreign governments and non-Sierra Leonean entities; including the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), United States Agency for International

Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID) and the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS).

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) operate in more than one country. According to Bartoli (2008:51) they are often "[r]ecognised legally...and therefore they must have a direct link with a state and a legal system. Within that state and legal system they are recognised as non-state entities and yet given legal recognition".

The civil war and its ramifications for local capacity

Sierra Leone has come a long way. The country's vicious civil war (1991–2002) claimed over 50,000 lives. The conflict, especially in the later phases, captured the world's attention mainly due to its sheer brutality and banal economic exploitation. An estimated 10,000 people were amputated and 5,000 children recruited into the various fighting forces involved in the conflict. Countless others were maimed, violated and displaced.

The civil war was caused by socio-political and economic factors. Poor governance, corruption and mismanagement were partially responsible for fuelling the conflict. Observers of the country's political scene say the conflict was inevitable, as it brought into focus the serious political failings that had confronted the nation since its independence in 1961 (Laggah et al. 1999). By the end of 1985, the nation's economy was faltering, with the prices of basic commodities rising sharply. Social factors such as grinding poverty and massive youth unemployment and lawlessness created the perfect environment for the involvement of youth in the conflict. The youth, who make up more than 60% of the country's population, had been perennially unemployed and underemployed. Abdullah (1998) underscores how young people in Sierra Leone had often either initiated or facilitated violent incidences of conflict. Furthermore, with the help of neighbouring countries such as Liberia, and to some extent Guinea, the rebels used the proceeds from their illicit diamond mining activities to sustain the armed campaign. Diamonds smuggled out of Sierra Leone were packaged as Liberian diamonds, and sold in the international diamond markets of Antwerp, New Delhi and New York.

The war ended dramatically, with the decisive intervention of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the British military on the side of a weak government,

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against the fearsome Liberia-backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF). This intervention dramatically tilted the balance of power in favour of the former. The United Nations sent in more than 20,000 peacekeepers to shore up the peace process. The onerous task of managing the peace process fell mainly to the international peacebuilding community. Major donors such as the EU, World Bank, United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and African Development Bank all contributed generously. Between 2003 and 2005, the UN spent over US\$1 billion on the peace process, while the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) programme provided US\$244.6 million towards the same process (World Bank 2007).

The 11 years of conflict took a heavy economic, physical and mental toll on the country and its people. Economically, the country emerged from the war almost totally dependent on foreign aid. In 1971, approximately US\$155 million (34%) of the country's total cumulative revenue came from foreign aid (Roberts 1975). By the end of the civil war in 2002, more than 80% of Sierra Leone's gross domestic product (GDP) was obtained through foreign aid. The European Union and Britain alone disbursed approximately US\$800 million to shore up the country's post-war elected government (Bineh 2002, in Kanyako 2010).

The aftermath of the conflict and its impact on peacebuilding

Positive effects

The ramifications of the Sierra Leone civil war were far-reaching. The international community, which had encountered some spectacular failures in the Balkans, Rwanda and Somalia, was determined not to fail in relatively small Sierra Leone. The country thus became a test case for managing protracted conflicts and building peace in the world's troubled regions. It is not surprising then that it became the first conflict over which a sitting head of state was tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, was formally indicted for instigating the conflict by arming the rebels using proceeds from the sale of Sierra Leone's diamonds. In April 2012 he was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity for, among other crimes, recruiting child soldiers, amputations of civilians, and mass rape. He is reported to have obtained between US\$8 to 9 million from the sale of Sierra Leonean diamonds, bauxite and timber (Lowenkopf 1995).

The civil war also changed how the residual effects of internal conflicts are managed by the international community. Sierra Leone became the first conflict to explicitly write child soldiers into its peace process. This was a key lesson learnt from the Mozambican peace processes, where ignoring child combatants in the peace process had serious repercussions.

With the creation of a hybrid international legal system, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) which was set up to try those most culpable in the Sierra Leone war after 30 November 1996, the country ensured that the concerns of child soldiers were not forgotten. The court, the first of its kind, joined both domestic and international law supervised by local and international judges. Furthermore, the United Nations used Sierra Leone as a test case in operating the Peacebuilding Fund, which was developed to provide sustained support to help countries make a smooth transition from conflict to peace.

Partly due to such proactive engagement by the international community, the country has made immense strides. The peace has held thus far. Two relatively free and fair presidential elections have been held since the end of the war. The post-war period has witnessed the expansion of universal primary education and the introduction of free health care to curb the country's excessively high infant and maternal mortality. The government's revenue base and economic capacity have increased as a result of improved diamond exports and collection of taxes. Reports on the Government of Sierra Leone's website indicate that diamonds alone brought in US\$142 million in 2007, a massive jump from the US\$76 million recorded in 2003.

The brutal war galvanised and reinvigorated national civil society into an organised entity. Loosely organised groups suddenly realised that developing a national outlook required concerted action and a common front. The instability forced various inter-denominational religious groups, women's and youth groups, as well as other professional bodies, to transcend their traditional issue-specific interests to collectively engage the power structures. Whereas various groups, such as the Sierra Leone Teacher's Union (SLTU) and Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC), had previously only looked after their own partisan interests, civil society leaders soon realised that their collective interests were best served when they acted in unity. As the government proved incapable, or unwilling, to provide security and basic social services, various civil society groups coalesced

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under umbrella groups to organise pro-democracy activities, demonstrations and peace rallies, resulting in widening of the space for civil society participants in governance and democratisation (Naim 2007 and Jusu-Sheriff 2004). Various groups in Sierra Leone's cities and provinces, but particularly those in the capital, Freetown, began demanding a more substantive role in issues of national interest. Civil society not only demanded space and a voice in negotiating the peace agreement between the government and the rebels, but also acted as an arbiter to ensure that parties adhered to the agreements they had signed to end the war. This participation was manifested in May 2000, when various civil society groups demonstrated outside the residence of the RUF leader to demand the release of 500 peacekeepers the RUF had abducted (Campaign for Good Governance 2006). The incident, which resulted in the death of more than 20 civilians, became a major turning point in the conflict as the international community finally came to realise that the RUF rebels had not been negotiating in good faith. From that day, the RUF and its leader, Foday Sankoh, lost all credibility. This event marked the beginning of the end of the war. Sankoh died a few months later in government custody.

Negative effects

In spite of these immense strides, Sierra Leone still faces myriad socio-economic and political problems. Firstly, overseas funding has been cut back drastically since the war ended and external funding has declined sharply as the country enters the post-conflict development phase. This is the case both for bilateral aid (government to government), as well as multilateral support. In 2005, bilateral aid was at US\$74 million, down from US\$219 million in 2003. Furthermore, USAID disbursements decreased to US\$9.4 million in 2006, from US\$21 million in 2005 (Development Assistance Coordination Office 2006). Funding that is channelled through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) declined from 24% in 2004 to 15% in 2006. Today the country relies mainly on the UK and the US for bilateral aid, and on the European Commission and World Bank for multilateral aid.

Secondly, and perhaps more worryingly, the root causes of the conflict, among them bad governance, corruption, denial of basic human rights and political and economic exclusion, have not been fully addressed. High unemployment among the general population, and persistent and pervasive unemployment among the youth in particular, present serious threats to stability. Widespread illiteracy

and some of the world's worst health indicators contribute to a staggering poverty rate of 70%, with life expectancy of only 41 years. The country still experiences acute shortages of basic amenities such as electricity, water and sanitation. Government institutions lack the capacity to effectively discharge their duties and provide essential services such as safe water, energy and transportation. As of 2002, only 8% of the country's roads were paved (World Bank 2007).

Another attendant consequence of the civil war was the proliferation of civic groups. As the public sphere expanded, so too did the number of groups engaged in a wide range of activities: advocacy, monitoring, conflict analysis and resolution, and investigating and reporting human rights abuses. Many of these groups, which traditionally had little, if anything, to do with conflict management, such as the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), the SLTU and the SLLC, became increasingly involved in conflict management and peacebuilding. They were joined by newly-formed groups such as the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP), and federated groups such as the National Co-ordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP), which was formed in early 1995 by 60 civil society groups. By the end of the war, many of these leading coalitions quickly collapsed, due to internecine squabbling, and personality or policy differences.



Dr Vandy Kanyako and Dr Memunatu Pratt during the ACCORD conference on Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: Charting the Way Forward

This may partly help to explain why, even though local civil society groups have now taken on a character of their own, their impact is still limited in influencing government policies on the hot button issues of good governance, anti-corruption and stemming human rights abuses – the very issues that led to the war. Civil society divisions, lack of proper training, government

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crackdown, shortage of funding, and the absence of the requisite donor pressure all contribute to limiting the influence of certain sectors of local actors in areas which are critical to post-conflict peacebuilding.

In short, as is to be expected, the civil war had both positive and negative effects on local actors. For one, the government emerged weakened from years of conflict. With this as a backdrop, the case for local-centric citizen-based peacebuilding, and its ramifications for Sierra Leone's peace process, must be analysed.

The case for local-centric citizen-based peacebuilding

The case for the involvement of local actors in peacebuilding is widely shared. It has been argued, rightly so, that the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long-term is always rooted in the local people. The generally held wisdom is that building on cultural resources and utilising local mechanisms is the best way to sustain the peace. Jusu-Sheriff (2004) makes the strongest case for local involvement in peacebuilding processes, postulating that any peace process which is not embraced by those who have to live with it is likely to fail. There is unequivocal support for this line of reasoning among policy makers, development professionals, and conflict resolution analysts and practitioners. The consensus is that outsiders can, and should, assist, advise and provide incentives for locals; but ultimately, those within a society must define their own future by eventually taking ownership of the direction of the peacebuilding process. As the repository of knowledge, culture, traditions and mores, a representative local constituency is capable of bringing rich historical, cultural and linguistic resources to further solidify the peace.

Active participation

Participation and community buy-in are central to effective social transformation. Participation enables individuals, organisations and communities to assume responsibility and capacity for their own welfare and development. As Narayan (2002) observes, the active participation of individuals in defining their real needs raises their esteem, mobilises their social energies and helps them to shape their social and economic destiny. In this sense, sustainable post-conflict peacebuilding is not feasible without the involvement of a broad spectrum of the society. Because peacebuilding is about empowering groups and individuals who have been seriously impacted by more powerful forces,

an understanding of the demands and constraints of larger social forces is critical to one's comprehension of both deep-rooted sources of conflict and the challenges of sustainable peacebuilding. Dukes (1999) perceives the participation of citizens in community life as essential to the development of identity, meaning and self-worth and, ultimately, to the achievement of the public good.

Strengths and limitations of external support

Local ownership works in tandem with external support and nurturing. Anderson (1999) has argued, quite convincingly, that as helpful and as genuine as outsiders might be, their work and efforts are best complemented by forging meaningful partnerships with local interlocutors or *people in the setting*. Outsiders bring power, resources, influence and access which, when meshed with local knowledge and expertise, can produce opportunities for increased effectiveness (Anderson 1999). Sierra Leone has benefitted immensely from the goodwill and generosity of the international community. A 2008 report by the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD) highlights that nearly one fifth of this aid is channelled through NGOs.

However, as is well documented in peacebuilding literature, external support by itself, of any kind, does not necessarily guarantee positive societal transformation. The driving force for such change should come from within, with outsiders acting as facilitators and stimulators of positive change. Such a process, where it fully incorporates the aims and aspirations of the affected communities, is crucial to assisting societies to successfully navigate economic and political uncertainties, and to lay solid foundations for durable peace. Successful post-conflict peacebuilding builds upon indigenous knowledge and good practices to introduce locals to new concepts and models on the role of domestic actors in peacebuilding and national reconciliation. Most beneficiaries acquire the necessary skills to undertake advocacy activities for peace and reconciliation at the community, regional and national levels. They use and build on these skills by incorporating local knowledge and traditions.

On the basis of the preceding arguments, it is perhaps easy to see why the call for local involvement in post-conflict peacebuilding has steadily grown over the years. However, beyond this basic agreement there are serious disagreements that are at the heart of peacebuilding. Who, or what, constitutes the *local* in local ownership of a peace process? What are the forms and nature of such ownership? What does the concept

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mean to those who have to live with the consequences, or those who are designing and implementing democracy programmes in societies emerging from debilitating wars? When should the handing over be initiated and implemented, and to whom should this handover be done? For what kind of peace is the society aiming? These questions are important for understanding the peace-development continuum, and the evolution of social relations in post-conflict peacebuilding. Answers to these questions will foster deeper understanding of change, structural transformation and sustainability in societies emerging from conflict. To build viable constituencies for peace, through the creation of professionalised social groups, one has to understand these dynamics. Thus, the transition from external to local ownership is a rite of passage that is laden with challenges. This was succinctly put by Goodhand and Hulme (1999) who advocate that concrete guidance and strategies for determining voices should be prioritised among the cacophony of local owners. They underscore the importance of prioritising issues and actors in the local ownership discourse.

Perils of local ownership of peace processes

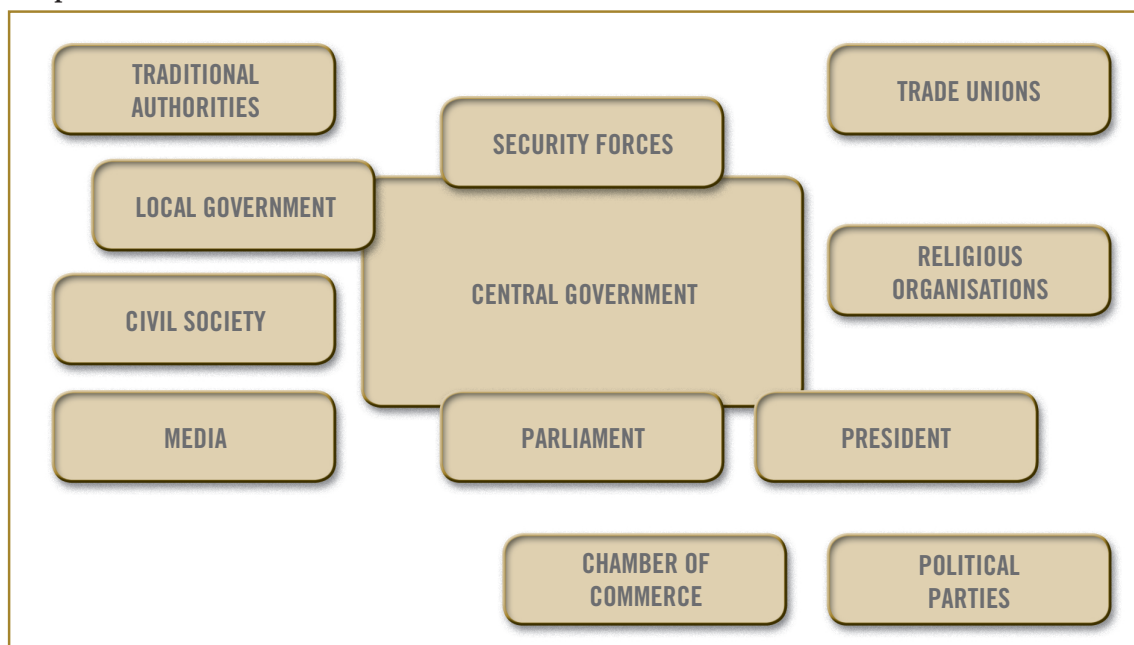
It is important to appreciate that actors in local peacebuilding processes are not monolithic units, but rather an odd assortment of constantly evolving groups with diffused interests and contradictory goals. Civil society, government, private sector,

parliament, media and a host of other informal groups that comprise Sierra Leone's social forces (see Graph 1) all have competing interests circumscribed by inherent tensions. Some of these tensions are not new. For example, during the war, there were those groups which favoured dialogue with the rebels as a precondition for peace. Organisations such as the Women for a Morally Engaged Nation (WOMEN) argued that a speedy return to democratic pluralism was a *sine qua non* for peace in the country. Others, mainly traditional rulers, such as chiefs, who bore the brunt of the conflict through direct targeting, became increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress to end the war. Some of these chiefs mobilised their constituencies into village and local-level militias to defend themselves against rebels and renegade government soldiers. While some may see such inherent tensions as necessary for accommodating multiple voices; where these are ill-managed, post-conflict development can be hampered.

Undefined relationship between local actors

The second peril of local ownership is the relationship between the local actors. For example, as Jusu-Sheriff (2004) correctly points out, civil society relations with the state have never been fully defined. Even though civil society is also shaped by the state structure, it still tends to largely operate in opposition to the state. For example, before, during and after the war, many women, youth, members of labour unions, students and others successfully challenged the state.

Graph 1: Sierra Leone's social forces



Source: Campaign for Good Governance 2006

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In their role as pressure groups designed to force change, civil society groups are at constant loggerheads with the state system. Not surprisingly, successive governments are out-rightly hostile, suspicious and wary of civil society groups. In fact, the general trend seems to be that in weak, collapsed or collapsing states, most governments are wary of any organised bodies or movements that might threaten their authority. Thus, when civil society attempts to wade into the traditional preserve of the state, especially in the areas of security, development and conflict management, governments tend to become defensive.

Closely related to the above is that local CSOs engaged in hot button political and advocacy issues involving human rights, anti-corruption and democratic reforms face far more scrutiny from the authorities and constraints to their work than their peers working on less contentious issues. As the Government of Sierra Leone has grown in confidence and gained more sources of income of its own, mainly from mining rights and taxation, it has clawed back some of the powers it lost during the war, through a series of laws supposedly aimed at regulating the civil society and donor sector. In doing so, however, the government has focused a lot of its energy on organisations that work in sensitive sectors. As the public sphere expanded, so did the number of groups engaged in a wide range of activities, including advocacy, monitoring, conflict analysis and resolution, and investigating and reporting human rights abuses. It is these groups that have been at the receiving end of stringent government regulations.

Preference of external actors

Local actors' capabilities and functions are often predicated upon by their relationship with outside agents. Thus, the location and structure of local actors matters. External actors, especially donors and INGOs, tend to lean towards larger, urban, professionally-staffed local organisations. This tendency often contravenes one of their key goals: to empower the weakest. Because of this practice, a small number of influential local development and peacebuilding organisations now dictate the donor-funding process in post-conflict Sierra Leone. These are often elite, urban-based groups with urbane leadership, structures and *modus operandi* (bank account, board, etc.) which are decipherable to the donor. By failing to fully engage with informal or non-traditional groups, external actors have inadvertently created a tiered

system that disadvantages the most marginalised in the community and stifles the growth of grassroots, rural and indigenous sectors of local leadership.

Phased nature of post-conflict peacebuilding

Post-conflict peacebuilding unfolds in phases. According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2002), peacebuilding often goes through three main phases: intervention, transformation and sustainability. All of these phases incorporate long- and short-term goals, with the ultimate aim of enabling the emergence of legitimate local capacities to manage the peacebuilding process. But, because each country's situation is unique, what aspects of the peacebuilding process get handed over varies considerably. As such, the manner, sequencing and timing of the transition from international to local also has wider implications. In short, there are perils involved in an abrupt, as opposed to gradual, turnover. Zartman (1989) cautions against perpetual international trusteeship of peacebuilding initiatives, and instead advocates the handover of sovereign responsibility back to local authorities.

Importance (and limitations) of civil society

Effective local ownership entails a strong and vibrant civil society. Evidence abounds to show that in the absence of an alternative critical collective to hold the leadership accountable, and to make governance more transparent, democratic gains can quickly be reversed. Local civil society organisations are vital for grassroots peace building and play an important role as gatekeepers of early warning. Their existence is a prerequisite for good governance, and the main channel for promoting durable peace, justice, accountability and sustainable development. A vibrant civil society is essential to reviving social institutions in fragile societies such as Sierra Leone. Without any doubt, the peace processes in this country, and in others, such as Liberia and Mozambique, would not have come about without the aggregated efforts of non-state actors, both local and international. In all three cases women, professionals, students, religious bodies and rural inhabitants succeeded in making the processes more participatory (Jusu-Sheriff 2004). An active and organised civil society is thus necessary for nurturing peace and the building of sustainable democratic culture and institutions (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Throughout the conflict in Sierra Leone, civil society groups played an active, but limited, role in the search for peace. Civil society groups like the

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SLLC, the National Forum for Human Rights and Women's Forum played behind-the-scenes roles and were highly influential in the negotiation process (James 2000), an effort which earned them recognition in the peace process. For instance, Article VI of the Lomé Accord provided for the establishment of a Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (CCP), of which civil society was to be a part. The commission was further charged with the responsibility of creating an enabling environment for all parties to the conflict to cooperate with each other and consolidate the peace.

As John (2007) indicates, civil society's role has fluctuated over the years. It diminished considerably as the war came to a conclusion. Despite the proactive efforts of civil society in the overall political process, it did not occupy centre stage with government in negotiating with the rebels. It appears that the impact of pressure by civil society groups was limited to urging the government and the RUF to sign a peace deal. Thereafter, they were no longer as active as before. They are still relatively weak. These groups, which should act as checks of abuse of power, have not proved strong enough to enforce the accountability and transparency needed for democratic governance. Like with most institutions in fragile post-conflict settings, this state of affairs mirrors the shortcomings in the wider social system. Issues such as corruption, misappropriation, lack of transparency and accountability (both financial and moral) are just a few of the challenges that local civil society would have to address and overcome if they are to be taken seriously by those with whom they interact. Without such reforms, civil society groups will become mere pawns in the hands of ruling parties that embark on a monopolistic style of rule.

Importance of free and fair elections

Sierra Leone will go to the polls late in 2012 in what will be a litmus test for the country's democratic strides. In a post-conflict setting, such elections are much more than just a means of choosing public officials and changing government. Due to the symbiotic relationship between poor governance and instability, elections have also come to be viewed as a means of conflict management. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, in 2002 and 2006 respectively, free and fair elections conferred legitimacy upon the political order and helped consolidate the fragile peace that both countries are now enjoying. But even where elections are deemed free and fair, politics in Sierra Leone, and indeed most of West Africa, are still, by and large, a

zero sum game. Political parties are more often than not predatory networks through which ambitious individuals strive to maximise their access to state resources and to reward cronies. Under this climate of 'winner takes all', it is not surprising that instead of unifying a nation, poorly-timed elections, as in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, can contain the seeds of discord and anarchy. In these sorts of elections, ballots are often cast along predictable ethnic, clan, regional or religious lines, as these are the most easily mobilised sources of political support. In many cases, political parties merely mirror these cleavages in the process of exposing deep social divisions.

The key challenge is to go beyond regular elections to instil and consolidate those democratic values that decentralise and devolve political power; tackle corruption; promote human rights and the rule of law; create credible judiciaries; foster independent mass media; empower civil society; and, perhaps most importantly, isolate the spoilers. Without these wide-ranging measures, the few democratic gains that have been recorded can be quickly reversed in a region circumscribed by fractured polities, moribund institutions, damaged economies and divided societies.

Conclusion

Using the case of post-conflict Sierra Leone, this paper has outlined the strengths and limitations of local ownership of the country's peacebuilding process. The paper has pointed out that securing the peace is a daunting and complex task that is time, personnel and finance-intensive. Furthermore, the paper has argued that local actors are indispensable in managing the peacebuilding process. Their knowledge of the local context, and the fact that they have to live with the consequences, makes them a vital part of any well-meaning process. However, their aggregated advantage is best maximised through the mobilisation of the requisite will, and financial and technical resources (domestic, bureaucratic, and international support). Tensions often arise over how to divide the spoils of peace. The key is to ensure that the economic beneficiaries of war (conflict entrepreneurs) do not end up becoming the economic beneficiaries of peace, to the detriment of the local community.

Also of importance is to whom ownership is handed over. Democratic consolidation is about empowering the peripheries of society so as to diffuse the concentration of power in a few hands. Before local ownership can take root, social integration must take place in these micro-centres. In this context,

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local ownership is viewed more as an end than a means, where decision-making authority is gradually transferred back to local actors as the appropriate institutional infrastructure becomes operational.

Whether the process is implemented by external or local actors, or a hybrid of the two, there are certain elements that are critical to its success. These include: fighting corruption, empowering women, providing socio-economic opportunities, and free and fair media. In societies emerging from conflict, accountability (both moral and financial) is a major issue. Structures are often weak, and lack the requisite capacity to receive and diligently dispense with the resources. To make headway, the country has to continue on an equitable path in which women are given a voice, and visibility, in managing the affairs of the country. It must be appreciated that handover to local actors does not necessarily lead to conditions that help enhance economic, political, and social development. Actualising and mainstreaming local leadership, and providing incentives and means for local parties to take action, would require the requisite climate, and collective action, operationalised across a joint group of preventive actors (Lund 1996). Strengthening of local capacities for the ultimate transfer of local ownership should not just be an end in itself, or a means to an end. It should be a more comprehensive process where the ultimate goal is to deepen democratic processes in ways that are sustainable, and that meet local needs through empowerment of key actors (Van der Borgh 2007).

Lessons learnt

The international community has a mixed success record of transfer of peacebuilding to local ownership. While there have been some relative successes, such as Mozambique and El Salvador, similar efforts in the Balkans and Timor-Leste have had mixed results. In the Balkans, the EU's 6,300-strong peacekeeping force has been stuck in the country since 2004. With little progress and change in social relations between the belligerents, the multinational peace mission cannot hand over to local ownership. In Timor-Leste, shortly after handing over the reins of power to local ownership after years of trusteeship, tensions flared up between the police and the army. Key government officials, including the President and the Prime Minister, were targeted for assassination in 2008. A court later convicted 23 rebels over the attempted assassination and some are set to be imprisoned for up to 16 years. There are some lessons to be learnt closer to home as well. West Africa is a bad neighbourhood.

Liberia's descent into civil war in late 1989 plunged most of the sub-region into chaos. The conflict created a disastrous domino effect in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and eventually, Côte d'Ivoire. Sierra Leone's peacebuilding transition has to be approached with close attention paid to what is happening in other parts of the sub-region. Should Côte d'Ivoire continue to periodically experience volatile security situations, political anxiety and challenges to its transition to a peacebuilding phase, the ramifications, whether in the form of increased attacks by militia groups, refugee flow and proliferation of illegal arms etc., will be felt in other corners of the sub-region, including Sierra Leone. In this vein, as much as lessons can and should be drawn from similar situations, if the process is to endure, the specificities of the Sierra Leone context should be central to the design of a local-centric transition.

Recommendations

Rebuild social relations as a critical element of peacebuilding

Investing in peace is not simply a matter of rebuilding infrastructure; rehabilitating and resettling refugees, internally displaced persons and combatants; trying perpetrators or undertaking macro-economic development. All of these are noble goals and are critical to the overall peacebuilding process. For such a process to be successful and sustainable, however, it also involves rebuilding the social relations that may have been fractured due to the conflict (Cortright 2002). Healing the wounds of war lays solid foundations for peace.

Integrate state-society relationship

A core strategy is to integrate the state-society relationship as a central dynamic in the process of both rebuilding a state apparatus and recreating a new society out of the ashes of conflict. This is mainly because the fortunes of both state and non-state actors are intertwined. Thus, mending, building and clarifying relationships among people, and between people and institutions, is critical to addressing a post-conflict country's development needs.

Identify and work with the most marginalised groups

Local civil society (staffed, managed and operated locally) is made up of formal, as well as informal or non-traditional groups. Due to weak capacity, language barriers, inadequate funding, and high transaction costs, the latter – which consist of some of the most marginalised in the community – often

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fall outside of the radar of donors and other external agencies (Menocal and Rogerson 2006). As such, it is not surprising that professional NGOs tend to attract the greatest share of support, compared to informal grassroots groups. This reinforces societal marginalisation of the most vulnerable. If external support of any kind is to be effective, then the engagement of informal networks is critical.

Invest in human and social capital through tailored capacity building programmes

Post-conflict programmes are designed to address communities' governance and constitutional capacity-building needs. The majority involve fostering change and transforming key actors across a broad spectrum of the society. Such targeted capacity building requires investing in the human and social capital of marginalised individuals and groups in order to enable them to develop the capacities needed to thrive and to play various roles in developing and renewing their communities (Blagescu and Young 2006). For such efforts to be successful, a participatory approach, in which beneficiaries feel a high degree of ownership over both the process and the outcome, is required.

Establish long-run sustainability

Developing a vibrant civil society in fragile and post-conflict societies is a massive undertaking. Organisations are often weak and personnel inexperienced. Further, competition for resources is fierce. The private sector generally pays relatively high wages, thereby attracting some of the most qualified people. This is compounded by the fact that the government does not make it easy for civil society organisations to operate and is sometimes hostile (Klees 2008). But these difficulties are not insurmountable. There is always a desire on the part of local actors to learn, share, and in the process, become agents of positive change. External actors aim to tap into this invaluable asset. The necessity of external actors exiting a country in the context of strong local ownership and capacity should not be equated to washing off their hands completely. A phased withdrawal is best recommended.

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